

# 2019-04-15: Foundations of Mindfulness

## Part 10 - The Five Hinderances

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sensual desire, mind, mindfulness, hindrances, arise, impermanence, buddha, meditation, journey, focuses, people, mindfulness practice, stupor, refrain, wisdom, present, desire, lethargy, understands, teachings

### SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

Good evening, everyone, and is the volume. Loud enough here? Great.

So happy to continue with a series of talks I'm giving on mindfulness practice, and specifically the mindfulness practice as it's taught in the discourse, the teaching scripture, attributed to the Buddha called usually called the four foundations of mindfulness. And one of the angles that I've been using for these talks is to refer to this text as presenting a journey. That mindfulness practice is a journey that we undertake, and a variety different ways in this text. There's kind of a movement that goes on. From along a path, a movement along a unfolding, a deepening of practice. And that sense of deepening is presented in a variety of different ways as a text goes along, and it isn't like it's one path or one kind of linear deepening. And as a journey, you're not really going anywhere, like physically. And I somehow I think about it like someone who is a swimmer, like athlete to swim says their sport. And they might swim in the same pool for years. Back and forth and back and forth. And it's a journey for that swimmer. So a journey of learning their body, using their body developing their concentration, their attention, refining and, and swimming as a kind of thing where it gets Very, very refined, the subtle shifts and changes in the movements of the arm to make it just as efficient as possible. And some of it just slowly the body kind of learns how to do by itself slowly over time. And so it's a journey for the swimmer, to perfect the swimming to excel in the swimming to develop themselves a swimmer, even though it's not a journey that goes anywhere just back and forth in the pool. So for people who do meditation, which is sitting on our cushion, so it's not much of a journey that way. But it is an inner journey. Where the same like a swimmer, we're painting the same thing over and over again, sitting, sitting, still focusing on the breathing and the body, bring mindfulness to our experience. And slowly, sometimes imperceptibly. We're refining the body, refining the mind, refining our emotional life, our ability to pay attention or concentration, and it gets more and more refined or more and more different.

eloped and acute and supportive of this process of taking this journey deeper and deeper. But it takes the repetitions like a swimmer swimmer has to do it over and over and over again. There's this journey and mindfulness meditation is one of repetition over and over and over again. And this sutta this discourse that presents this is kind of coming at this journey from many different angles, just like for a swimmer. Some days they're focusing on their kick other days are focusing on the stroke other days they're focusing on you know, I don't know everything about swimming, but different things about swimming. And then slowly the overall to the taken care of these different elements of, of swimming, the overall the swimming journey gets deeper and deeper. So this text is kind of coming at different angles. The four big ones it focuses on the body, and within that cultivating a variety of different things. It focuses on the feelings focuses on mind, state And the topic for today, it focuses on some of the deeper truths, some of the deeper insights that we can have, as we do this mindfulness practice. And, and the beginning of this long, long series of talks, I talked about the refrain. There's a particular passage that gets repeated some, like 13 times or in the text over and over again. And for years, I ignored that refrain, because repetition is boring. And repetition in my, in my young juvenile mind that I had for way too long. Was is kind of not really where the real emphasis is, or that's kind of like use a literary kind of embellishment or something. So whatever, what he's not kind of just kind of glossed over it. Turns out it's maybe the most important part of the whole text, and it's being repeated over and over again, because they're the composers of the texts. And this is important.

And it was an oral tradition. So people would memorize the text and recite it. And when you recite the song or a poem or scripture over and over again and has a refrain, that sometimes really sticks and goes in deeper and, and the refrain is a journey. And it's a journey towards from first just kind of being present for experience internally and externally, our body or feelings or mind states, and it's and then discovering, noticing how the impermanence of this, how the experience that we have comes and goes arises and passes and the inconstancy of our experience. And there's a paradox in mindfulness practice, that we're cultivating a lot of stability and steadiness, we're sitting here being present, the mind becoming more more steady, kind of kind of certain kind of wonderfully. soft and nice way, mind becomes less and less moving stuff moving after its thoughts not being swept away and the thoughts dreams. And as it gets more stable and still the inner life, then it becomes clear that the experience that we're observing from that stillness is constantly shifting and changing as in constant coming and going. And so this refrain talks about first establishing attention internally, externally, then seeing how things are in constant coming and going. And that supports the mind to not to latch on to any of it. And now to when you see a lot of the inconstancy of our experience, it's people are less inclined to add a lot of labels interpretations on that experience concepts on it, it's easier to more likely just let it be leave it alone. Leave the experience come and go. Just let it come and go like being in a stream. Just let it wash by you. Many years ago, I met a woman who was backpacking, I think somewhere she met This other backpacker, I think they sit here at a camp for the night or something. And that this guy that you met, had been at the Zen monastery. And she didn't know anything about meditation or Zen. And so I guess that the evening he taught her about how to do Zen meditation in his way. And he said, it's like sitting on a rock and a stream, and just letting all the river just flow right by. So that was the image he had for meditation and never great for her. Just let the stream which is, you know, washed, washed

by everything washes by everything, your everything, but everything but awareness at the stream. Awareness is still so that you're so then seeing the rising, passing, not making anything of it. The mic is simpler and simpler, and very still and economists and just just sees things in the simplicity of how they are. And then with that simplicity and stillness, then at some point, they can let go so but that the path that path goes through a stage of seeing things arise in past seeing things coming and going. It's very important in emphasizing this because what we're going to cover today So, the fourth foundation is, is an ancient languages dumb ma foundation. So the Dharma and there's many interpretations and guesses at what this word means here because the word Dharma has 54 different meanings. And the which one applies here is anybody's guess. And so maybe come back to mine to my guests later. And, but it can mean some like truths, the doctrine, teachings, it can refer to qualities of mind, aspects of mind factors of mind, objects of mind. It can also sometimes interpreted in the big scenarios it means nature, that's pretty broad. So all kinds of things could also mean behavior. So anyway, so this last foundation is dharma. And so usually what people do is they see what's being talked about in the in the section, and then they come up with this. This means that Dharma must mean that this in this section. And so there's five things in this section of dharma. And they can be divided into two different categories of exercises. Learning to focus and be mindful of the things that keep us in bondage, keep us stuck, keep us suffering. And the other is to, there's three of them and the other two have to do with the things that are explicitly liberating.

The seven factors of awakening these beautiful qualities of mind that get awakened and strengthened as we do mindfulness practice. It makes us do Journey of mindfulness quite spectacular to have these beautiful qualities arise. And I'll talk about them in a few weeks. And then the fourth, the Four Noble Truths are very important teaching in Buddhism. So the Four Noble Truths, the seven factors awakening about explicitly about liberation. The other three exercises are about what keeps us in bondage. The first one of them are the is the five hindrances. Very famous list for mindfulness practitioners, because no students, everybody who practices Vipassana, should memorize what these five are. And think that part of the task that part of the journey is to become an expert on these five hindrances. To study them, get to know them and get to know them how it works in your own mind. There is a level logic often a tangent

There's a Zen story of

so there's the Buddha. And then kind of in the in Mahayana, Buddhism in the hierarchy of great enlightened beings, kind of right up there near the Buddha is this Bodhisattva, kind of a celestial Sage called Manjushri. Everybody's thought for great wisdom was to have, you know, in wisdom of emptiness, wisdom of great wisdom. So one day Manjushri came to see the Buddha. And lo and behold, there was a woman, a woman of all people sitting in the seat of honor next to the Buddha. Now, that's kind of the seat of my judiciary. So Manjushri goes to the Buddha, what's going on here that a woman is sitting in the place of honor, she's meditating? And so the Buddha says to my judiciary, why don't you ask her and so when she tries to get her Come out of her meditation state out

of her Samadhi. And, and so he tries everything he can try psychic powers, he lifts her up in the air with her psychic powers. He does, you know, all kinds of mumbo jumbo to try to get her uses, get her attention, and she can't snap her out of her meditation state. And so the Buddha what going on here? And Buddha said, No, not even 100,000 Medusa series could manage to get this woman out of her Samadhi. The only person who can get this woman out of her Samadhi is way down deep in the underworld, deep in the world down below the ground deep, far, far deep down. There's another Bodhisattva a great being of enlightenment, called wisdom about delusion. And so then apparently Round comes. This other buddy sought this wonderful woman called wisdom about illusion, comes and stands in front of the woman and snaps her fingers just once. And the woman comes out of her meditation something that Menges she couldn't do. So that's the end of the story. So it's what it is. It's kind of a Cohen. It's a teaching story. And, and the question is, why is it that the greatest wisest disciple of the Buddha could have no influence couldn't have couldn't get the attention of this woman who was sitting there and meditating. And why is it that the being that was represented by was called a wisdom about delusion? Why could she wake up the woman? So that's the interesting question. Some people think that wisdom is about knowing great, wonderful, perfect spirit ritual things. But there's a long history in Buddhism that reveal wisdom is, is to have wisdom, but how we get caught wisdom about delusion. And that's what's portable. That's what's useful. That's what's applicable in so many different circumstances. And that's, that's what gets us free. So it isn't so much about studying emptiness and studying greats, you know, powerful, wonderful cosmic consciousness kind of spiritual states, but getting really wise about how we get caught. And so these five hindrances are considered kind of, by the tradition, at least, some of the things that meditators in particular really need to understand if they want to have wisdom and not delusion, wisdom, but how not to get caught. And these five are actually seven because two of them are paired. So it's sensual desire. Ill will sometimes it usually in Should we say a version. And then the third one is this pair of I think of it as resistance and lethargy, or stupor, and lethargy, is probably closer to the original stupor and lethargy. And then next pair is restlessness and regret.

And the last one is doubt. So these five are things forces in the mind concerns of the mind, that can pop up quite strongly. So we get preoccupied by them. And we can't stay on track with our swimming, we can't stay track, you know, with our mindfulness staying present, we get veer off and go off in other directions. And so we have to really understand how they do their trick and how we get pulled into them and get hooked into them and how to become free of them. And, and so a big part of mindfulness practice meditation is to learn to recognize these work with them or not be free with them. There's a lot of different strategies for this. One of the preeminent one is just learned to really recognize them when they arise. And that's why studying them get to know them really well. gives you a lot of choice and power over them, because then you're less likely to wander off into them. When they're when they're present, not only they preoccupy us, they say it's kind of like having seeing through colored glasses or seeing ways that you can't really see clearly they hinder clarity. They hinder concentration, they hinder wisdom. They say that, they would have said that, when there's a lot of sensual desire, desire for sensual pleasure, craving, addiction of all kinds, that it's like having water upon upon where they summon, it's thrown in red dye. And so everything you see is red. And you

know, it's like when you fall in love with someone, everything is about person about that person. person is perfect until you get a divorce. And then everything is imperfect. And, and so then ill will. Version hostility is like the water, water that's boiling. And when the water is boiling, you can't see reflection in the water. This stupor and lethargy is like having mud. Isn't that was my desire, right to hydrate the algae. What is it? Is it algae for the algae for that one, okay. So algae is like it's the pond is full of algae. It's hard to make your way through it. It's all kind of, you know, thick. And then rest of this and regret is, the top of the pond is a wind swept. And so it's all churned up and also you can see your reflection can see through and I guess it's doubt that it's like mud and And it really, you know, gets us stuck maybe because doubt gets us stuck so much like quicksand or something that we pulled in. And so these are the forces. So that the instructions are to notice these things. And so I'll read you what specifically what the instruction is in relationship to the does the same thing for each one. Oh, I printed out the wrong one. Wrong page. But I can read from here because I wanted to do two different interpretations for how this is this famous passage for how to do this. And one is literal, which is the one I was going to have, which I'll try to do from memory. And then there's one that's the most common one is interpretive for based on the Pali and I'll say that then I'll explain a little bit to these two things. I think it's Remember I said the refrain emphasizes seeing the arising and passing the impermanence of things so the two different interpretations or translations of this instructions for how to relate to the hindrances, one, the literal one, I believe, emphasizes seeing the impermanence of the hindrances as they come and go. The interpretive translation says notice the conditions that caused them to arise and the conditions that caused them to go away. So develop understanding about the causality and conditionality of them. Both of them are very important and very effective. Getting wise about the conditions that bring them out. This is one very important way not to be caught by them and be wise about makes them go away. I suppose a powerful way not to be so under their sway. But I think of those as preliminary, that ability to see the conditions and the conditionality how they come into being and how they go away. Is is preliminary to coming to the stage of very Keeps settled, focused attention in the middle of the stream and let everything go by, and not thinking so much about it not being so involved in why it's there, how it's there. And just see it as impermanent phenomena, impersonal, impermanent movements of the mind. It's very common for people when they have undesired mental activity.

You know, so few of us occasionally will have things in our mind, which we're not particularly proud of, or happy for, are things which are may be painful to think or do or attitudes, all kinds of things. And people can have a lot of shame about that they can be very upset about it. But one of the strong characteristics about these kind of mental foibles that occasionally arise in human minds is people take them personally. It's it's it reflects badly on me. I'm a bad person, I shouldn't be this way. And I hope no one notices and all that. But the ability to sit, to cultivate to keep practicing and practicing and practicing, keep swimming. And then in the Dharma, you're swimming in the mindfulness, until you're able to watch and just watch all this stuff. Just go by the stream, go by stream of the hindrances, thoughts, ideas, even if they're undesirable, but don't identify with them. Don't take them personally. Don't do anything with them, like, Oh, this reflects badly on me, I shouldn't be this way I have to get therapy I have to meditate but I am meditating. And, you know, so the idea is to just be really simple.

And just see it, just be with it. And at some point, what we see is that things come and they go, they arise and they pass, just stick through. And that's a phenomenal a powerful state to see. And to be able to see our whole inner landscape with respect with care with attention that mindfulness is, but not take any of it personally. And see it as just phenomena that goes by goes through, it's kind of like you're out for a walk and the leaves and the trees are kind of rustling in the wind or the wind blows by you or, you know, the clouds overhead or just kind of floating by to be able to sit still and quiet meditation. And just watch everything just kind of stream by come and go. sets the stage for releasing the mind for letting go deeper. And so the literal translation of this exercise goes something like this.

Here, there'll be being sensual desire within one practitioner. understands their essential desire in me. So that's just very straight mindfulness. It's no judgments, there's no criticism, there's no holding on to it, no being for or against it, just sensual desire rise, we just know it. This is what it is. And when there is no sensual desire, in one, one understands, there is no essential desire in me. So it's very useful to know the absence of these things. Because the absence of being caught, teaches that if we pay attention to it, it teaches us what it's like to be uncaught it helps highlight what it's like to be caught. And if you really see the difference between that after a while, we get disenchanted or disinterested in being caught. It's not so interesting anymore. These sexual fantasies I'm having in central desire, you know enough of that already.

And then when.

So this here, here's this where it's the causal or conditional interpretation is, is done in distant translation. And when also understands how there comes to be the arising of unreason sensual desire, and how that comes to be the abandoning of arisen sensual desire, and how there comes to be the future non arising of abandoned sensual desire.

It's kind of a mouthful.

But how it arises, how it goes away and how it doesn't come back ever again. So that's a nice thing if you can do that. And that has to do with conditions, the causes and all that. But the literal translation is something like this. One understands episodes, let's Like I have to admit better from memory retina, as for the sensual desire that has not yet arisen that has not arisen when sees its arising. When understands its arising. As for the central desire that has a risen when sees it's going away, it's fading away. So one is conditional and one is has to do with impermanence. And so and that's what I wanted to emphasize today, the deep insight that we're looking for in mindfulness practice, is an insight into impermanence, into the changing nature of phenomena that we can't see very clearly, if we take things personally. If we react to things if we're judging things, if we have preferences about things if we try to fix things. What we're looking for in mindfulness meditation is the ability to sit on that you know, right Walk in the river, and just let everything just stream by that comes, everything comes and go and everything that comes into awareness will go and to watch that go by. But to get to that place, it's a



journey to get there. And it requires us tremendous stability of the mind steadiness of the mind, where the mind is no longer drifting off in thoughts, the minds been trained, the wandering mind has been quieted down. And we just don't here, here. To get to that. The journey to get there is a little bit like the journey of a swimmer. Repetition, over and over and over again, come back, come back, focus be here, see this, come back, see this. And then the strokes of the mind the strokes of mindfulness, so they get more refined, more particular more exact. What is a weak gets that needs to be strong, a stronger mind stronger, concentration gets stronger. The things that are stronger Shouldn't be stronger, like, the strength of being a preoccupation gets weaker and quiets down. And it's phenomenal. The shift that happens in the mind and the body in the heart as we stop being preoccupied. You know, it's kind of like, now I'm finally home. Now I'm finally myself. Everything else was kind of just kind of disconnected from myself. Here, I'm finally connected. And in that deep connection to oneself, that's where freedom can be found.

So

so what I said about what I read about the sensual desire is true for the other hindrances as well. It will see its dream by coming and going and stupor and lethargy, I love these terms. And this is not not tiredness, but they're rather their strategies of how people respond to challenges. And so, you know, people can be completely, you know, plenty of rest. You seen children really well, that children can be quite rested and you know, had a good nap and everything. And then you asked them to do something like when I was I wasn't quite a child, maybe I was still a child. I was slow to grow up. I think I was maybe 13 or so got a child. And so I was given weekly allowance when growing up of \$10 a week. That was a lot of money back then, and but I had to mow the lawn. I was so tired that I was mowing that lawn was just like, Oh, I got so tired. That was resistance, boredom, aversion. So it was stupor and lethargy. So there's all kinds of you know, so. So that makes them more interesting to study these hindrances, if you can recognize that what's going on in me? And what are the conditions for that bring on this. And then restlessness and regret are also very powerful things and they sometimes have strategies of how to avoid challenges. And sometimes there are ways in which we get caught in the web of our challenges, web of our shenanigans in our mind, and we get all restless and running around. And that also is a fascinating way in which we sometimes avoid being committed to facing our challenges and being present for things. So these are great playgrounds of mindfulness, swimming pools of mindfulness, the five hindrances, so I'm repeating myself, but it's such an important point. If you get visited by some of these hindrances don't be discouraged, be encouraged. Because this is the material you have to learn. This is your opportunity to study my aversion. Hopefully you do it, you know, in your privacy of your own little mind so that you don't doesn't spill over and cause harm to other people. But, tomboy, I get to look at my version. Isn't that great? Isn't that a great attitude? As opposed to Oh, shit.

So

that's probably all I wanted to say today, but we have about 10 minutes if you want to have any questions about this or clarification any better but the mindfulness instruction so far. I'd be happy to hear Your questions are

gonna be heard.

Thanks you combine the regret and restlessness says wondering why it doesn't go together in my head

Why did the same or why they're combined as one

yeah I don't do it it's the Buddha who did it so and I yeah, I don't have a good Good idea. It's possible that we don't really know what the original to be translated in English, but I understand them to be these these two paired ones. I think that one is being physical, more physical and the other one being more mental. And sloth and torpor or this lethargy and stupor are forces that bring on the sinking mind. The mind gets tired sinks are kind of gets dull. restlessness and regret is what keeps which activates the mind keeps it energized and keeps it going. And so maybe that's that's why they're put together there's a because these two restlessness and regret because both of them keep us excessively agitated

that good enough

Thank you

during your talk I thought you mentioned that you were going to share your definition of Dhamma

or Dhamma. Yes, I said maybe a few Yes. Yeah. So this, this five exercises in the in this section and select with the first one I talked today is the five hindrances. And it's because the hindrances get our, our, our what's prominent and people talk about the hindrances. People think that the Dhamma, the word applies to the hindrances. And so because they're kind of mental states or mental factors of ours, they call these dogmas or mental factors or mental mental states or something like that. And, but I think that I suspect that what Dhamma is referring to here is not the five hindrances or seven factors of awakening. It's further emphasizing the seeing of the impermanence. Because elsewhere we have places where the Buddha says emphasize what the Dhamma is, is seeing impermanence recognizing impermanence. That's the key key insight that gets repeated throughout his teachings over and over again. And so I suspect it's the, the teaching or the doctrine or the core dogma here is insight into impermanence. That's Yeah. So and that sense that my, you know, maybe maybe could be translated as insight or maybe could be translated as teachings or you know if we want to be really bold and reckless we me as truth.



The doubt, the last of the five I think of that as and correct me if I'm wrong is doubting the efficacy of what we're trying to accomplish. We're doing too.

And that's certainly one very important form of doubt that this is a work showing the efficacy of the practice the truth The teachings they see of me as a practitioner, these, these teachings are great this practice works for most people, but I can't do it. I don't know if I could do it. Yeah, so those are all things that worked out. Sometimes doubt is described as uncertainty in decisiveness. So if something keeps us indecisive and non committed, so I can't do this. I don't know how to do it when supposed to do here. And so it manifests as in decisiveness. Whereas in practice, there has to be some decisiveness. This is what I'm doing. I'm engaged.

You talk about

the talk about

coming home to yourself and your mind seeing things but also

it talks about not having a cell or not identifying yourself independently. So listen

I think that

when we're so comfortable so at peace in our physical home we might not be thinking about ourselves at all. So I think that when when there's a deep sense of harmony of peace so well being, we've let go a lot it you know, we can you know, it's kind of conventional language to say we're at home in ourselves, but really in that state, there's no reference to self going on anymore. It just, it just kind of like if you have to say something convenient. You can say you know, at home with yourself or something, but don't take it too seriously. Don't take it as a technical disgust description.

Is there another mic? Yeah.

So earlier in your talk, you're talking about the lists of things that keep us caught in those things that wake us up. And the hindrances are one of those one of the lists, you went into detail about the things that keep us caught. I was expecting meta to be in there somewhere, meta. And as something that would keep that that would wake us up. But it's not part of this discourse. And just, I'm wondering if it fits into these. It's not one of the four foundations of mindfulness. How does this How does metta interact with this as a separate is it I think

that that, what we're looking at what we're looking for here is the operating system of the mind. Whereas for meta meta is usually an object of meditation. But it's not the different factors of meditation that allows us different mental faculties that allow us to do the meta. And so if you're doing metta

meditation, loving kindness meditation, the hindrances might come into play, they interfere with your ability to do that. If you're doing breath meditation, the hindrances might come into play interfere with you staying focused on the breath. You do loving kindness meditation, you might get really concentrated and the factors of awakening come up in relationship to the doing the meta. If you do breath concentration, breath meditation, two factors awakening might arise. So these are kind of like the background operating systems in a sense, maybe, whereas meta is the object of the meditation practice.

Thanks kind of

So with impermanence, I have a question. Do you like just watching things arise and pass away? Will that automatically give knowledge to knowledge of impermanence? Or do you have to kind of note it? Or, like this wasn't permanent? Do you have to constantly kind of acknowledge that it's impermanent? Or does it just

no you no, because we're, we're looking for a nerve to really see the arising and passing the stream growth capacity by you, the mind can't be that busy. And so if you're constantly kind of that's impairment that's, you know, you kind of keep the mind kind of active and agitated. Just trust that. It'll be obvious as you get as you settle in, settle in. It'll become obvious. And then you sit back and watch it. Maybe this is the kind of reverse metaphor that is And quite work, but it's kind of like you're sitting on a riverbank. And, and you're there, you know, through the winter and the river is frozen. But slowly over time the Fraser River melts, and then you start seeing that it's flowing. But you're not looking for the flow. It's just you just notice that it flows. So the reverse metaphor means that as the mind in the mind that's very concerned with concepts, ideas, and is a little bit of a hard frozen mind, paradoxically, even though it's busy. And the mind that gets really still and soft is one that flows or can flow with things or can watch the stream go by something like that. So it's almost like you want to just let go of doing some point at some point, once you get some stable and you're more or less stabilized in the present moment. You want to let go of the doing. But if you're caught up completely and agitated, then you might want to use the labeling and not there's desire. There's a very There it is. Yep, there it is. And that helps you free you a little bit, make some distance. But once you're really present, it's just, just just get out of the way. And just

watch. watch the river.

Okay, and so there were no questions about this wonderful story about wisdom about delusion.

You

You might want to you might want to consider why the great Bodhisattva of wisdom couldn't get this woman never meditation. But the bodhisattva wisdom of delusion did. What is it about? What is it

about? Why is the wisdom but illusion so important? If it's important, what does that mean for you? What you should be doing. So thank you very, very much and