

2003-11-03 Satipatthana Sutta (Week 8)

Dharmas - 5 Hindrances (Part 1)

Wed, 7/15 11:16AM • 39:52

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

hindrances, sensual desire, dharma, people, present, called, mind, ill, doubt, desire, torpor, buddha, retreat, remorse, world, sloth, qualities, restlessness, captivated, mindfulness

SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

So we've taken a break of two weeks now from our series. And the series we're doing now this fall is going through the different sections of discourse of the Buddha called the Satipatthana Sutta, the discourse on the establishment of mindfulness. And this is the foundational discourse for the book by the Buddha, for the kind of practice we do here at IMC and for all the Vipassana traditions around the world. And there's a whole series of different ways that be postino is presented with mindfulness practices presented in this text. And, and it basically falls under the rubric maybe or the four categories of learning how to pay bump pay mindful attention to our body to our embodied experiences. Learning to pay mindful attention. Establishing mindfulness by paying attention to what's known as the feeling tone of our experience. Learning to establish mindfulness through attention to our state of our mind, the qualities of our mind, the quality of mind that we have. So those are the first three, and the first what's the fourth? That's what's called the foundation of mindfulness. The fourth foundation that is called damas. dharmas in English nowadays, and this is a little bit hard to know how to translate hear the word Dharma, because dumb our Dharma is a multi valence word in Pali or Sanskrit, it has many different meanings. There's a Buddhist dictionary, ancient Buddhist dictionary, that gives something like 54 different definitions for the word dharma. And, and, you know, one of the most common meanings it means the teachings of the Buddha. And so, but another common teaching is definition of the word Dharma is that it means thing. Like we would say a thing in English, just a Dharma is just a thing. You know, it's kind of very casual kind of way of saying a thing. So it has a very kind of loose that meaning there. It also refers to mental qualities. So they're kind of qualities that you develop as you practice are sometimes called dharmas. It also also refers to mental objects, things that the mind can know are called dharmas. And not just simply good qualities are developed. But anything the mind could know which is basically anything at all, is known as a dharma. In Buddhism, they sometimes distinguish different kinds by capitalizing Dharma for teachings, the teachings of the Buddha is Dharma with a capital D, and Dharma or Dhamma. In experimental qualities are things with lower

lowercase D The difference between Dhamma and Dharma is two different languages. Dharma is Sanskrit. And Dhamma, is in Pali. And it's kind of like the difference between Latin and Italian. were left at your church, Latin and Italian. And so Sanskrit is a little bit more of a constructed language. That word Sanskrit literally comes from the root to construct to make. And it's more like church Latin in a sense, and then probably is a particular dialect of ancient Indian language, Indic languages, and it tends to be softer than Sanskrit. So the RS often gets softened too. So like if it's our RM, in Sanskrit it becomes m in Pali. So karma becomes Kama Dharma becomes Dhamma. So here in the in the fourth and last category of the foundations of mindfulness, we're looking at what's called the dogmas And usually English translators will translate the word down my head has mental qualities, or mental or mental, mental qualities or mental objects. I think it's gonna be best not to translate it at all, because it Dharma has all these different meanings, but rather to look at the different exercises that are given in this part of the discourse. And that turns out to be five different exercises that are given five different ways to establish mindfulness to develop mindfulness. And if you look at these five different ways, they can be summarized as those mental states, those mental qualities, or mental processes or mental insights, those insights that either keep us enslaved, or that liberate us. And that's kind of one of the central purposes of Buddhism is to move from a state where the mind is in bondage or is addicted or is is, you know, clinging neurotically to things or said not captivated by its attachments. And moving from that to a state with the mind is not that way, it's free, it's liberated. And so and so when we're looking at this next category is really getting down to the nitty gritty, the important areas of Buddhism, which is really understand now, how the mind is kept, captivated, kept in suffering, and how the mind can move to freedom. So the five categories, these five exercises, the first three have to do with the being captive aspects of being captive. And the last two have to do about the movement towards freedom, how to become free. And so over these this week in the next four weeks, then we'll talk about these five exercises, and the ending with the Four Noble Truths. Last of the exercises is important. Noble Truths, and which are often presented as kind of basic introductory Buddhism. But here and this, this course is presented as the pinnacle, the climax of Buddhist practice, and very, and I'll talk about how that works, I guess in about five, five weeks. For today, what we will talk about is the five hindrances, and they're calling Pali Nirvana and not to be confused with Nirvana, very different word. And the hindrances are, belong to a category of lists. The Buddha gave that talk about all the different ways that the mind is kept captive, or kept inflamed or kept addicted, or living in its compulsion, all these different ways that the mind is not free. The mind is not free. There's something is preventing it from being free. The heart is not free, something's preventing it from being free. And so to help us become free, the Buddha points to all kinds of areas that keep us in change or keep us in suffering or keep us in this way. And the five hindrances is one of these lists. It's not meant to be a comprehensive list necessarily, there are other lists also that talk about these things. But the five hindrances are very important list, because it's said to be the list, the five qualities that are the greatest hindrance for people going with any kind of depth into their meditation, to be able to develop a real stability and stillness of mind, in order to do the deeper work that has to happen to find liberation. You have to really come to grips and grapple with and become an overcome the hindering quality of these things called the five hindrances. And if you go to a Vipassana retreat, especially a 10 day retreat, I would venture to say that Every single retreat, you go to 10 a retreat, someone will give a talk on the

five hindrances, who has been an attendee we've partnered with someone didn't give a talk on the five hindrances. Probably, you know, a lot of other things can change Dharma topic when they talk and Dharma talks, but someone will always give a talk on the five hindrances. It's kind of like a liturgy of the past in the world. And I like to think of it like an old Greek place where they're all kind of go here, see this plain play over and over again, but they'd be so interested in nuanced ways in which they were kind of people present the play in different way. So same thing with the five hindrances. So hopefully now you'll be very interested in the way I presented or the way the Buddha Buddha, the Buddha is going to present it. So this is what this section of the discourse says. It's not so long two paragraphs and how monks, does a monk abide contemplating dhamas? As dumbass Dharma as Dharma? Here a monk abides contemplating Dharma as dhamas, in terms of the five hindrances. And how does a monk abide contemplating Dharma says Dharma in terms of the five hindrances here, there being sensual desire in him, a monk understands there's a sensual desire in me, or there being no sensual desire in him. He understands. There's no central desire in me. And she also understands how their comes to be the arising of unreason sensual desire, and how their comes to be the abandoning of arisen sensual desire, and how that comes to be the how that comes to be future non arising of abandoned sensual desire. So, we'll talk about that. Make them clear The first one is called sexual desire. Then it goes through the same thing. Same description again, of each each of the other four. And I'll list the other four. It's, ill will, sloth and torpor, restlessness, restlessness and remorse. And the fifth one is doubt. So that three and four to pair things together there. So, three is our sloth and torpor and four is restlessness and remorse and his translation. So those are the those are the five. And the instructions here are to understand certainly know when one of these things has arisen to know that they have arisen and when it's no longer there to know that as long no longer there. So it's basically kind of clear seeing seeing what's there seeing what's not there. There's no evaluation of it is good or bad. There's no identification with it. using it to define who I am in any kind of way. Just very plain straightforward, recognizing, oh, this is what's here. We call it in the past now bear attention, bear attention, naked Attention, attention that just sees things as they are, and doesn't add any interpretation or reaction on top of it. And that's a big part of it. One of the positive practices developing is that capacity to see what's going on, in this simplicity of bear attention, just oh, this is what's happening, no interpretations. And we often find that tremendous amount of our life is lived in interpretations is second guessing what's going on and hear and reacting to it and judging it and assigning meaning to what's going on. And some of that's okay. But often we miss really what's going on, and we often suffer as a result, and there can be a lot of suffering around the five hindrances. Because sometimes they can be unpleasant to have in there, especially if you're meditating and trying to be present. And these things arise and make it difficult for you to be present. Then meditators can be, get very depressed or angry about their presence or discouraged by their presence, or they can feel, you know, they try to get rid of them and attack them or they try to hold on to them because they love them sometimes. There's all these ways in which we complicate our relationship to the five hindrances. So first, we're asked just to pay attention to them as they are, here they are, and just have the simplicity of awareness of their being here. So you could ask, you know, what, do the hindrances hinder? Why are they called, they're also called explained by the Buddhist being that which obstructs There is a obstructs and also talk. It said the Buddha said that the five hindrances are that which

blinds us. So it obstructs our ability to see clearly. It blinds us from seeing what's going on clearly. And that's very easy to see. I think when you know we're in the throes and the grip of really strong sexual desire, you don't really see clearly. And probably many of you have had the experience, perhaps of falling head over heels in love. And so someone, perhaps no clue who the person was, and then finding out later well, gee, I guess that was a bit of a projection. It's a story I have is one of the one form of of sexual desire in the passionate world is called the passionate romances. And every passionate romance is the kind of romance that develops on a Vipassana retreat. That's a Silent Retreat. So no one talks to each other. And so there's no con no verbal contact with anybody else and people don't normally don't even make much contact and eye contact or anything on retreat. And so the other person is really just a blank slate for your projection. And so the positive romance is when you fall in love with someone, you see someone across the hall and, and, and you have all this idle time on retreat. And so the mind kind of gets carried away into this world of Central desired, you know, there's desire for this person and that desire builds fantasies and ideas. And when I sat my three month retreat, I had one of these and I don't think I had it all three months. But it was there periodically with this woman. And but three months is long enough, it was a long enough time to kind of build the story. And you know, getting to know her and, you know, hanging out and then getting married and having children and getting divorced and living happily After and, and then the end of the retreat has happened. And at the end of the retreat we, we do something that's called breaking silence. And so we broke the silence and I heard her speak for the first time. And she had a really thick for an ax accent the French or something. And I realized my whole fantasy was based on her being an American. And you know, and suddenly I realized I didn't have a clue who this person was, and this was all this projection of my son. So sometimes sensual desire, or, you know, can kind of paint the picture kind of put filters over our eyes, we don't see things clearly how things actually are. And same thing with ill will, or aversion, the second hindrance it's probably true for all for all five of them. So they create blindness, they create the hinder our capacity present. You're trying to stay Present and the mind is so powerfully pulled into the fantasies of sensual desire, all kinds, you know, sitting here it's cold, perhaps it's cold outside, and you start thinking about again, wouldn't be great be in Hawaii. And for 10 minutes or the sitting and all 45 minutes of sitting, you're thinking about, you know, planning and thinking about going to Hawaii. If you're lost in that world, then you're lost in a hindrance, you're being hindered by that movement of desire from being present. The other The second one is aversion or ill will, and that's since the opposite. And like also the mind can get pulled into that world. And never leave or thinking a lot takes a long time to kind of snap out of it. And that's where there's some aversion or ill will or hatred or anger, it can be very subtle, it can be very large. On retreat, sometimes it is called the personal vendetta. Same story, you don't know who the person is at all. But somehow, you know, you notice the kind of socks the person wears. And maybe that socks reminds you of your, you know, high school, you know, boyfriend or girlfriend who was kind of difficult person for you and suddenly, you know, all that anger is directed towards that person or, or someone you know, just the smallest little thing on retreat or a big thing you know, can, you know, you think that this person is just and it might be complete fantasy, and you realize at the end, you've made it all up and, and because there's all this time, you know, time on retreat. If a person is not careful, they can get pulled into this world of their fantasy of hate or vendettas, and off they go. So if you're sitting here on the retreat right here today,

and you happen to be sitting on a very hard chair, or a hard zafu and it's getting really hard for your butt. And it hurts and you're mindful of that fine, but at some point, you slip off the mindfulness into having a version it will For the cushion over the chair, you starting fantasies about taking it home and getting your acts out and doing something to it. Or you have maybe start having a version to the people like me because somehow I'm I represent the center in some way and I must be responsible for these soft foods that are here or the chairs that are here and so you know, who's this Gil? And what's he thinking about? And he should know better and, and, you know, you know, I'm the recipient of or someone comes in late and makes a noise coming in. And that's fine. We don't mind that so much. But it can be a source of a personal vendetta How could that person do that is so disrespectful and in the mind gets lost as swept up in this world, ill will the fantasy of your will. It said that ill will, is a lot people tend to be more motivated. To overcome the hindrance of ill will, than the hindrance of desire sensual desire, because sensual desire is pleasant. It's very seductive the thoughts and I've known people who've told me Oh, like on retreat sometimes, you know, I had a really hard days last day on the retreat. And then this fantasy came up, it was a great fantasy. And I just, you know, felt like I needed a break some entertainment, you know, and so I just went for it. And, and it was lost in our world for a while. Some people are really into ill will anger and get lost, they're easily maybe because anger sometimes is energizing. And some people thought, like the vitality that comes from feeling kind of angry and upset or whatever. And so they're attached to that. I think both desire and aversion here as being the caffeine of the soul. It kind of people kind of get into both of these because it keeps us revved up and going. And it seems sometimes sometimes disconcerting for people to have that caffeine taken away. And then not to be driven by desire driven by anger, can can lead people kind of flat for a while. It's kind of like if you stop taking coffee, there's a withdrawal period. And it's kind of a little bit rocky a little bit before you get a headache and it'll be difficult for a day or two. The same thing can happen if you withdraw yourself from being addicted to desire or addicted to or consumed by ill will, if you're used to that and depending on that for your energy level of four, your sense of orientation, who you are and how you orient orient yourself to the world, then it can be disorienting to put that to rest for a while. frightening for actually for some people. sloth and torpor. We don't ever use words in English do we think was last time you use the word outside of a Buddhist retreat context or meditation context? sloth and torpor, sometimes it's referred to as dullness, and, and boredom. I like to think of it sloth is physical and torpor is mental. And it's not the same thing as tiredness. So it's something that happens in the psyche in the body. That makes it difficult to be present because we feel kind of heavy or, or drained. Or sometimes the mind feels really dense or feels like like a like thick mud. Like you're in quicksand. You can't get the mind going or moving, do anything or just, you know, no energy in the mind, your energy in the body to get going. And sometimes this comes from resistance. We don't want to be present. We don't want to be here what's going on. And it's a classic strategy for some people to you know, to not you know, reaction to what they don't want to be present for they get tired, or they get resistant, or they get bored or something. The fourth one, restless in this and remorse. Sometimes in English we translate it as a restlessness and anxiety. Because remorse is a kind of anxieties is more relevant apparently for Americans than remorse. Somehow or the idea of remorse doesn't. It seems that an ancient India the idea of remorse was a much bigger issue for people than it is kind of most people here and in the modern world. I could be wrong about this. But

my sense is that the in Asia in ancient Buddhist world, perhaps the only reason why you'd feel kind of anxious or by yourself or kind of feel bad about yourself or depressed or kind of agitated about yourself restless anxious was if you had done something that had caused harm to someone or done something that was caused shame or embarrassment, did you actually done something a transgression. And if you had done no transgression, then you had what's called freedom from remorse, which was considered one of the one of the forms of happiness. But it seems like plenty of people here in the modern America, they just feel bad about themselves just because who they are. They don't have to do anything about you don't have to do any transgressions or do anything, you know, say anything bad or us walk into a room and you didn't you never seen these people before, and you feel like, you know, something wrong with us. Me, you know, Oh, I should be you know, and we're anxious then. And I think this kind of idea of being anxious for no reason, particularly, it was kind of absent from the ancient tradition and maybe it comes from the kind of Western idea of original sin, maybe we're kind of we are already sinful the way we are. In Buddhism, the ideas were already kind of know exactly what the Buddha said. But it kind of counterpoint to the idea of original sin and put it in for Buddhism is that teaching of the Buddha that says, The mind is luminous, except for the taints, the defilements that visited. So the thing seems like a hindrances cover over the luminous quality of the mind, the beauty of the mind, the freedom of the mind. So insane in a sense, originally, the mind is free, in a sense. So with restlessness, agitation, remorse, anxiety, and these also sometimes can be strategies of how we respond to situations. Where do we find it? Difficult to be present for. Sometimes, people get anxious as a way of kind of showing in a herd of some people, where they only feel like they show in certain families, they can show that they love other people in the family, but being anxious about other people worrying about other people, because that's how you show it. And I know some people who, you know, if something bad has happened, and they get anxious as a way of somehow thinking, they're coping with the situation, maybe showing their coat I don't know exactly how it works. And then the last of the hindrances is doubt. And classically, in the Buddhist tradition, it said, the primary forms of doubt is doubt about the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. So doubt about the enlightenment of the Buddha the possibility of purification that the Buddha represents the possibility of freedom, the Buddha Buddhism, what the Buddha represents. So, I think that's possible doubt the Buddha had that To experience and without some kind of confidence, or inspiration is in either the Buddha or other people who've practiced ahead of you. That can be it can be very hard to go into the depths of what meditation can provide. To be really motivated to really take it as far as it can really take you is something which goes so much against the popular currents of our culture and what our culture thinks is important that you really need some powerful sense of faith or trust, to really take it all the way. So if you if you have doubt, the doubt can be a hindrance, it keeps an obstacle or blockage that keeps us blind keeps us from being present, gets us lost. I've had doubt in my meditation practice, and it kind of pulls me off into this own world of thinking and thoughts and concerns and second guessing and wondering and confusion, and kind of get lost in that world. Doubt in the Dharma doubt in the practice. Often the teachings are doubt in the community, the Sangha, and they can take all kinds of forms, you can take the form of doubt that this was the right time to meditate. I'm not sure this is the right time, maybe I should try different time. Or maybe it's not the right practice. Instead of mindful, I think you should be doing concentration practice. No, no, not that. I think she'd be

loving kindness practice. No, not that I think I should be doing walking practice. They're walking meditation or not sitting meditation. You know, what's really the best practice to do is always I've heard there's different schools of Vipassana practice. And you know, what's the best one I don't really know and, and pretty soon You know, you decide to collect stamps instead. Because you know, all the confusion. And it said that doubt is the most dangerous of the hindrances, because doubt is the hindrance, hindrance that can get you to stop practicing to give up practice entirely. In the ancient tradition, the there's analogies given or similes given for the hindrances, I think they're kind of interesting. sensual desire is like being in debt. And to be free from sensual desire is like being free from debt. And being free from debt. You know, people feel kind of happy and light. But when you're caught in the grips of Central desire, that kind of addiction and craving, it's kind of like being in debt. The hindrance of ill will, is like into being imprisoned, being in prison, because you're being afflicted by this torture by this ill will and anger and then being free of this hindrance is like being set free from prison. sloth and torpor is likened to But I can't to what? Yeah. Doubt is like being lost in the desert lost in the wilderness. And restless is an anxiety is like being a slave. Because it's some something running around telling you what to do and you're kind of running around like crazy, you know, someone else is in charge right? And sloth and torpor is one quick send, that big worked works. But I remember maybe it's a symptom of a sloth and torpor mind that's remember the other simile is is, the mind is like water. And when desire is present, it's like the wall has been filled with dye is different colors red or blue or something and so you don't see things very clearly. When you look for your reflection in the water and the water has a dye in it is colored. Then you see yourself colored you look down you see yourself blue or orange or whatever the dye is when ill will is present is like the water is boiling over, bubbling with boil and you can't really see yourself at all. When sloth and torpor is present, it's like it's the water is covered with moss. And when restlessness and anxiety is present, it is like the wind is blowing across the top of the water and creating ripples so you can see and when doubt is present, the wall it's like the water is Oh, it's muddy, muddy, you can't see anything at all because all muddy. And this simile is very nice because it is what we're looking for is having clear water so we can see our reflection clearly so we can see things as they actually are. So the five hindrances is that which keeps us from seeing things as they actually are seeing ourselves or seeing senior experience. So a big part of the passionate practice or meditation practice is learning to recognize the five hindrances and learning to somehow overcome them, somehow no longer have them, be hindering your experience your capacity presidency clearly. The interesting thing about that is that you don't have to get rid of sensual desire or ill will or the other three. What we have to get rid of is the way in which they function as hindrances. And that's a very important point, because you can it's possible to have sexual desire arise and there's enough clear stability of mind that it doesn't hinder our capacity to see and to be present. So it isn't that central desire ill will is the problem in and of itself, with the problem is the way in which we have we relate to their arising, the way we relate to these being present, we get pulled into their, into their world into their orbit, we get sucked in there, and awareness gets lost. It's kind of like, I'd liken it to the black holes of the mind. So you're going along narrowly on your own and, and suddenly, a great desire routers, you know, one of the best ones you've had. And two days later, you wake up from that desire, the or 10 minutes later or something that it's so captivating. That like a black hole in space, where the gravitational force is so strong, that light goes by well get sucked in and ever

comes out. So when the hindrance is hindering. They pull in the light of awareness and awareness doesn't come out. But if we can overcome the hindering quality of the hindrance, then they're no longer a hindrance. And they're just essential desire. That makes sense. So it's very important point for me because otherwise, if you don't understand that point, then some meditators will declare war on sexual desire, or an ill will or these other things out there bad not to get rid of them. It's nice to get nice not to have them present. But we're trying to do to be passing on first and foremost, is learn to become free of their hindering qualities by waking up enough and have enough clarity, so we're not caught by them anymore. So in this discourse then talking about the five hindrances, it says, one should know when desire is present. When to know when there's the absence of desire, sensual desire, seeing the absence of a hindrance is very important because it gives us a reference point to highlight the felt sense difference, of being captivated by hindrance and being free of it. But by knowing when we're at when, when it's absent, you start appreciating the quality of the mind or the quality of the heart. That is, it's free, it's liberated, that's at ease, there's not caught. And to appreciate that it's very important thing to do. To appreciate that capacity not to be captivated and caught by something, something of the mind is one of the ways to, to strengthen that capacity of freedom. It's one of the ways to begin, orient or orient, orienting ourselves more towards that kind of work. way of living. To know that that's possible no one feels like no one's like it also by knowing the absence of a hindrance. It helps us to highlight when a hindrance does arise. Because one of the things to be positive students need to do, I believe, is to become so familiar with the five hindrances. You can smell them coming. So you Oh, there it is. And right away, you're, you're wake up to it and right away, you learn how to be free of it. Rather than waking up five or 10 minutes later, five or 10 days later, whatever it might be. It's best not to take the hindrances personally as if they're personal failings or personal problems or whatever. Some people specialize more than one more than one than the other. Or maybe see we specialize in one sometimes more than the other. Sometimes desire is really good, you know, really into it and sometimes Ill will really into it and sometimes the other ones but It's best not to take it personally as being a personal failing, they just come with being a human beings part of the territory. All meditators have to grapple with these five hindrances. And rather than see when they do arise for you, rather than being upset or discouraged or feel like there's a problem that, you know, I can't really meditate because they're here, which is really take them as being the food for deepening your practice. It's the very stuff the material by which we develop our practice on. So when you have a really good we have central desire arise. We don't indulge in it. Don't you know, but your job is to study it and get to know it and explore all aspects of it, what it feels like in your body, what it's like for the mind to be gripped by it. What some of the themes are, to really get to know it, well study it investigated, so that you know, it's so much so well They're no longer is captivating for you. It's kind of like a magician, if you if you're watching a magic show. And these magicians can do amazing things sometimes. And you look at that. And, you know, I'm sure it's a trick, you know, somehow that card deck or somehow that ring or somehow it's, you know, rigged in some ways, probably, you know, but it's pretty amazing. And you go back the next day and you're still interested, you know. And you may come a time to see that the magic trick. But then finally, you see how the trick is done. And then you no longer interest in seeing it anymore. So it doesn't work that way sometimes. So if you get to know that the hindrance is so well, that you see how the magic is woven. The spell is woven. Oh, that's how

it's done. And then you lose interest. Oh, there's much better things in life. than being captivated by sensual desire, there's much better things to do with a human life than being captivated by ill will. There's much better things to do in human life than be caught in slop, torpor, restlessness, anxiety and doubt. And to see how that magic is spun on you, is really great. I have a lot more to say about hindrances. I feel like I'm just warming up. Now, some of you have heard talks in hindrances a lot before many times. And it's now one minute to nine. I could speed it up. Do you feel like I've talked about hindrances enough or should we do it again next week? Next week, because they were part of it. I didn't cover here. The important the really interesting part Would you? Well, those of you have a lot of desire. Please come back next week. Those of you who have certain level of aversion to this topic No, note that and come back next week. Those of you who now very tired at the end of the evening, can't imagine coming back spending or the other evening like this. Next week, we'll give you the solution to sloth and torpor. And those of you who just kind of just so restless, it is nine o'clock and he hasn't ended yet. And when is it going to end and then just, you know, you know, I feel like a captive audience and I gotta get out of here. And just this has been long enough. And if you have that going on, come back next week, and we'll we'll do it again. So anyway, thank you.