

# 2004-11-28 The Hindrances: Restlessness (5 of 6)

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## SPEAKERS

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So we're getting near the end of a series of talks that I've been giving on Sunday morning on the five hindrances. And today, we'll explore the hindrance of restlessness and anxiety, restlessness and regret, restlessness, restlessness and worry. And for those of you who haven't been coming, hindrances, the word hindrances is a translation of a Pali word called Nirvana, which literally means to cover over. And it's that which covers over many things, but some of the wholesome qualities is beautiful qualities of the mind. The qualities, for example, primarily over covers over our ability to stay present. And so it's very hard to stay present in a clear direct way when these coverings are there. It also covers over our ability to act wisely in the moment to act with compassion and wisdom and, and the other kind of beautiful qualities of the mind. So a big part of Buddhist practice is learning to recognize these coverings, see them when they're operating. And then learn how to negotiate ourselves with them or, or work with them, so that they no longer cover us over this potential of the heart or the mind. And so they often called hindrances to that which hinder the practice, hinder that our capacity to get into some deep meditative experience. They can do all kinds of beautiful capacities of the mind and the heart. And there are five of them. There's actually seven but they're in under five categories. And the first two are paired: desire and ill will, and kind of like opposites. And then the next two are also paired and they have these wonderful terms: sloth and torpor is the one you know, one side of the pair. And the other side is restlessness and anxiety. And so kind of being drained of energy, not being able to apply oneself, not having the ability to do anything is contrasted with somebody being overexcited or agitated. And so then the also is not very useful state to be in because in the agitated state the rest of the state. There's often confusion. There's often an inability to make decisions. It's often an inability for a settlement, settlement, settlement on anything, and be focused to really see what's going on. When we're sloth and torpor, the same kind of inabilities are there also, but they're because we're being drained of energy. So they're kind of paired. Sometimes, these sloth, torpor, restlessness, anxiety, are a result of some problem with we have with desire. In the end, frustrated desire can sometimes lead to feeling discouraged or feeling lethargic or feeling, you know, you know, slothful, sometimes frustrated desire can lead to restlessness and anxiety. Same thing with ill will, it will, you know, when the frontman ill will is frustrated or somehow, you know, has a deleterious effect on our system, it can lead to sloth or can lead to restlessness. For some people, sloth and restlessness are strategies for how to respond to challenges in daily life in our lives. It has some deep personal psychological challenges, or social challenges, and people have trouble being present for it. Sometimes the response as a way of maybe protector cells are avoided. Sometimes the shut off, shut down slot and sometimes it's to get overly excited and restless and kind of run around like you know, like, I don't know what, like, when in doubt once when the image is given in in Texas, like a rat trapped in a cage. And North rats look like trapped in the cage. But I think the idea is that they're kind of running around like running and running, running

don't get anywhere and they can ever settle down. The so in this fourth hindrance, we're talking about two terms. One is we're talking about restlessness and the other anxiety. That's not sure what the best translation should be. The first one restlessness. The Pali word is dacha. And dacha means comes from, like the tremble or shake, so it can be agitated to be restless.

And it's said that it is restlessness, uddhacca, is present in the mind whenever the mind is caught up in some unskillful tendency or activity. Whenever the mind is involved in some activity, mental activity, which is unhealthy for oneself or for others. There's some degree of restlessness in that mind. It's also said that restlessness can be very gross, and it all can be very so. And in its subtle forms, it takes being fully enlightened to become free of the tendency to restlessness entirely. So, those of you who are not fully enlightened here today, there you should be able to find somewhere in your psyche, something that you can relate to this talk. Because somewhere you have the tendency to have the restlessness in your psyche. In deep meditation, the mind can be very still very concentrated, very focused. And it still becomes an issue of the mind getting restless. But it's very, very subtle, very small movements. It's more like, you're very, very still in meditation. It's kinda like You're on the razor's edge almost, you're very still and focused in there. And then ever so slightly, the mind kind of slips off that edge slips off, then you can go either direction go in the direction of what's called sinking mind, where the mind gets kind of dull, or can go in the, in the, in the direction of what's contempt sometimes called rising mind excited mind, the mind gets excited. For example, it's not so uncommon for people to fall or move into very deep states, sometimes interesting states of meditation. very concentrated states have never had that before. Wow, this is cool. They get excited, and they pop out of it. And, and it's also common enough when Mike is very calm and concentrated, that certain little bit of complacency can sit in laziness can sit in, and it's very, very easy for the mind to drift off into thought it is pleasant thoughts, and the minute it kind of falls into kind of a stupor. So a very important task of meditators, even very good meditators is to stay very attentive to this movement of sinking and restless mind, agitated mind or excited mind, and to track it, so that you can stay right on that middle point of staying balanced, and be able to go forward. So wrestles is an issue for both people who never meditated. And for people who are actually quite good at meditation, it's always going to be there until they say, person gets fully awakened, fully liberated. People who are new to meditation will sometimes occasionally report how dramatic the restlessness is. And I've known people who was like the rodeo, they first it's the first time they sat down to meditate, they'd never sit still in their life. And they never sat still in such a way that they got to see what was coursing through their body in their minds. Because if you're always moving and acting and doing you know, don't be to confront yourself and meet yourself. But if you really sit still, sometimes it requires you kind of suddenly all this energy doesn't have an outlet in the sense, and so you get to see it. You know, right up front, right close up. And sometimes it's really like, like rodeo. I've known people who've broken into sweats. Sometimes you got nauseous, sometimes I've gotten up and run away. Because it's so dramatic. The meaning of themselves, this restlessness and anxieties, agitation that might be there that's hidden, often hidden. Sometimes you'll have much easier time the beginning of meditation practice. Sooner or later. I think some kind of restlessness will sit in agitation we say it will sit in I've sat certainly stuck with my share of restlessness and agitation in meditation. And it sometimes takes the form of you feel as energy in my legs. I just feel like I'm on a boat. You know, just like anything you know, or is rising energy is kind of like almost like a tension that rises up. Sometimes it can feel like a lot of energy coursing through the body just kind of like movements, tightening intention tensing, and just going to impulses going moving through the body a lot. Sometimes it feels like kind of shakiness, vulnerability, and kind of being feeling kind of shaky and not really able to settle and relax because it's shakiness, agitation. Some of you probably know the feeling of having too much caffeine. If you have too much caffeine, then when you sit down to meditate, then you probably be visited by restlessness or this agitation that can be there. Interestingly enough, the effect that caffeine the agitation that caffeine can have on the on the body in the system might not

show itself for meditator when the meditation is somewhat coarse, when their mind is so much you know, busy. But as the mind gets more and more quiet Meditation, it becomes more and more obvious that there's kind of an edge of restlessness or agitation that caffeine tends to create. And so sometimes, sometimes on retreats, people who drink caffeine will stop it for the retreat because they find that it gets in the way of being able to drop further down some deeper level of stillness and calm. One of the interesting qualities of restlessness is, or agitation is that it can be it can camouflage itself. It can. Because often restlessness is kind of focusing, can at times focus on something we're concerned about. Something we're worried about something that we're agitated about somebody's trying to solve something which is frustrating us something we feel responsible for, we're not taking care of properly or there's many things that can make them up to make the mind kind of agitated. And as long as we're focusing on the thoughts That are responsible thoughts that are the focus of the agitation, it's very hard to get the system to settle, unless we can fix unless you can solve the thoughts solve the problems, right? That's the holy grail of the mind. Just think about this long enough, I'm sure I can solve this. And we'll think about it for days and months and years. And, and it's kind of a dead end certain degree. So at some point, what we have to do is learn to turn away from the thought. So it can be very hard movement, to learn to focus away from what we're thinking about. You don't necessarily have to stop thinking about it. But there's this art of turning the energy or the interest away from what we're thinking about, to what's happening in the immediate presence right now. And with restlessness and agitation, it can feel uncomfortable. One of the responses to discomfort is to Try to run away, try to get away from it or try to attack it. In other words, to get restless over again, it can be kind of self perpetuating cycles and restlessness is uncomfortable. We touch it, we recoil to get more restless. So part of the art in certainly meditations to come back at times, and learn how to sit still with our own restlessness and agitation, very important quality of practice. And let it hide itself by always focusing externally. The so that's the first word in this fourth hindrance that dacha the other half is called cucaracha gotcha. Gotcha. And, and this is a little different quality. This is In the ancient texts, it's referred to as hindrance of regret. And this is when our so in the, in the ancient texts, the assumption there is the only reason that person would feel this feeling of culture. Regret is if you did something morally off so you have something to be ashamed of, or embarrassed if you wouldn't want some, you know, diet you wouldn't need a Dalai Lama comes in and you say, oh, by the way, I, you know, I recently lied to my best friend, you know, you want to like the Dalai Lama, you'd rather not get better things to talk about, you know what to have to admit that. So it's behavior which causes the mind to be agitated, or restless. Because it feels regret kind of caught up in that regret. Many years ago, I remember doing something that could be considered unethical. And it certainly was something I didn't want other people to know. About and I went on retreat, and the first days of the retreat, were awful. Because, you know, it was just one of those those thoughts and feelings are right there and we're a we're gonna do and people are gonna notice and what's going on what am I gonna say? What's gonna happen to me? And so that was the kind of being visited by the covering this hindrance of regret.

There's a different kind of hearing, kind of regret or agitation that can maybe be related to culture. And that is anxiety about our self, our ego, or egotism, our self definition. Most of us have very, most human beings are tremendously preoccupied with their sense of self, who they are, who they are in relation to other people who they're not. I'm not going to tell that to someone or let me tell you this about me. So you know who I really am really with a spin we're doing. We're great politicians. And we're kind of always giving spins about ourselves. We're very concerned about ourselves. And that concern around self and self identity is one of the sources of anxiety and restlessness. And that can be seen sometimes again, in very deep meditation, very, very advanced meditators it's that very little, it doesn't feel like restlessness anymore, but it's but it's it's very kind of slippery little kind of concern for itself. Or use it or, or identifying with oneself. Oh, I am so concentrated right now. Just that little innocent statement. I'm so

concentrated right now. You know, if you just say casually, I'm concentrated, that's probably safe. But if I am so concentrated, then you can get caught. Gotcha. Right. And, and this Kind of the mind is no longer in that Razor's Edge of balance place throughout, it's been caught by something, and it's gone off. And so for some meditators, it's when they can let go of using the word AI, around what's the good things happening to them in meditation, that a certain level of restlessness or anxiety falls away, and then I can get Stiller.

So in the classic discussion about the five hindrances, it describes how a person practices with these hindrances with these coverings when they appear, the assumption is they're gonna appear to all of us until the mind gets concentrated enough that they no longer the mind is kind of Stronger than the power of these forces. So it's something most meditators have to work with and learn about. And what I recommend is that all meditators be eager to learn about them. So rather than being discouraged when they appear, say, Oh, great. There it is, I was told it was, would come and barricade, and I get to learn to work with this. Now, how do I work with this? How do I learn to develop the skills and the strength to work with this? a different attitude might be, oh, shoot, this is this is a drag. I just ignore that part of my life. Or I'm just really bad or something. And, and I think I'll do you know, watch television instead. There are skillful and unskillful ways of responding to the appearance of the hindrances and the skillful one is to be interested and be respectful and begin engaging with them in a way that begins overcoming their hindering quality. The first line that we emphasize in our insight tradition is simply mindfulness, knowing that it's there, recognizing it's there. And I think a mindfulness is, I think, kind of some of these hindrances as being like a maze, and you go into this maze, and there's no out in this maze, but you think there is one. And so you go into this maze, and you go endlessly around kind of searching around the corner is going to swing that way. And but mindfulness is like learning somehow to lift yourself up over the top of the wall of the maze. So you get a panoramic view of the top you see it all. You put you lifted out of it, and you have this overview of the whole situation, rather than being mired into the middle of it, lost in it. So we try to pull ourselves out of the mire push us out of the maze, so we can get an overview and see it and having an overview having a strength of mine to see rather In the last in is one of the very important strengths we're developing in this practice. And that takes not so easy to do. So it takes a while to learn how to do that. With restlessness one of the most useful ways of doing this, I found is to feel the restlessness physically. And, and you just kind of let the body be the container of all that impulses and energy and sit there and be committed enough moving. And sometimes you might break out in the sweat you might get into because it's so strong feels like the rodeo and you sit there and just feel it almost like a pimple. Imagine it's a ping pong balls, you know, or something and he's moving inside and going this way in that way. And just feeling in the body takes away that little extra agitation that comes with the mind thinking it has to fix it and solve the problem. Maybe you don't to solve it and fix it. All you have to do is feel it physically, and the body will take care of it will help it to unwind in its own time to let the body feel it. It's also can be very empowering for some people to learn to have the ability to ride it out. They don't get to not be swayed by it or caught by it or, or pushed around by it forced to do act in the world because of it, but they can just sit with it and get the upper hand. If it's regret that's going on, then perhaps we need to look more carefully at what's going on in the mind. And not just be present in the body. But look at the beliefs thoughts that are generating the memories of generating that kind of mental regret that's going on. So that the classic instructions, the first thing it says is just notice it's there. The second thing it says, Is noticed when it's not there. And in our tradition, we emphasize so much paying attention to what's present, that we probably don't say enough. Pay attention when something's not there. It isn't. It's not saying the same thing as Pay attention to all the things which are not present. It's saying it there's some usefulness of paying attention noticing when you're not being caught by hindrance. So if 100 say that restlessness is a really common hindrance for you, then notice those times in the day when it's not there and get in not just

notice it kind of in the abstract, but really get a felt sense of what it's like to be without the restlessness or the regret, physically, emotionally heartfully in the mind,

really get to know what it's like. Because that knowledge, that kind of almost physical knowledge of what it's like to be still calm or peaceful, is very nourishing for the psyche. It helps in forms of psyche what's possible. And it's just a very useful thing to do. But it's also useful for the for the next three instructions on how to work with these indices. To address today's restlessness. So the next thing is to do is to notice what is it that prompted the arising of the restlessness or the regret so there's a kind of using our I don't know if analytical abilities is the right word but using our abilities to reflect to look at to analyze a little bit. What is it that happened here that caused this to arise a little bit sometimes going back into the past? A few minutes, perhaps, or an hour a little bit in the past? What is it that happened that's caused this to happen? Because this restless have to be there. That's what the Buddha said should do that. is not necessarily same thing as psychoanalysis going back, you know, to your childhood, you know, to early cause it but just kind of an immediacy. What is it that cause that perhaps you lie to a friend And you've noticed the next hour your breath you had also regret, oh, my behavior an hour ago was the condition for this restlessness arising this regret arising to see that and to begin understanding, what are the reasons reasons for the rising of restlessness and anxiety, restlessness, agitation, regret. Now to leave it as something you take for granted. It's there because of causes and conditions. If we begin to become aware of what those causes and conditions are, is a very, you know, it's very useful, because then you can start doing something about it more than just be bring mindfulness to it. You can actually change your behavior. You can stop lying, or stop drinking caffeine, or do whatever it is that's causing this, this kind of this hit this hindering quality. So that gives us some some, again, some empowerment, some control over our lives. That's more than just bringing mindfulness just changing our experience changing what we do.

And there's a whole slew of kind of things that prompt restlessness and regret. But you might look a lot and look carefully at your sense of self. Self definition, how the way you define yourself a wonder, define yourself affects the degree to which you're restless, or agitated. You might also look at the role of desire or ill will you Your, your attachments or your fears, in this, to take a very honest and direct look at the nature of your desires. What do you really desire? What's going on? What, how are you caught by your desires? And what's the relationship between having desires and getting agitated to see that connection? The next thing that the meditator needs to do or can do an instruction is to understand what it takes to abandon or let go of this hindrance. And again, this is a little bit different than just being mindful of it. Sometimes mindfulness by itself is enough to free ourselves from the hindering quality. But sometimes it's not. It's days. So you can look, what can I do to abandon this quality that's keeping me from being present that keeps spinning me out, spinning me out with the restlessness and agitation. And again, there might be a whole slew of things that person might do. Sometimes they're more meditative. Sometimes they can be more non meditative. Sometimes getting more exercise is helpful. I've noticed sometimes if I don't get enough exercise during the day, there's a kind of a I would call it an agitation restlessness, that kind of energized state that I have sometimes when I've tried to go sleep at night. A bit harder to fall asleep. But if you get exercise then when I go to sleep at night seems like it's a lot easier I kind of feel the effect of lack of exercise. So maybe maybe external maybe get my exercise, more activity. But what does it take to abandon or let go of these? If Genesis if you've seen what prompted it, you'll have a better sense of what it takes to like to abandon it. You see it prompted by desire, maybe the issue is not abandoning restlessness, the issues abandoning desire or attachment to certain things? Or Ill will if we're angry, maybe angry is was keeping angers what's keeping us restless? We have to take a very honest look at the anger and learn what do we have to let go of there? What do you have to diminish there? Sometimes bringing up opposite qualities to the restlessness, never regret



as antidotes can help balance it out and smooth it out. And one of the classic ones is doing some kind of concentration practice, like loving kindness practice. And the other is to,

to, you know, the opposite of restlessness is usually seen to be stillness, or calm to tune into what that part of your being, which is calm or still. Even though most of you might be restless to begin appreciating and valuing calm and stillness, and tuning into it, sometimes I can get a sense I might feel somewhat restless, but around me just the perimeter just outside the boundaries of my body. I could feel it you really still. I don't know if everybody else has that sense, which doesn't seem to be happening there. So it's kind of a kind of stillness. It's all around me. And sometimes I'll tune into that stillness. It seems to be all around me. And that stillness then will be very soft kind of almost loving. container for what's going on inside. And that that tends to kind of then soften what's happening inside in a nice way for me. Some people find an inner stillness, deep inside, that's the core of their being. And that informs the restlessness and kind of helps you to settle into quiet. One of the classic antidotes for restlessness and regret is happiness. And it said that you cannot be happy and restless at the same time. You cannot be happy and regretful the same time. So, to bring in some kind of happiness into the system. So, you know, it can be many things, bringing some kind of happiness, because I was giving this talk this morning, when I first sat down to meditate with all of you. I was a little bit restless, probably because of the talk, but I just, you know, just come down here for my kids and stuff. If at all, happiness is the antidote to restlessness. So I thought about all you sitting here. This is a phenomenal thing. This is really great to have you all sitting together all these people here and this has made me happy. And, and sure enough, I felt more settled as soon as I thought about that happiness brought up that happiness. So, be mindful of the hindrance when it's there. Be mindful of what it's like when it's not there. studied a little bit what prompted the hindrances to arise. study what it takes to abandon the hindrance like oh, but if you can, and then the fifth approach is when a hindrance is not there. Then avoid prompting in the future. So you have to know there's nothing there. And then you have to know yourself well enough to know that certain things tend to prompt you to be restless. And so, you know, I think a better avoid that. I have noticed that every time I stole from my friends, it made me kind of restless. It took me a while to learn this, learn this. But I finally learned it after about 12 times. I think that I don't this restless is not very helpful for me. What I'm trying to do is to I'm trying to learn how to meditate to be really present that has a high enough value for me in my life, that I really want to see what it's like to be really present and concentrated. I think I need to change my life a little bit so that I don't come to my meditation, so restless. So I think I better make some changes here. I think I better stop stealing. Because if I keep stealing, I just can't get into the meditation the way that I you know, it's meant to do. So there is this kind of prioritization that goes on. The spiritual life are kind of understanding the trade offs and being willing sometimes to put aside or abandoned or let go of certain things that are integral to interfere with our interest or intention to develop a spiritual life. There is a kind of trade off and some people think they can have it all steel and develop meditational method. You can't do that. And, and there's other things you can't do and you have to decide for yourself or explore for yourself.

What is it that interferes with your ability, what gets in the way with your ability to develop useful, deep, still concentrated focus? You're really here and present

So I'd like to end with a short story of from the story from the Buddhist enlightenment. And it's kind of you know, my version of the story. The

the Buddha spent some six years wandering around India as an ascetic he was in he left, he left the palace, his palace life in order to pursue a spiritual life. And the spiritual lives that were available for him in India at that time, were the ones that he pursued the common routes, and one of the most common

ones that he pursued was the ascetic route. He did that for many years, until he realized that it was a dead end wasn't going to take him anywhere. And so he stopped that. And he said, How am I What am I gonna do now I've done all the major things that people, the passive unavailable to me, and I haven't found my piece. And then he remembered a story remembered a memory Emory have when he was six years old. And it was a spring day. And the father was officiating over the Royal the ritual plowing first plowing of the season, in the spring. And all the people are out in the fields with a ritual plow and they're flowing. In the six year old Buddha was left underneath the rose apple tree, the edge of the field just by himself, people had left him alone. And I imagined that he was kind of as a child of the royalty he wasn't alone that that much so he was left alone and the shade of this tree You set up right and in a way sometimes children can do a dropped into a very deep state of peace instead of a state of well being. So when he was 35, he remembered that event. And he said, Oh, perhaps something about that childlike openness, when I just sat there without trying to engage in any kind of special kind of spiritual practice is try to be very open and present in a very relaxed way. Maybe that's the way forward for me. So he tried that, and I call it kind of a child like openness. He was gonna sit and meditate with a childlike openness to whatever was going on just open ready to be receptive, undefended. No agenda is not trying to manipulate or do anything with experience, but just here open. Now, someone who's been an ascetic for six years, and been repressing and pushing down denying themselves for that long is going to have a rebound effect. That's just six years. And one of the first things that happened to the Buddha when he kind of sat with that childlike openness was he was besieged by what's called Mara, all these psychic forces that have been repressed all these years. desire and fear and hunger and thirst and, and, you know, and you know, a whole bunch of stuff came, I need to deal with all these very strong forces. And it's kinda like taking the lid off and all that Pandora's box was pouring out. But as a 35 year old, who'd been trained as a warrior, who done years of spiritual practice, he combined that childlike openness with an adult likes stability, and he stayed rooted and focused and grounded. The present moment here without moving, unwavering, unwilling to let greed, desire, anger, fear, somehow push him this way or that way. agitate him right. Kachin move in, he sat still. And so is that combination of childlike openness and adults like stability. That then allowed the Buddha to become enlightened. That 90 sat under the Bodhi tree. So this idea of stability is a very important part of Buddhist meditation practice. The kind of unwavering stability kind of rooted stability and restlessness and anxiety restlessness and regret are what makes it very difficult to have that stability. Learn to have that stillness ability to learn to have that anchoring in the present moment allows us then to have a productive, childlike opening openness to our experience also. So that combination, I think works really well together. So those are my thoughts today about the hindrance. The fourth hindrance