

2008-11-10 The Five Hindrances Sloth and Torpor

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SPEAKERS

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So, last week we were interrupted by the elections. So now we'll try to get back on track with our theme our series, and we giving a series of talks on the five hindrances. And I suppose this is the fourth talk now I've given I'm going to give and those of you haven't been coming. The five hindrances are a favorite theme in meditation retreats, a favorite theme for people who do mindfulness meditation, because there they are. category of mental phenomena, distractions that make it very hard to meditate. These come up, the mind kind of gets swept away in their current and Bullets this way in that and so very, because they're very common, then the, the I Kido of mindfulness practice is not to dismiss them or attack them or ignore them, but in a certain way turn towards them and get to know them better. And by becoming familiar with them, then they lose some of their alert some of their seduction some of the power they have over us. And also as we turn towards them and understand them, then we can understand what needs to be done to correct for them or to work with them or somehow what we need to do so we we can get the upper hand and rather than being swept away in their current and these five hindrances, there's actually seven because the two of them are are paired paired Paired items. So the first is the sense sense desire. The second is ill will, and the topic for today is usually in English we use the word sloth and torpor and not a word that we don't think slot this word we often use it torpor is look more common. And then the fourth one is fourth hindrances, restlessness and worry. And the fifth one is doubt. So today's topic is sloth and torpor, dullness and lethargy. And this is a, they're all big topics. And this is a big topic as well. And it covers there's a narrow definition of it. And there's a wider definition each of these hindrances is a narrow definition and a wider definition. The narrow definition is what the Buddha said. And the wider definition is how it's expanded to include a lot more a lot more bigger range of distractions, than the narrowed kind of words that the Buddha use. So, like the first one is sense desire for hindrance. And but many teachers will just call it desire because desire no matter what it doesn't have to be sense desire, just any kind of desire, and we get swept up in that current takes us away. So in terms of the wider definition of sloth and torpor, it can include sleepiness and fatigue. just ordinary everyday kind of sleepiness and have a long day you're sleepy, and you have to kind of contend with that if you're trying to meditate that point. I've read somewhere that 20% of Americans are fatigued. That seemed reasonable 20% of you are fatigued. More. And so and it also also read that in America that that there's a high percentage of people who are have sleep deprivation, don't sleep enough, some because they have some kind of issues, physic physical issue. Some people because they don't give themselves enough sleep, they stay up too late and then they get up early to go to work or whatever. And they're always kind of trying to narrow how much sleep they can get. And so and then there's people who are deeply fatigued not because of lacking sleep, but because of how they live. If we're constantly worrying, worry takes a lot of energy. In fact, I've noticed sometimes that

I need less sleep when I'm concentrated, On some one particular thing, and not just you know, in retreat where, you know, concentrated meditation. But if I'm working on some writing project, for example, and I'm really concentrate really focused on my project. And the days where I spend a few hours doing that, I need less sleep that night. And I think part of the reason is that concentrated mind, even though the energy is going into it, cleanly concentrated mind expends less energy than a worried mind or mind scattered or fragmented going off in a different directions. So people who are chronically anxious, go around life be anxious, but all kinds of things are expanding a lot of energy. And so and that energy, not just mental energy, but physical energy as the muscles in the body tense up in different ways and struggled against each other. And so it's not surprising that people who are constantly anxious, would also be deeply fatigued. If you go and meditate Retreat, it's very common for people to just be surprised by how much fatigue they're carrying, carrying along with them. Sometimes you can kind of override the fatigue by just being busy and keep yourself distracted and engaged hyped up, and then you go on retreat, and you can't do the usual hyped up kind of things anymore. You can't even walk fast or talk faster, you know, use this, they're yours, you know, and, and so that meant for many people the first couple of days and retreat is a chance for the fatigue to catch up to us. And then people will often kind of nap the first days or be exhausted the first days and just kind of kind of just to feel it. And then if you go a little bit deeper and meditation and kind of the surface fatigue, some people also just discover that it's not just kind of generalized fatigue in their body because sleepiness or whatever, but there's a can be a very, very deep weariness in the brain and the mind and thinking mind The poor mind is exhausted. I mean, you can get all the sleep you want in the world completely rested that way. But because of the incessant movement of the mind being anxious and desiring and hating and doing all this activity, there's sometimes going to cover very, very deep kind of exhaustion in them in the mind. So that also needs to be settled out and recover from that. So there's those kinds of boutiques and kind of sleepiness. There's also a different kind of fatigue or tiredness or fatigue with kind of drowsiness or dullness that can happen and that can be psychological and it can be because of the house like more deeply psychological as a reaction to what's going on around us. So for example, frustrated, frustrated desire some people if their desire suppressed sweated enough, will get fatigued, or tired or dough or numb or shut down or some great variety like that. It just you know, they have a very strong current of desire of wanting something, wanting, wanting one thing that you really want to do something or want to have something or something and reality doesn't cooperate. You can't do it. It just sometimes things shut down and get tired. I've noticed this occasionally in parenting.

You know, the, it's not exactly what I want to do. You know, parenting, you know, after the sixth hour of you know, and not a few parents talk about how their IQ seems to drop. And they don't that is not a joking thing. Just recognize that the IQ kind of drops in there when the kids are in their early ages. toddler's and all that. And something I think is just kind of this, maybe it's a shock. But there's a kind of, you know, I think it's a certain kind of dullness that could set that sets in because there's not so much stimulation. intellectual stimulation or adult stimulation sometimes spent a lot of time with kids. But also, I've noticed in myself that there are other things I want to do. And, and, and sometimes I've noticed when I'm wanting to do other things besides then my mind sometimes gets kind of where you're tired. And if I finally stopped doing the thing, that's, you know, it's interrupting what I want to do, I get more energy back. And this is not speaking well about myself. You know, it isn't that the you know, I should be free rein to do what I want to do, I should be able to let go better, but sometimes it's hard to do that.

so frustrated desire for some people can produce dullness, lethargy, sometimes it's resistance, something comes along that it isn't so much more frustrating to desire, but we don't want to do what's coming down the road, we don't want to do what's being asked of us. Perhaps someone comes to talk to us, and we'd rather not have a conversation with that person, or about that topic. And so it's tiring for

us or dling. Sometimes it's a shutdown. So resistance can be a source of dullness in the mind or lethargy. And you know, it's most obvious I think, in children, where you ask your children to do something they don't want to do and suddenly they're so tired. What's amazing, just a, you know, their shoulders drop and, you know, their feet that suddenly their feet they're 30 pounds each and they're dragging them along and you know, it's and then And then, you know, somehow, circumstances change or friend comes over to play with them or something. It's where they get all that energy. Because just, you know, five minutes it's turned, or one minute or, you know, a second little kid. And so there could be plenty of we've gotten all the sleep we need. And we're not tired that way. Maybe we're not fatigued in some deep way. But there is. So there's lots of energy available. But sometimes that avail energy is shut down or not available, because of psychological reactions we've had to what's going on around us what's going on. So it can be resistance, it could be frustration. It could also be a certain kind of defensiveness. There's Some people, you see it in babies, that if baby gets overstimulated, they they go sleep, you know, it's a nice thing to do is request protective. And adults apparently apparently adults do this also. And the only place I see really as adults is on meditation retreats, where sometimes because of the dropping of kind of the surface lid on our consciousness, some of the deeper unresolved issues that a person is carrying with them sometimes for a lifetime will bubble up. And sometimes these deeper things that may be long forgotten and maybe not forgotten, just kind of been resistance hold suppressed for a long time. Sometimes it's too much for the mind to handle all at once. And so it seemingly what happens is that in order to protect ourselves from it resistant, people fall asleep. I've known some people occasionally who've kind of didn't stop falling asleep, until they discovered what it was that they were holding back. They sometimes it's a very symptom, sometimes it comes with a memory of some trauma that happens this child, and they get flooded with memory and then oh, then they wake up, then there's not a problem anymore of being sleepy. But there was a transition before that came to the surface, where we just fell asleep. I'm very respectful of that kind of falling asleep meditation, because the somehow the mind psyche kind of knows when you're ready. And so just keep meditating and not off. And, and then at some point, you could do your best to practice Don't worry about it. And then at some point, you'd be ready to kind of you open up to that part of you. I think I'm not I'm not a believer and just kind of busting into the unconscious. You know, and just kind of, you know, opening all the ones

related to frustration could be disappointment, great disappointment. And other thing that leads to kind of sleepiness and tiredness. I haven't quite covered it yet. And that is a lot of people do live hyped up lives and always busy always doing something. Some people call it the caffeine or the sole desire and aversion. You know, some people pump themselves up with a lot of desire. Some people pump themselves up with a lot of aversion. And some people do to the fear. People like to apparently go to fear movies, I never understood it but but I guess they feel really alive then. I don't know what maybe some of you explained it to me someday. But they get energy From these things, and some people get energy from being praised. Some people get energy from being criticized. But if there's no caffeine of the soul, desire and aversion is not operating, or if we're being praised, or criticized, some people don't get juiced, and they fall asleep, they get tired. You see that it's very sad sometimes in social conversations, where someone doesn't mean anything for. For someone else, that person is not doesn't that mean you're not going to get something from that person that you want praise or advancement or something. And that person is also not going to be criticizing you or danger to you. Then the person is maybe boring, or just dull or it's not interesting. And so sometimes it's kind of kind of lethargy or dullness sets in and it's various Add, especially to being the recipient tend to that.

So, so one, one when desire and aversion settle down the first two hindrances settle down, some people find it what follows in there is, is sloth and torpor, dullness, drop of energy. And it's almost like a transition some people need to go through. Because just like with caffeine, that's why I like that

analogy. Some people when they stopped drinking caffeine have to go through withdrawal, two or three days. So if you stop using desire and aversion, yet, sometimes you have to go through withdrawal as you make that transition, where you find some more natural energy to stay alert and awake. So I've talked about, try to talk a little bit about the physical causes of sloth torpor, fatigue, dullness, drowsiness. There can also be psychological causes, or psychological reaction to things, and then the third form of sloth and torpor, it can be called meditative sloth and torpor. And that's where when I meditate a sloth and torpor is a sloth and torpor, the dullness that arises. And not because of some kind of psychological issues are not because of not getting asleep, but rather because of some imbalance in meditation itself. So there's plenty of people who associate meditation with getting calm. And then because of that, some people are pushing the contactors they meditate. Some people are the meditator soothing themselves, like the breath can be kind of soothing, and so they soothe themselves.

You know, and if you push the calming too far, you'll fall asleep. And meditation is not about not only about becoming calm, it's about becoming calm and alert. And alert means energized, healthy energy. Not that not that I typed up, but there's a very healthy clarity and energy that comes along. And so if we follow the path of calm, or if we somehow sit too long and without enough energy kind of being aroused, then we start falling asleep. Or you know, or getting dollar and dollar and it's a very common phenomena of meditators because often meditation brings calm and as we get calmer and calmer sometimes the mind we kind of thought we kind of let go the alertness we're kind of lower this right technology and I nice the right expression for meditation, but we lower our guard you know, we're not kind of so alert or careful anymore when attentive anymore. So this is so nice. Sometimes calm is very pleasant and enjoyable. Wow. Finally, I've arrived. Meditation has been in this chore for me for last few months enough. It's so pleasant and so calm and so nice. I'll just drift here and go so nice. And then we don't notice we're starting to think about something. And the mind kind of kind of goes off and off and off and off. And it was still a very pleasant state. But really, primarily what the mind is doing is war is drifting away in some wonderfully calm, nice, pleasant thought. And you can spend, you know, a long time thinking you're meditating, but not, you know, because you've kind of been carried away in this calm kind of stupor. Sometimes meditation is called sinking mind, the mind the energy, the energy and alertness of the mind sinks and drops. And it's something that meditators have to be very attentive of. So these are some of the kind of causes for us force, sloth and torpor. The effect that has on us is the mind can sometimes feel tired, the body can be tired, then there can feel that could be a lack of desire, wish to, to engage effort to make effort and practice. Or it can be all the desire in the world, but the mental factors cannot be aroused. You just can't get yourself kind of there I've had the experience of kind of being somehow clear, and not being sleepy. sitting meditation being clear and not sleepy. But somehow the mind functioning of the mind, the inner functioning, the mind, the different factors in mind that have to operate. Were kind of dull, and there wasn't any energy in them, to kind of, do the meditation practice to be mindful. There's something deliberate in the mind that has to be engaged to be mindful, and that deliberateness just couldn't I couldn't get it up. I could have given stock meditating, and I could have gone about my life and not been tired. But there's some kind of deep, deep kind of kind of dullness, that I couldn't get this aroused and up and going. Other times where, if not, I'm just going to kind of globally tired and sleepy and just very dull. And when I was for many years, enough many years before a year, actually, I worked as a fast order cook. And at greens restaurants in San Francisco, and I would get up in the morning and meditate at the Zen center. And then I would go to work and then I come back and meditate at 530 in the evening. And the first half of every afternoon meditation was like this. Just I wasn't They're nodding and just dropping, dropping, dropping. And it would always last 20 minutes. After 20 minutes, I was awake. I was alert. And I don't think it was just a matter of there was getting a nap which probably I was. But it was it was, I felt it was deeper than a nap because I felt so much when I finally came, came to after 20 minutes, I was really clear and present. And I think that was I was cleansing off the tiredness of the day, but the various holding patterns of the

day, the various kinds of stresses of the day that have built up. And that was a very deep way for me to kind of release discharge. All that and then once I was discharged, I was awake.

But that's just another way of another manifestation of dullness. tiredness meditation is just nodding off dropping off. And my great dropping off story was I was at Tassajara Zen monastery living down there for a few years. And it was my job to for a while to ring the bell at the end of the meditation sessions. And would you be laughing already? I suspect you think that I forgot to ring the bell? No, no, I don't think I ever forgot to ring the bell at the right time. But sometimes I would have it was so ingrained somehow. Maybe I was kind of sleeping and but after the 40 minutes, I'd wake up and ring the bell just to write on time. Sounds good. But they had they had this big bell. They still have this big bell. It's about I don't know how, you know, two and a half feet tall and two and a half feet wide. So big though. Like this, this shape here, right? But you know, 10 you know, I don't know, four times bigger. Something big, big. Last thing, and, and the person who rings the bell has a sit in front of that bell. And so you're sitting there, it's a little distance from you. And so I was sitting meditating during a meditation session, and then I nodded off. And so I fell forward, and my forehead hit the bell.

And now, the bell that ends the period of meditation is a much smaller high pitched bell. So people knew it wasn't into this if you were waiting for the small bell, not the big Bell long. So everybody knew what happened to Gil. And, but then I gave myself some credit, because it was a 40 minute period of sitting, and then a 40 minute period of sitting. I did it a second time. And why I gave myself credit was was some credits, maybe dysfunctional or delusion delusory credit, but was that I was I was relaxed enough to fall asleep again after the first time. I hadn't gotten upset or anxious or worried about what people are gonna think about me. I used to pee relax, so good again. So we have a smaller Bell here so it's a common phenomena and so people who meditate, need to learn how to work with it how do you adjust for it now some of the things like sleepiness, physical sleepiness, for example, And sometimes you need more rest. Some people need to sleep more they need to meditate. So that just really sleep is really important. Getting a nap. Some people who meditate early in the morning and find themselves kind of drowsy and sleepy in the mind. Maybe they shouldn't meditate first thing when they get up. Some people are slower in waking up than other people. And so maybe your shower or your breakfast or something or coffee or something before it makes sense to meditate. Some people are more like night people, maybe it makes more sense to meditate in the evening. So we have to kind of look at our patterns and see what makes sense for us for who we are. The other thing is we need sometimes you need to do something to stimulate yourself. My teacher in Burma Pandita he told me, Gil, never do sitting meditation without doing walking meditation first. And so for a long time, I would get up when I did my early morning meditation. I'd actually get up and do walking meditation for five or 10 minutes first, and then I would sit and the walk meditation kind of get got a nice kind of energy flowing, in order for me to sit and practice. Things like sitting up straighter, was one of the, one of the, one of the things that can help you get sleepy in meditation is if you're too comfortable. What I thought meditation was about becoming comfortable. I just, you know, I meditate on my couch. No wonder you fall asleep all the time. So, if you get too comfortable, to be too warm, it's better to be a little bit cool and, you know, in some, you know, enough you won't be uncomfortable, but you don't want to be really comfortable. You know, just lay in a military maybe meditate in a, in a, in a bed of pillows. You know, you know, you need to sit up straight and so sometimes Sitting up straighter can be very helpful. Sit up straighter, straighter straighter than you normally do just that sometimes can sometimes get energy if you're capable of it. And not everyone is capable for by any means. But the half lotus position would cross your legs to half lotus and full lotus are yoga postures that bring a really good energy. So you sit up there and full lotus and, and I've done that in order to stay awake, mostly I've done it when I've been a teacher sitting in front of everyone, and it just didn't seem to be coming to be nodding off too much. That is though some of you have seen me fall asleep up here. So, you know sitting in, some people find

that helpful. It gets good energy going. If you can do it. washing your face with cold water, your face, your neck your hands and your feet before you meditate can stimulate, they'll keep you awake. It's if you're really tired or sleepy or dull, instead of getting a lot of light,

luminosity light can be helpful like to open your open your windows curtains and get sunlight coming in or turn on a lot of lights in your house. You don't have a lot of light even. You can even open your eyes when you meditate to get the light coming in. But even with the eyes closed, the eyelids are pretty thin and light come in that can help.

The sometimes it's interesting to when there's psychological resistance to ask a quite some questions of yourself reflect one interesting question is if I'm not If I wasn't sleepy if I wasn't so dull, what would I be experiencing? And occasionally, when people have asked themselves that question, they're, you know, they something? Oh, then I have to face the fact that I'm so depressed. Oh, then I have to face the fact that I have all these regrets about something a long time ago. Oh, you know something, something comes up. So if I wasn't so sleepy now, so Adele, what would I have to face? What I would have to experience is one that sometimes brings energy for people. And now there is, you know, to look a little bit about the desires that might be frustrated. What is it that I really want here? And then to reevaluate your desires, your wishes, just really, you know, what is it about my desires here? What is it that I want? This is really appropriate. Am I able to let go? How can I let go more deeply? So rather than keep trying to wake up or to deal with sleepiness, we have to deal with the frustrated desire to deal with the resistance. Otherwise we're, we're dealing with the wrong thing. Another thing to do, which is much more in the line of meditation, mindfulness meditation is to arouse more mental energy for the practice. So for example, if people use mental noting as a technique for mindfulness, you know what you're aware of, to know a little bit more vigorously in the mind, this silent vocalization the mind, you notice more vigorously, or your mental knows more frequently. So like, you know, say you're doing mental noting where you're aware of breathing in, breathing out a sound of traffic It's aching me and making me feeling the ache. So that's one speak. Or you could go more notes you can go. Breathing in breathing in here and hearing hearing a king, a king, a king a king, and kind of pick and pick up the speed a little bit, maybe by saying it two or three times each note rather than just once. And it can seem like a lot of work. Like it seemed kind of meditative to do that. But if you're really just falling asleep or dough or just nothing else is working. It's a great technique, great way to get you over a hump and get yourself kind of the juices going again.

So what else sloth and torpor? Another is to it's really important to recognize its presence I've mentioned earlier, it's possible to not recognize it's there to kind of be lulled into the comfort of sloth and torpor, the dullness of it and, and then kind of drift off in the mind sinks more and more. So it's very important to learn to recognize the seat Oh, this is what it is. And then it's very interesting in mindfulness practice to become a student of sloth and torpor. get interested, what is this feel like? What does it feel in the cheeks you know that the teacher over 60 the eyes and all that Sandy gritty feeling a little bit heavy and, and mid cheeks might be sometimes a bit hot, maybe warm, a little heavy baby as well. The mind feels like sludge or you know, like really thick molasses and, or sometimes it's there's no energy in the body. The key is not there in the body. And so you know, If the energy is going good in the body, the body holds itself up nicely by itself. When the energy is not there, you don't pay attention to your posture, and body will collapse and collapse. And so sometimes coming back, just focusing on your past posture and reasserting your posture, over and over and over again, until finally the CI that energy just kind of just kind of kicks in. And then you find yourself kind of here.

It's useful with sloth and torpor, to outs for, to outside outside of meditation, when you're not meditating, to spend a little bit of time contemplating and reflecting. What are the causes and conditions for your

sloth and torpor? Is it the lack of sleep? Is it too much? spending too much time and worrying anxiety? Is it the Under too much stress, is it resistance? Is it frustration is a disappointment? Or is it you know, or it has something to do with meditation practice. You know the factors, they are getting too calm, not making enough effort getting complacent was a period of time where I fell asleep, every meditation. Everyone I just would always fall asleep. And it I didn't. I didn't kind of get out of it. Until I learned to I just I discovered that I was complacent. I'd gotten I've been meditating for meditating for some time, and meditation and gotten very comfortable for me. My body was no longer uncomfortable. My mind was no longer uncomfortable. I was basically contented, happy and settled. And I became complacent. And so I wasn't putting effort in anymore was making a good, good Good, good efforts. To be present and show up. And so, without that effort, I just kind of nodded off. hit that bell. So fatigue, sloth and torpor I think it can be a great teacher for many people. So I think it's really worthwhile taking a deeper look at your fatigue and tiredness and dullness. Doctor friends about it. Go for a nice long walk and really think about it, explore it, and really kind of explore it in meditation itself, see what's going on there. Understand. Some people will learn a lot about themselves in that in that domain. And the final thing I want like to say, about sloth and torpor is relating it to what's called the three roots of unskillful behavior in Buddhism. Buddhism says that there's three primary routes to unskillful, unhealthy mental behavior. There's greed, there's hate, and there's delusion. And the first hindrance of Central desire has its root in greed. The second hindrance ill will, has its root in hate. slot into the last three. hindrances sloth and torpor, restlessness, anxiety and doubt, have their root in delusion and confusion. There's something about the mind getting confused. That can be very conducive to a very supportive of the mind getting very dull. And one of the things we can be very confused about is a dullness itself. We can be seduced by it. But it kind of lends itself to kind of poor thinking. Not thinking very well but what's going on. So wake up

and translate the word Buddhism into English. In a pure English kind of English ism, we would call it we should really call it wake up ism. Because the Buddha, the word Buddha means to wake up one who's awake and the ISM is ism right so the wake up ism. So please practice, please be devoted to wake up cup ism stay awake so thank you