

2009-02-27 The Five Hindrances Sloth And Torpor 1 of 3

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SPEAKERS

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If you're new Welcome to our Dharma practice day. If you are new me say that you're joining a series. Every year I do a series of these Friday Dharma practice days on some topic, and this year, it's the five hindrances. And so we're going through over the course of the year, these five and we've done so far the first two which is desire, sexual desire and aversion. And today we're going to do the infamous sloth and torpor and, and, you know, I didn't think anybody would come because the people who don't need it had better things to do than look at sloth and torpor all day. And the people who needed didn't get didn't get out of bed.

So, so and so and then what we do and during practice days each day is a little different. And every year, it's a little bit different how it's done. But generally it tends to be fairly interactive, I'll do a little bit of teachings do a little bit of meditation. And we often break up into groups, and sometimes even to into pairs of people in order to explore and discuss and reflect on some of the themes and topics, the practices that we're looking at. And that's a way of delving more deeply into a topic in a personal way. Because it's one thing to hear teachings in the abstract, it's another to apply it to one's own life. And so the idea is to really learn how to apply it and see how it's relevant for oneself and one's own relationship to it. And also, it's a way of learning from from each other. And classically, traditionally in Buddhism In monasteries, for example, a lot of the learning that happens is not from the abbot or the teachers down in a sense, but happens from peers, peer to peer, people the chance to talk and get to know each other and, and, and share each other's experiences and wisdom. So we do a lot of that here and Dharma practice days. So that's kind of what's in store for the day. So today, the topic is sloth and torpor.

And

I want to say a few words about the hindrances, his background for them. The hindrances are sometimes associated with hindrances to meditation practice, but they're also they're also meant to be understood as hindrances to any endeavor that a person who wants to engage in so outside of meditation as well you want to do something and Then you find yourself wanting to do something different. So that's desire to feed that the fears, the desire to do something else. or there might be annoyance or aversion about what you have to do and that interferes. And then there could be, sleepiness can set in, you know, you've quite energized and feel really, really good until you have to do that particular task and something about that task, just as de energizing, draining, and just you suddenly feel really tired. And, like, happened this week for me. I had to pick up my son from school and middle of the day and spend a few hours with him. It was quite nice to spend time with him, but I

noticed that at some point, I was reading stories on the couch. And I started getting really sleepy. It was actually hard to keep my eyes open. And if I'd stayed at work stayed here. I wouldn't have been so sleepy, but something about that something about that. experience was soporific. And then, and then there's the fourth hindrances, restlessness, anxiety remorse. So, and then the fifth one is doubt. So these things can come into play in any any activity so they're really useful to look at, because they apply in a different situations, not just meditation. The sloth and torpor classically is meant to be is that which the kind of lethargy or tiredness draining of energy that interferes with our ability to follow through on what we want to do. So if we don't want to do anything, I suppose sloth and torpor is not a problem. But once you want to try to try to do something, whether it's reading to your child or sitting in meditation or anything else Sometimes, there's a whole constellation of states that come into play that fall under the rubric of sloth and torpor. So it certainly tiredness and sleepiness, lethargy, resistance, dullness kind of heaviness. One translation from the sutras talks about the mind feeling like it's a drug that is sometimes called in retreats is sometimes called swamp mind. Your mind just feels like you're in the swamps and you can hardly really feel foggy. Write variety of states. So each one of you will maybe have a different description that works for under this kind of general category of sloth and torpor. sloth and torpor is not a particular those those terms are almost quaint. We don't usually go around using those words very much in common English anymore. Maybe they're Victorian English almost torpor. Maybe a little bit for us. And so that so the virtue of being vague or word we commonly use, is we can fill it in better with our own experience of what fits into this category. The opposite I suppose, of sloth and torpor, is engagement and energetic engagement. So, if sloth and torpor interferes in some endeavor, something we're doing, then you know, it's interfering with our ability to be engaged in a clear and energetic way, with good energy. So that brings up the whole question of what it was like to be energized, to be engaged in a healthy good way. And some of that has to do with knowing what to do. In practice, one of the causes of sloth and torpor is not knowing what to do, just kind of sitting in meditation, for example, and not sure I supposed to follow my breath or how am I supposed Follow the breath though. You know what it has to do with what's happening and, and the kind of the lack of clarity sometimes can lead to kind of muddledness which can lead to tiredness. So, let's start with sitting now. And sit upright. Thank you

when you asked us to

look at the three states

I noticed that the state I was in was kind of the middle, the middle one,

just right.

The middle sized bear,

and

it felt really good. I mean, I

felt just, it just felt easy. I

felt like I was in that state I was really present. And whereas

in the low energy

state, I've experienced that a lot.

It's dragging you away and not, not there.

And in the high energy states, this concept in my mind is just

going going going, you know, and I'm not there either, but it's like the middle way is just present and it's easier to be present. Thank you.

I find that when I my full scroll mind, that runs around and it's full scroll. has a task to do. It's much easier for me to meditate. And I found the last minutes where I was just moving from one state to the other. Very, very useful.

What else about what happened during the meditation? Go ahead. Go ahead. Go

ahead on. Okay. I'm

at the point where you suggested that we notice whether our mind had gone off in what kind of energy might be around those thoughts. My mind had indeed gone off into thoughts and feelings around something that was really energizing. That I had kind of let it do that when I noticed this kept coming up. I thought, well, maybe this is timely and important to think about. So I let myself go there. But the suggestion To bring that energy back to let the thoughts go.

It really worked,

the energy came back and I was able to let those thoughts go, but keep the energy and I really found that helpful. And I

am hoping to try that again. Great. Thank you.

When you gave those instructions, I had the image of electricity sources the energy and with the low energy it would be like a light bulb just not having this being very dim. And then on the high end, it would be just burning out really quickly. And then the middle one was just like oh, the light bulbs gonna last a long time and sustained light. Great sustainable.

Someone else please

I'd like to do is get back up behind you, Debbie.

I

would like to hear about or talk about the,

the anatomy and physiology of breathing

that the body does for us.

And that

the diaphragm does and the pressures, negative and positive pressures in the chest and,
and there is
a time when my breath settles down
that
in,
in our
anatomy and physiology that's the time for sleep
that that
the body takes over
And we drift away. And so
what I'm
aware of
is when that occurs
where then to bring the energy back.
That is it that
see,
energy is low, because it's the body's response to just wanting to naturally go into a sleep state. So
that's something that I think about a lot when I'm using the breath as my focus. And I think that this topic
kind of brings that up more than anything else, that there is a point in my meditation where I can allow
my body to breathe me without falling into that sleepy state.
And I'm not sure what
That's just because I need more oxygen.
And that that's the time to take a bigger breath and, and
bring the control of my breath back to me
rather than allowing my body to breathe itself. So those are the kinds of

questions that come up as we're

talking about energy and breath. Great questions, great questions. Not gonna respond too much right now because maybe later in the day, we'll go into more, some of these topics but the, something like sloth and torpor dullness can sit in meditation when we get calm and concentrated. And there's an imbalance between energy and calm. And then people often fall asleep during a situation the breath can get quite calm. And, but it's also possible to bring in a kind of energy especially kind of mental energy or physical energy that can keep Quite alert are quite energized, nicely energized while we're getting very, very calm, so calm, being really calm and being energized, they're not opposed to each other. And, and so when there's really strong concentration, which is almost synonymous being deeply calm, if the energy is there, the breathing can actually come seemingly to a stop. Now you can't discern if you're breathing at all, there's no need. There's the oxygen need for oxygen drops dramatically, but there's a very sharp alertness and clarity. And there might be no there's no tendency to fall asleep. So any most almost every any meditator who starts developing a strong sense of calm, as sooner or later is gonna have to contend with or deal with the dullness that can sit in as well and learn how to arouse a certain kind of mental energy or physical energy to balance that calm. That's part of the art of meditation. Kim

I was noticing that

during moments of flow or appropriate attention, there are sort of shifts that just happened because conditions are changing in the line can respond very easily and in a relaxed way to the shifts that occur. They might or even outside of meditation, if we need to get up and do something or whatever, in adult mind speed, the tendency is to miss these cues. And they, they come by, and sometimes I'm aware of them, and even just say, I'm not going to do it. Not doesn't sound interesting. And so sometimes, you know, they have to come several times before I'll get the energy to do something or attend to something appropriately. Whereas when the mind is very agitated, then there's a tendency to try to create shifts that aren't there and say, Oh, now I need to do this. Now. And do that I'm going to make this happen, I'm going to make that happen. And then also missing the natural shifts and cues that come along. So I see the appropriate level of energy as being maximally responsive to what should be done. Great, thank you.

I was noticing that the

when you invited us to think about vitality or to experience vitality, that there's a tendency to want to confuse sensation or thinking for vitality. And so, when I came back to just breathing, there was a naturalness there wasn't the need for all that effort and then sinking into reflection about low energy states, that seems like the price that I pay for the high, the false high energy state, and there's sort of a muddy, or even a resistant quality of like, I don't want to do any of that high energy stuff anymore. So like others, I really appreciate the readiness of the middle state. There's just availability, their readiness screen.

So there's a pendulum that happens with high energy and low energy. One of them is just simply we get exhausted if we swing to being tired, but also there can be resistance to dullness can be I don't want that high. They're within the readiness, great term. So I'd like to hear some other words or felt sense experiences of what that middle places have clean or clear or healthy kind of being energized, how different people experience that are no, it's happening. And the reason I, what I hope is that we'll get a

lot of different very different kinds of descriptions and not just one so that we can kind of get a mosaic are getting kind of wide range. So here, Victor, let's see. So the

middle state

it feels like there is an availability of,

of just whatever is needed for this.

It's neither high nor low. It's just you're able to engage actively in following the breath, or catching. When the mind goes or feeling sensations or whatever comes up. You're just engaged in just reading. If there's tiredness and sloth or whatever, there's nothing I can do to pull me out of it just

Sitting session is that's the way it is. Typically

drift off and oh, drifting. Drifting up could barely get through breath to drift off. I'm tired then I'll stop and stop struggling with trying to get back to breath and just know this is tired. This is tired tripped off come to realizing I drifted off. This is tired This is set upon brother just sort of feel the sensation. And when I'm over energized I just know for time they'll settle down. I'll just watch.

Watch, watch the changes.

So that thank you Victor. That was great. And but what I liked what I like to do now is just mostly have descriptions of the middle. Mostly a variety of different descriptions of available ready state with different ways people experience it.

For me, it's it's fairly elusive. But when it happens, it's like a brightness like, anything's possible. Like, all of a sudden the colors seem brighter and things seem crisper and clearer. And sometimes that can get me into a hyper state which I won't go there because you asked for the middle ground, but it just it I associated with happiness and joy because it's, it's rare for me. And I, I tend toward the end of things and so it just the world just seems bright with possibility

when I have that middle state.

Great, thank you. settled, they're receptive. Go ahead. I didn't hear settled or receptive, settled or receptive. Thank you.

The expression I use the feeling in my practice

my stereo equipment on standby

So that

I'm prepared. Nothing is really happening and it's not off. I'm just on standby.

available. Ready, standby. Ready? valiums really good. Great.

For me, it's

an opening. I feel

like things get big. inside. I don't know how to explain it, but it's, it feels peaceful, but energetic, in a sense, but not too energetic. And I feel like there's this opening and I love when that comes but takes, I don't know, like you said it's elusive. And when it happens, it's, you know, I want to kind of cling to.

So you know, it's interesting.

Great, thank you, behind you.

I think I kind of relate it to kind of a confidence

when everything's when the energy feels really even accessible a lot of people use possibility but it gives the sense of confidence. Like,

doesn't matter what happens, I know it's gonna

be okay and I can handle whatever comes up. So that expansiveness that you're talking about really comes into play. Okay, it's just,

I'm ready, which is a really nice place to be.

Great. Thank you.

Yes. Okay, so I think I experienced it

like, it's like a humming along. I think there's like a boat on a really smooth water and it's just kind of going along and if there's a bump then it just kind of goes with the bump but it's not there's nothing jerky about it. So it's this presence with everything that happens and just being with it, but not no jerkiness or reactivity. Great. Thank you.

One thing I noticed

in that state, afterwards, during walking, meditation, everything seems or can seem parceling seem seeming. Just Very bright, very just deep contrast of colors and shapes and just much more vibrant and it's almost like a wow. Oh, you know, things are bloom or sounds are happening just tell us how overwhelming it's

neat. You can create

for me it feels very natural. It's not false, natural

not false. Thank you nice to get out there this is pretty nice to get a wide range so that doesn't have to be one way doesn't hopefully you as you're listening to this you don't feel like oh, I have to be like that now. There's no no should here just each person will have a different way of experiencing this and so it's nice to get a range.

I think when that middle state does come which comes very rarely and control, more in control

the comm status base When I'm not getting anything done, and the hyper status, outside things are controlling me in Instagram, a checklist, I have to get all the stuff even if I

have to get all the little status. I know what's going on outside and I'm reacting as I want to react not being

not being pushed into anything.

I think that's what brings about joy and

feel more confident, more happy with what you're doing because you're in control of

ethicacy beautiful, thank you.

I find

when I hit that, that sweet spot, it's like the lights come on. I feel light in just about every sense of the word and very open and it's so hard to say. Thank you, and there's a certain flow or timelessness to it. I noticed that when painting Sometimes, and there's a real pleasure and it doesn't mean that things don't go wrong, but there's a certain equanimity to it. I think it's a real pleasure feeling creative.

Thank you.

The quality that I often relate to is a quality of boundlessness.

Yeah, boundless light. Thank you.

See, we exist though.

For me, it's the sense of balance so

that I know that I, I'm kind of here and I'm not

going to go this way or that way. Just I can stay in that balance balance place. Beautiful.

We exhaust the possibilities okay.

The strongest Association I have this clarity between this place there's clarity, physical mental clarity.

So

let's take a break