

2013-03-04 Five Hindrances

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SPEAKERS

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So this evening, I would like to talk a bit about the hindrances. And the hindrances are very important topics for people who do mindfulness meditation. People who do mindfulness meditation are meant to become experts on them. Which is different than what people usually assume. The hindrances are these forces in the mind that usually make it difficult to be mindful, difficult to be present. Buddha said, it also makes it difficult for you to be wise. People usually in the grip of the so called hindrances usually make poor choices. And so the usual attitude towards these is that these are unfortunate or perhaps worse visitors, and you do whatever you can to get rid of them. The approach of mindfulness meditation is certainly we want to not be hindered by the hindrances, but the path into mindfulness is to pay attention to them and learn what they are really studied and how they work for you. So these five hindrances, us say them, two to two of them are a sets of two, so it's actually seven total. But so their first two is the is desire, sometimes called sensual desire, desire and aversion or ill will, and they're kind of paired. The desire and aversion. One's wanting something other was not wanting something. So when the mind is in the grip of desire, then it thinks about what it wants, it's consumed by what it wants. They may be an extreme version of maybe someone who's an addict, addicted to something. And they just their mind is lost down the highway of addiction, their thoughts and desires. Or we're sitting in meditation and we're trying to be present, or we have a strong desire for something desire for a good meal or for sex or for Anything at all a good or even a good meditation session. And the mind is so caught up in thinking and fantasizing imagining about the desire, that becomes a black hole for our awareness, meaning that the light goes into a black hole and doesn't come out or awareness goes into the black hole. And we get lost in this world of desire. Same thing can happen with a version. We have something that we really don't like, something we have a lot of antipathy for I hate it we have angry or resentful, and the mind gets involved in the stories, the conversations, the imagination, the fantasies about our resentments, and why we're grumpy and things and it's hard to kind of spend 510 minutes in meditation. And you finally wake up from your thoughts and say, Where was I and you look back and you realize you were, you know, going on a rant with someone because you're angry. And so those two are paired, the next two are paired as well. And the simple way of saying that is, is tiredness and restlessness sort of like a drop in energy and too much energy, but they have a little bit more fancy words for them. The first is called sloth and torpor. So how many times have you thought you had when you had slots that you don't know? Did you tell your friends I'm really slothful today we don't use that we don't use that word in our active vocabulary too often. But these is not ordinary tiredness. It's not the tiredness of you know, you know being sleepy or something. But it's a tiredness that comes from the cycle that psychological approaches we have of living our lives, psychological reactions and responses we have to our life. And so you see it really dramatically and it should small child is smaller than you know, child to you. Ask them to do something they don't want to do and they're so tired. But you know, there's you know, five minutes later they're playing you know, happily lots of energy and you can where they get all that energy, you know, and you can't keep up. So this kind of it's, you know, conditional

tiredness, it's pent causes and conditions come together. And a psychological one talk about psychologically, and then sloths maybe is more physical torpor is new or mental. And then the next one restlessness is peritus. It's restlessness and usually it's called regret remorse. And this is a ways in which we get heavy or get drained or get energy drops and we're uninspired is no way you know, we can't just get muster up our effort and energy to practice.

Well, I mean, we have energy. This sloth and torpor is no energy, we have energy, but the energy is kind of going in all kinds of directions. You get pulled into being restless into a group. rats, remorse, we feel bad about what we did. We were worried somebody's going to catch us and notice, we feel like kind of uneasy about something about ourselves. And so it's easy to get swept up into the world of restlessness, uneasiness, remorse, regret, so that there's very little presence of mind because we're swept into the thoughts, the stories of that. The last of the five hindrances is doubt. And doubt isn't paired with anything. It's just, it's just out. And they say that doubt is the most dangerous of the hindrances, because it's the one that's most likely going to cause people to stop practicing meditation or stop practicing mindfulness. And so doubt is anything that is vacillate or you feel hesitant or uncertain about practicing, feeling capable of practicing. So for example, you know, I have doubts about whether I can do this. This is too difficult. I don't know if this is the right time to be meditating. I don't know if this is the right practice for me. Should I be doing loving kindness meditation? So I do breath meditations, open awareness meditation. I don't know what I'm going to do. And I, you know, I don't know what I'm suited for. And I don't know why I'm doing this for and, and probably this Buddhist practices, you know, not really good for most people and I'm not sure it works and, and so the mind gets swept up in doubt, uncertainty vacillation that it can't make a decision I can't engage with what's doing because it's doubting everything we want to do. So these hindrances operate in all activities, not just meditation. One interesting way to look upon them is that there are strategies the mind can have for what we do when there's a challenge. And so each of you probably get challenged, things happen that you'd rather didn't happen. They've made things difficult for you. Something uncomfortable happens in your environment and then there can be a kind of gut reaction of one of these hindrances can arise. And different people have different strategies, their favorite strategies. So some people strategy is more, if you know some people more than desire type, so something difficult arise and we're challenged by. And so the best thing to do then is to, is to ignore it by going into fantasy. Or you get lost in some nice desire fantasy for something, or to not do anything about it, except kind of start spinning out in imaginary worlds of desire around it. I'd like to do this, I'm gonna do that and planning and to be quite beautiful in the plans. So somehow, it gets swept into desire. That's the response. The some people have more of a tendency towards aversion. And so no matter what the challenge might be, they're critical of it and they push it away and they attack it. They blame Sometimes the blaming the attacking the version can be towards the things the world people around us who are challenging us. And sometimes it's to ourselves for our incapacity or inability to respond to it or, you know our shortcoming. We blame ourselves. And so the world of aversion is a whole world that people get lost in. It can be the primary kind of operating strategy in relationship to being challenged. And what we can learn through the meditation practice or through mindfulness is that it's possible to have a high quality, presence, attention and awareness to what's happening. Wait for challengers difficult for us and, and be present for something with neither being swept into desire or swept into a version neither in a sense being for it or against it, neither moving towards it or pulling away from it just kind of being present in a full way A different kind of a different response because then it's not a reactive response. It's not habitual response. And it's not the kind of response that colors our view what situation is, if we respond through desire, wanting a different or wanting a particular way, it's easier that easy than to see things through the lens of what we desire. If we see it through the lens of our version, then we also be biased not seeing it clearly for what it is. If we can learn not to see through the filter of desire or aversion, then we have a better chance to see clearly what's the situation is whether it's ourselves in our own meditation,

whether it's our neighbor who's blaring their stereo, at 11 o'clock at night, or in or whatever it might be. So

So then, restlessness also can be a response to being challenged to kind of feeling challenged by something, something's difficult. Something happened we don't like something is uncomfortable. And so we don't we kind of run around in circles and kind of doing that not quite, we get kind of aroused and preoccupied and, and somehow the energy kind of level of arousal comes up, sometimes because of fear or being alarmed or something. Or sloth and torpor kicks in, like the kid, you become a six year old, who's being asked to do something you don't like or it's too challenging or too difficult. And so in that challenge, that difficulty of not feeling up to it, this is too much, you know, it's an uphill battle. And so then, you know, that we see the heavy and draining and tired and that's a response to psychological response. So I can't do it, you know, just kind of feel. And then there's doubt and some people specialize in doubt, as their primary response. I don't know what to do. I'm done. I can't figure out what to do someone, tell me what I should do. And You keep second guessing, well, I can't do that because that doesn't work. Maybe I'll try something else. But I can't do that and which which one should I do? And so kind of people lost. So these things can happen in meditation practice and two ways. We can sit down to meditate. And the hindrances can arise in relationship to anything else going on in our life. So you start to meditate, and you haven't had dinner yet. And so you sit, doubting what you should have for dinner after then do the meditation. You know, should I have pizza spaghetti? calzone, or cheesecake? What should it be? You know, you can't quite decide the doubt is there or maybe there's no doubt at all you know exactly what you want. Apparently, I just finished teaching a retreat. And I made some reference to in my talks to cheesecake. And I found out today that one of their treatments who left when she got home, she Oh, She could think about and he was he was he had to get cheesecake. So I'm sorry that I planted that in her mind. But so, you know to have so you come here and you have you have some strong desire operating about something outside of here, and your mind goes off and that's the direction it goes. It's hard to get off that bandwagon. You try to get present. And the mind goes back into the fantasy. Or the hindrance of desire can be in relationship to meditation itself. So there can be some difficulty in meditation or some idealism in meditation, or there can be some wishful thinking and meditation. About You know, this meditation should be so wonderful. I've only I could follow more breaths in a row, then I'm sure I'll be colliding and floating and wouldn't that be nice to have a really deep peaceful meditation and that'll be great. And then I'll be able to teach and then I'll be on, you know, Oprah and I'll give wonderful talks. And, you know, wouldn't that be nice and you know, if I can only follow a breath or two, you know, so it's the desire has to do about meditation. So same thing with the version, it could be about something outside here, it's so strong the aversion that no matter how much you try to meditate and be present here, the mind keeps wandering off into the version. Or it could be about aversion towards something happening in the meditation. And a common one would be pain. Or it could be the wandering mind itself, my mind keeps wandering away, and then we have aversion towards that. And then we get caught up in and thoughts, plans, ideas about relationship that are all based on aversion and ill will. So these things are really common. And I suspect that a good number of you specialize in one more than the other. And it might be interesting for you to look at your life, look at your common responses, and see which of these tends to be more predominant for you in your life. Some people have more Desire types and reverses type, some more doubt is really big outcomes often with confusion. And some people are more sloth and torpor some more restlessness is kind of like the predominant thing. So how is it for you, but they can also all operate at once. There's a wonderful term that was coined I don't know Nike, I think maybe it was I seal the Borstein called a multiple hindrance attack. They're all kind of like for she when she described it, they're all operating all at once.

The you know, and they can follow up right in sequence to like you can have a strong desire, the desire to get frustrated and so there's a version or anger and, and then in the version and anger there might be such disappointment that our energy level drops. And then I don't know how maybe restless is my follow after that, but the end result would be doubt He's like, Oh, well, it's hopeless. I don't know what to do and what should I do and something. So these things can operate. And tradition, the Buddhist tradition from ancient times, holds up these five as one of the primary forces in the mind, that prevents the mind from getting concentrated, and prevents the mind from learning to be wise about what's happening in the present moment. So if you want to concentrate in the present moment, if you want to be here fully to be mindful and present, the tradition This implies that you should really get a handle on these five hindrances. So there's, there's two things to do and to get a handle on them. One is to understand how they work for you. How they operate, to. Sometimes it's really hard to let go of things unless you understand them. Well. Sometimes when you listen to Buddhist teachings, it sounds like you're supposed to let go at the first opportunity you have just let go, let go let go. Sometimes it's not wise to let go of things you don't Understand yet, so to take your time and get to know it. So if it happens that you notice that you have a strong desire a stronger version, restlessness, tiredness, doubt, you might look and see what strategy what your thoughts about that is, are you, you have aversion to that or you're reactive to that. And instead, try to be curious, try to be to investigate and look at your experience of what it's like. And there's a number one of the primary things to look at is what it actually feels like, what's the subjective experience you're having? Because it doesn't help for the purposes of meditation practice, to spend a lot of time analyzing, judging what this hindrance, the hindrances there, it doesn't really help to take it as a personal failing to have a hindrance, but helps us to take take these movement. This, these forces in the mind when they're operating as impersonal forces that are Human beings have, it's nothing doesn't mean that you're a bad person. It just means that you're a person. And, and but the chip, the task is to understand that really well understanding of it, learning how to learn how to be free of it, and to understand it by feeling and sensing and watching how it operates within us. So in terms of desire and aversion, most people have desire and aversion towards something, there's usually an object. And so the tendency when there's strong, these hindrances are strong, the mind is preoccupied with the thing that we want or the thing that we have aversion towards. We're thinking about thoughts. So we're focusing on the object. And when we do mindfulness we try to do is to turn the attention around 180 degrees. And instead of focusing on the object, of what we're wanting or not wanting, we focus on what it feels like to be wanting. What is Like to be aversive. So I could be holding the glass. And I can be thinking about how wonderful we drink the glass. I'm thirsty. And I'd like to drink. And, yes, my mouth was so good after I drink. And I'll give better talks and all kinds of wonderful thoughts about the class, the glass. Or I can focus on how I'm holding the glass. Maybe my hands gripping it, or my eyes are fixated on it or something.

And so to turn around and look and see when you have strong desire, what does it feel like in your psychophysical being to be in the grip of desire to have a strong desire operating? What, what parts of your body are energized? When you have desire? Is it the desire in your stomach or in your heart during your head or is it a lot of thoughts spinning out and a lot of energy? Is there any tension anywhere in the system? It's very interesting to look at the world of design. Because it's often a multi layered world so there might be a very strong desire and might be leaning forward a lot of energy of wanting to act and to do to want and if you begin hanging out with and looking at it sometimes with desire you can see there's layers underneath it. There might be sometimes be some discomfort underneath a desire that's prompting the desire so you know the idea that some some if you're lonely Some people go to the refrigerator because somehow to kind of satisfy or kind of cover over the loneliness with food some people stuff themselves or go shopping. You know, it's a good one right? feeling depressed or sad or kind of off and shot things a great thing to do writing go to Macy's and try

on clothes. What makeup I don't understand that one. Do y'all feel good? So that's apparently that's just makeup is a good strategy.

So the idea is to turn around and actually feel so underneath you might feel the loneliness or feel the sadness or the distress or something that's going on underneath. That's prompting the desire. Then you were saying with a version what is the version feel like a version? lol anger, resentment probably feels a very different than desire. Usually desire feels good. There's usually a kind of a nice feeling but usually with desire. aversion usually feels lousy, though some people like the energy of anger and feeling the vitality of it, and that's part of the hook that keeps people attached to their anger is that the vitality that they have, but, but usually kind of burning, heaviness, hardness, variety of sensation, sensations, feelings tension that can come with anger aversion, sloth and torpor. restlessness, doubt, they all have their own characteristics, sensations and feelings in the body, the ways in which they manifest. And so if we can turn around 180 degrees and feel it in the body, then we're present for what is happening in the present moment. And that's the task of mindfulness is to learn to be present for what is. If you're lost in the hindrance, then you're not present anymore because you're lost, you're involved in something else. But if you're present for your hindrance, if you're very mindful, you're completely mindfully looking at straight in the eye and say, I see you desire, then you're not, then then it no longer becomes a hindrance, because it's not hindering your insight, not hindering your ability to see. So this is a very important thing about these five hindrances is we don't have to get rid of them. In order to become free. We have to be our mindfulness has to be stronger than the hindrance. So we see them clearly. And if we see them with enough clarity, you won't be caught in their orbit, you won't be stuck to them. And so and that's at that point, they no longer hindering you. Then desire becomes, does not a desire of hindrance or desire. It's just desire. If they if the aversion if you're stronger than the aversion, and it's not the hindrance of aversion, it's just aversion. And it's possible to have anger and resentment, bubble up. And in the, the attention, the awareness is so strong, that it's just there. And you don't have you don't buy into it. You're not reactive to it, and probably just kind of passes relatively fast that way. When we can identify hindrances, a hindrance, really see Oh, that's by hindrance, that's a hindrance operating and in identified strongly enough like that. That's also a very good time. Then to realize this is not a good time to make a decision. This is probably not probably not very wise right now if I'm in the grip of this strong desire and strong endurance, sometimes you can get to have it and recognize you have a hindrance and still be pulled back into it. But if you have it, but if you have enough wisdom to know, oh, you know, I've kinda, it's not the time to make a decision. This is not the time to say something. To first I'm angry with the person I'm desiring. I think this is the time to just kind of start to come back and be present and ground myself here and myself. So the five hindrances are common themes for mindfulness practice, it's useful, very useful to become familiar with them when they operate for you. I suspect that you don't have to wait very long for one of them to operate. And so then to stop and look at it, but it can be a little bit tricky to recognize a hindrance. As a hindrance because sometimes the habit of reacting or responding to things with desire aversion these ways, can seem so natural and seem so right. That doesn't occur to people to be mindful of it. So for example, someone I mean, it could be that someone decides to come to IMC really late from one of our events. And we finished our meditation and maybe I'm in the middle of giving my talk and they go grab a free chair and they lifted over everybody's heads and they put it right down in front of here in front of me in the big chin, big person, and, you know, most people can't see behind and so, you know, that's kind of unusual behavior.

You know, coming late, they made a lot of noise and, and so it could be like, I'm gonna write to the Board of IMC and complain about people how they sit here, and they really have to, they have to fix something. And this is terrible. And this is wrong. This is injustice. And one more time, you know, it's injustice is done to me and this, you're indignant. And it just seems like because you know, you're a victim of this person's callousness of putting a chair right in front of you in the front of the hall and all

that and there's lots of space in the back for the chair. And it just seems like right to think those thoughts is completely reasonable that you should be carry swept away and think about these thoughts. And maybe it is, but it's unnecessary. And to be caught in those thoughts means you're not free. And so one of the options you have if you practice mindfulness is to rather than blaming IMC, for not taking care of these chairs and bolting them down so no one can move them. Or wishing that you were six foot tall or eight foot tall, there's look above them. I don't know. Whatever you wish, I wish you'd done that. You can, you can turn around again the attention to 180 degrees and look at yourself and feel and sense what's going on feel the energy of it. Feel the sensations feel the thoughts, feel the emotions, and then in that turning around and looking to notice the glue to notice the hooks notice the way you're kicking pulled into it and you want to think about it you want to get involved or how that works. Just feel and sense and be present be present. With the hindrances when they're strong, it can be very helpful to very quietly softly in the mind. Name the hindrance, just desire, desire, aversion, restlessness slot to get to use the word doubt. Sometimes there's something about naming what you're paying attention to. That helps loosen up the stickiness to it helps to get acknowledgment helps us not be so identified with it. So that's one of the strategies to do but so you want to look at it. So probably in the course of the day, there's a lot of opportunities to stop and look at it. And one of the things to look at and notice what difference it makes for you. If you are mindful of the hindrance, rather than what usually how you usually deal with it, what did the difference between turning around and looking at it 180 degrees, and breathing with it, sensing it, feeling it, relaxing with it, and letting it kind of float away or dissipate. After you've gotten to know it? Well, then if it's easy, maybe you can let go of it. But it's usually not unless you're going to cause it's going to cause problems if you keep keep it going. It's usually best as I said not to let go right away. But to get to know it first see it clearly for what it is. And then you know it's also then a little trick because the point of mindfulness practice is to be mindful of what's happening in the present moment. And if something's making it hard for you to be present, and you make that the object of mindfulness, then you're in the present again, because that's happening in the present moment. Isn't that a nice trick? So whatever is the problem, whatever is a difficulty in meditation, make that the focus. And then you're in the present moment again, like that. And then we try to be present in a kind, relaxed way. So I have a question for you. A survey for you to do. If I don't know if you guys are game or willing to admit this. How many of you have these five there's five, right? So desire or aversion, sloth and torpor, restlessness and anxiety in depth. How many of you mostly kind of can identify with one of them as being kind of like your Ace or your more common anything. The rest of you multiple hundreds of tax dollars. Okay, so, so, those of you who raised your hands, how many of you is desire, the main one? Those of you raise your hand how many years aversion about sloth and torpor? Only a few people had the energy to raise their hands

and then restlessness but the same number of different people and then doubt Great, thank you.

should ask, oh, who's unsure what type there? And so I don't think we have time. But I had this idea that I'd asked for five volunteers to make a panel appear. One one of each type. And then we kind of find out each of them, you know, their point of view how they see the world and themselves. And I think we get five very different points of view of the same thing. Do we do that return in 10 minutes we have, do we have five volunteers are willing to what what type? Are you? aversion avoidance? or desire, your desire, that's your thing? desire because yeah, okay. And how about an aversive type? Anybody? and Buddhism, they say it's better to be aversive than to be desirous type. It's more dangerous, we can cause more harm, but it's more helpful for practice. Because it's sometimes because you have a strong thing. No, I'm not going to buy mango. I'm not going to do that. So Anyway, those of you who are shy about admitting your aversive type in public like this is a good sign in Buddhism universal type. Yeah. Okay, how about sloth and torpor? We didn't have many hands went up in any other slot interpret people willing to make the make the effort to come up here.

No. How about the restlessness type? Yeah. And then what about the doubt? Yeah. Okay, so we have four out of the five that's good. So I'm not sure how we're gonna do this second thought this out but maybe we can get can we get four chairs up here and then come sit up here to help with it people can they help us some extra chairs and

Have them

So? So maybe we can begin by asking them they don't have much time. So maybe like each of them maybe there's a few seconds a minute or something or less. What's the primary way that your hindrance operates in meditation practice you've done what does it look like in your meditation?

For me, it's its desire. And I think that the reason I probably default to this one is just because it's enjoyable.

Brings pleasure.

I think the for me the biggest hindrances is doubt, but doesn't have much problem in meditation and meditation. It's probably sloth.

sloth and torpor meditation. Okay. Oh good. So we got one. We got two for one year. And what does it look like in meditation? How is that experience for you in meditation?

If I'm tired, I

fall over. Yep, I've done that.

For me, it's at times, just having that monkey mind. So going from thing to thing and then saying not now,

that helps.

And then saying not now again, and then saying,

I said, avoidance. I'm not sure if that operates in my meditation as much as it operates in my life, daily life, it operates.

Probably doubt is more in my meditation, but I'm not really sure

whether I should sit with the Zen style and I slightly open or none of those kinds of questions I've got, but in my life, it helped me when you said about the aversion because I realized, I'll read about something and get excited about something and think, well, I need to do something about that. I need to That's terrible. I need to fix it. Do something I need to do. Take some action. And it makes me avoid all the things I already you know, it takes me out of my focus.

You get distracted easily by this desire to fix something and do something in the world.

Exactly.

So, and then when when you have a challenge in doing something uncomfortable happens to you in your life, something feels very uncomfortable or challenging. Does your favorite hindrance kind of operate in some? Can you describe a little bit how it works? and hold it vertically? Or horizontally? So that

was the question.

Yeah. So if you're if you're challenged or you're up against something very uncomfortable, if a difficulty does your hindrance kind of rear its head and how does it What is your particular what particular way does it rear its head? How does it show itself for you?

I either lose focus, as I said, or for me, it's doubt I can't decide the right course of action. Okay.

Well now I'm wondering if we have restlessness or doubt.

But under those circumstances off, and I'll just go from option to option to option, trying to become more and more analytical about, which is the right option, which is the wrong option in weighing, and then get lost in that in a very restless manner.

So the two goes together very much with you. Great, thank you.

It's usually when when I'm making decisions, there's lots of decisions, and I get paralyzed and I'd end up doing nothing. And I get more frustrated and so you're free paralyzed. Yeah. freezes, doubt freezes me from taking action.

phrases you Great. Thank you.

I think for me when when something challenging comes up, I go into gathering information and planning and deciding, okay, what's my next direction I'm going to go in so that I don't have to be in this anymore. Because I feel like I can take action to get out of

it. I see so outrageous it sounds like sometimes that's wise but it's a hindrance when you are.

I think it's just not being present. It's like avoiding what's there and trying to get to the next thing that feels better or is easier.

Great. Does anyone have a question for our panelists?

And that way in the background,

I can't see. Oh, yeah. So like No,

I just not Oh, yeah, I'm just not close enough to the mic. Okay, So yeah, given what what they all said and given what you said about when you're in the grip of a hinderance maybe it's not the best time to make a decision. That seems I can't decide how I feel about that with doubt. Because in some ways I

see that like, maybe maybe it's not the right time to make a decision. If it's like a big thing then just wait for I

think when there's doubt you don't have a problem like that because you're not going to make a decision.

Oh, that's true. That's true. Yeah. Okay, so I guess it's not that it's not wise to make a decision in that case, since it's never gonna happen.

I've done that sometimes where I had doubt what to do in Finally, I just, maybe it's because a little aversion kicks in ice. I just I don't know what to do. I'm doubtful. And I find I just give up and flip a coin or give up and just do the easy thing or the first thing or,

yeah, cuz I've actually found that like, especially with little decisions, it's better just pick one, just to flip a coin or, like, I don't know, sometimes I just use the time on my phone even or odd. That's my system, but I don't know.

Then I don't have to think about it anymore.

Okay, so this is times I have any, any really good questions for people? Good questions. Yes, you have a question or

not a question a little bit related. It was just happening this evening, I was in a situation discussing decisions. And I decided I don't want to make the decision and I'm better off 10 minutes to insert. I'm gonna go and

come here were the result of the hindrance today.

Not making the decision postponing it with the intention of just sleeping on it.

Great. Thank you. So maybe thank you for thank you for willing to come up here like this and maybe we can have your names. Maybe you could say your names. My name is Fadi, buddy,

Jennifer.

I'm Scott.

Lara.

Makes a thank you very much and may you all learn about your hindrances, so not only you become free of your hindrances, but the world becomes free of your hindrances.