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SPEAKERS

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The following talk was given at the insight meditation center in Redwood City, California, please visit our website at audio.dharma.org.

So, good morning, everyone. Welcome to IMC. So this morning I'd like to do a Dharma talk that's a bit of an exercise. And, and perhaps it's an exercise you could participate in. And in a sense, maybe the exercise is applied to myself. And you could try to apply the exercise to yourself as you listen and maybe you can do the exercise in parallel as I go through it. And the exercise is based on an idea that it does appear in the ancient texts of Buddhism, that something's that two things might look very similar and be confused as being the same, but actually they might be quite different. You They look similar. And that classic representation of this or example of this has to do with what's called the four kinds of love that brahma viharas. They have what's called the near enemy. And then near enemy are the things which are kind of the opposite. But they look so similar, that people confuse them for these kinds of love. And so loving kindness is one of the one of these forms of love metta, and that certain kinds of affection certain kinds of attached affection or desirous affection. Looks like love but maybe has more to do with the attraction to pleasure or other things that we want in our relationship. And so it gets confused. We say it's love, but it's actually not or something and with compassion, sometimes. With it, the West gets confused with compassion. Is this may or discouragement or being horrified by the suffering out there. The karuna by itself has no sense of dismay or discouragement, or, you know, there's nothing negative in the experience of karuna, this compassion. It actually feels when it comes through us. Even though we're in touch with suffering and somehow feeling the suffering of others, there's a feeling of it being clean or pure or something as it moves through us. There's no dismay that's built into it. But we confuse the dismay with compassion. So make sense. So the exercise has to do with the not the near enemies, but maybe we'll call them the near friends of, of the hindrances. Not that the friends or the hindrances they could be, but, but there are our friends that look like the hindrances. And sometimes when people hear Buddhist teachings they'll take them in And then they apply things to those teachings in appropriately. So they think that, you know, I can't do this thing or that you know, because it looks like it is the same thing. So there are things that can look like the hindrances, but are not hindrances. And so rather than being upset that they're they're concerned that somehow we're caught in the hindrances, we can recognize them as being actually beneficial. So the five hindrances are the five things that hinder our wisdom. They also the five, five things which hinder our ability to get concentrated, and our ability to have clear mindfulness to be really present in the present moment in a clear, direct way. And in this Buddhist tradition of ours, the meditation tradition, these five hindrances are talked about over and over again, because of their tremendous importance. And in fact, people who do a lot of mindfulness practice you're kind of It helps if you become an expert on the hindrances. They're like the thing that you should kind of like get a PhD about. Because if you really understand how they work in your own mind, then you're less likely to be tricked by them, you're like less likely to

be pulled into them. And so if you have an opportunity, if to study a hindrance, do so. As opposed to try to get rid of it as quickly as you can. Because if you get rid of as quickly as you can to try to avoid it too quickly or too much, then we don't learn the ins and outs of it the tricks of the mind in relationship to it, how we get pulled into its orbit and such things. So the five hindrances are usually

listed as sensual desire. Sometimes people just say desire, but it's sensual desire, aversion, sloth and torpor. Even though it's two it's considered one tangerines restlessness and regret or remorse and doubt, the fifth one. And so these are things that we might get caught up in and get preoccupied with. And so in that preoccupation, it's hard to come mindfulness to shine forth or to be seated in mindfulness or concentration, to see clearly to be settled, to be focused, and to be really here to clear away. So we have to recognize how we get caught in thoughts of sensual desire and swept away and that was how we get caught in aversion and anger and, and resentment, and how sloth and torpor kind of makes it really hard for us to be present. How restlessness agitation, and also this thing called remorse, gets pulls us into its orbit, and we get preoccupied with that. And they say that doubt is the most dangerous of the hindrances, because doubt wouldn't really come with a lot of authority and can cause people to give up the practice to keep up meditate. Session are given the practice as a whole, because there's so much doubt going on, we're caught in the grip of that doubt. So the exercise is to look for the opposites of these are another opposite, but those things which look like them, but which are actually beneficial, and we might get confused about what they are. So with sensual desire, there's a few things that get confused with it. First, the word sensual, implies that it's has to do with desire around sensuality, and that certainly be around sex, but it can be about sights and sounds and tastes and touch and even even the sensuality of having great thoughts and ideas and creativity in the mind. And some people get pulled into the orbit get caught up in the pleasure of the things they're involved in. And people don't people want comfort, they're attached to pleasure and they're seeking it out. And I think It's probably fair to say that it's a much bigger deal in our society than most people recognize. And problem probably, it's a bigger deal maybe in some of your own lives and you've quite appreciated up to this point. Because it's kind of just taken for granted or something. And, and so the degree to which sensual pleasure when we can get attached to it, you know, it's considered to be a hindrance. And so we you know, and people who are learning to meditate are learning how to step away from the hindrances, so they don't hinder us Don't get involved. But there are things that can look like it. And some of them is that there are pleasures that come with being on the spiritual path or pleasures that come with meditation. And, and because they can have a physical component to them a physical kind of pleasure. They're associated with a kind of sensual pleasure, that in meditation, we're trying to, you know, not get caught in or Korea in the grip of so there's meditative pleasure. They can arise. And there's also yesterday I spent some time sitting at the edge of a lake, little lake. But the water was very peaceful there was kind of greenery around it, and had a very serene, peaceful feeling to be there and quiet that was with some people. But it felt just like, we should just wish we shouldn't talk, because it was just so nourishing to be there. It was, I would say it was a great pleasure to be there. But it wasn't a sensual pleasure that was important, was nourishing but rather there was a deep sense of nourishment of goodness of peacefulness that was welling up inside of me looking at the scenery, and that was very pleasant to experience. That pleasure, I would say is that was a healthy pleasure. So kind of like taking vitamins or something, you know, it's a was a good thing to do and he take it in very different than the pleasure I have, I don't know, there's a, you know, what we might call sensual pleasure that some people are involved in that we have them and we want more, or we have them and they make us restless and agitated. And we get caught up in the grip of wanting that and planning it and getting it and all that.

What comes to mind sitting here is some of the sensual pleasure that I had when I was a teenager, in relationship to certain people. And, and I would say that my mind got pretty contracted, and pretty tight

and pretty motivated around trying to pursue that those particular pleasures, it was not nourishing. It was not conducive to essential to this deeper peace and well being. So there are people who can think that they can feel this welling up of this pleasure of meditation, the pleasure of spiritual life, the pleasure or maybe being in nature, a deep kind of sense of goodness that can arise in relationship to other people's. And talking to people being with people. And there's not essential pleasure involved or sensual desire. But there is something really wholesome that's welling up. And the desire for that the wish for that. The pursuit of that is actually a very important part of a healthy life in a good thing. The fact that we want it doesn't mean that it's necessarily wrong. But rather it's how we want it, how the desires we have, are, are engaged in so the desire of sitting there at the lake and continue to sit there was were a simple and relaxed and it did not involve a contraction. My mind didn't get preoccupied. I was involved in planning and strategizing. And, and I wasn't trying to think about how to squeeze every possible little ounce of pleasure out of that lake. I would it was I felt good to be there. It felt appropriate to linger there and be with it. There was a desire for it. And that desire had a feeling of goodness in it. So, the fact that is a desire doesn't make it a hindrance. The fact that it was sensual in a certain kind of way, didn't qualify it is what Buddhism calls sensual desire, come much under. And so this could happen in meditation, these things, all kinds of ways. And it's good to recognize that these can arise without being a hindrance. And we're no they're not a hindrance, because we're not fixated on them. We're not preoccupied with by them. We don't get lost in the world of fantasy and thoughts and ideas. When they occur, we stay in a more open and relaxed way. So one of the one of the ways that I think of healthy desire and maybe healthy desire for this kind of what's going to be called spiritual pleasure is I use the word aspiration. I don't know how it resonates with you the word aspiration. But for me, it's a beautiful word word, partly because I love my breathing. And the word. You know, aspiration comes from the word Latin the word for, for breath. I like respiration. And it's, you know, inspiration also comes from that. And, and so the idea that when the breathing is relaxed and at ease, or when there's aspiration, that kind of desire, it allows the breathing continue to be at ease and open and soft and comfortable. When there's attachment connected to desire, when there's clinging and craving, it affects the breathing, and the breathing becomes contracted and tight. And so this, the quality of the breathing can be a wonderful measure a wonderful guide about how we go through our lives. And if you get used to being present and mindful and mindful of breathing You'll get a tremendous amount of information from your breathing, that tells you what's going on in your inner life, simply from the fact that breathing has gotten contracted or held, or the breathing is flowing easily. So the desire that so there's word of aspiration. So the near friend, our friend that's close looks close to a sensual desire, or forms of aspiration, which are healthy to have, and forms of pleasure, which are also healthy and nourishing to have. And so to distinguish those, then we can, we can prioritize where we can support the ones that are healthy. And then it gets interesting with the second hindrance, which is a version. The actual word in Pali ancient language is probably more like ill will, than it is a version. And the reason why that's important is that it's healthy, to avert from some things Verse means in Latin to turn away. And some things should be turned away from as opposed to go towards or just continue as they are. Some things are unhealthy. So if I'm sitting there at the lake and feeling this peacefulness and it feels like it's nourishing me and supporting me and, and cleaning out some of the gunk that's built up over the day.

And, and I feel like oh, you know, then I suddenly notice, oh, you know, I have you know, I have a lot of sensual pleasures to pursue. You know, there's all these good things out there in the world, you know, playground and, you know, I may go down to the local liquor store, and that's the kind of nice pleasure and I think there's something great on TV and you know, and you know, you go through the list of things, right. And so and so then I could, I could, you know, naively take some Buddhist teachings say, Well, I'm just accept everything. So I'll just accept my mind is going down. This font this direction. And so, you know, let's go to the closest liquor store. This is not healthy. So in that situation, the averting, I said, No, I don't need to go, my mind doesn't know it doesn't need to go down that track. I don't have to

be involved in that kind of thinking. It's, in fact to be involved in that thinking restricts how much I'm being nourished by this wonderful little scene. I'm sitting here next to this water. And so there's an averting a turning away. So sometimes I believe it's these some practitioners feel like they're never allowed to avert from anything turn away from anything, because they believe it's the so called hindrance of aversion, because we use that word language. But if we use the word ill will, then it may be slightly easier to understand that it will is one thing but averting doesn't have to have any ill will in it. In fact, it has goodwill in it. I have Well for myself, I'm taking care of myself by turning away from, you know, going 90 miles an hour to the liquor store or something. And the, and then you know, the Buddha was a sometimes I think he was a trickster kind of character, because he does a lot of wordplay and kind of plays with the words and probably in ways that shocked people then just as much as sometimes it shocks people today. So in one, remember, there's one place where the Buddha says that he teaches intolerance. You know, if I could put a big sign in front of IMC and said, Come here and He will teach you intolerance. If I would get some, you know, some version maybe. And, and then he goes on so it gets people's attention by saying that and then he says, I teach intolerance for Greed, hatred and delusion. And so there's a particular mind states like the hindrances, which we're not supposed to be tolerant of, but the intolerance is not supposed to have any ill will not supposed to have any clinging to it. But it's just a healthy turning away not this I don't have to be Melton this. So here are two people who learn this teachings by the hindrances or learn teachings about naive acceptance. feel like they're not supposed to ever have any turning away from things or say no to things we're supposed to just be with the way things are, but there's healthy turning away. The third hindrances sloth and torpor, which sometimes people refer to as sludge, or, you know, or swamp like mind or you know, in that you know, in the swamps, and this is where that you know, there's such lethargy in the body and the mind that it's hard to do anything physically. It's Hard to do even through something mentally and can't, can't get the mind the mind kind of going to be mindful and be present to be concentrated. And, and it's supposed to be different than ordinary tiredness, which you know, is just a physical thing that can happen. I'd like to think of sloth and torpor as little bit as a strategy of the maybe the subconscious mind, a strategy of avoidance, a strategy of somehow not really dealing and being present with things and so we we kind of, we kind of shut down and, you know, not really going to deal with what's happening. And so this is also considered a hindrance. And so what's the near friend of that? sloth and torpor?

Sometimes when people are feeling quite settled and peaceful and contented in their lives, and especially in deep meditation, there can feel a tremendous stillness of the body where it feels like I don't want to move the body, the body doesn't want to move. I don't want to move the body. It just the best thing in the world is just to sit here and moving in this body. The bell rings down to the sitting and you know, I'm not moving in here. And some people will take that because you're supposed to get up and move around. Okay, now I'm caught. You know, this must be sloth and torpor, because I'm not motivated to do anything, I just feel unmotivated, I feel like I just want to sit here forever. But in fact, it's actually can be a very healthy and nourishing state to be in here. to finally have a state of being where we're not always being driven, always wanting to go to the next thing and accomplish things improve ourselves or get something but we're just kind of completely here and acetals solid, contented way. And then mentally contentment, deep contentment can be confused with loss and torpor for the same reason that when there's a deep layer of contentment. We don't want to do anything. It's like why do anything when things are perfect? You know, just you know, and but, you know, the idea of not being motivated and not having a lot of aspiration and doing something can be, you know, can seem like socially unacceptable and like, you know, I'm supposed to be, you know, you know, so here, I'm sitting peacefully after lunch at a retreat center maybe and looking out and just feel very contented and peaceful and the bell rings calling us back to meditation. And I don't want to go anywhere and feel perfectly content is not acceptable. You know, I must be caught in the hindrance because I just don't

want to do anything. I don't want to go to the sitting. In fact, it might be the opposite that if we are unfamiliar with this kind of deep state of contentment, it's really good to stay in it and be familiar with it and let it kind of wash through us and benefit us and you know, So maybe it's better to stay there and not go to the city. I've heard that in one of the Southeast Asian countries Theravada in countries that they I don't know if it's true, but I've heard now a number of times from people that there's been an attempt by the government to prohibit Buddhist monks from teaching about contentment. Because the fear is that if people are too content, they won't be productive at work. And lately I've seen one or two articles are in about this mindfulness, secular mindfulness movement in America that now people are becoming a little bit concerned that if people learn just mindfulness too much in the corporation's at work, they're going to be too content and they're not going to want to be productive and ambitious and you know, all this stuff. It's important to be ambitious and you know, so so this idea that you know, contentment maybe is a problem, you know, and we'd speak a couple hours is an issue That's why some people might confuse sloth and torpor with contentment, peace, stillness. And then there's the fourth hindrances, restlessness and regret or remorse. And, and restless feels quite uncomfortable, a lot of energy coursing around jumping around bouncing around. And we can't be settled physically can't get settled mentally. Sometimes the legs feel like they went a bolt, all kinds of things that go on. And it's quite uncomfortable. It's quite hard to meditate in that state. So what is it that might look similar to slide, restlessness and remorse. And so in terms of restlessness, physical and mental restlessness, there can be a strong drive for liberation or strong drive to practice a strong drive to going on retreat or strong drive to going to meditate. This is really important For people so maybe some people, some people it becomes maybe the most important thing in their lives. And so the strong all the energy to do it that gets awoken gets confused and whether or not supposed to have so much energy I'm not supposed to be so have so much drive or movement inside of me this is what I want to do. And it might feel a little bit restless because that's the direction things are going. I remember when I was I took a long time for me to get my visa. It was a meditation visa to go meditate in Burma. I was that was the most important thing in my life at that juncture of my life was to get to Burma to do long retreats.

So it was a long time to get it I finally received the visa from the embassy from US Embassy in Bangkok and they stamped it and then I left the embassy and I was walking down the street and I started us Getting down the street and singing to myself. I was so I was so happy. Now maybe I could have you know, you know, been, you know, good Buddhist, you know, and I shouldn't be, you know, should be calm and settled and knots skipping and singing and all that. But, you know, maybe if I'd held myself still, I think I would have felt this energy building up. I think that that, that enthusiasm that the light, that's something that I've been wanting for so long that was so important for me in a good way was finally possible to give that give that the expression in the skipping and singing. You know, I don't think that was being restless. That was just the light and enthusiasm that was coursing through me. And I know to confuse it, the two means that maybe you should always look placid you know, you should always you know just kind of be still in college. economists are something. And so there are energies inside of us which are appropriate and healthy that can be maybe confused with restlessness. And then the regret thing is interesting. Some why regret is a hindrance is some people will look back at what they've done earlier in their lives, either they caused harm or they didn't pursue certain things they wish they'd pursued, and they beat themselves up. I like the word remorse for this rather than regret, because the Latin for remorse is to chew again. So, we're chewing ourselves over and over again, like more so I guess, remorse and there's over chewing you know, grinding ourselves up. And, and so, but there could also be healthy regrets. There is something about recognizing, you know, I took the wrong turn there. I went down the wrong way. I did the wrong thing. I said the wrong thing. I feel bad about that. And feeling bad about it. I have regrets. And I want to do better in the future. I want to learn from that so that I can improve without some reviewing and some taking in and some feeling that something was off there maybe even feeling uncomfortable about something that we've done. Maybe that we don't

have, we're not giving it giving ourselves a chance to have the energy or the motivation to learn from that and do better in the future to change and be something different. And so the fact that we feel uncomfortable in the in, you know, there are there is a way of feeling healthy regret. And not all regrets are a hindrance, some regrets are actually fuel and food for the very path of practice for the path to becoming a better person. And so to to to, you know, I've sat and meditated and what a woke for me sitting there with some of the things I felt I regretted having done And I took it this is appropriate that I'm feeling this. Rather than feeling I this shouldn't be happening. This is a hindrance, I should somehow get over it. So I can really do the meditation and be blissed out. This is appropriate. This the healthy thing here to do now is to really face up to this and allow this to be present. And to learn from it and move through it, let it be processed. So it needs its time. Rather than treat it as a hindrance, this is actually support a friend. So then the fifth hindrance is doubt and, and sometimes just translate is uncertainty, the kind of uncertainty where we don't know what to do. We can't choose what to do like, you know this or that. Should I meditate on the breathing Should I do loving kindness? I do open awareness meditation, should I get up into the walking meditation and you know, we get up and do walking meditation and well Should I do walking meditation Should I go back and sit? You know? No, you know, whatever, you know, there's a whole range of doubts that people get caught up in life. And they can be quite powerful and hold a big grip on us. And so what is it that can look like that be confused with it. So what occurs to me looking at my own life, is sometimes the experience of not knowing something.

I thought, oh, that if I don't know it, then I have doubt. If I don't know what to do, then that must be doubt. And I had to somehow correct for this. But I've learned that there's a healthy state of not knowing we don't have to know everything. In fact, we can come to a very healthy place of not knowing where kinda like the word aspiration, where there's not knowing that kind of open and present for possibilities. That just available and actually can see much clearly because it doesn't know Where it maybe doesn't know what the next step is or what the next thing to do is, but it's okay, because we're present and available, and paying attention. And the not knowing is actually very supportive. Because we can, we can take in more of the situation, we can learn from more of it. If we know too many things, something's too easy to narrow or focus to be. I know, let me tell you, I can't tell you how many times I've known what I should tell someone. I know what the story is. I know what's the you know, thing is, and let me tell you, but then I've held my tongue. I haven't said anything. And I learned more about the situation. And I realized Gil, you didn't have all the information. It was actually more complicated. Are there other options that I realized, I'm sure glad I didn't speak and we learn more here. So not knowing can allow for full Understanding full there is something so that the idea that not knowing is a, you know, can look like that because we don't know what to do. And therefore, you know, we might try to get rid of it, we think it's a problem. But there's healthy enough knowing. And in fact, I think that as we practice, there's more and more comfort with not knowing in certain certain ways in certain situations. And that comfort with not knowing is really important. When we people always need to know. It's, it gets too close to always needing to be in control, or always needing to kind of make herself safe and not knowing and doesn't caught up in the trap of, you know, always pursuing control of the situation or safety in the situation. So that's my exercise, my playing out the exercise and there might be better ways better connections between hindrances and then the things that are friends look like them. And certainly a bet for some of you with better connections for you and your life. So I hope that if you didn't do the exercise along with me as I spoke, maybe it's something that you'll try on your own at home or go walk, talk with a friend and then kind of try to find your own ideas of what what's true for you in your life. The end to conclude these words.

I think this is very valuable to differentiate between these things, because what we're trying to do in this practice, is we're trying to find a way forward. So some of the best qualities of our heart of our mind can

come forth. We're trying to find a way to some of the fullest capacities we have of being Peace, being free, being at home in our own hearts settled the fullest capacity of really being in this universe, so that when we die, we can die with an open, relaxed heart. That is and it kind of certain sense is there to be available for the experience of dying to use a more dramatic example. But in any moment in our life where they're sitting sitting at a lake, or sitting in rush hour traffic, to find this place of deep inner well being, and freedom, it's a beautiful thing. And to find that it's not an easy thing to do an easy thing to stay in touch with. It requires a lot of mindfulness, a lot of subtleness and, and then it takes a lot of self study. It's not meant this is not meant to be a shortcut to all this, the Buddha would emphasize over and over again, the way to become wise is to become wise about how we get caught, how the hindrances work, and as we do so that we maybe can learn to recognize then the opposite, that which is an hindering that which leads us to an unhindered place in our lives in our hearts. So we have a few minutes here, maybe it might be nice to take just a short few minutes. If any of you did the exercise along with me, if you came up with some other good, near Friends of the hindrances that I didn't mention that might be nice to to name here in the room. Well,

good, okay. I came up with them gratitude, which is a big one for me. gratitude. Because I know that when I get caught up and I get angry or I have pet peeves, then I start thinking about what's going well and what's great and what I'm really happy about in my life and it really works to change to get me uncaught

great. Gratitude is very nice. So someone else

I hope you haven't all most of you settled into not knowing too quickly.

When you were speaking about sensual desire, I thought about play. This play being kind of essential experience but being very wholesome and fun and light hearted.

Great It's wonderful play along with gratitude I I like the word appreciation. And when I get when I experience a situation that it's works against me or make a mistake, I can be grateful and appreciate that experience because it both the negative and the positive experiences because both of them are pieces that I learned from Fantasticks, appreciation for learning opportunities.

We can move to the this woman here but go ahead, Judy.

Everything and I do feel that

Nice, thank you. So we had to summon up, maybe two more maybe this if you can move here, right there. And then after that you Yeah, I

thought about surprise when you talked about our version and a specific exam boys when I'm a bit scared of having a conversation or difficult conversation because I think I know how they're going to react. And I have already went through my mind like, oh, they're gonna say these and I'm gonna say that and you have all these prepared dialogue and then you surprise rather than react with a version

huh? Fantastic surprise. the delight of surprise so back up there that be the last one and

yeah I think now it's better.

When you were talking about hindrances and friendly hindrances versus actual hindrances. I was thinking about situations and circumstances that you go through in life. And even in the hardest of those situations. There's a lot of unknowns. If you continue to believe that life and these experiences are working for you and not working against you, it gives you tremendous strength.

Hmm. So reminds me about the concept of faith. And faith sometimes is considered to be a form of desire that's healthy, because faith has faith in what's possible or the direction we're going. So that reminds me. Oh, yes.

When I was Thinking about is yesterday, I put on a dinner party. And it was to share a travel experience. So I spent a lot of time organizing it working on the food. And you know, there's a lot of tension in that, like, Can I get it, get it, get it, right. And yet, there's also this, you know, there's this reason why I'm trying to get it right, which is because it's for the benefit of these other people. So I think that would be maybe like a near friend, there's kind of this tension. When you're doing something for somebody else. You want to get it right. You can get really tense, you can overthink it, but on the other hand, there's also this aspect of your, your motivation is to get it right for somebody else or to share something.

Yeah, yeah. So So. Yeah, I think so. it's sometimes hard work and be you know, hard work. But it's not necessarily the problem to do it that way to experience that.