

Satipaṭṭhāna (47) Hindrances: Doubt

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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

blinking out, present, confusion, main road, trust, uncertainty, residence, indecisiveness, wise, healthy

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Good morning, everyone. We can live in a world where we are quick to think that things are wrong. Or we can live in a world where we are present on the main road of what is – not taking the side road of alarm about something being wrong.

We are experiencing the video blinking or blacking out here. I don't know what that blacking out is. For now, we can use it as a practice opportunity to pause, wake up, and let go.

When meditation gets very still and quiet, sometimes the mind does things that some call “blinking out.” Sometimes the blinking outs are interesting: “Wow! What was that?” They can be repetitive. Sometimes the blinking out is an amazing transformation that can happen as a result of being on the main road of experience, just being present for what is. The blinking (or blacking out) that can happen in deep meditation arises when the mind is no longer taking any side roads. It is simply here.

By not taking any side roads, we are very present for what is, without being for or against, without any preoccupation, thinking, or input from the world of thoughts. We are not living in our thoughts. We are not living in reactivity. We are not thinking about or reacting to anything at all. We are not taking up residence in thoughts. When the mind (or the heart) is at rest with all things – not caught, not taking up residence in anything – then something deep can let go. Sometimes this letting go lasts for just a second.

The last of the hindrances is doubt. It involves a world of uncertainty, indecisiveness, and confusion about things. I think of trust as the opposite of doubt, confusion, and uncertainty.

For the practice of meditation, trust means trusting the main road. If you stay here, you are on the right track. When you take the little side paths, you might end up in the thickets or the woods. The side paths can lead you in circles and make you wander around for a long time before you can come back to the main road.

Trust the main road of practice. Just show up. Just be present for this...be present for this...be present for this. When the mind starts going down a side path, remember: “Oh, that is a side path. Just stay here.”

One of the side paths is doubt and confusion. We wonder: “What am I supposed to be doing? Where am I going? Am I able to do this? Is this the right teaching? What about the teaching of not-self? The Buddha's teaching does not make any sense. What does it mean? I have doubts about it.” All these are varieties of side paths.

The path to trust is the path of simply being present for *this*. It is as if the path arises as we step onto it. If we are looking for the path beyond our next step, then it is easy to fall into the world of confusion and doubt. If we trust that next step, then the path arises. The path appears in this step, with this step. In mindfulness practice, the step is to simply be present for the most obvious experience of the moment and recognize it. With everything that happens, we recognize: now *this* is happening... this is happening...this is happening.

One of the forms of doubt and one of the side paths that people might take is: “How can I take care of myself then? How can I take care of the world if I am simply taking in just this moment?”

There are two answers to this. One is that meditation is the primary reference point that we are talking about right now. How we are in meditation might be different from how we are in daily life. We are mindful in both. But in meditation, we can experience the radical simplicity of just being with the obvious – being present for *this*. We do not have to solve the world's problems while we are in meditation. We do not have to solve our problems. What we are doing in meditation – being present for experience – does not have to be directly connected to solving all the problems around us.

Secondly, being present in meditation prepares us to be wise, considerate, and kind in the way we respond to things outside of meditation. It gives us the ability to keep it simple. It also teaches us how much we complicate things unnecessarily. The radical simplicity of meditation highlights the complications and how we veer away from the present moment. When we go back into our daily life, we are wiser about that. We notice when we are preoccupied with thoughts that are not useful. We can recognize more useful ways to think, and how to problem solve if we need to.

To have this deep trust in just being present. Doubts, uncertainties, hesitation, and confusion will certainly arise. The path of mindfulness in the *Satipaṭṭhāna* is to simply know: "Oh, this is confusion. This is doubt. This is uncertainty. This is vacillation. This is a lack of commitment. This is what it looks like. This is what it is." We see it arise, see its presence, and we see its absence. We see it as a hindrance in meditation. It is a hindrance to staying on that main road.

The video was interrupted again. We can stay in the dharma mode and practice with this: this is just what is happening. This is what we are present for. This is an occasion to not make anything a problem.

It is good to be able to distinguish between healthy and unhealthy doubt. There are all kinds of healthy doubts that we can have. Healthy doubts are the ones that encourage us to look and consider more deeply and question in appropriate ways. Unhealthy doubts are the ones that keep us indecisive, confused, or hesitant, without questioning what is going on.

The meditative way of the *Satipaṭṭhāna* gives us an opportunity to see the arising of doubt. We can see when it is not there. We get a feel for the sense of trust and clarity that come when we stay on the main road. We see that we can let go of doubt when it arises. When we are meditating, we do not have to debate or justify doubt. We can trust the main path: just be present, just be present, just be present. Then things like doubt can arise and pass. They are not our business. We just pause for them briefly, like the blinking of the video today. Then we continue on the path.

I think it is wonderful that we had an issue like the video blacking out today. We did not lose the connection for more than a few moments, and then we just continued to practice with it on the main path. Thank you.