

Monday Dharma talk, week 3

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In the journey of *satipaṭṭhāna*, I think of it as a journey inward through different circles of our experience. The first foundation is the outermost circle, both in terms of being the body more generally, and also activities that we do, and different kinds of reflections or ways to understand how to be more intimate with the body. To begin, not treating the body as a whole exactly, but thinking of it as made up of parts, and then thinking of it as made, you know, the experience of the body is made up of sensations. And then in the second foundation, there's a deep dive into sensations, which is another circle inward, which is a little bit more... Conventionally, sensations sit at the interface, experience and the mind. Sensations and the mind. So they're a little bit deeper than just the parts of the body.

And then if we go to the profound sensations, again, we're kind of going in closer into a more close-in circle of our experience. And the mind, in a certain kind of way, is pretty intimate and deep and kind of a pretty core aspect of who we are. And maybe it's hard to visualize it as a concentric circle that's even smaller in, but it's kind of getting closer in to something profound within us. And then the innermost, most profound aspect of all this is the fifth, the fourth foundation or the fourth way of establishing awareness, which is the observation of the *dhammā*, observing *dhammā* in terms of themselves. And the question is, what is *dhammā* here? There's a lot of, a lot has been written, a lot of different choices of how to interpret it, how to translate this term.

And I've come at least to a conclusion, at least for myself, that a really good way of understanding *dhammā*: they are not things, and they're not states, and they're not qualities of states or qualities of beings, but rather they're activities, they're processes, they're something dynamic, and they're mental activities. And as soon as you have a process or have an activity and action that goes on, it's easier to understand that this is in constant, changing, coming and going. It's not fixed. And as an action, as an activity of the mind, it's amenable,

conditioned by other activities and other factors that come into play. And now we're going in more deeply, and there are two very general categories here. And as you have seen now, that in the second foundation, there are two categories, the surface sensations in the deep.

In the third foundation, there's kind of the ordinary ways in which we get caught, greed, hate and delusion, and the absence of them is kind of one whole category, the more the unwholesome side, and then the wholesome side with the mind becoming expansive, connected in some way to the highest way of being, free of clinging, steadied, freed. And so here we get to the fourth of these areas, and these are also, I have two, divided into two categories, two distinctions. And we'll see over and over again that the Buddha emphasizes being able to see clearly the distinction between what is wholesome and unwholesome, between what is on-ward leading in the practice and what is not. And so the first three discussions, instructions in the Fourth Foundation, have to do with the hindrances, five hindrances, the five bundles, usually called aggregates, and the six ways of getting knotted up with the world, kind of areas of attachment. And then the second category, the wholesome side, the seven factors of awakening, which are more like states, and the four liberating insights, insights which are freeing, known as the *Four Noble Truths*.

So it's learning in a productive way, in a useful way, to see, to know, to feel, to understand. These activities in the mind allow us to appreciate a few things. We begin seeing how they work, how they influence us, the impact they have. We can begin understanding that some things are not useful for us. Maybe they're harmful and deleterious. They undermine us. They bring suffering. And some things do the opposite. They are beneficial for us. And they bring freedom from suffering.

And these two categories, the wholesome and unwholesome here, kind of have different instructions on what to do. And those two that I want to highlight today... I'll spend mostly time talking about the hindrances, but the hindrances are often paired with the seven factors of awakening. And the task, kind of one of the important steps in the hindrances, is a very powerful word. I believe it's powerful and sometimes a challenging word, and that is abandoning the hindrances. But that stands in contrast to what you're supposed to do with the seven factors of awakening.

So on one hand we have abandoning, which I don't know how you associate what you associate with that. Good news, bad news. With the seven factors of awakening, one is to develop and bring to fulfillment each factor of awakening. So it's not a matter of abandoning the factors of awakening. And here we're doing almost the opposite. When they have arisen, we're developing them, cultivating them, allowing them to grow. To this, I think, very significant

word, fulfillment. Are we allowed to be fulfilled in Theravāda Buddhism? There must be a typo.

And while the Buddha pairs these two in certain teachings, hindrances and some factors of awakening, what's very significant is that the source of each arises, they come from a different source. And as some of you know, I call it two different operating systems that we have within us. And the hindrances arise out of the *saṅkhāra* operating system. A certain kind of way of constructing ourselves, our experience, that is mixed with clinging and craving and hatred and various kinds of attachment. And because there's attachment involved, clinging involved, we gather together these attachments. Once we're attached, we don't let go very easily. And the chances are that at least some of you, maybe you weren't born with a lot of attachments, but then you got it, as you were growing up, you got a little bit attached to a few things. And maybe you outgrew them, but maybe you didn't. And then you got attached a little bit more. The world became more known and understood, and all the things of the world became more and more. And it just, you know, it's great. There's more things to cling to. And so we gather these bundles of clinging. We have, some of us have big suitcases.

And then we're a little bit like people. We go and retreat. Like a backpacker who decides to go backpacking in the high Sierras for a week or two and then brings three suitcases, a cooler, and other important... And you know, I'd have to carry them all, you know. There might be a backpack involved too, but, you know, maybe they carry a couple of suitcases and it'll go 100 feet to go back for the other one. And, you know, that's a great time to backpack. Back and forth. You get to walk twice as much. And so we carry all this baggage with us. Sometimes we come on retreat. It's amazing how much. But what it is, is we're starting to see the baggage we've been carrying with us maybe for a lifetime. It's game. Everything is practiced on retreat. There are no mistakes. Everything's a chance to see and to be honest, and to discover.

So this one operating system that produces the hindrances and the bundles, five bundles, are this kind of way the mind, the surface mind, constructs things. And then there's the deep mind, the *yoniso* mind. And that's the source for the seven factors of awakening. The Buddha says that those are the conditions, those are the precursors, those are the means by which the seven factors of awakening come. And if we go along with translating as caring attention, maybe you can get a feeling that something profoundly nurturing, nourishing about caring sometimes, that brings something deeper flow inside of us. So it's the surface mind that is based on clinging, that we want to see clearly and understand clearly, so we can put it to rest, so we cannot be caught in it, so we can begin making room for this deeper operating system within us, to offer it what it has to offer. And it has to offer things like the seven factors of

awakening.

And the idea of developing, as I've said at the beginning, the word is *bhāvanā* to grow. These grow within us. And things that grow come to a fullness. And so these wonderful things that can come to a fullness within us. So the hindrances. It's relatively common to give talks on the hindrances at the beginning of a retreat. So maybe in a sense the retreat's beginning today. It might be something very significant to see it that way. And, you know, everything up until now is preparation. And part of that preparation is to have this, have the calmness or clarity, stillness, spaciousness, something different than ordinary, caught-up, busy mind, that kind of clears the air, clears the smog, the fog enough so that you can start seeing these things more clearly, and seeing the effect they have, seeing how they operate.

And so, yes, it would have been good to talk about the hindrances two weeks ago, but most of you know them well. But there's a, this practice is kind of, I love the idea that this practice of *satipaṭṭhāna* is a spiral. Right. That we go, it depends on what kind of metaphors you like. It goes deeper and deeper with each turn, or it goes higher and higher in each turn. It's your choice. But it goes someplace wonderful. But it goes in spiral, so you come back to the same thing, but in a different way. So instead of coming back to the hindrances, we do that repeatedly, and we start seeing in the new ways. And one of the things to understand, to see is what happens to us when a hindrance is strong.

The Pāli word for hindrance is *nīvaraṇa*, which means, doesn't mean exactly hindrance, but apparently it means a covering, covers over. And to me that's quite evocative. Something gets covered over and you can't see it. Something gets covered over and it can't grow. Seven factors of awakening can't grow because they're weighed down by this big blanket that plants don't grow up through blankets usually. So it's covered over something. It says that it covers over wisdom. It's hard to be wise when we're caught in the hindrances. It obscures or covers over the seven factors and one of the key ones that it covers over is our ability to concentrate.

So it's possible to, it's very interesting actually as an exercise, if you happen accidentally to fall into hindrance, but known to happen on retreat, is that you would be curious, be interested. What's the quality of your attention, of your awareness when the hindrance is strong? Has your world gotten small and tight? Is it covering over something? Does it make it difficult to see? No. Is it difficult to tap into your wisdom? Is it difficult to tap into your clarity about what's happening? So is it, does that involve tension? Does it involve seduction? That you're being lured into this world of the hindrances in some ways because it just somehow or other, it seems alluring or promising or important or authoritative or what is that glue, what is that

attitude that comes into play that you get kind of really caught in that, in the hindrance?

So take your time. Don't be in a hurry to abandon the hindrance. Understand how it works and sense the effect that has on you. My understanding, one way of understanding the hindrances, they are part of this surface mind that constructs things and makes things up. And the way the hindrances function is they're very much connected to stories, story mind. And that's sometimes why hindrances are so obscuring, because we're kind of in the veil of some story that we're living in. And also why sometimes they're so compelling, because it's a good novel. It's a good story. Or it's a bad story, but that's interesting enough. There's a story involved.

So you can probably figure this out for yourself, and maybe I shouldn't give examples. The last thing you need is more stories. But there's a lot of stories around sensual desire, sexual desire, comfort, desires in general. And to recognize that when there is the hindrance of sensual desire, desire, desire, longing, possessiveness, acquisitiveness. There's actually two different lists of the hindrances in the suttas that differ in the Pāli word for the first one. The most common one, especially in the *Satipaṭṭhāna*, is *kāmacchanda*, desire for *kāma*, sensual pleasure. But there's also another one which I'm not going to embarrass myself by trying to pronounce. But it means something like longing or acquisitiveness, possessiveness. So there's a wide range of what this can refer to. But it can be involved with a sexual desire, fantasy, for example. It can be involved with some story about why this is going to be so great and wonderful. Right. And we live in those stories, telling us stories over and over again, rehearsing them, telling us, coming back to it and telling the story better. And that's part of the glue and power of this desire. It's not simply desire by itself, but it's a desire that's gotten really sticky by the stories we tell. And some of the stories might be very subtle. You might not think it's a story, but some stories don't have much plot.

So, you know, like, so it might be that the story is, you remember that once upon a time during the retreat they serve cookies. And so that's a little story, and it would be so good to have us a cookie. That's the story. That's simple. There's no big plot, but maybe you provide the plot. Now, already you're planning about how can I manage an insight retreat where we're not supposed to have a lot of desires. How next time can I manage to get three cookies? How is that done in a place like this? Because I certainly can't go down there and take three on my plate. So how do we do this? And do I take one and do I then hide it and come back to get another? What do I do? So then now it's a drama with intrigue and cast of characters.

So an ill will generally, see both desire and ill will have an object. It's rare that people just have ill will for no reason. I suppose it could happen, but maybe then we say they have ill will

for everything. But just, you know, just ill will, desire, just a good policy. You should always have desires. It doesn't matter what desire. Just always keep it going. It's like my little son, when he was young enough still to carry, I was carrying him in Safeway. And he kept wanting things. When he got to take it to Safeway, he wanted everything that he could see. But one day I was holding him up nicely for some reason. It was... And not to restrain him, but I was holding him. And we were kind of chest to chest, so. And he lifted up his arm, stretched his arm backward behind him. He had no idea what was there. Didn't matter. He just knew he wanted it. So I guess it's possible to have desires with some object in mind. But generally there's an object. And so that object, you know, involves a story that we tell ourselves. How good it's going to be, how wonderful, how great I'll be. This is going to, this piece of ill will is needed because it's going to right the wrongs of the world and everything will be good. And I'll be a hero. There's something. Stories. Stories.

And then there's this third hindrance that's usually called sloth and torpor. When I looked up the first word, sloth, in the Pāli English Dictionary, they defined it as being rigid. And I like that because sloth and torpor is a little bit too tame for me. Sometimes what happens is we freeze. We go numb. We get so afraid we can turn hard and rigid. We shut down. And so to appreciate that, it sometimes makes the practice a little bit more useful than practical for how we actually, what happens to us, than if we keep just saying sloth and torpor. And so that usually freezing, going numb, psychologically usually has some story. Maybe something happened to us, story in the past. Maybe it's some story in the present about what we're afraid of, what we're predicting in the future. Maybe it's a story that things are too much. It's so unrelenting sometimes what happens on retreats. Maybe the fear, maybe the despair, maybe the physical pain, maybe the boredom. Just too much. And some people want to just shut down. And they go numb. Yeah. It's said that the sloth and torpor here is not ordinary tiredness, which doesn't need a story to happen. It's really something that, it's a strategy of the mind. It's an activity of the mind. Sometimes to protect ourselves, sometimes to shut things out. Sometimes it's a strategy of resistance.

And I remember very well, I still have very clear memories of I'm very happy to call this sloth and torpor. When I was maybe seven and my mom took me to the department store to buy clothes. Oh boy, I had so much sloth and torpor. I just, I can't walk. No, it's so hard. I can't do this. I hated it in those getting clothes. Okay. Sometimes she had asked at the end, do you want ice cream? Then I had lots of energy. I could walk then. So I remember that simulating a heaviness and shutting down, like, oh, what do we... So sometimes it's resistance, giving up of all kinds. Sometimes it's overwhelm. So what's the story of that? What are we telling

ourselves? Sometimes it's what we're telling ourselves that makes some things really difficult. And some things we're telling ourselves might even be subconscious. But that's why waiting until now to talk about the hindrances, you might be able to start tapping into your subconscious. Bring the unconscious to consciousness as we get quieter and stiller and able to see the small movements of the mind.

And then there's restlessness and regrets, remorse, agitation, and that also has stories connected to it. It might be some of the same stories that cause sloth and torpor, rigidity and torpor, but just a different way of responding to it. And sometimes I like to call the second one remorse, just because it kind of means in the Latin root to chew again, and so to ruminate. And so sometimes we have regrets, and it's appropriate to have regrets if we really caused harm. But remorse is kind of where eating it or chewing at our heart, chewing at ourselves over and over and over again in a way that undermines us. It's problematic. And so we're telling ourselves stories of poor me or I've done something terrible. It could be that short the story. Right? Or it could be longer. You could be reviewing what happened and what you think was going to happen, all the ways that you're terrible. Chewing on that, chewing on it.

And then doubt. So the way the Buddha defines what we call doubt is actually more, I think the word doesn't mean doubt as much as it means uncertainty. And he has a very particular example of what he means about what we're uncertain about when we have this fifth hindrance. It's uncertainty about what is wholesome and unwholesome. Because if there's uncertainty and we don't know, we won't find our way. We don't see the path of practice. And so then we vacillate, we're indecisive. We have a certain kind of doubt. We're in the ability to choose. The corollary to that is when we don't have the hindrance, then we do recognize what is wholesome and what is unwholesome. What is healthy or unhealthy. What is nourishing and what undermines us and drains us. What supports the growth of good qualities within versus what supports the growth of unhealthy qualities within, states within. And so to have our own reference for that, to have uncertainty about that, can make life very difficult for a practitioner especially. Like, what's the wholesome thing to do here? And it can stir up the other hindrances because of that uncertainty. But also to understand what is wholesome and to understand that this is the issue not to overcome your doubt about the Buddha's teachings or about the teacher or your own ability to practice. Those are certainly big obstacles that some people have to face. But if you know the next moment, this is how to be aware. This is how to know and to sense. This is how to meet this experience right now. So, for example, you don't know what to do. How do you hold that? What's the wholesome way of

not knowing? What's the unwholesome way of not knowing? There's always a wholesome step, and it can be very, very simple. It's said in the Theravādan tradition that mindfulness is always wholesome. So it gives us an easy out. All I have to do is to clearly know that it's there, clearly sense. Right then there's something wholesome. And by now you might know it's not that easy. Because sometimes knowing can come along with baggage. But if you're learning how to know calmly, clearly, kindly, freely, then you can start appreciating that just a moment of that kind of simple knowing, calm knowing, clear knowing, non-reactive knowing, it is wholesome.

And so the fifth hindrance also makes our relationship to the other four hindrances more difficult. Because we don't really understand how unhelpful it is for us. What a hindrance it is for us. What a covering over what's lost if we're caught in the hindrances. Because we don't know what is healthy and unhealthy. You know, and so some... Some stories that we tell ourselves are... Not only they show promise of great pleasure, they produce pleasure in telling ourselves the story, living in the story. And so do we know the difference between unhealthy pleasure that doesn't really nourish us and nourishing pleasure? Well, it's hoped that by going through the second foundation, we really know the difference between surface pleasures, which certainly can be pleasant, but they don't really touch, don't really arise from some deeper source within. By knowing that distinction, it might be easier to not be caught in the allure, the promise, or the actual pleasure that desire stories can tell us. You can actually sometimes see, oh, this is not good. And it's unfortunate that sometimes I've had desires on retreat of different kinds. And they seemed innocent enough at first. They seemed pleasant enough at first. But after the third day, give me a break. This is a drag. This is exhausting. This is unpleasant. This pleasure is not pleasant. And sometimes it takes a while before we catch on. And that's, well, maybe that's what it takes, because then we really see the impact it has on us. Then something gives. We're ready to abandon it.

So this abandoning of the hindrances, maybe it's easier if what we're doing is abandoning the storytelling mind. Abandoning telling ourselves stories. Maybe it's the stories that keep the hindrances fueled and going by no longer telling stories. Letting the storytelling mind, the surface mind, become quiet, or seeing clearly the surface mind, the story-making mind. Oh, that's what's going on. I see. And maybe you know something deeper. Maybe you know the deep mind, the *yoni* mind, the gut mind, the heart mind. Okay. And just knowing that distinction and knowing that one is wholesome and one is not, just that distinction allows us to connect to something deeper. Or that distinction allows us to not be so invested in the stories that support the hindrances. And why are we so invested? Why are we so interested?

Why are they so powerful sometimes? Why are we caught in them? And there's probably a lot of answers. So it's best if you answer that for yourself. But can you feel the power of being pulled? Can you feel that gravitational force between you and the hindrances? What is that like for you?

So I'm not suggesting that all of you are sitting here wrapped in interest and hindrances after the two weeks of practice. Right? But I do hope that the first two weeks have created a better reference point, a better contrast, a better vantage point to understand even the subtle working of the hindrances that operate, how they sneak in, and that you're ready more to appreciate what's wholesome and unwholesome, what is onward leading and not onward leading, what is freedom and not freedom in relationship to them. And that you have the ability to know the hindrances when they're there in a calm way. That you have the ability to sense them. And that's sometimes really helpful for some people. Some people it's not. But to really feel it physically. What's happening here? What are the sensations that are going on here when I'm caught in these hindrances? Sometimes dropping into the sensations, rather than the knowing mind, it might take us out of the stories easier once we're in the body and directness and immediacy of the body. But you have a practice momentum now to meet these and know them. And sometimes it might be enough to only know it, only feel it, keep it that simple. Just that might be the freedom from the story, freedom from the being caught in it, just to know it.

So if we make it a project, get rid of it, the danger of that is now you're telling yourself another story. And some of us have great, wonderful stories of heroic practice that we're going to do. Sometimes there's just no story. Just this. Oh, there's desire. There's a desire story. Really simple, really clear. And then sometimes, after we've been involved with the hindrance for a while, it might not be there. Maybe you got the cookie, the three cookies. So cookie desires have been abated for a while. Whatever the reason, the Buddha said, it's really good to know what it's like, how it is for you when a hindrance is longer there. It's like in the second and third foundation, knowing a mind with craving as a mind with craving, knowing a mind without craving as a mind without craving. So here it's kind of like knowing a mind with hindrance as a mind with hindrance. Knowing a mind without hindrance, know it as a mind without hindrance. Being able to see this clearly helps us to be more sensitive in the future to what goes on when the hindrances operate, to not be so tricked by them.

And then there's a wonderful, very important instruction here. As we're practicing, as we practice there, at some point when we're settled enough and clear enough, a very useful thing to be sensitive to, not go looking for, but be still enough or open enough, available

enough, that you begin seeing more in clarity how things that didn't exist appear, they arise. And when I said that, and there arose the little bit of wind from the air conditioner. It just, it wasn't there in my experience, and then it arose. So I saw it arise. That's that simple. It came. And all kinds of things that come, and you can kind of sometimes see where it comes from, but in the immediate experience directly, it's sometimes like it just arises out of nothing. You're sitting there and there arises an itch. There was nothing before, just itch. There it is. Or there's a little tension or a little warmth or a little vibration. Or there's a... maybe occasionally some of you have a brand new thought, not a recycled thought. But it just arose. But even recycled thoughts. Oh, there. Like just came out of nothing. There doesn't seem to be any past, no condition. There it is. So this is becoming, seeing things as they appear for the first time. Be right there. Oh, look at that. It just came.

When I was in Burma, I tried, one of my little games, mindfulness games that I had there, was could I notice the first moment during the day that I started to get tired? Yeah. In terms of like that kind of tiredness that only goes to getting sleepy. Like there was the first moment of starting, little hint of sleepiness. And mostly I never saw it. But it was kind of fun to kind of be kind of available for that. It kind of kept me on my toes or on my butt. And to just a kind of little game that I played. And so, when can you be there to see the arising of the hindrance? You were there minding your own business nicely, and then came a story about desire, an event that brings up resentment. Something arises and we go back to our remorse. There it is. There's something very powerful about seeing something arise, kind of out of nothing, when it first begins. I think that one of the reasons it's so useful is that that's usually before we've bought into it, before we've gotten pulled into its orbit so strongly. So it's easier to leave it alone. It's just, oh, it wasn't there, and now it's there, but it's not, you know, it's not, we haven't taken it seriously yet. So we're less likely to be hooked in.

And then the way that the text works, it says, one knows the abandoning of sensual desire that has arisen. The abandoning of it. And there's something for me about this grammar that it doesn't say one then abandons with great passion, just to let it go. It says one knows the abandoning. There's something, I think miraculous, amazing that can happen. And I offer this to you as a little carrot for your interest. There's something that, there's a lot that happens that's really good in this practice that we're not the agent making it happen. We just provide presence, attention, so something can happen in that field of attention, field of mindfulness. So if we bring a lot of attention to the hindrances, really sense it in this calm way, clear way. If we stop telling the story, we're going to be just feel the forces, the sensations, the desires, the aversion we have. Then something inside of us can let go. Something wants

to let go. Something's not being fed to be continued. And it's remarkable to start seeing how there's abandoning, there's a letting go. That is what our psychophysical system does. No self-needed. You don't have to be the one who's the doer of it. Many of us take a lot of responsibility. We feel it's up to us and to the moral failing that I have a hindrance. And I got to do something about and make myself a good Buddhist again. No, no, you don't have to be a good Buddhist for anybody. Just be present. And maybe you see it drops away. We see that it's abandoned. Right? And then one knows that the abandoning is full enough, full enough, clear enough, strong enough, committed enough that the hindrance doesn't arise again. The one knows the abandonment and the effect of that abandonment. Oh, this was complete, at least for now. You're still welcome to let go if it's easy. But don't make letting go your only strategy. If it's easy, it's okay. There's something very powerful and useful in this practice to see that letting go happens in the clarity of mind. A mind that's clear, mindful, concentrated, really there, fully there, but not buying into it, but sees it clearly. And to watch that it changes, that drops away. And that's one of the reasons why it's so useful, is to see so that we're not always being the agent of change. We're not always taking responsibility. We start seeing there's something else operating here that is not our usual sense of self. The usual thing that we identify as me, me, myself and mine. That's a different, but that is a different construct of the mind, of the surface mind. And that's the topic that'll be in a couple of days. But for tomorrow, we'll follow up with this with a corollary from the deep mind. Talk about the seven factors of awakening. So in the meantime, if a hindrance might arise, you practice with it. It's practice well done, well worth doing, and see what you can learn of what I've talked about today. See if you can recognize the roles of story that the surface mind makes. And see if seeing this that way makes a whole project of being with hindrance easier. And maybe, just maybe, discover how to be present with clarity and focus and care, love. So you might see the hindrance release itself. You might see the abandoning of it that you didn't do, except for creating the mental space, room for that abandoning to happen. Thank you.