

Observing the Five Hindrances In Daily Life

As a theme for the daily life practice this week, I would like to focus on observing our experience with reference to the five hindrances. For descriptions of the five hindrances, see the handout: *Definitions of the Five Hindrances*.

These difficult states of mind arise for all of us, and they run our lives more often than we would like to admit. Sometimes it feels like our lives are on autopilot, with difficult states of mind running the show, often leaving suffering in their wake. The ways that the hindrances manifest in our experience are usually based on old and deep conditioning. We can illuminate these tendencies with mindfulness, understand them, and see whether they serve us, or lead us into struggle and difficulty. Taking an interest in the hindrances can lead to a deeper understanding of the undercurrents that motivate us, and mindfulness begins to give us a choice about whether we engage in them.

As we begin to explore the hindrances with mindfulness, they no longer hinder our practice! Instead, they become the fertile soil in which our practice can grow and deepen. We can actually become quite interested in observing these states, especially as we see the benefit of observing and responding, rather than automatically reacting to their presence.

The Buddha offered several practices for exploring and observing five hindrances. We will begin this week by exploring three of those practices:

- (1) Knowing whether the hindrance is present.
- (2) Knowing whether the hindrance is absent.
- (3) Noticing the arising of the hindrance. When you are familiar with the absence of the hindrance, you might be able to see it arising. This helps us to understand what triggers, or causes a hindrance to arise.

Using mindfulness to notice whether a hindrance is present means to turn towards the experience of the hindrance itself, rather than being aware of the thing (a situation, relationship) that the hindrance is about. Recognize how the hindrance makes you feel. Can you simply hang out with that feeling, rather than automatically reacting? Mentally acknowledging that the hindrance is present can be helpful, e.g. “aversion is happening.” For daily life practice, it helps for this practice to have a light touch. Just notice that a hindrance is present, and go on with your day.

Noticing that a hindrance is absent can actually be quite helpful! When certain hindrances are frequent visitors, we often create an identity around them. Consciously recognizing when they are not present helps to undercut the process of identification.

For the third practice, you might begin to recognize when a hindrance arises, and in seeing that, you might also notice some of its causes, conditions, or triggers. For example, ill will might tend to arise more easily for you if you are rushed or tired. Or you might notice a hindrance happening frequently in a situation with a particular person. Or you might notice an idea or belief in your mind that is connected to the arising of a hindrance. Seeing the causes, conditions and triggers for a hindrance helps us to learn how ways to let go of a hindrance! If we see that we are more reactive when we are rushed, we can support non-reactivity by choosing to allow more time so that we are not rushed.

I'd like to suggest that you reflect about how the hindrances manifest in common habits or patterns that occur in your life. Most of the reactive emotions have the hindrances as part of them. For example, anger is often a manifestation of ill will. Excitement is usually a manifestation of sense-desire with a fair measure of restlessness thrown in. The same emotion can also include different hindrances at different times. For instance, frustration might be predominantly related to sense-desire (not being able to have something that we want), or it might be related to ill-will (as a form of anger directed towards the thing that is in our way.)

As a practice for this week, choose a hindrance, or two if you wish, and see if you can start to recognize the presence, absence and arising of that hindrance in your daily life. I'd suggest that you choose one associated with your familiar habits and patterns.