So, welcome back. And it's a pleasure, a delight to see many of your names here and see that you're coming back and participating. And it's day two of this Intro to Meditation series, part two. Second day of Part Two, Introduction to Meditation.

And the main topic of this part two, for these eight days, is working with the challenges of meditation, and specifically working with what's called the five hindrances. And these five hindrances are used as representations for all the things that can be challenging in meditation. And how we learn to work with the hindrances may be as useful for many of the different challenges that come up and find our way through. And to wake up. To learn to be mindful. And it may be nice to begin by emphasizing that one of the core principles, values of the Dharma, of Buddhism, teachings of the Buddha, is the importance of paying attention. The importance of being present in a clear, aware way for whatever is happening in the present moment. And there's no doctrine connected to that. It doesn't have to be in and of itself. It's a basic human capacity that we're trying to cultivate and strengthen and deepen with the idea that by being clearly aware, we can start seeing some of the underlying patterns, underlying influences, underlying assumptions, underlying beliefs, underlying emotions that are really driving us and moving us along. And often in unconscious ways. And sometimes in driven ways where we're caught in the grip of beliefs, of ideas, of attachments, of desires. And we kind of lose our freedom, we lose our inner capacity for free open awareness. Where we can live a life of wise choice. We can live wisely.

And so the idea of becoming aware, paying attention is so central to Buddhism. So much so that there is a teaching from Japanese Zen. Japanese Zen masters, in addition to being Zen masters, are often known to be great calligraphers. And people often want from a great Zen master they'll want their calligraphy. And so a person came with the beautiful silk paper and beautiful, wonderful ink and gifted it to the Zen master and said, "Could you please write down the most profound and important and central teachings of Buddhism? So I can hang it on my wall and be reminded all the time." And so the Zen master thought for a little bit, then nodded and took out the paper and brush and did this beautiful

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calligraphy for the Japanese character for attention and handed it to the person who asked. And the person looked at and said, "no, no, you don't seem to understand. I want the most essential, the most profound teachings of the Dharma, Buddhism. The most profound and significant that really inspires me." And the Zen master said, "Oh, now I understand, okay." And took out another piece of paper and wrote the character, attention, and then again. Attention twice. And handed the paper to the person. And the person "No, no, you don't understand. I'm an important person. I've studied Buddhism a lot. I really need something that really touches some of the most deepest, valuable, most profound, most sophisticated, most intelligent, most, you know, wisest teachings of Buddhism. It's a wisdom tradition after all." And so then these master said "Oh, now I understand what you want. Okay, let me do this again." Took out the paper, the brush, and then wrote across the paper, Attention, attention, Attention.

So this story emphasizes that how important attention is and that in order to really cultivate a strong capacity for real, relaxed, open, wise, luminous awareness of what's happening now, one has to kind of work with the challenges to that. The ways in we're not paying attention. The way we get distracted, caught up, preoccupied. And the kind of the little secret, open secret of Buddhism is that one of the best ways of getting to this clear, luminous, valuable, wise attention of mindfulness is in fact by bringing attention to what makes it difficult. Rather than taking the difficulties as being difficulties. Rather than seeing them as being unfortunate. Feeling aversion to them or feeling somehow discouraged by them. They're actually the royal road to really developing and cultivating great awareness for two reasons. One is, as soon as you're paying attention to difficulties, you're being aware. And if the difficulties are what's present, you're bringing attention to the present moment. The second reason is that once we kind of look at and work with and work through and overcome or see through the difficulties and kind of get to the other side of them, then they're not operating anymore to distract us. And then we don't have to expend a lot more time letting go, working with it, contending with it, because we've actually gone through it to the other side. And this is kind of royal road to mindfulness, to a wakefulness, to freedom, by going through the very difficulty, is one of the core principles of Buddhism. And so with that, there's a kind of a positive regard. A certain kind of positive regard for the very difficulties. That they're necessary. They're important. We learn how to address them and be with them to see them through to the other side. To come free of them. And so the hindrances are part of this.

Now the five hindrances, desire, ill will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and worry, and doubt. These can also be seen as strategies by which we are trying to cope with the challenges of our life. Generally, they're not effective strategies. They're kind of malfunctioned or maladaptive strategies. But still we're trying to deal with the challenges and it's a strategy. So for example, if, when there's a lot of desire, desire can be a strategy of avoiding discomfort. We go into wishful thinking, fantasies, planning, imagining, wanting something else, feeling uncomfortable, feeling lonely. And then desire for food comes up and wanting food. Feeling somehow depressed and unsure of oneself. And then fantasies of sex come up and desire for sex or sensual pleasure of some kind. Alcohol, desire for alcohol and getting pleasure. These are all strategies sometimes to avoid being with what's challenging and maybe uncomfortable.

As we learn mindfulness practice, we learn the value of learning how to be comfortable with discomfort. If we're only free when we're when we're comfortable, we're not really free. And so we have to learn to go through the discomfort or learn a whole radical different way to be with discomfort. There can even
be a kind of pleasure ... kind of. Kind of comfort level or ease or peace with what's uncomfortable. But if we're always kind of trying to fill it with pleasure and desire, it doesn't happen.

So then for ill will. Ill will is often a strategy to deal with, you know, to have ill will, blame, attacking others. When we're also uncomfortable or when we're not getting what we want. We have desires, some reasonable desires and they're frustrated. And then the frustration is dealt with by assigning blame to someone. Someone else is responsible or something.

Sloth and torpor is sometimes a form of resistance. We just don't want to face something or be with something and so we shut down and get dull and get tired. "Oh, I'm so tired", I used to tell my mom when I was 10 and she would take me shopping for clothes. I'd be so tired. It's so hard. I don't I can't hardly walk because I just didn't like being in shopping, in clothing stores.

And then restlessness and worry can be also a way of avoiding difficulty by just kind of spinning around, getting all excited and agitated. Not really addressing something but kind of spinning around it and bouncing off it and it can be a kind of avoidance.

And doubt can be avoidance of commitment or avoidance of making a decision. We know what has to be done, but it's so uncomfortable or we're so unsure, we're so afraid. So doubt is a strategy. Sometimes there's a lot of reasoned doubt, thought out doubt, we're not sure which thing to choose, and sometimes a strategy of avoidance.

So the hindrances is also strategies. And so to turn towards the hindrances, to turn towards and see really what's going on.

So there, what I'll do is tell you about five practices to go with the hindrances, and these are five practices that are useful for other purposes as well. And then we'll do a meditation based on these five. And these five are organized according to the acronym, BELLA. So in Italian that means beautiful. And so it's what hinders. It's how we return to overcome the hindrances to the beauty of our own mind. Our minds can be beautiful if we're not hindering, or covering it over, or agitating it, or caught up in the compulsion of desire, the compulsions ill will. There is a beautiful, luminous, clear mind that awaits us. So this BELLA is the practices of how to get there.

So the B of BELLA stands for just being, being with. Letting things be. So B in terms of letter b and e. Letting things be. And letting things be. So letting a hindrance, letting strong desire and strong ill will, let it be there does not mean participating in it. It doesn't mean attacking it or indulging in it, or even justifying its existence, like it's okay for it to be there. It just allowing it time to space so that we're not fighting it or resisting it or engaged in it or caught up in it. It is a kind of stepping back from it. Giving it permission to be there. And in discovering how to be very simple in relationship to it. When things are challenging, our relationship is often complicated. And we don't want it, we feel bad about ourselves for having it, we attack it. We have all these things we do. It's a radical thing to do to practice letting things be. Okay, there it is. I have a lot of anger. I'm gonna let the anger be. I don't necessarily want to keep it there. I don't want to act on it. But I've learned that if I can just begin by just letting it be, I begin finding my freedom from it. But if I'm constantly interacting with it, wanting it, being bothered by it, I'm caught in its grip. So, when desire comes up, it'll will, when there's sloth and torpor, when there's restlessness,
when there's doubt, we kind of turned towards it. And begin by just finding out how to let it be. How to be very simple in relationship to it. Not being for or against it. But just okay here, this is what's happening.

Once we let it be, then the E stands for Explore. To study something, to get to know it better. And this is a little bit the bad news of mindfulness practice, and also the good news, is that we actually give ourselves time to really get to know and study the very challenges that come up for practice. And some of those challenges are things that are difficult to look at in ourselves. Things we prefer to avoid or not admit to ourselves. And so we examine it, we look at it. That examination, that study of what goes on for us, is a lot easier if we done the first step. We first learn the art of letting it be. It's kind of like giving it permission to be there without indulging in it or reacting to it. And so there's less kind of complicated relationship to it. And so then it's easier to start examining it. Seeing it for itself. Oh, that's how it is. That's how it is. I see now that I'm so uncomfortable about something. And it's the discomfort which is triggering my desire or triggering ill will. That's how it is. We can examine it physically. What is that like for a hindrance in the body when there's very strong, these forces are very strong? Almost certainly there's some physical expression of it. And as soon as we discover some physical movement or energy or vitality or tightness or something in the body that's associated with any emotion or any hindrance, then we have a vantage point, a kind of leverage, to learn to be present for it without getting swept up in the story connected to it, the ideas and desires, specific desire is connected to it. It's kind of like going away from the content of distractions to feeling what's really happening in and of itself. The content maybe it's not so important. What's important is the physical direct experience of what's happening.

So we might feel it cognitively with the beliefs we have, the thoughts we have. We might explore emotionally, what emotions are coming into play. There might be a range of emotions. There might be we're uncomfortable and then we're angry. The anger leads to ill will. We're feeling uncomfortable and therefore we feel lonely or feel despairing or discouraged and therefore we have desire for something. So we might see the underlying emotions and motivations that come up when these hindrances are there.

And we might also study our relationship to it. This letting it be can sometimes only go so far. And then we need to study that actually we're operating very much under being very discouraged that's there. Very angry that it's there. Or confused that here we are. And sometimes what's needs attention is that the relationship that we have to experience. The word as I said yesterday for the hindrances, the original meaning of it in Pāli, is coverings. And so the hindrances sometimes cover over parts of who we are. And so sometimes you can ask yourself, what is my desire that I'm caught in and driven by? What's it covering over? Is desire, for example, a covering over loneliness? Or it's a desire covering over a feeling of inadequacy? And I'm desiring to do something that kind of makes me feel like a good person or an adequate person or delusions of grandeur, or some people will have desire fantasies where they have fantasies about how they will do great things. And they're caught in those fantasies. But they look underneath it. What's a covering is a feeling of inadequacy. So then the principle in mindfulness is that you would go and bring attention to that feeling of inadequacy. That becomes the subject. Then there's less movement towards the desire. If the underlying symptom, the underlying cause is brought attention to.
Anger can come from frustrated desire. Sloth and torpor sometimes is a covering for fear. And restlessness sometimes. And worry also can cover over fear. I sometimes associate it with issues of approval and being right in other people's eyes. And then doubt can be a covering over of a reluctance to commit. So sometimes the exploring of it, we can start seeing deeply what's going on. The art of mindfulness is not to analyze and to guess and to try to intellectually figure it out. The art of mindfulness in exploring is to ask yourself the question, what is this? What's going on here? And then almost like be quiet and still. And feel and sense and allow the experience to show itself more fully. Be very, almost like you get calmer and quieter in response to the question let's explore this. What is this? And then feel and sense. And then all these things I'm talking about, they'll kind of begin showing themselves.

So let be, B. Explore. Very important next step is to lessen. The first L is to lessen. Lessen means to lessen the intensity, lessen the strength of it. Hindrances can be very, very powerful. They propel some of the most awful things that people do in life. People kill each other because of anger. People cause tremendous amount of harm to themselves and to others by acting on certain desires. Some people act on the desires, that are really forms of addiction, and they just kind of spiral out and cause a lot of suffering to self and others. And so sometimes these hindrances are really, really powerful. And rather than solving them, getting rid of them, that's too much of a challenge to kind of stop them. But maybe it's possible to lessen them. So maybe it starts by noticing the tensions in the body connected to the hindrances and then relaxing those tensions. Softening. Perhaps getting rest. Perhaps is going for a walk or taking a shower. Perhaps going for a walk with a friend or something and getting some kind of decompressing little bit. Finding some way to lessen the experience.

The second L of BELLA is to let go. And Buddhism is often associated with letting go. But letting go is not easy to do. And letting go should be done with wisdom. You don't want to let go too early. You don't want to let go of something you haven't studied first. Examine carefully and well. Partly you might let go of the wrong thing if you do that. Or you might let go in a way that doesn't really get to the root and the bottom of things. And so you have to kind of keep letting go over and over again because the root will keep sprouting new plants. So to let go. To release the grip, the hold in the mind, the compulsivity. And that might also be felt physically. If you're really quiet, you can sometimes feel physical tension that's part of the gripping, holding on, being attached. And it's possible to sometimes feel a mental gripping, pressure, pushing, that is going on with holding on or being attached to something. And when the hindrances are really powerful, we're attached to something. There's something we're holding on to. And so with time we start seeing that. And when you see it, then at some point you can release the grip.

And finally the A of BELLA is to appreciate. When we kind of let it be and examine it, there's a little bit more freedom and breathing room. Appreciate that breathing room. Appreciate you're not caught in the grip of it quite so much. As you listen it, it feels good to have it relax a little bit. And again appreciate the lessening of the intensity. Letting go can be very sweet and quite wonderful. And that is to appreciate the goodness that's there, the ease that comes, the peace that comes, the spaciousness that comes. What's good that comes from having let go. And the importance of appreciation is that when we appreciate something, it gives it a bigger chance to become part of our life, to live in us, to grow in us, to recognize that more often. We learn to appreciate that there is an alternative to being caught in the hindrances. Some people, the hindrances are so strong, they're constant companions. But it's so habitual and so normalized, they don't even know that they're always involved in aversive thinking and looking through eyes aversion towards everything and ill will. Or the eyes of worry, everything is worried
going on. And to have a taste of the heart, the mind without ill will. Without worry and fear. That can be revolutionary for some people. Wow, this is possible, I had no idea.

So to begin appreciating it so that it becomes a value, becomes important, we learn to recognize it more easily. And we make space then for that nice states of being to grow and develop. Until the next hindrance attack comes. And then we see that as the royal road back to what we appreciate.

So BELLA. To be. Examine. Lesson. Let go. And appreciate.

So let's do a meditation. And I'll guide you through these in a very simple, hopefully a very simple way. And this acronym, these five kind of practices, can be really be done for anything. And so if no hindrances are up for you as we do this meditation, you can just use these for what is happening for you.

So in order to begin the meditation, take some care in assuming a posture that really allows you to stay alert and allows you to relax. If you're too slumped in a chair or a couch, it might allow you to relax so much that you fall asleep or stay dull. If you sit up too straight, you might get tense. But where's that right balance of uprightness? Or if you're lying down and because maybe have body issues, you might want to do something intentional like have your arm or your elbow to the side and have your arm pointing towards the ceiling directly. Or both arms. Just so there's something that requires some alertness while the rest of the body can can relax. And then close your eyes. And take a few moments now to breathe deeply. Breathe in deeply and feel the rib cage stretch, expand. Exhale in a long, gentle way. Comfortable way. So there is some maybe even pleasure in the exhale. Not too long, not too short. But a nice long extension of exhaling.

Breathing in and being reminded to be here. Breathing out and we're settling into here. To be present here and now.

And then letting your breathing return to normal. You can take a few moments to roam around your body. Relaxing anything that's being held or easy to relax your body. Soften in your body.

And then take a few moments to notice what's going on for you. What's happening? How are you feeling? You're allowed to be how you are. The task now is just simply notice what that is.

And if you have one of the hindrances: desire, ill will, sloth and torpor, restlessness, worry, doubt. And for the purposes of this exercise you're fortunate. This is good. If you don't have them, then simply notice what is happening for you. What's happening in your body, what's happening emotionnally, what's happening in your mind.

And whether or not you have the hindrance, whatever you're noticing, experiment. Try out different ways to allow it to be that way. Maybe metaphorically stepping a couple of steps back and turning back and looking at what's happening as if how you are right now is permission to be there. But you're observing it. Allowing how you are to be.
If it feels uncomfortable or challenging to be with it, then it becomes a more stronger exercise and seeing how well, how much you can just let it be without being pulled into it, involved with it, being for or against it.

What you might do is in letting it be, is to breathe with it. As if the inhales and exhales, move through it, massage it, help you from being swept up in it. Breathing gives you breathing room for what's happening. Letting it be.

And then as your let it be, observe it more carefully. Examine it. Again, as if it has permission to be there. Whatever is happening and whatever changes to something else. Observe it carefully. And not so much that you're actively studying it. Like probing it. But you're almost like settling back in an easy chair, relaxed. But you're allowing it to show it to you more fully. You're bringing it into greater focus. So it just appears to you more clearly. Oh that's what's happening. This is how it is physically, emotionally, mentally.

And then see if you can lessen any of the tension pressure, tightness, excessive energy that might be part of this experience. Any extra tension. And to lessen the tension. To relax, soften.

Perhaps coming back to your breathing and breathing through and with the experience. And every time you exhale to relax something, soften, soften, relax the thinking mind.

Exhale and soften the shoulders in the belly.

Exhale and let that you're thinking and become quieter, softer.

And then letting go. What can you let go of so that you're more present? What can you let go of so you're more aware of breathing? More aware of the present moment.

As you exhale, let go of your thoughts.

As you exhale let go of your thoughts and let go into the silence, stillness within quietness.

And then take a few moments to appreciate anything that it shifted since the beginning of the meditation. That's nice for you. Are you a little calmer? More peaceful? A little wiser, patient? Is there any small amount of joy or delight? And if there is anything to appreciate, breathe with that. As if breathing moves through what is to be appreciated.

And then coming back to the simplicity of breathing. Perhaps letting go of the five practices of BELLA. Allow yourself to be simple. Perhaps by allowing breathing to be in the center of all things. Take some moments just to breathe. You're allowed for these few moments to just breathe. Trust yourself to breathing.
And if anything makes it difficult for you to be present, to be aware of your breathing. You might in as simple of a way you can, bring BELLA to what's difficult. Let it be. Really clearly let it be so it's really seeing it. Examine it carefully. Observe it. Lessen its intensity by relaxing or softening.

Let go.

And appreciate it. And in that appreciation to begin again with your breathing. Feeling your breathing.

And then then the last moments of this sitting, which of these five do you feel most comfortable with? Or feels most right at this moment? Feels most right to be with being? Being with. Exploring. Lessening. Letting go. Or appreciating. And perhaps just allow yourself to be with whatever is nice for you of these five. Perhaps while you're with your breathing, or while you're simply with what is happening.

And then to end this sitting with a few moments of appreciating whatever can be appreciated. Appreciating yourself, appreciating maybe these moments of meditating. Maybe these teachings are meaningful for you and so you can appreciate those. And whatever warmth or happiness that comes with appreciation, allow yourself to feel that.

So these five practices of BELLA. You could memorize them and you could go through them. If you're really challenged by something and makes it hard for you to be present in meditation, just be reassured that it's quite appropriate to turn towards difficulty. No matter what it is. No need to condemn it. No need to judge yourself because you have it. It can be very simple. It's okay. In fact, it might even be beneficial to have a challenge, difficulty because it's the very difficulty which is the door towards freedom, door towards really deepening and learning in a valuable way. How to be aware. How to work through things. How the thought comes to the other side.

And then you could go through the BELLA systematically, one after the other. Or it's completely fine to do them backwards. Start at the middle and jump around. Whatever seems the right call for you. Whatever seems natural or easy. What's not helpful is to have doubt about what to do. Should I do this one first or that one first? Then you have the hindrance of doubt. If you feel like this is too systematic, it's too forced, I don't really like this, I don't like to be told what to do. Then maybe you have the hindrance of aversion. If you're so eager to do BELLA. Oh, this is going to be great. I'm going to get some great experience. I've have so much to appreciate. I really wanted to have. Maybe the hindrance of desire has come into play in doing it. Or maybe you're just kind of too agitated to even remember which one you're at. And it's the hindrance of agitation. Or maybe you're just like every time you bring up one of the letters, you find yourself beginning to fade away, nod off, get really dull, and it's the hindrance of sloth and torpor.

Some of these hindrances are predominate in for individuals more than the others. For some people desires are a much stronger and regular partner than ill will. Or some people it's sloth and torpor. It's all personalities of sloth and resistance. There's personalities of agitation and worry and anxiety. For some people it's just doubt and confusion. It's not a personal failing if one of these five is a little bit your strong suit. More predominant in you than others. All it means is that of course we all have the hindrances. It's what we're working with. Go to the gym and you pick up a heavyweight. Go to meditation, you pick up the heavy hindrance. And this is where you're going to practice and learn to be mindful and to work
through. And this constantly coming back and learning how to not to take it personally and not to be reactive and critical or be upset or discouraged by what we conventionally can call difficulties. Conventionally can call distractions, challenges. Eventually the hope is that there are no challenges. There are no distractions. There is nothing to be bothered by and upset by. It simply one other thing to bring our attention to. It's one more thing to practice mindfulness with. It's one more thing we can say, Oh this too I will include in my practice. This too is here. And in a certain way, at some point the idea that there are distractions and difficulties just fade away. And it's just more stuff. It's just stuff. Just phenomena. Of course, there has to always be something that's happening in our experience. And now it's this and now it's this and now it's that.

Or, it's fine to tell your friends you had challenge because then they understand a little bit what you are practicing with. But now you understand the value of it. And this is a real gift that you can carry in your life. That the difficulties that come up are the place we wake up. And so no matter where you are. In social situations, practical things, computer problems that you have and you can't make it work properly. With time and practice of mindfulness, eventually there's a graciousness. There's an equanimity, there's an openess, there's a patience with how things are. Because we've learned to recognize and work with so called challenges. We learn to stay peaceful around how things are difficult, rather than take them as poor me, or this is so hard, or frustrated by it.

So it's a journey. All this takes time. But it takes developing understanding and seeing clearly what's there. And becoming wise and clear about how these hindrances work is part of the task. So the plan for these next days, is to go and really spend some time on each one of the hindrances so that maybe you can get a better handle on it. You can see how it works for yourself. And you can become wise about your hindrances, rather than being fooled by them. Rather than being pulled into them and they in charge of you. You can be in charge. You can become the master of your hindrance by seeing it and understanding it, and learning how to step back and be mindful of it. And that's a beautiful, wonderful, important task of human life. It's a kind of a way to mature and to grow, and to become free.

So I hope that you have just enough hindrances in the next 23 hours that you will study them and look at them and work with them. Maybe you'll have them in your daily life. And just Enough. Not too strong and not too few. Not too many. But stay alert for the next 23 hours to see if any of these pop up for you. And if you can apply BELLA to them. And if that's useful for you.

May you enjoy your hindrances. Thank you for today.