So my friends. So welcome back to our Introduction to Mindfulness Meditation Part Two and we're looking at the hindrances. And today we're going to look at the hindrance of desire, sensual desire. And in order to kind of begin this topic today, and anytime there's going to be some kind of practice opportunity like this, sometimes it's nice to just pause at the beginning. To get settled and connected. And this kind of learning the art of, you know, 30 seconds settling, 60 seconds settling, is very, very helpful. So what you might do is, just without changing your posture, just be the way you are, close your eyes and then do the three breath journey. Just count each breath three times, you know, 123 breaths. And just be with your breathing.

And then let's do that again. Count three breaths, three breaths journey, but as you exhale each time, relax your body. Settle your body.

And then a third time, the three breaths journey. Counting three breaths. This time as you exhale, can you soften, relax the thinking muscle. Let the mind become more settled perhaps if we can or rest the mind with each exhale.

And then you can take one deep breath and when you're ready, you can open your eyes.

So the first of the five hindrances is usually translated as sensual desire. And it's useful just to step back and look at desire in general first. Desire is a central aspect of human life. And so much so such a big part of it, that it's probably fair to call humans, not human beings but human desirelings. We're always desiring. Desiring is part of life all the time, whether it's small or big, whether it's healthy or unhealthy desire. There's always some kind of desire. Even wanting to eat is a desire. Wanting to go to the bathroom is a desire. Wanting to make yourself comfortable as you're sitting is a desire. So all these things that drive us, and move us, that inspire us, that helps make your way through our daily life and our whole life itself.

So it's very important not to automatically make desire a problem. To think that desire is the problem that we have to overcome. There has to be some discernment about desires and to distinguish there's
two sets, two distinctions to be made. One is between those desires which are healthy, appropriate, and those desires which are unhealthy or unhelpful or not appropriate. And to have some wisdom about that distinction is very helpful. And the word appropriate is important because, and this is the second distinction to make, is between the appropriateness of desire and the inappropriateness. That is some desires could be very healthy and appropriate in some situations. But not in other situations. If we have a very busy full life and then we would like to help a neighbor with their shopping. That seems like a noble and wonderful thing to do. But if we're already overstretched, thin and that's the straw that breaks the camel's back to go do one more thing for one more person, then that desire to be helpful probably isn't appropriate at that moment. And we better take care of ourselves or do what we said we're going to do and finish that rather than take on a new thing. So there's lots of appropriate very healthy desires, but the timing of them or the situation for them is not appropriate. So we have to kind of distinguish so we're not making all problems, all desires our problem.

A third distinction around desire are the desires that come up where there's no compulsion to act on them and those desires that come up where there is compulsion. And compulsion means that we're driven. There's a sense of urgency, there's a sense of I have to do this, desperation even, or very strong kind of energies driving us and even sometimes against our own wisdom. In the extreme version, for example, is a form of desires is addiction. Very strong desire for food, alcohol, drugs, sex, all kinds of things. That being in relationship, getting approval from other people, being right, having you know, insisting on our opinions. These things are very powerful for people's psyche. And the sense of compulsion. And even healthy desires that are the object of desire, the purpose of the desire is good in and of itself, can come with sometimes with this compulsion where we're not really free. And sometimes because it's a healthy and appropriate desire, it's so easy to justify it and not notice that we're not actually acting freely in free will with this. We're being driven and pushed into doing it. Sometimes in situations is not appropriate.

And then there's desires that come up that there's no compulsion involved. There can be a lot of strength to it, a lot of clarity and a lot of even kind of passion to it, like enthusiasm for it. But there's no drivenness. There's no like we have to do this or else. We can just see, Oh, there's my desire. Desires come, a dime a dozen. They come and they go. And there's no compulsion. But now that I sit with the desire and look at it, it does seem like a good desire. If I look at the situation, it seems like this situation warrants it. It seems appropriate this desire. And so let me act on it. And let me act on it with being relaxed and not a bulldozer that pushes through and gets what I want for me. I'll just work on it in an easy way, nice way, and if it works out great. But I'm not gonna have some of the forms of compulsion that have to do with the expectation or when there's a sense of need, associated with the desire. Of course we have needs, but the compulsion that can go along with need transforms need into neediness. And this idea of desire and neediness, then we're not free.

So to make these kinds of distinction, healthy and unhealthy desires, appropriate and inappropriate for the situation. And then is there compulsion or no compulsion? The idea of compulsion is fascinating because driveness, or being glued to the desire, because that's something we can usually feel. If you quiet your mind a little bit, just close your eyes, you could maybe feel physically in the mind and in the body, that what it's like for that extra tension, pressure, reaching out, grabbing hold, contracting that comes along with compulsion. And to really feel the tension of that, to feel the contraction of that, the pressure of it, is a game changer. Because then we begin to step away and see what's going on
underneath it, rather than just kind of being pushed, almost unconsciously sometimes, by the compulsion.

So that's looking at desire. These different ways. And also, I think It's important to have a lot of respect for desire. And as some of you know, I really like the word respect because it means not to dismiss anything or demean anything. But to see it with respect means to see it's worth our attention. It's okay for it to be there in a certain kind of way. But also the word respect means to look again, to re-spect, like spectacle, to look again. And mindfulness practice has a lot to do with looking again. So not to kind of automatically reacting, automatically coming to conclusions, this is what it is. But having some pause to be able to say, "what is this really? Let me take a look at this."

So to respect our desires, and then if we respect them, and really be with them, first we just want to just get the general picture, general sense of what's going on. And sometimes it's a big deal to admit how strong desire is. Or even what our desires are. Some desires operates on subconsciously. That we don't really see. Early in my practice one of the desires that I had that I didn't even know was operating was a desire to be liked by other people. Now in and of itself, that's okay to have that desire. But to have a neediness and need everyone to like me, was exhausting. And it was like the social gymnastics to try to figure out how I can make everyone like me. And it's just not possible. It's just exhausting to do it. And so what I learned eventually was that the cost of trying to be driven, this compulsion to be liked, was just too much work. And it wasn't worth it. It was actually counterproductive. But I didn't see that. It was unconscious, it was subconscious, it was under the radar. So to see that and admit some of these deeper desires we have is a huge learning, a huge growth spurt, to have this kind of honesty. Oh, that's what's happening. I'm embarrassed to admit this. But, Oh that kind of desire is what's operating.

Sometimes desires take the form of addiction. And sometimes they're so strong the addictions and the compulsion that we really sometimes it is very hard to resist them. And so there's a number of things to do before meditation, if desires are really, really strong. Sometimes, you want to do something that really you know helps you break the intensity of it. It could be for some people maybe just walk around the block, step away from a situation get a fresh air, walk around the block. It could be talk to a friend, call a friend, and especially a friend who kind of represents something different than just going and getting your desires satisfied at all costs. If there's alcoholic addiction, maybe you want to talk to a friend who's in recovery, not the friend who's still an addict. But get some help and support. The Buddha talked about that with desire, sometimes you want to go find a good spiritual friend to talk to and be with when there's really strong. The other thing is, do something that helps you relax. You know, some people can take a shower, some people can take a nap, some people maybe eat. Sometimes not having enough to drink or enough food can give the kind of compulsivity to the addictions and all that.

For people who meditate when desires are really strong, I really think a useful exercise and also very instructive exercise is something that I call riding out the wave. And that is, as soon as you feel there's a strong addiction to something, no matter what it is, that you almost can't resist acting on it, go find a comfortable chair. Sit in the chair and have a unshakeable commitment to not leaving the chair. To stay there and not act on the impulse. And so it can be like the rodeo. It can be wild in there to sit there and not move. The lawyers of the mind come up and say why it's so important. This tremendous feeling like I'm gonna die if I don't get it. It has to be now. Very, very strong forces can arise when there's strong addictions, strong desires. But to not move. To sit there and maybe hold the arms of the chair and really
insist. Because sooner or later the wave will crest, the intensity will pick up and pick up, the wave will crest, and you'll get to the other side, and it'll diminish and get quieter. And the idea is to stay in the chair long enough until it crests and you find yourself on the other side of the wave. And I've known many people who follow this instructions. And they've come back and said, this was so empowering for me. I developed so much confidence in my ability. And I felt a kind of strength developed in me because it was really hard. I broke out in a sweat, but I just rode out the wave. And now when these things come, they're less powerful or I know what to do.

So these are all things you can do independent of meditation because we respect them and respect the intensity of them. Sometimes sitting down in meditation, maybe it's not the time and place to really kind of work through some of the intensity of desire.

The particular desire that the Buddha focused on is one of the hindrances is what's called sensual desire. And the word for sensual is Kama in the ancient language, Pāli. And it also means any kind of sensual desire, desire for comfort, desire for pleasure, desires for sex, desire for good experiences, like good food or anything. And these can be very primal in human beings, and very intense, and also very fundamental. And that's maybe why the Buddha emphasized them for meditation practice, because as the mind gets quieter and desires for more abstract things are quiet down. And we're more and more in touch with the immediacy of our experience, our physical experience, then the pleasure and discomfort, the desire for good feelings, good meditations, is one of the kind of things that are left or becomes more salient, more obvious.

And so to get a handle on or understand our desire for sensuality, for sense pleasures, for comfort. And I think for me, when I was a new meditator, I didn't think of myself as having many sensual desires. But it doesn't take a lot of thinking about it to realize that it's really desire which is often integrated deeply into many people's lives in ways that maybe again are subconscious, we don't really see it. So many people will spend money buying something that the only difference between getting something which is practical and straightforward and the basic needs taken care of, will spend more money to buy something that's more pleasant, more enjoyable, that brings more sense of sensual pleasure. Maybe you could buy a relatively cheap used car to get around, but you buy a nicer used car, because it just a pleasant experience to drive that car. Maybe you could just buy some basic simple food at the market, but you spend a little bit more to buy something that's more pleasant. It's not wrong to do that. And sometimes actually it's a good thing to do it. It satisfies something very deep inside of us to have some aesthetic or pleasure or something. It's the idea that it's always operating. And to what degree are we free to choose? And what degree are we being pushed into doing it even without thinking about it and just kind of automatic? So, I was trying to say this example to kind of convey the idea that sensual desire is a really common part of human experience and human life. It's so much so, that the Buddha called the human realm, the realm of desire. The kama loka, the world of desire.

So how do we work with it? We sit in meditation. So this is where the BELLA that I talked about yesterday comes into play. So the first, this respect for desires is to sit and become aware of just that the desire is there. And to not make it a problem, not be critical or angry with it, not be embarrassed or ashamed of it. But just, Oh here is a desire. That's what's happening. To have this respect for it. And to learn this letting it be, is almost the same as being still. Maybe the B of BELLA could also be still with it. Be still means recognize it's there, but don't act on it. And certainly don't act with it physically if you're
meditating. But maybe just step back and look at it. That stepping back and taking a look at it can help you discern, hopefully in a very simple, relaxed way. Is it healthy or unhealthy desire? Is it appropriate to have this desire at this time? Inappropriate? Is there compulsion with it or no compulsion? There can be a desire, for example, if the knees hurt when you’re meditating, a desire for the knees to be more comfortable. Is that appropriate? Is that healthy or not healthy? It depends a little bit on what motivates you.

If it's healthy, is it appropriate to do it? It may or may not be. If you've been moving and adjusting yourself every 10 seconds, maybe it'd be not appropriate to do so much of it. Maybe it's appropriate just see what's going on in some deeper way. And is there a compulsion connected to it? I've had knee pain and just really felt driven. I have to change. And what was interesting for me was to then look at the compulsion and relax that. And then I actually had more wisdom about whether to move my knee or not. Sometimes I would and sometimes I wouldn't.

So just be still with it. And it's such a powerful thing, no matter what happens, what comes up, what's happening around us, to have this respect, be still. It's a kind of independence from it, not being entangled. Then investigate it. Look what's there. This is also part of these discernments I talked about. But some of the things to investigate is, maybe I'll mention just one for now. And that is when there's a desire – this is true for aversion as well – there's usually an object of the desire. Something that we want. We think about or fantasizing about or something. One way to examine desire is to turn the attention around 180 degrees and look at what it feels like the subjective experience of having desire or the subjective experience of having aversion. Turning around and look at it. And at that point we no longer focus on the desire, but we are respecting the desiring, the act of desiring. And really looking at that and then looking where is it in the body? What are the physical sensations that come into play with it? What are the contractions? Is their sense of compulsivity? And then to hold all that gently in awareness. To watch and see and watch the pull and push, the being for against. And just be and breathe and be and feel what's going on. Get to know it better. And in that examining, starting to become free.

And then if the desire is strong, then we want to lessen the intensity of it. And that's why it's helpful to do this 180 degree around to really feel what's here, rather than being blinded by the object of desire, because then we might be able to see we can lessen it by relaxing the shoulders, the belly, the face, the eyes, the jaws. Maybe we can soften in the mind as well. And at some point, it might be possible to let go of the desire. Often desires come with thoughts. As we let go of the thoughts or let go of the desire. Sometimes it's quite difficult to do that. But at some point, it might be easy enough to just let go of it.

And then as the desires lessen, or if they do stop or let go of, then appreciate that how nice it is not to be caught in the grip of these things. The compulsivity of it. Appreciate the peace, the quiet, the settledness, maybe even the contentment of just being when desires are not pushing us along. And then it could be easier to come back to the breath in meditation and sit in practice.

So we could then maybe try do a meditation session. And if you could take a comfortable upright sitting posture. And then you can gently take a few long slow deep breaths. Breathing in, breathing out.
And then let your breathing return to normal. And look around your body to see if there's anything that you can relax and soften.

And then to spend a few moments now. Breathing in a normal way. For a few moments, perhaps trusting the body's experience of breathing. Even if it's uncomfortable in any kind of way, almost like your give breathing the benefit of doubt, to trust being with it.

Being with the body breathing. Maybe each time you exhale to let your thinking muscle relax. Letting go of your thoughts, quieting your thinking mind.

And then as you’re sitting here, notice if there's any desire happening. Is anything in your thinking or in your heart or in your being? Any impulse that would be a wanting of something?

And then can you offer it some respect in the sense of letting it be or letting yourself be still. Just observe it. Just know it's there, including knowing if there's any compulsivity. Is it there in a light easy way or is it strong?

And if there is a wanting or desire, no matter how small or big, weak or strong, see if you can do that turn, 180 degree turn, rather than focusing on what you're wanting. To feeling the subjective experience of wanting, of desiring. What's that like for you? In your body, your heart your mind. To have a desire.

And then if there's any easy way, simple way to relax and lessen the strength of the desire. Maybe relaxing it all on the exhale.

Or letting go of the desire.

And if a desire has lessened or disappeared, is there something you can appreciate about that? Appreciate its absence. Appreciate maybe some nice feeling that replaces it.

And then returning to being aware of your breathing. And staying with your breath quietly for a few minutes. But if you find yourself distracted or challenged to be with your breathing, notice if there's any desire as part of that challenge. Is it that you want something that is the distraction? And if there is, then see if you can go through BELLA. Be, explore, lessen, let go, and appreciate around this desire that has arisen.

If there is some strong desire, or you just keep getting distracted by desire. See if you can move away from the object of desire, thinking about it, to feeling the subjective experience. If there is no strong desire, compulsive desire, maybe you can take a little bit of time to appreciate the absence of that. Appreciate the mind which is not caught up in desire, that's able to kind of maybe be content with just this moment of experience. Just with breathing.

If there's a strong desire as we look at the desire, the desiring, you might also notice if there's an underlying emotion to it, that may be fueling it, supporting it. And if there is, you can do mindfulness of emotion.
And if you’re mindful of the underlying emotion what happens to the desire?

And then then the last couple of minutes of this meditation. If it's at all possible, see if you can sit with a contentment that needs nothing more than the wish to rest with your breathing. Wishes nothing more than being present to the experience of the moment. Maybe you're resting with it. Resting with breathing, contently.

And then to end this sitting, you can take a few long, slow, deep breaths And when you're ready, you can open your eyes.

So, in giving these instructions today I'm aware that when we give mindfulness instructions, vipassana instructions, sometimes there's a lot of instructions. Almost too much. And it can lend itself to the idea that there's a lot to do, you have to be busy, and to keep all this stuff in mind. And hopefully that's not the results of giving these instructions. What we're trying to do in vipassana practice, mindfulness practice, is start to become wise about how our minds and hearts work. So we can navigate with it and find a way to be free, to be at ease, to find peace, and not be so busy, not be so compulsively active and doing and searching. And so the things I teach is more like that landscape of where we're becoming wise over time. It's not the instruction to be busy.

Now in terms of desire, there's an interesting kind of thing to be aware of. And that is that there can be any of these hindrances, but let's they keep focusing on desire. There can be a secondary desire in relationship to having a desire. There can be a desire that arises. And then there can be a strong desire for it to go away. A strong desire for some other experience. A strong desire to be involved with a desire. I have known people have had fantasies, and fantasies are often desire fantasies. Not always, but often. They've had fantasies and then they felt I've had a hard day, I deserve to fantasize for a while. So there's this desire for the desire, for the fantasy. Or there could be desire not to have it. There could be kind of an aversion. There could be desire for more of it. More of that desire because part of the reason desire, especially fantasy desires, can pull us into their orbit is because they can come along with a feeling of pleasantness. The promise of something pleasant, or the promise of something wonderful happening, or just the imagination of great things can physically start feeling pleasant and relax and warm. And so we get seduced sometimes by the pleasure. And so the desire, maybe it's sexual desire or desires for food or desires of grander or something, and then we find ourselves wanting more of the good feeling that can come from having those fantasies. So sometimes a step back and say, is there any secondary desire underlying desire for it?

All in good time. The idea of being still. Letting it be is a such an important part of this vipassana practice because we don't want to be in a hurry to fix anything. Don't be in a hurry to do the technique and somehow overcome things and make it different. It's really powerful to learn to just be still, not being for something, not being against it, not being involved, but also not pushing it away. Just being with it and seeing it clearly. And then we can begin the examination. And one very, hopefully, simple way to go through the examination is to go through the instructions I gave for the Introduction to Mindfulness Meditation Part One, which was there's basically four domains of area of our experience that are useful to tune into. There's our breathing, the body's experience, the emotion, and the cognitive thinking parts of it. So if there's a lot of desire going on, you can go through that checklist. How is this
affecting the breathing? There's really a lot of desire. The breathing has maybe gotten contracted and tight and shallow. How is it in the body? The body is contracted. It's getting warm or it's very pleasant these sensual desires or fantasies I'm having. Wow this is really warm and nice. And boy, am I addicted to this good feeling. What's going on with emotions? There might be an underlying emotion. Maybe fear is driving desire? Maybe a feeling of lack or loneliness? Or some discomfort we're trying to get away from? And then also what's going on in the mind? What's going on with the thoughts? Are there certain beliefs operating that are very strong? Are there certain fantasies that are operating or images that are operating that's really fueling and keeping this going?

Again, not to be busy, but kind of take your time. Be slow in being mindful. I like to think of mindfulness as going at the speed of trust. Going at the speed of love even. Just take your time. And just the speed of mindfulness, the speed of staying present and aware of what's here. Operate on this at the speed of awareness, speed of recognition. Oh, that's what's happening. That's what's happening.

So desires is an important part of human life. We're not trying to problematize it or be critical automatically of desire. We're trying to become wise about desire. And as we become wise, to navigate the world of desire so the desires don't take away our capacity to be centered, to be at peace, to be at ease, and to be wise about these desires that we have.

So we have about five minutes before the 10:30 ending. And I did take some questions before we started at 10 o'clock. And someone asked, it was recorded for YouTube. And so we'll keep it in the recording. It was not recorded for Audio Dharma. But if you would like to maybe ask one or two questions, we have time now in the last five minutes. I'm happy to try to answer some more and hopefully I didn't miss a question that was earlier. Is is too hard for me to go back up in the chat box to find it.

It is kind of fun to have this very interesting relationship with you in this format and to share something that's very important for me.

"I really want the quarantine to go away. Big desire." Yeah. And there's a lot of people that have that desire and it's a reasonable desire to have. It could even be appropriate. But can we not have that big desire take over or make us do unwise things and learn to find our peace with that desire. And maybe just the intensity needs to lessen so it's not so big. And we recover. We recover something important about ourselves when desire is not in the forefront.

"Grief is a big hindrance for me. The clinging and not being able to let go. What is a good way to approach this?" So I think that grief is a powerful emotion. There's appropriate grief. There is actually healthy grief. And there's ways of grieving which are not so healthy. And so part of this discernment of mindfulness is over time to learn the difference between kind of healthy and not so healthy ways of desiring, grieving and all that. And one thing about grief is not to collapse into it. And not to have self pity. But this is why meditation is a wonderful kind of laboratory for discovering a different way of grieving. Is to sit in an upright and like this riding out the wave, can be done very respectfully for grief. Allow the waves of grief to come, but don't collapse into it or don't make conclusions on it or don't build up a sense of self or self pity. Just kind of trust it and ride out the wave. And this washing it through and
keeping the posture upright, rather than collapsing or pulling back. It's a very powerful thing and allows the waves to wash through. And then it's also possible to do BELLA with grief.

And "I like the quarantine." Yes, some people do and some people don't.

And "I also find it hard to let go of grief." Yeah, maybe sometimes grief should not be let go of quickly. Grief is sometimes grief is the natural inner process of the heart to work through something. And I'm not saying it's true for those of you who make comments here. But sometimes many people in our society have this idea that if you're uncomfortable or grief is strong, you're not supposed to be grieving. Or people, unfortunately, will come and say, imply that you should be over it by now. But it's very powerful, very healthy, and wise to allow your grief to arise in meditation. There's something purifying and it allows the inner process, the healing process of the mind, to have good grief, to have healthy grieving. And it might not actually be a very important part of the learning and the growing and developing of our life and respecting what it is. We've lost. I'm not one to kind of be quick to overcome grief. Give it its time. Let it be.

"Can desiring". So I apologize I'm not seeing these in order. "Can desiring Dhamma and helping others be an addiction? To what extent is it an addiction?" Great question. Yes. Too much Dharma, too much Buddhism, wanting it too much. It can be a desperation, it can be holding on tight. It can be all kinds of reasons why people get attached to it. They want to be right. They want to be holding on to the truth. They're attached to hope that their Buddhism is going to give. All kinds of things. They want to do it right. They want to be successful. They want to be the next great Buddhist teacher and so there's a lot of intensity there. And helping others same thing. There can be a lot of different ideas where there's addiction to helping other people. All these things can be respected. All these things we can stop, be still, look at them, respect them, and begin to kind of see more fully what's going on. To do the 180 degree turn and look at what it's like to be desiring. Look over the feelings of clinging, compulsion. This idea of no longer looking at the object of desire, the thing that we want, but really turning in. What's the impact it has on us? What's it like to have these desires, this compulsion and clinging? There's a lot of wisdom and freedom that can be found by no longer being fixated on the object of desire.

So I appreciate these questions very much and hopefully we'll have more chance. And hopefully even just answering a few of them is useful for many people. And I really value a lot that you're doing this class, and you're part of all this and you're interested in working on these very important and deep and difficult human energies that we have. And so we'll go on tomorrow. And the plan tomorrow is to talk about the second hindrance, ill will or aversion. And in the meantime I hope that these next 23 hours, if you want to make a particular study of how desire works in your life. And have conversations with friends about what you've learned about how desire works in your life. And the different aspects of it. And look for different ways that it operates throughout the day. And in subtle ways, small ways, big ways, And just learn. Read the Dharma book of your own inner life. Thank you very much.