

## **EVENING DAY TWO**

### **THE FIVE HINDRANCES**

When we start to meditate and try to develop concentration on the breath or on the walking, we soon find that there are certain thoughts that may be giving us difficulty or problems -- which draw us away from the meditation object. We find that we cannot stay with the breath or the walking meditation for more than a few moments. These obstacles to concentration also often cause the building of stress in the mind and body. Within the Buddha's teaching, these obstacles to concentration are called the Five Hindrances.

In meditation leading to Vipassana, working with these hindrances is a large part of our practice. They can be used as vehicles for the development of Insight and Understanding.

We can learn to recognize thoughts and the mind states that they produce, when they arise. We can learn to "step back" a little and observe their effect on the mind and body. We can try to observe their particular energy as it is. We try not to get lost in them or push them away. By objectively observing them, we will gradually understand their nature and learn how to let them go.

Generally, the usual response to these thoughts and emotions is to get involved with them, and we get caught in a cycle of reaction. Our contacts with everything become clouded and colored by them. They gain in power and dominate the mind.

When this happens, it is very difficult to see things in a clear way. All we see, then, is our views and opinions about things. It is like putting on tinted glasses, viewing the world through them. Everything gets stained by the color of the glasses.

We are trying to build Awareness. When we continually recognize the hindrances in the mind, then we will gain in the ability to observe them without continuing to "feed" them. We can learn to investigate their nature, see the effect that they have on the body and mind, and be able to see their unsatisfactory nature.

With the continual investigation, seeing in this way, Compassion may arise for the unsatisfactoriness, stress and difficulty in the mind and body. And we gently learn how to "let go." We will then be able to see their impermanent nature. They arise and pass away.

If you never look at them objectively, but continually become involved in them -- I am angry, I want, I am agitated, I am worried; rather than, there is anger, there is desire, there is agitation, there is worry -- then we will not be able to develop the ability to allow them to pass through the mind. They will then continue to cause a long chain of thought and reaction.

In the beginning, we may only be able to recognize the hindrances after we have been involved with them for some time. We may come to notice, first, the continuing struggle or stress, the inability to concentrate, or, that we are simply lost and are not really clear what we have been thinking.

With the gradual building of Mindfulness, Awareness, we can suddenly remember -- "we are meditating" -- that we have become lost. This moment of Mindfulness is very precious. This moment of recognition allows us to investigate and gently let go. With the strengthening of Mindfulness and Compassionate Understanding, we will gradually start to see the hindrances closer to the beginning of their arising.

Rather than viewing what arises in the mind; thoughts, emotions, as a problem, something to be annihilated or destroyed at all costs, they can become vehicles for Insight, Understanding and

Compassion. Vipassana meditation seeks to develop non-attached awareness and clear understanding of the characteristics of the body and mind, seeing their impermanent, unsatisfactory, impersonal, conditioned nature.

Things are arising within the body and the mind, and passing away. The breath is coming and going, thoughts are arising in the mind and passing away, feelings arise in the body and pass away. This is a reflection of the continual change in nature.

When a hindrance arises in the mind, we try to use mindfulness and be aware that it has arisen. We try to identify it and, if we can, let it go, seeing it pass away. If it is sticky or difficult to let go, we can investigate its nature, its energy, and we will be able to let go more easily.

Try not to have aversion to the hindrances, thinking that they should not be there. Try to recognize them when they have arisen. Try to use Compassionate Understanding, realizing that the mind is a product of conditioning. Whatever is arising in the present is the result of our past conditioning and actions: how we have reacted and thought in the past, the conditioning of society, our upbringing, beliefs, parents, friends, teachers.

Suppressing the hindrances is one extreme; indulging them is the other. If we suppress these things, then we will not get to know them and have the opportunity to let them go. If we indulge them, we will be continually under their power, sowing seeds for their continual arising in the future. We will not be able to see deeper into their nature and will be unable to get beyond their power to dominate the mind.

Habitual thinking will continue to arise in the mind, especially the untrained mind. A great deal of Patience, Perseverance, Energy and Compassionate Understanding -- that gentle, caring attitude -- is needed. It often feels very uncomfortable trying to resist the impulse to flow with the habitual energy and, instead, to step back, to just watch, without suppressing or indulging. But that is OK. It's part of developing deep inner Peace and Balance, the ability to be in uncomfortable situations and energies, understand them, and gradually learn to transform negative energy into positive energy.

You may begin to see that the mind and mind objects are different, that the mind has the ability to be unaffected, to have Equanimity and to see the arising and passing of these energies. Necessary qualities are Persistence, Patience, Compassion and the willingness to continually start again.

Often you do not think that you are doing very much if you cannot stay with the breath, with the footsteps, with your activities for very long. Yet, just by trying, trying to continually come back, come back, recognize what is in the mind, you are building Patience, Persistence, Effort and Energy, and Compassionate Understanding of your mind and the mind of others. You are also learning to gently resist impulsive reaction to thought.

This, in turn, will allow you to let go easier and develop Equanimity. Equanimity is that evenness of mind which can be with whatever arises with Balance.

The first hindrance to recognize is sense desire. Sense desire is a feeling of wanting, a feeling of incompleteness and poverty in the mind. There is the desire for pleasant sights, sound, odors, tastes and feelings in the body. When these pleasant feelings have arisen there is also the wish for them not to end, and the wish for them to be continually available for us. Sense desire is a constant thirst and reaching outwards.

The particular energy of desire is a very strong one in most of us. During much of our lives, sense desire has dominated and ruled. A lot of our dissatisfaction arises because what we have in the moment is not good enough. We may continue to seek the excitement of a better sight, a better sound, the most delicious food, the best partner. We want to be admired; we want to be loved. We are continually seeking experiences that will satisfy us, so many thoughts are involved in fantasies, or dreams about obtaining the object of our desire.

It is not the object of desire that causes the difficulty -- it is the feeling of lack within ourselves and the deeply held belief that if we had everything we wanted, we would be happy. Most of us have had

many opportunities to fulfill our desires and wants. Most of us grew up in fairly wealthy countries, with abundant food, clothes and material things, and with many opportunities we took for granted.

Yet by having this abundance of opportunities and by continually satisfying desires, have we gained Serenity or Peace of Mind?

The problem with seeking lasting Happiness and Peace in sense experience is that it is so temporary, so fleeting, and so dependent on external things, which themselves are temporary, and impermanent. It may satisfy for a short while, but it is often followed by boredom, dissatisfaction, restlessness, and the seeking of a new experience.

It also so conditions the mind toward seeing happiness dwelling in some future moment that it becomes impossible for us to be awake and experience the present. Often dissatisfaction and emptiness cloud the moment, and the mind is continually longing for the illusory future. How many of us get lost in the very common thought pattern of "if ... then."

If I had some nice land somewhere, then I'd be happy.

If I had the right partner, then I'd be happy.

If I could meet the right spiritual teacher, then I'd be happy.

This list can go on and on. "If I had this, if I had that, then I'd be happy." We continually postpone peace and happiness. We may never reflect on nor see the pain and stress of our desire, of living our life in this way. And our peace and happiness will remain dependent on something outside of ourselves.

Perhaps peace may be the fading away of the stress without having to gain anything, the absence of desire, and a feeling of flowing with the moment, whatever it contains.

So how does desire manifest while we are practicing here in the retreat? A common one for many of us is that it is getting nearer to meal time and we find that it is really hard to concentrate during the sitting or walking beforehand. The mind starts drifting off to food; "I hope there's some sweets," "I hope there's plenty of fruit and salad," "Actually, what I really want is a candy bar and yogurt -- that would be great!" Many meditators find that it is very difficult to be with each step as they are walking to meal time.

We can start to daydream about music, start singing in our head. It seems *much* more exciting and creative than sitting here in silence, watching the breath. Or we can get lost in our future plans. They seem much more exciting than sitting, watching the breathing.

On a more subtle level; there is the desire for blissful feelings of concentration, bright lights, visions in the meditation. There is the desire to be concentrated for the whole sit, even desire for the next breath. And especially, the desire for the bell to ring.

Desire is a reaching for, a wanting to gain something, a feeling of lack and non-contentment, a pushing away of the moment. This is very different from the feeling of flowing into the moment with non-resistance and non-clinging, the feeling of settling back, which is a feeling of fullness.

So how do we work with the energy of desire? The first thing is to recognize it, see it for what it is. "Desire, desire." Try not to judge it for being there. The condemning quality of the mind does not carry with it the Compassionate Understanding that the mind is a process of conditioning. What is arising in the present are the fruits of what we have thought in the past, how we have reacted, how we have been conditioned.

We try not to indulge in it either. This is because we realize that if we do, we will remain under its power, claim its stress and condition the mind to continually reach out for and be dependent on external things. Thus we may never experience the Peace that comes from within. Instead, we can try

to watch desire, recognize it and begin to understand its turbulence, agitation and unsatisfactoriness. By doing so, we can learn to gently let go and return to the primary object of meditation.

With this clear seeing, perseverance and non-reaction we are gently de-conditioning the mind. We are strengthening Mindfulness, Equanimity and our ability to let go. We are also increasing our understanding of the mind and seeing the nature of sense desire as stressful. Also that it arises, stays for a while and passes away -- it is impermanent.

So the first hindrance is sense desire.

The second hindrance is aversion, dislike. This is the opposite of desire. It is a "pushing away" rather than a "reaching for." There are, for all of us, things in life that are unpleasant. This is normal. What we add to this unpleasantness is aversion, the condemning quality of the mind.

Aversion usually has a rather strong energy in the mind. Because it is a strong energy, many people find it quite stimulating. They enjoy the involvement, the absence of dullness and boredom. Anger and hatred give them a powerful sense of identity.

However, these people have not yet investigated deeply the negative effect that anger and aversion have on their own mind and body, and the effect that anger and aversion directed toward others have on other people. It is pretty easy to see the devastating effect that aversion and hatred have had, and are having, in the world.

There are many forms of aversion. There is jealousy, judgment, fear, prejudice, annoyance, irritation, hatred, anger, etc. There is aversion towards sights, sounds, odors, tastes, feelings in the body, thoughts in the mind. There is aversion towards people who are not pleasing to us; who challenge us in any way, who hold different beliefs and opinions, or maybe, who do not fulfill our expectations of them.

Aversion and annoyance can arise when desire is frustrated and remains unfulfilled. When we do not get what we want, we may start to blame the outside, judging situations and people, elevating ourselves in comparison, justifying our anger and aversion. Our usual way has been like this.

These experiences of pushing away or condemning create deep impressions in the mind. They can make the mind "simmer" about the past long after the actual event has ceased, ruining our present moment, our Peace. In meditation practice, when we try to concentrate on the breath, these deep impressions from the past often surface. If we do not have enough awareness and the ability to step back a little and recognize anger, aversion, then we may get lost in recreating these scenes from the past, feeding the cycle of thought and reaction to thought.

The stress, unpleasant feelings that arise are the characteristics of aversion, judgment, depreciating comparisons, frustrated desire, and unfulfilled expectations. The cause of the stress, the difficulties, lies within our own mind, in our reaction to experience. But for most of us, the usual way is to blame the outside -- the people, the situation -- rather than our own reaction to our experiences, our own expectations.

In this retreat you cannot talk to the other meditators, so if you are experiencing aversion then you cannot express it or "throw" it at the other person. So it remains with you. From this it is fairly easy to see; the others are not suffering -- you are, from your attachment to aversion.

What are some common aversions that meditators experience in a retreat?

You may be sitting peacefully and *finally* you are able to keep with the breath, it is coming in, going out, or rising, falling and you are actually staying with it. Then the people near you start to move and fidget, making a lot of noise, or even get up and leave the hall. Suddenly the mind starts to "spin" with thoughts such as; "Why do they have to make so much noise? Can't they sit still? It's distracting me!" You start to judge them.

Perhaps the Thais are speaking a little bit too loud or laughing, and you get caught in judging them ... Maybe you feel that there is *too* much sitting or *too* much walking ... Somehow people can make themselves into instant experts on what a meditation retreat should be, or how it should be organized.

Some people may be taking a long time in the food line, they might be trying to take their food so very slowly and mindfully. You may become impatient and think to yourselves, "They really don't have to be so slow to be mindful."

You may be having a difficult time sitting and concentrating. The actuality of the retreat may be very different to your projected hopes of, perhaps, good times and an easy "high." So you may start to blame the schedule or the teachers, having thoughts such as; "How can they be so insensitive? They make us sit and walk, sit and walk, sit and walk. It's just *too* much!"

You may find in the next moment that you turn the blame onto yourself, building self-aversion. You may think, "I'm hopeless, I can't meditate!" You look around the hall: "Everyone else is sitting like little Buddhas! I can't meditate! Here I am, I can't sit still, I can't concentrate! There's really no hope for me! My mind is a hopeless mess!"

So how do we work with aversion? First we can try to prevent it from arising. When we hear a sound, we try to note "hearing, hearing" and watch the sound pass away. It is the same process with odors, sights, or feelings in the body. We can see how they arise, exist a while and pass away. This is applying mindfulness to the sense contacts. We try not to get involved in the outward things and our reactions to them.

If we miss this and find that we are lost in aversion, try to recognize it. We may have been thinking in this way for some time, that does not matter. We have *now* become aware. We can try to note objectively, "aversion, aversion," "judging, judging." Try to see its true nature without falling into more aversion or justifications. Try not to have aversion toward the aversions. This only hinders the ability to let go and continues the energy of aversion.

We can try to understand that this tendency of mind is deeply conditioned by our past habitual thinking and actions -- recognizing the Law of Conditioning -- yet also know that we have the opportunity to step back, stop justifying and begin to recondition the mind towards better conditioning. We can learn to let go.

Often we cannot let go of aversion solely by trying to observe it objectively, because the attachment, the justifications are deep. In this case we can investigate. What do I mean, "investigate"? We are not going to investigate the object of the anger, who or what the anger is directed towards, the story line, or why we feel justified in having the anger. We are going to investigate the characteristics of the energy of anger, aversion.

What is anger? What is aversion? How does it feel in the body, and how does it feel, in the mind? Run your attention through the body. How do the eyes feel, are they closed tightly? The jaw? The hands, are they clenched? The shoulders? The breath, is it rough, is it short? See the tightness and tension in the body. Look also at the turbulence in the mind. Clearly open to the unsatisfactoriness, the stress, the suffering of aversion.

With Awareness and Wisdom, we see aversion's nature is stress. If we never open to it, become willing to investigate it, we will never see aversion clearly as stress. We may not want to let go of attachment, self-righteous justifications, or the blame we place on the outside for our own suffering.

If we open to it, Compassion may arise for the stress, honestly seeing the cause of the stress within ourselves, and we can learn to gently let go. Forgiving ourselves, letting go of the wish to manipulate others. This is bending the strong energy of aversion and transforming it into the energy of Compassionate Understanding.

Gradually with the building of Awareness, we will be able to see when aversion is present or when it arises in the mind. If we are able to watch and investigate without continuing it with more

aversion, and without getting lost and indulging it by our attachment to it, then we will get to know its particular energy. And we will be able to recognize it sooner and more easily.

We also may come to understand how aversion arises and how to bring Equanimity and Compassionate Understanding to all of the unpleasant things that help to activate this feeling. Through understanding the unsatisfactory nature of its energy, we build the ability to let go, strengthened by Compassion. In this way, aversion will have less power over us.

So there are the hindrances of sense desire and aversion.

The third hindrance is called sloth and torpor. In common language sloth and torpor can mean laziness, inertness, dullness, sleepiness, boredom, not wanting to put forth any energy.

You may find sleepiness, tiredness a problem in the first few days of the retreat. This may be because you are doing something different. You are waking up at 4 am, trying to sit and walk many hours throughout the day. It is a lot different to what most of you are used to, and it is a lot different to lying on the beach.

Sleepiness and tiredness are very common and most meditators experience this. Try to have patience with this, understanding that as the retreat progresses, you will probably get more used to the conditions and you may find the mind becoming brighter. This has been the experience of many meditators. Try to recognize and observe the sleepy mind: dull, inert, lacking in energy, bored, making all things fuzzy and unclear.

Often the next thing that happens for us is that we bring up aversion toward the sleepiness -- wanting it to go away. "I don't want to be sleepy, I don't want to feel like this." Or we may bring up aversion toward the schedule: "It's too hard!" But wanting the sloth to go away by generating aversion only makes us more tired. The attachment with it, wanting to go to bed, not wanting to put in the energy, and sinking into the pleasantness of the dullness often results in our just giving up in the sit or walk.

How do we work with sloth and torpor? When it is present, it is difficult to be with the breath. The breath is a fine, subtle object and the mind has become too dull. The breath, also, sometimes has a tranquilizing effect on many meditators. So if we stay with the breath, we may find that we get more and more sleepy.

Watching the breath while sloth is present can be compared to being lost in a forest in a fog, and trying to find our way out of the forest by trying to recognize small pebbles on the ground. This is very difficult. But, if we try to recognize a huge boulder, a familiar outline, it will be easier to find our way out of the forest. In this case the boulder is the body.

Let go of the breath and focus your attention on the body. Run your attention through the body noting the various sensations. The eyes, are they heavy? Note "heavy, heavy." The head, is it tilted? Note this, feel it without straightening it. Allow the mindfulness to arise, then straighten it. The back, is it slouched? Note this, feel it without straightening it. Allow the mindfulness to arise, then straighten it. Keep running your awareness through your body, investigating the various sensations arising and try not to bring up aversion to them.

If you still find that you are having a problem, open your eyes and just sit. Feel the body sitting, note, "sitting, sitting," then focus into a smaller area such as the hands touching or the buttocks touching and note, "touching, touching." Then broaden the awareness out to the whole body sitting, note, "sitting, sitting". Keep focusing in and broadening out the awareness to keep the mind active. Perhaps after a while the sleepiness may lessen, you can close the eyes again and go back to feeling sensations in the body or to the breath.

What the investigation does is to break up the sloth and torpor with moments of Mindfulness, which has an energizing quality. We may see that sloth, tiredness and sleepiness can actually pass and be followed by a bright mind.

When we investigate this hindrance without condemning or attachment, we can come to see that its nature is impermanent. In Vipassana meditation, we try not to push anything away. Instead, we try to investigate and see things as they are, not as we think they are, or as we think they should be, or as we want them to be, but the actuality of things as they are.

If you are having difficulty with sloth and torpor, here are a few more hints which may be of benefit to you. If you are drowsy in the early morning, splash water on your face or take a cold bath. Some people find this very refreshing. If it occurs during the walking meditation, you could quicken the pace a bit to help get the energy moving, and broaden the awareness to the simple touching of the feet on the ground. You can try to prevent sloth and torpor from arising by being mindful of the amount of food that you eat. Eating too much often gives one a heavy feeling. A brisk walk after meals can also help.

You could also increase the mental noting. This can often prevent us from drifting into a dream state. It is also important to know the difference between sloth that arises from boredom and the sleepiness, physical tiredness that comes after a "long, hard day." Try not to create ideals. Try not to force the mind to excesses.

Here you have the opportunity to get an adequate amount of sleep. You also have time after the meals to relax. So a lot of the tiredness that you feel may not be due to lack of sleep. It may be that you are not used to working the mind to develop Concentration and Mindfulness, and putting forth the effort needed to do so. It may be boredom which arose from trying to watch a neutral object such as the breath or steps. It just doesn't seem "exciting" enough. It may be that you did not catch the aversion that came before the sleepiness, which depleted the energy in the mind. Or perhaps it may be you just do not want to look at something in the mind -- you would rather hide from it.

Try not to give up and drift into it. Try to put forth a little effort to investigate and brighten the mind. Or try to have patience with it until it passes. Try to remember those moments of brightness within the "fog" and those may encourage you.

So there are the hindrances of sense desire, aversion and sloth & torpor.

The fourth hindrance is restlessness and worry. This is the opposite feeling to sloth and torpor. Restlessness often manifests with out-of-control thoughts. Frequently there is neither rhyme nor reason to them. There may be a feeling of agitation and speediness: thoughts going on and on, jumping into the future, the past, here, there and everywhere.

Jumping into the future, we create situations and worry about the outcome of what may never happen, developing fear and anxiety by thinking about two days in the future, two weeks, two years, twenty years. Jumping into the past we stir up memories, often creating guilt or grief, becoming upset. This can overwhelm the mind.

Restlessness and worry are usually strong obstacles when we begin to train and develop the mind in meditation. Much of our excitement and identity is concerned with the future or the past. Staying in the present is difficult for us.

This agitation in the mind often manifests in the body as a powerful urge to get up and go away. It is the inability to sit still even if there is no real major discomfort. It is often a pressure in the mind and body, and sometimes it gets so strong we feel that we will explode if we do not stop this sit soon or the bell does not ring.

A common worry of meditators comes from a projection into the hugeness, the enormity of the task; gazing forward, putting into the present moment all the rest of the future moments that we will have to deal with. When we do this, we can exhaust the mind.

This is a particularly common tendency in the first stages of a retreat. In the beginning, Concentration and Mindfulness are fairly weak. We seem to be constantly working with one thought, one hindrance after another, and we have not yet experienced a feeling of ease in the mind.

Frustration may arise and we may begin to burden this moment with all the future moments -- the next eight days ... the next three sits ... the 4 am wake-up bell tomorrow, "I can't possibly wake up at 4 am again! I'm exhausted now!"

Try to remind yourself that you only have to deal with the next step, the next breath, not the whole of the retreat; this day, not the whole of the rest of your life. What you are capable of doing now, do. In the future, the mind will have changed in some way. And then, again, there will just be one moment arising after another to deal with. As the mind gets stronger, its limits will expand. Try not to create limits that are static and unreal. Try to let the fear drop away whenever you catch this tendency. Feel the stress in the body and the suffering in the mind. Try to experience the characteristics of worry and fear in the body and mind. Try not to draw away from it.

If you can open to it, Compassion may arise for the stress, the difficulty, and you will want to let go. Allow yourself to feel the relief of coming back to deal with the present, only this moment, *now*. It is the letting go of worry and fear. Try to experience deeply the moment of letting go, of softening, the absence of turmoil, the spaciousness. At this time, you can experience the "fruits" of letting go immediately. This experience will help strengthen the ability to let go in the future.

By not hiding from the uncomfortable energies in the mind -- restlessness, agitation, fear, worry, regret, guilt, etc. -- we can recognize and learn how to deal with them. Also, we may be able to recognize them sooner and more easily in the future: "Ah ... there's fear, there's worry ... I know you ... you're just paper tigers come to try to scare me."

Try not to react with a heavy judging mind or conceptual thoughts, such as "worry is bad," "restlessness is bad," "fear is bad." This is not clearly seeing its actual energy, and letting go through Compassionate Understanding.

Also try not to react with excessive idealism, thinking that we should not have fear, worry or restlessness. Again, try to remember the "Law of Conditioning," that the thoughts arising in the present are fruits of our past reactions, past tendencies, past living. How we deal with them *now*, however, creates conditions for our future.

With restlessness and worry, you can also encourage yourself, if you find it difficult to "open" and let go. Try to increase the concentration factor in the mind by using a few words, a small phrase; "Just one breath at a time," "Just one step at a time," "Start again, start again," "Settle back into the moment," "Care for each step," "Care for each breath," or whatever words appeal to you. This often puts a brake to the projection, the out-of-control mind, with an aid to concentration. These words can help, just as "in, out" aids in staying with the breath, and they have the added power of encouragement for our mind.

What starts out simply as restlessness and lots of thinking can activate a whole chain of hindrances if we do not catch ourselves in the beginning. It often goes like this: First restlessness arises, and we start to have aversion for our restlessness and thoughts. This is followed by desire for a better experience. All this thinking can cause the mind to become exhausted, giving rise to sloth and torpor. With sloth and torpor, we cannot concentrate or see anything clearly so a lot of self-doubt and hatred arises.

This is commonly called the "multiple hindrance attack." Most new meditators experience it quite often. This can be discouraging; we may feel that it is just hopeless. We need to encourage ourselves during these times and not let it get us down. It is a normal experience when we start to train the mind. In order to help drop the past, we have to continually start again.

Try to realize that the mind and its various qualities are full of flux, change. During the next sit you may be able to strengthen your Concentration and Mindfulness enough to let go of the thoughts or your reactions to the thoughts for a while. You may then be quite peaceful, with Awareness very strong.



Realize the conditioning of the mind up until now has been to allow the thoughts to be dominant. This conditioning is strong. The energy of Mindfulness in the present is weak. The ability to let go is weak because it is something new that we are doing. We try not to hate ourselves or the mind for what it is. Although Mindfulness sometimes is simply overpowered by past conditioning, often it is the difficult times that teach us the most.

When the hindrances are strong, we don't just give in. We keep putting forth the effort to come back, to let go. This is doing a lot. It may give us the opportunity to build the beneficial, balancing energies of the mind -- Strength, Perseverance, Patience, Persistence, Equanimity and Compassionate Understanding. Even, simply, the ability to be in the constant onslaught of thoughts in a more balanced way.

We may see the thoughts coming and going with no rhyme or reason to them, like bubbles in a stream -- sometimes stupid, useless or low, sometimes intelligent, lofty or sublime. Ask yourselves, "Which of these thoughts is really me?" And so, in these moments, there may be an ability to detach, to gain insight into the non-personal quality of thought.

So there are the hindrances of sense desire, aversion, sloth & torpor, and restlessness & worry.

The fifth hindrance is doubt. Doubt is a hesitation in the mind. Doubt has an immobilizing energy; it is a blockage, a dark fog, a not-knowing, and especially a lack of confidence.

There is doubt about ourselves. We are having difficulty sitting still, we open our eyes and everyone else may be still for that particular moment; "Everyone else can meditate, I can't!"

There is doubt about the retreat. Everyone is walking around not talking to each other. Sitting, walking back and forth, walking back and forth, walking back and forth -- "Is this some type of mental hospital?!"

There is doubt about the teachers! "I come to Thailand and these people are Westerners, they look just like us! No robes, no beads, no beard, no fancy names, they aren't even monks or nuns!"

There is doubt about the teaching. "Is it really going to help me?? Is this the right path for me?? How am I going to become "enlightened," find answers to all my burning questions by just sitting, watching my breathing??"

There is doubt about the future. "Where will I go after the retreat? What will I do? What am I going to do with my life?"

Doubts about whether you can possibly make it through eight more days of this! Doubts about whether you are practicing correctly.

Doubt is an important hindrance to recognize because the power of doubt lies in its ability to stop us, to make us run away from our challenges in life, and to dissolve the best intentions.

With doubt in the mind, there is not much practice done but instead a lot of thinking and half-hearted effort. Because it creates such a stop-start practice, results do not come quickly, if at all. Because results and understanding do not come quickly, we start to blame the method rather than our doubt and lack of efforts.

Also it is dangerous in that if we hold onto our doubts, without asking questions in order to clear up the doubts, they can easily transform into aversion and hatred toward the person or thing doubted. With aversion in the mind, one turns away, wishes not to listen, seeking out instead reasons and justifications for doubting and not listening.

This does not mean that we accept things blindly. We weigh what we hear intelligently, trying to stay open, and if it sounds like it may be of help to us, then we try to put in the effort to practice and confirm things for ourselves by experience. Without some effort, we cannot experience for ourselves the benefit of practice; it will continue to be another person's experience.

So how do we work with doubt? As before we first have to recognize it as doubt. The hesitation in the mind gives us the clue. Also there may be lots of arguments and debates going on in the mind.

With self-doubt we can reflect that a lot of it comes from a sense of unworthiness that has been conditioned into us. Also it may come from the competitive drive that is so strong in the West. Try not to let it overpower you. You do not have to have perfect Wisdom, Equanimity and Concentration tomorrow. Continue to remind yourself of this.

Try not to compare yourself with anyone else. Just do the best you can in the present moment. You may feel inspired by others, but try not to add unworthiness and self-doubt. Often it comes from creating ideals of "how we think we should be."

In Vipassana Meditation we are investigating the actuality of things as they are, not as we want them to be or think they should be. We are trying to develop the ability to be with what is arising with Equanimity and Balance, so that our Peace does not depend on whether things are perfect, but on a coming into harmony with change and impermanence.

We are going to get lost again and again. That is OK. Simply start again. Return to the moment again and deal with only that moment.

Doubt has certain characteristics; hesitation, uncertainty, lack of confidence. Try to recognize its energy and note it clearly, "doubt, doubt." This is important because attachment "feeds" it. Watch it. Try to open to its difficult energy; see its particular kind of unsatisfactoriness and stress. Allow Compassion to arise for this unsatisfactoriness and stress, and gently learn to let go.

When we know its quality and see it often enough, it will come to have less power over us. We will be able to recognize it sooner without involvement. Try to allow the "space" in the mind -- to feel comfortable with not knowing.

With doubts about the practice, try to clear them up as soon as possible. This is important. Do not waste your time here, it is very precious. Leave a note for Steve or myself if you have difficulty understanding. Some of your doubts may dissolve the more we explain things as the retreat goes on.

When it arises in meditation try to recognize it. Note it; "doubt, doubt" -- even if you have to do it many times. And if you can, try to let go of the doubt. It may be helpful to agree with yourself to test these methods *fully* for these 10 days so that doubts do not prevent you from working as best you can and receiving the most benefit from these days. Try to come back to the moment, to be content with one step at a time, one breath at a time, not what may happen in meditation in the future. Try to treat these days as a "Journey of Discovery."

So there are the hindrances of sense desire, aversion, sloth & torpor, restlessness & worry, and doubt.

These are the five major hindrances that pull the mind off balance and create problems for us until we recognize them, understand their energies and see how to let go of them. Try to investigate with Compassionate Understanding: the hindrances are arising due to conditioning, how we have thought and reacted in the past. Try to investigate without suppressing or indulging the hindrances. Try to develop non-attached awareness of things as they are.

Mindfulness gives us the capability of realizing when the hindrances are present. Then we can try to investigate, to learn how these particular energies affect the mind and body. Investigating and opening in this way, we may come to see their unsatisfactory nature, and how attachment to and involvement with these energies create difficulties and stress for ourselves. Compassion may then arise for the difficulty and we gently learn to let go.

As Mindfulness increases, we may recognize these energies earlier and more often, understand them, and be able to allow them to pass away more easily. In this way, the dominance they once held in the mind gradually decreases. We also may come closer to realizing the causes for their arising

and may be able to see how they will not arise in the future. We can use these hindrances as vehicles for developing Insight and Compassion.

Vipassana meditation is the awareness of and understanding the characteristics of the body and mind: the breath, the sensations in the body, the feelings, the thoughts. All is arising, staying for awhile and passing away.

We can begin to see the impermanent nature of things and try to come into harmony with this impermanent nature. We can begin to see the unsatisfactoriness, the stress and the suffering of attachment to self-images based on impermanent things. The developing of this Compassionate Understanding strengthens our wish and our ability to gently let go.