

## 1

*Nīvaraṇa*

The mental hindrances

Theme: The 5 barriers to mental focus and how to break through them

An essay on the 5 mental hindrances by Piya Tan ©2006, 2010, 2014

All the water in the world cannot sink the smallest boat—unless it gets in.  
All the bad and evil in the world cannot get into us—unless we allow it in.

*Pañca kho ime nīvaraṇā.**Katame pañca?*

*Kāma-c, chanda, nīvaraṇaṃ,*  
*vyāpāda, nīvaraṇaṃ,*  
*thīna, middha, nīvaraṇaṃ*  
*uddhacca, kukkucca, nīvaraṇaṃ,*  
*vicikicchā, nīvaraṇaṃ*

There are these 5 hindrances.

What are the five?

The hindrance of sensual desire.  
The hindrance of ill will.  
The hindrance of sloth and torpor.  
The hindrance of restlessness and worry.  
The hindrance of doubt.

(Brahma, vihāra) Subha Sutta (M 99, 15/2:203), SD 38.6;

Kusala Rāsi Sutta (S 47.5/5:145), SD 84.7<sup>1</sup>1 Suffering and the mind

**1.0** In this introductory chapter, we will examine the 5 mental hindrances *as a set*, beginning with its conjectural historical development in the Pali canon. After preliminary definitions of the hindrances [1], we will examine the *evolution* of the term and how the hindrances work as a set [2]. We shall also examine some of the many imageries used in the ancient texts to illustrate the hindrances [3]. We shall then discuss *why* the hindrances need to be overcome [4], and *how* this can be effected [6].

**1.1 IGNORANCE AND SUFFERING**

**1.1.1** Early Buddhism identifies ignorance (*avijjā*) as the root condition for suffering, which is a lack of understanding true reality, as defined, for example, in the 4 noble truths.<sup>2</sup> As such, ignorance forms the first of the 12 links of dependent arising of suffering, where it conditions volitional formations (*saṅkhārā*), that is, when ignorance is present, it initiates and supports intentional ideations and mental deliberations.<sup>3</sup> In simple terms, we conjure up private realities and meanings, expressed through our thoughts, speech and actions.<sup>4</sup>

The hindrances blinker and skew up our minds so that we “unwisely attend” (*ayoniso manasikaroti*) to our sense-experiences. The Commentary explains unwise attention (*ayoniso manasikāra*) as attention that is unskillful in means (*anupāya, manasikāra*), attention shown the wrong way (*uppatha, manasikāra*), that is, by way of the 4 perversions, namely:

what is impermanent	is taken to be permanent	( <i>anicce niccan ti</i> );
what is painful	is taken to be pleasurable	( <i>dukkhe sukhan ti</i> );
what is non-self	is taken to be self	( <i>anattāni attan ti</i> ); and
what is impure	is taken to be pure	( <i>asubhe subhan ti</i> ). (MA 1:64) <sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> More elaborate formula, with “an obstruction [a screen], a hindrance, a mental impurity, that which weakens wisdom” (*āvaraṇo nīvaraṇo cetaso upakkilesa paññāya dubbhālī, karaṇo*) at **Āvaraṇa Nīvaraṇa S** (S 46.37/5:94-95), SD 84.6. Also at **Rukkha S** (S 46.39/5:96), SD 75.2; **Nīvaraṇa S** (S 46.40/5:97 f), SD 77.6; **Kaṅkheyya S** (S 54.-12/5:326), SD 77.7; **Āvaraṇa S** (A 5.51/3:63), SD 32.3; **Akusala Rāsi S** (A 5.52/3:65), SD 84.8. Qu at DhsA 382.

<sup>2</sup> (**Paṭicca, samuppāda**) **Vibhaṅga S** (S 12.2/2.4), SD 5.15. On ignorance as a latent tendency, see **Anusaya**, SD 31.3 (8).

<sup>3</sup> On the 12 links, see **Dependent arising**, SD 12.16.

<sup>4</sup> On ignorance as the first of the 12 links of dependent arising, see **Mine: The nature of craving**, SD 19.3 (4.2).

<sup>5</sup> See **Vipallāsa S** (A 4.49/2:52), SD 16.11, Vism 22.68/685; **Satipatṭhāna Ss**, SD 13.1 (4.1a).

**1.1.2** Unwise attention, in other words, is based on *ignorance*, which starts off the dependent arising of formations, and so on leading to the whole mass of suffering, and the prolonging of the samsaric cycle (*vaṭṭa*) (MA 1:64 f). In short, unwise attention is the root of samsaric existence; for, it increases ignorance and craving. The mental hindrances function to keep us within this rut of suffering.

**1.1.3** Psychologically, we can say that the hindrances are defilements (*kilesa*) that limit our vision, so that we do not see beyond our noses. They distract us from focusing our minds into clear stillness, which in turn, prevents us from realizing our highest potential as awakened beings. As such, the hindrances are mental impurities (*cetaso upakkilesa*) that weaken wisdom (*paññāya dubbālī, karaṇe*),<sup>6</sup> thus preventing us from rising above the mere physicality of our senses. In short, the hindrances simply prevent our minds from directly knowing the true nature of our being.

**1.1.4** Etymologically, *nīvaraṇa* is cognate with the Sanskrit *ni-vāraṇa*, which is resolved as *nis* (low, downward) + √VR (to cover), as in (Skt) *vṛṇoti*, “to cover, conceal.” It is said to be *āvaraṇa* (screen, obstruction),<sup>7</sup> *onaha* (covering),<sup>8</sup> *pariyonaha* (full covering),<sup>9</sup> *caṅga, vara* (strainer),<sup>10</sup> *akusala, rāsī* (a heap of unwholesomeness),<sup>11</sup> and *paṭicchanna parissaya* (hidden danger).<sup>12</sup> It is, in short, a mental hindrance.

## 1.2 SPIRITUAL SOLITUDE AND FREEDOM

**1.2.1** The hindrances not only prevent us from seeing beyond our noses, but they also induce us to think that all these sense-objects *out there*: desirable forms and colours, enticing sounds, fragrant smells, delicious tastes, and enthralling touches. We are made to think that all these words relate to what are out there, rather than to how we perceive them *within* our own minds. We are deluded into inhabiting a virtual sense-world of duality. Duality means one thing depending on another for its existence. Understandably then, we feel alienated when we think we are deprived of these sense-stimuli.<sup>13</sup>

When we understand the hindrances for what they really are, we are no more caught up by the sensual baits that they lure us with. We are able to see our sense-experiences for what they really are—sometimes pleasant, sometimes unpleasant, but always *impermanent*. We are then able to rise above bodily experiences into the mental realm where our experiences are formed and acted out.

When we understand how our mind works, we also understand how the hindrances try to delude us into being dependent on sense-pleasures. These pleasures are not out there, but in here, in the mind. We begin to experience the joy of solitude, that is, the ability to be joyful for ourself, independent of external sense-stimuli. This in no way devalues or demoralizes external reality, but our awakened minds begin to see the external world as being existentially neutral.<sup>14</sup> We create the world we live in.<sup>15</sup>

**1.2.2** The truly solitary mind begins to know itself, and knowing itself, it is truly happy. The solitary mind that is completely free from the hindrances is able to reach such a point of oneness that it can only be described in terms of the most profound bliss, that is, dhyana.

The Suttas speak of **2 kinds of solitude**—that of the body and of the mind—which specifically apply to the process of attaining the first dhyana, where, in **the Sāmañña, phala Sutta** (D 2), for example, we have this stock passage:

**67 PHYSICAL SOLITUDE.** Possessing this aggregate of noble moral virtue, this aggregate of noble sense-restraint, this aggregate of noble mindfulness and clear comprehension, and this aggregate of noble contentment, he resorts to a secluded dwelling: a forest, the foot of a tree, a

<sup>6</sup> D 12,30/1:246, 25.16/3:49 f; M 39,15/1:276; S 46.37/5:94, 46.38/5:96 (cf Sn 66); A 5.51,3/3:63, 6.57,7/3:386; Vbh 244 f.

<sup>7</sup> D 13,30/1:246; Nm 9, 30; Vbh 362; Dhs 1136.

<sup>8</sup> D 13,30/1:246.

<sup>9</sup> D 13,30/1:246.

<sup>10</sup> M 23,4/1:144 @ SD 28.13.

<sup>11</sup> S 47.5/5:145 f.

<sup>12</sup> Nm 1:12, 2:360, 467, 486, 492.

<sup>13</sup> See the important verse in **Nibbedhika (Pariyāya) S** (A 6.63,3.4), SD 6.11.

<sup>14</sup> See **Nibbedhika (Pariyāya) S** (A 6.63.3b/2:411), SD 6.11 & *Kāma-c, chanda*, SD 32.2 (2.2).

<sup>15</sup> See *Saṅkhāra*, SD 17.6 esp (4+8.3). On def of “world” (*loka*), see **Rohitassa S** (S 2.26 = A 4.45), SD 7.2 (1).

mountain, a gully [gorge], a hillside cave, a cemetery, a remote forest [jungle grove], the open air, a heap of straw.<sup>16</sup>

Returning from his almsround, after his meal, he sits down, crosses his legs, keeps his body erect, and establishes mindfulness before him.

**68 MENTAL SOLITUDE.** (1) Abandoning covetousness with regard to the world, he dwells with a mind devoid of covetousness. He cleanses his mind of covetousness.

(2) Abandoning ill will and anger,<sup>17</sup> he dwells with a mind devoid of ill will, sympathetic towards the welfare of all living beings. He cleanses his mind of ill will and anger.

(3) Abandoning sloth and torpor, he dwells with a mind devoid of sloth and torpor, mindful, alert, perceiving light. He cleanses his mind of sloth and torpor.

(4) Abandoning restlessness and worry, he dwells undisturbed, his mind inwardly stilled. He cleanses his mind of restlessness and worry.

(5) Abandoning doubt, he dwells having crossed over doubt, with no perplexity with regard to wholesome mental states. He cleanses his mind of doubt.

(D 2,67-68/1:71 = M 27,18/1:181 = Vbh 508/244 f), SD 8.10

Thus far, we have taken an overview of the potentiality of the mind to attain the highest bliss and self-freedom. We are limited by our own shortsightedness that is the 5 mental hindrances. This is recognized by the Buddha in his awakening, and he has formulated in various ways how they manifest themselves, and how we can overcome them.

## 2 The nature of the mental hindrances

### **2.1 ABHIJJHĀ, DOMANASSA**

**2.1.1** Hindrances (*nīvaraṇa*) to mental cultivation or meditation arise mainly through the practitioner's lack of restraint of the 5 sense-faculties, so that sense-stimuli from the eye, the ear, the nose, the tongue, and the body play havoc on the mind. Even when all these senses are well restrained, such as in one seated in meditation, the mind continues to be lost in its sensual replays and mental fabrications.

Originally, the word *nīvaraṇa* seems to have been used metaphorically with reference to the darkness of ignorance which enshrouds the minds of beings.<sup>18</sup> The world, in other words, is covered with ignorance (*avijjā nivuto loko*, Sn 1033; Nett 11).

**2.1.2** One of the oldest canonical terms for mental hindrances is the well known dvandva ***abhijjhā, domanassa***, often translated as “covetousness and displeasure,” “desire and discontent,” “liking and disliking,” or “longing and loathing.”<sup>19</sup> The term famously appears in **the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta** (M 10), in its definition of the 4 focuses of mindfulness (*catu sati paṭṭhāna*), thus:

<sup>16</sup> *So iminā ca ariyena sīla-k, khandhena samannāgato iminā ca ariyena indriya, samvarena samannāgato iminā ca ariyena sati, sampajaññaena samannāgato imāya ca ariyāya santuṭṭhitāya samannāgato vivittaṃ senāsanam bhajati, araññaṃ rukkha, mūlaṃ pabbataṃ kandaraṃ giri, guhaṃ susānaṃ vana, patthaṃ abbhokāsaṃ palāla, puñjaṃ.* This stock phrase of 9 places conducive to meditation are found at D 1:72, 207, 2:242, 3:49; M 1:181, 269, 274, 346, 440, 441, 2:162, 226, 3:3, 35, 115-117; A 2:210, 3:92, 100, 4:436, 5:207; Nm 1:26, 140, 2:341; Miln 369. A shorter list of 3 places, probably later, is mentioned in **Anāpāna, sati S** (M 118): “Here, monks, a monk who has gone to the forest or to the foot of a tree or to an empty place, sits down, and having crossed his legs and keeping his body upright, establishes mindfulness before him.” (M 118, 17/3:82).

<sup>17</sup> *Byāpāda, padosa* (like *dosa*) here can be Skt cognate *pradoṣa* (fault) or *pradveṣa* (hatred). As *pradoṣa* at D: RD 1:82 & M:H 1:227; but as *pradveṣa* at M:ÑB 275, Vbh:T 319 & Bodhi, *The Discourse on the Fruits of Reclusehip*, 1989: 40. Comys are silent; but the latter is pref.

<sup>18</sup> **S 22.94/3:140, 51.11/5:266, 56.33/5:439.**

<sup>19</sup> D 3:58, 77, 141, 211, 276 = M 1:56 ff (MA 1:243), 2:11 = S 5:141-143 (SA 3:180) = A 4:300, 457 = Pm 41 (PmA 175) = Vbh 193 f (VbhA 219 f). These stock terms are def at Vbh 194, 196 = 202; Vism 3; DA 363; MA 1:244; SA 1:204; AA 2:42; ItA 1:105; SnA 157; ApA 310. See SD 13.1 (4.2e).

Here, bhikshus,

- A. a monk<sup>20</sup> dwells<sup>21</sup> exertive, clearly comprehending, mindful, observing [watching] the body in the body, removing *covetousness and displeasure* in the world;
- B. a monk dwells exertive, clearly comprehending, mindful, observing feelings in the feelings, removing *covetousness and displeasure* in the world;
- C. a monk dwells exertive, clearly comprehending, mindful, observing the mind in the mind, removing *covetousness and displeasure* in the world;
- D. a monk dwells exertive, clearly comprehending, mindful, observing dharmas in the dharmas, removing *covetousness and displeasure* in the world. (M 10,2/1:56), SD 13.3

The Majjhima Commentary to this passage says that longing and displeasure signify *the first two hindrances*—sensual desire and ill will—the key hindrances to be overcome before we can attain samadhi or dhyana (MA 1:243 f).<sup>22</sup>

**2.1.3** In fact, since these two key mental hindrances, the parents, as it were, of all other hindrances, they are a synecdoche (or inclusive term) for all the 5 mental hindrances. This is confirmed by **the Mahā Assa,pura Sutta** (M 39), which has a passage that elaborates on what is only briefly stated in the Sati-paṭṭhāna Sutta passage above. Here, the Mahā Assa,pura Sutta passage describes, in detail, the 5 hindrances and how to overcome them, so that we are able to go on to attain dhyana, thus:

Bhikshus, what more should be done?<sup>23</sup> Here, bhikshus, a monk seeks out a secluded dwelling: a forest, the foot of a tree, a mountain, a glen, a hillside cave, a charnel ground, a jungle grove, the open air, a heap of straw.

Returning from his almsround, after his meal, he sits down, crosses his legs, holds his body upright, and establishes mindfulness before him.

- (1) Abandoning **covetousness** with regard to the world,<sup>24</sup>  
he dwells with a mind *devoid of covetousness*.  
He cleanses his mind of covetousness.
- (2) Abandoning **ill will and anger**,  
he dwells with *a mind free of ill will*, caring for the welfare of all living beings.<sup>25</sup>  
He cleanses his mind of ill will and anger.
- (3) Abandoning **sloth and torpor**,  
he dwells with a mind *devoid of sloth and torpor*, mindful, alert, perceiving light.<sup>26</sup>  
He cleanses his mind of sloth and torpor.
- (4) Abandoning **restlessness and worry**,  
he dwells undisturbed, *his mind inwardly stilled*.

<sup>20</sup> Here “a monk” (*bhikkhu*) may refer to either an ordained monastic or anyone who is meditating (here, doing satipatthana) (DA 3:756; MA 1:241; VbhA 216 f; cf SnA 251). See SD 13.1 (3.1.1).

<sup>21</sup> *Ātāpī sampajāno satimā, vineyya loke abhijjhā,domanassaṃ*. Here we find 4 of the 5 spiritual faculties (*pañc’-indriya*) in action.

<sup>22</sup> For a discussion, see **Satipaṭṭhāna Ss** (D 22; M 10), SD 13.1 (4.2.5-4.2.6).

<sup>23</sup> This whole section is a well known stock passage (pericope), found at **Sāmañña,phala S** (D 2,67-74/1:71-74) & **Yodh’ājīva S 1** (A 5.75.12/3:92 f). **The (Nīvaraṇa) Saṅgārava S** (S 46.55/5:121-126) gives a colourful simile to each of these hindrances. MA gives elaborate details of each of the 5 similes here: see Nyanaponika, *The Five Mental Hindrances*, Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, Wheel 26, 1961:27-34. See SD 10.13 App (comy on the similes of the 5 hindrances, MA 2:318-321).

<sup>24</sup> The “world” (*loka*) here refers to our 6 sense-bases (*saḷ-āyatana*): see **Sabba S** (S 35.23), SD 7.1. In other words, to overcome craving, we need first to fully understand the nature of the 6 senses (that is, the body and the mind).

<sup>25</sup> “Caring for the welfare of all living beings” refers to cultivating lovingkindness (*mettā*) or unconditional love; acting on it, showing compassion (*karuṇā*); rejoicing in their welfare and others who are loving and compassionate; and not to be discouraged in such efforts in any way, but keep a calm and clear mind. See **Brahma,vihāra**, SD 38.5.

<sup>26</sup> On the perception of light, see **Pacala S** (A 7.58,7), SD 4.11.

He cleanses his mind of restlessness and worry.

(5) Abandoning **doubt**,<sup>27</sup>

he dwells *having crossed over doubt*,

with no perplexity with regard to wholesome mental states.

He cleanses his mind of doubt.

(M 39,12-13b/1:274 f), SD 10.13

It is clear from this passage that the overcoming of the hindrances is not merely a negative exercise, but they each entail a positive mental change. The abandoning of ill will, for example, also involves the “compassion for the good of all beings” (*sabba, pāṇa, bhūta, hitānukampī*, Pm 1:46).

**2.1.4** After the brief definition of the 4 focuses of mindfulness, both **the Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta** (D 22,13) and **the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta** (M 10,36) then follow up with a description of the breath meditation and other body-based meditations. All this forms the first satipaṭṭhana, that is, the contemplation of the body (*kāyānupassanā*). This is followed by the second satipaṭṭhana, the contemplation on feelings (*vedanā’nupassanā*), which about wisely dealing with our emotional responses to sense-experiences.

**2.1.5** The third section is the contemplation of mind (*cittānupassanā*), that is, the third of the 4 satipaṭṭhanas, which deals with identifying manifestations of the 5 hindrances.<sup>28</sup> Then comes the fourth satipaṭṭhana—the contemplation of dharmas (phenomena)—which again lists the 5 hindrances and other mental phenomena. As such, in practical terms, the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta can be said to teach methods especially for overcoming the mental hindrances<sup>29</sup> (which leads to the attaining of dhyana).<sup>30</sup>

## 2.2 ASSĀDA AND ĀDĪNAVA.

**2.2.1** In the **Sukhumāla Sutta** (A 3.38) the Buddha relates how, when he was still a bodhisattva, he enjoyed sensual pleasures in three luxurious palaces, specially built for comfort during each of the three northern Indian seasons.<sup>31</sup> After his awakening, the Buddha reviews this experience and declares that worldly pleasures keep us in the world, and by letting go of them we are released from the world, as recorded in **the Pubb’eva Sambodhutta** (A 3.101a):

“Bhikshus, before my awakening, when I was still a bodhisattva, it occurred to me... ‘Whatever bodily pleasure and mental joy (*sukha, somanassa*) there is in the world—this is the gratification (*assāda*) in the world.

That the world is impermanent, unsatisfactory, subject to change—this is the disadvantage (*ādīnava*) in the world; the removal and abandoning of desire and lust for the world—this is the escape from the world’.”

(A 3.101a/1:258), SD 14.6a

**2.2.2** We see the close connection here between *abhijjhā, domanassa* and the two negative terms, *assāda* and *ādīnava*. Both these latter terms have the sense of being hindrances to spiritual development. My own understanding here regarding the naming of the first two mental hindrances as *abhijjhā, domanassa* is to show that with their elimination, the other hindrances are eliminated, too. This is further confirmed by the Commentaries:

But here since taking *abhijjhā* [covetousness] includes *kāma-c, chanda* [sense-desire], and taking *domanassa* [mental pain] includes *vyāpāda* [ill will], therefore it should be understood that the abandoning of the hindrances is spoken of by indicating the pair that is strong among those items that make up the hindrances.<sup>32</sup>

(DA 3:759 = MA 1:244 = VbhA 220)

<sup>27</sup> These are not doubts seeking answers, but persistent doubts regarding the Buddha, the Dharma, the Sangha, the threefold training (moral virtue, mental cultivation, wisdom), the past, the future, both past and future, and states arising through specific conditionality and dependent arising (Vbh 914/365).

<sup>28</sup> D 22,1/2:290 = M 10,3/1:55 @ SD 13.2+3.

<sup>29</sup> On satipaṭṭhana and overcoming the hindrances, see SD 13.1 (4.2).

<sup>30</sup> See **Dhyana**, SD 8.4.

<sup>31</sup> See eg **Sukhumala S** (A 3.38/1:145 f), SD 63.7.

<sup>32</sup> *Yasmā pan’ettha abhijjhā, gahaṇena kāma-c, chando domanassa-g, gahaṇena vyāpādo saṅgahaṃ gacchati tasmā nīvaraṇa, pariyāpanna, balava, dhamma, dvaya, dassanena nīvaraṇa-p, pahānaṃ vuttam hotī ti veditabbaṃ.*

### 3 The 5 hindrances in the suttas

**3.1 BASIC DEFINITIONS.** The list of 5 mental hindrances often mentioned as a stock set in the Suttas, are as follows [3.2.6]:<sup>33</sup>

<u>Mental hindrance</u>	<u>Cause</u> [3.2.7]	<u>Effect</u> <sup>34</sup>	<u>Prevention &amp; cure</u>
1. sensual desire	a beautiful sign	pulling	sense-restraint
2. ill will	a repulsive sign	pushing	lovingkindness
3. sloth and torpor	discontent etc	sinking	perception of light
4. restlessness & worry	an unstill mind	floating	letting go or disowning suffering
5. doubt	unwise attention	circling	recollection of death

**3.1.1** The first mental hindrance is *kāma-c, chanda*, “desire for sense-pleasures,” that is, being powerfully drawn to the objects of the 5 senses. It is sometimes called *abhijjhā*, “covetousness,” that is, a longing for things. It is likely that *abhijjhā* is the older term, first as a part of the dvandva, *abhijjhā, domanassa* [2.1], and then as the first item of an earlier set of the 5 hindrances.<sup>35</sup>

**3.1.2** The second hindrance is *vyāpāda*, “ill will,” sometimes, *vyāpāda, padosa*, “the fault of ill will.” The Dīgha Commentary says that it is synonymous with *kodha*, anger (DA 1:211). Actually, a closer synonym of ill will is *domanassa*, as found in the ancient dvandva, *abhijjhā, domanassa* [2.1]. *Vyāpāda*, in other words, is always present, at least in latent form, when *kāma-c, chanda* is present. This hindrance has an effect of our pushing away what we perceive as unpleasurable or undesirable.

**3.1.3** The third is *thīna-m-iddha*, which originally meant “increase of sleepiness,” but at a very early date came to be taken as a dvandva, *thīna, middha*, “sloth and torpor.”<sup>36</sup> They may arise as the common result of being assailed by the first two hindrances, or attending to an unsuitable meditation object. This hindrance has a kind of heavy mental effect on us, so that we feel a sinking emotional feeling.

**3.1.4** Cousins thinks that the fourth hindrance, *uddhacca, kukkucca*, “restlessness and worry,” seems to refer to “states of mildly manic-depressive nature.”<sup>37</sup> While *uddhacca* is mental restlessness (arising, for example, from thinking about the future) inducing bodily restlessness, *kukkucca* is a harping on the past, on memories or imaginations of wrong deeds of omissions and commissions, that is, guilt and worry. Emotionally, this hindrance has a sort of floating effect, so that we feel as if we being aimlessly tossed or dragged around.

**3.1.5** The fifth and last hindrance, *vicikicchā*, literally means “the desire to discern” (*vi-cikicchā*), and is, as such, usually translated as “doubt” (Dhs 205). This doubt is more specifically *spiritual doubt*, that is, uncertainty regarding universal truths of true reality and of self-awakening; hence, it is also a soteriological hindrance: it is any of the 3 fetters that prevents us from becoming a streamwinner, from a first step to awakening.<sup>38</sup> It hold us in a rut of cyclic despair, so that we are unable to break loose from our fixed ideas about what we see as bad and weak in us and in others.

“The taking of *domanassa* includes *vyāpāda* because all *citta* rooted in aversion is accompanied by unpleasant mental feeling.” (Gethin’s n, 2003:50)

<sup>33</sup> See eg (Nīvaraṇā) Saṅgārava S (S 46.55/5:121-126), SD 3.12.

<sup>34</sup> See Diag 3.2.7 for explanations of these “effects.”

<sup>35</sup> Eg A 2:14, 67, 210, 3:92, 4:437, 5:168, 207.

<sup>36</sup> See *Thīna, middha*, SD 32.6 (1).

<sup>37</sup> L S Cousins, “Buddhist jhāna: Its nature and attainment according to Pāli sources,” *Religion* 3, 1973:118.

<sup>38</sup> “The 3 fetters,” viz self-identity view (*sakkāya, diṭṭhi*), attachment to rituals and vows (*sīla-b, bata paramāsa*) and spiritual doubt (*vicikicchā*) (D 6,13/1:156, 18,1/2:200; M 11,12/3:81; S 22.109/3:161, 48.2+3/5:193, 55.24+25/5:377, 378; A 3.85,2/1:231 f, 4.88,2/2:88 f): they are the first 3 of the **10 fetters** (*dasa samyojana*), which are: (1) self-identity view (*sakkāya, diṭṭhi*), (2) spiritual doubt (*vicikicchā*), (3) attachment to rituals and vows (*sīla-b, bata, parāmāsa*), (4) sensual lust (*kāma, rāga*), (5) aversion (*paṭigha*), (6) greed for form existence (*rūpa, rāga*), (7) greed for formless existence (*arūpa, rāga*), (8) conceit (*māna*), (9) restlessness (*uddhacca*), (10) ignorance (*avijjā*) (S 5:61; A 5:13; Vbh 377). In some places, no 5 (*kāma, rāga*) is replaced by ill will (*vyāpāda*). The first 5 are the lower fetters (*orambhāgiya*), and the rest, the higher fetters (*uddhambhāgiya*). The abandonment of the lower 5 fetters

### 3.2 NEGATIVE IMAGERIES OF THE HINDRANCES.

**3.2.0 Imageries for the hindrances.** Numerous imageries are used in the Suttas to describe the hindrances or show their potency and danger.<sup>39</sup> **The Upakkilesa Sutta** (A 5.23), for example, compares the 5 hindrances to the 5 kinds of impurities that corrupt gold.<sup>40</sup> And **the Āvaraṇa Sutta** (A 5.51) compares the hindrances to five dams built across a swift mountain stream that would slow down or even stop its flow<sup>41</sup> [4.1]. **The Mahā Assa,pura Sutta** (M 39) warns that when these 5 hindrances are not abandoned in us, they respectively become like a debt, a sickness, a prison, slavery, and a journey on a road through the wilderness.<sup>42</sup> [4.3]

**3.2.1 Sensual desire: The debtor.** The first mental hindrance is **the desire for sense-objects** (*kāma-c, chanda*), sometimes “a longing for things” (*abhijjhā*) [3.1.1]. It is the most common of the hindrances, the symptoms of which are those of being troubled by physical discomfort, daydreaming, or distracted by some sense-stimuli (especially sounds and thoughts). **The (Nīvaraṇā) Saṅgārava Sutta** (S 46.55) compares this to like trying to see our reflection on the surface of *water that is mixed with all sort of thick colours*.<sup>43</sup> The Majjhima Commentary gives this debtor imagery of sensual desire:

When a man has fallen into debt, he is ruined. When his creditors, pressing him to settle the debt, speak roughly to him, or harass and beat him, he is unable to retaliate but has to bear it all. This endurance is simply because of his debt.

In the same way, if a man is filled with lustful desire for someone, filled with craving for that object of his desire, he would be attached to it. Even if he is roughly spoken to by that person, or harassed, or beaten, he will bear it all. This endurance is simply because of his lustful desire—he is like a house-husband<sup>44</sup> being beaten up by his wife. In this way, lustful desire is like a debt.

(MA 2:318)

**3.2.2 Ill will: the sick man.** The second mental hindrance is that of **ill will** (*vyāpāda*) [3.1.2], which is simply the other ugly twin of the first hindrance. As a result of distractions, we find fault with our practice or teacher, or even becoming upset with others making a noise—such inner rumbles are really excuses for not persevering in our meditation. This is like trying to see our reflection in *a bowl of water, fiercely boiling over a strong fire*.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, the Majjhima Commentary gives this illness imagery of ill will:

If a man suffering from a bile disorder<sup>46</sup> were to receive even honey and sugar, he will not enjoy its taste because of his bile disorder. He would simply vomit it, complaining, “It is bitter! It is bitter!” In the same way, when one with an angry mind is admonished even slightly by his

---

makes one a non-returner (*opapātika* or *anāgāmī*): see **Ānāpānasati S** (M 118,10/3:80) n, SD 7.13. On the stream-winner, see **Entering the stream**, SD 3.3.

<sup>39</sup> A well known set of 5 similes is found in (**Ānanda**) **Subha S** (D 10,2.5-9/1:207), SD 40a.13; **Sāmañña,phala S** (D 2,69-73/1:71 f), SD 8.10; (**Nīvaraṇa**) **Saṅgārava S** (S 46.55/5:122), SD 3.12; (**Manta**) **Saṅgārava S** (A 5.-193,4/3:231), SD 73.3. For positive similes, see **Mahā Assa,pura S** (M 39,14/1:275 f). For comy on the similes of the 5 hindrances (MA 2:318-321), see SD 10.13 App. See also Nyanaponika, *The Five Mental Hindrances*, BPS Wheel 26, 1961:27-34.

<sup>40</sup> A 5.23/3:16-19 (SD 74.3).

<sup>41</sup> A 5.51/3:63 f (SD 32.3).

<sup>42</sup> See M 39,12-13/1:274 f (SD 10.13) & Appendix for comy explanation of the similes of the 5 hindrances (MA 2:318-321).

<sup>43</sup> This simile, and the other four, for the hindrances are found in (**Nīvaraṇa**) **Saṅgārava S** (S 46.55/5:121-126), SD 3.12. For comy on the similes of the 5 hindrances (MA 2:318-321), see SD 10.13 App.

<sup>44</sup> “House-husband,” *ghara,sāmika*, lit “house owner.”

<sup>45</sup> This simile, and the other four are found in (**Nīvaraṇā**) **Saṅgārava S** (S 46.55/5:121-126), SD 3.12. For comy on the similes of the 5 hindrances (MA 2:318-321), see SD 10.13 App.

<sup>46</sup> “Bile disorder” (*pitta,roga*), ie a liver disorder. On the traditional Indian medicine, see **Sīvaka S** (S 36.21/4:230 f), SD 5.6.

teacher or preceptor for his benefit, he does not accept their advice. Saying words like “You are harassing me too much!” he would leave the order, or would go away and wander about.<sup>47</sup>

Just as the person with bile disorder does not enjoy the taste of honey and sugar, even so one who has the disease of anger will not enjoy the taste of the Buddha’s Teaching consisting in the joy of meditative dhyanas, etc. In this way, ill will is like an illness. (MA 2:318)

**3.2.3 Sloth and torpor: the prisoner.** Often such perceptions of lack of progress bring about **sloth and torpor** (*thīna, middha*) [3.1.3]—the third mental hindrance. The real reason is that our energy is heavy and congested as a result of too much thinking and mental chatter. This is like trying to look for our reflection *in water that is overgrown with moss and water plants*.<sup>48</sup> The Majjhima Commentary gives this imprisonment imagery of sloth and torpor:

A person who is imprisoned during a festival day is unable to see the beginning or the middle or the end of the festivities. When released on the following day, he hears people saying, “Oh, how delightful yesterday’s festival was! Oh, those dances and songs!” He will not reply. And why not? Because he did not enjoy the festival himself.

In the same way, even if a very eloquent Dharma discourse is being given, one overcome by sloth and torpor would not know its beginning, middle or end. If after the discourse, he hears it being praised:

“How pleasant it was to listen to the Dharma! How interesting the subject was and how good the similes!” He will not reply. And why not? Because of his sloth and torpor, he did not enjoy the discourse. In this way, sloth and torpor are like imprisonment. (MA 2:318 f)

**3.2.4 Restlessness and worry: The slave.** When our minds trail into the past, recalling things done or undone, we are likely to become worried or guilt-ridden. When our minds wander into the future, wondering what to do after the meditation, and so on, we are likely to become restless, mentally and physically. Or, we could be over-excited at our apparent progress, or discouraged at our lack of progress: this is **restlessness and worry** (*uddhacca, kukkucca*) [3.1.4], the fourth mental hindrance. This is like looking for our reflection *in water that is stirred and tossed about by a strong wind*.<sup>49</sup> The Majjhima Commentary compares restlessness and worry to slavery, thus:

A slave who wants to enjoy himself at a festival is told by his master, “Go quickly to such and such a place! There is urgent work to be done. If you do not go, I shall have your hands and feet cut off, or your ears and nose cut off!” Hearing that, the slave will quickly go as ordered, and will not be able to enjoy any part of the festival. This is because of his dependence on others.

In the same way it is with a monk not well versed in the Vinaya, who has gone to the forest for the sake of solitude. If in any matter, down to the question of permissible meat [such as pork], thinking that it is not permissible [taking it for bear’s flesh],<sup>50</sup> he has to disrupt his solitude to seek a Vinaya master to purify his moral conduct. Thus he will not be able to experience the joy of solitude due to his being overcome by restlessness and worry. In this way, restlessness and worry are like slavery. (MA 3:319)

<sup>47</sup> In **Khaluṅka S** (A 8.14), it is stated, “Again, bhikshus, here the monks accuse a monk of an offence. That monk, being thus accused of an offence by the monks, strongly objecting to the accusation, says thus, ‘Why do you venerable sirs fuss so much over me? Let me now give up the training and return to the low life!’ Having given up the training and return to the lowlife, he says thus, ‘Now, venerable sirs, are you satisfied?’” (A 8.14,17/4:194 f), SD 7.9

<sup>48</sup> This simile, and the other four are found in (**Nīvaraṇā**) **Saṅgārava S** (S 46.55/5:121-126), SD 3.12. For comy on the similes of the 5 hindrances (MA 2:318-321), see SD 10.13 App.

<sup>49</sup> This simile, and the other four are found in (**Nīvaraṇā**) **Saṅgārava S** (S 46.55/5:121-126), SD 3.12. For comy on the similes of the 5 hindrances (MA 2:318-321), see SD 10.13 App.

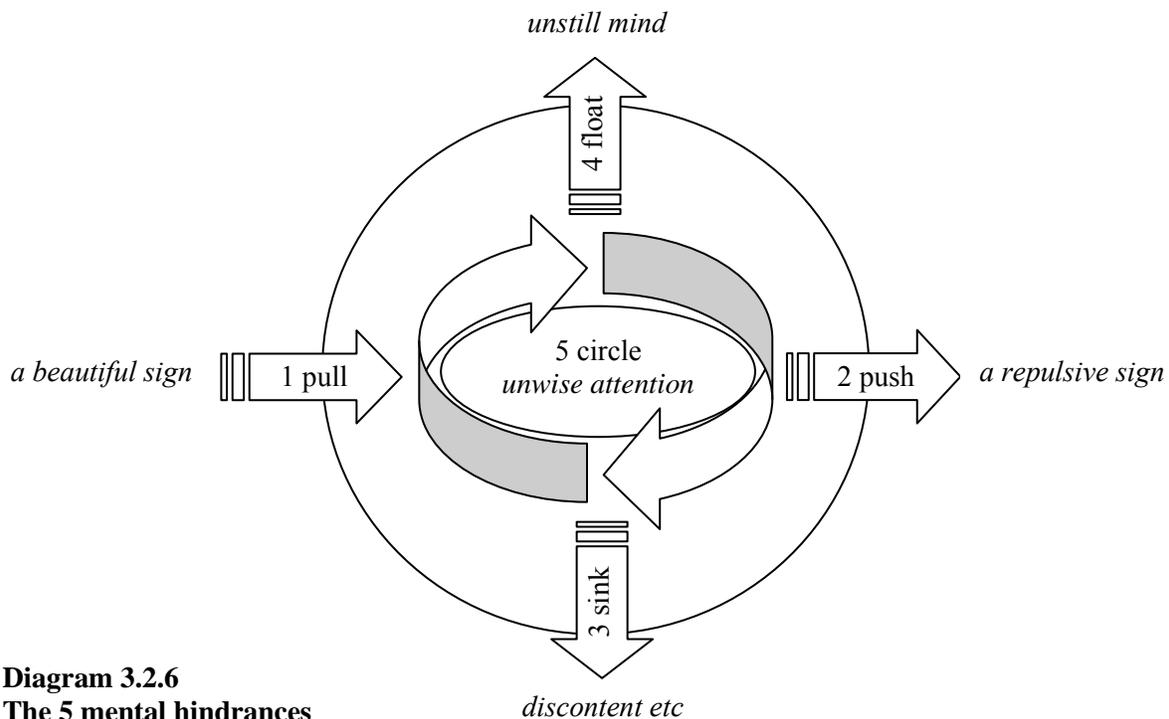
<sup>50</sup> These two examples are from MAT.

**3.2.5 Doubt: The traveller.** Finally, we may feel very discouraged on account of the various difficulties and distractions, that we begin to simply doubt our ability to meditate or be uncertain about the true purpose of meditating. This **doubt** (*vicikicchā*) is the fifth mental hindrance. This is like looking for our reflection in *a bowl of turbid muddy water left in the dark*.<sup>51</sup> The Majjhima Commentary compares doubt to a traveller going through a dangerous territory, thus:

A man journeying on a road through the wilderness where travellers have been plundered or killed by robbers would, at the mere sound of a twig or of a bird, become anxious and fearful, thinking, “The robbers have come!” would say, “Go! Stop! Turn back!” Thus he would be more frequently stopping than going ahead. Only with toil and trouble would he reach a safe place, or he might not even reach it.

In the same way, there would be the eight reasons<sup>52</sup> for doubt to arise in him, such as whether the Buddha is awakened or not. He is unable to accept such matters through faith. Being unable to do so, he does not attain to the paths and fruits.

Thus, like the traveller on a road through the wilderness who is uncertain whether there are robbers or not, there arises in him persistent doubt and distrust, wavering, mental agitation. Thus he creates an obstacle for himself from reaching the safe ground of the noble ones. In this way, doubt is like travelling on a road through the wilderness. (MA 2:319)



**Diagram 3.2.6**  
**The 5 mental hindrances**

**3.2.6 The hindrance diagram.** By way of a graphic summary, we can represent the 5 hindrances by way of emotional “directions.” *Kāma-c, chanda* (1), for example, as an appropriating tendency, has a pull-ing effect: we try to pull things we see as desirable *towards* ourselves. *Vyāpāda* (2) is a rejecting urge: we

<sup>51</sup> This simile, and the other four are found in (**Nīvaraṇā**) **Saṅgārava S** (S 46.55/5:121-126), SD 3.12. For comy on the similes of the 5 hindrances (MA 2:318-321), see SD 10.13 App.

<sup>52</sup> He has doubts regarding the Buddha, the Dharma, the Sangha, the 3 trainings (moral virtue, mental cultivation, wisdom), the past, the future, both past and future, and states arising through specific conditionality and dependent arising (Vbh 914/365).

tend to push away what we deem as undesirable. When *thīna, middha* (3) overwhelms us, we feel mentally lethargic and are bogged down with a heavy sinking feeling. *Uddhacca, kukkuccha* (4), on the other hand, uproots us, as it were, from our comfort zone, thrusting us *up* into the troubling heights of restlessness and worry. And *vicikicchā* (5) keeps us circling around an epicenter of self-doubt. These are the negative actions of the hindrances, which are here represented in Diagram 3.2.6.

**3.2.7 The arising of the hindrances.** Discourses such as **the (Āhāra) Kāya Sutta** (S 46.2) and **the Nīvaraṇa Pahāna Vagga** (A 1.2) of the Aṅguttara list the conditions for the arising of the hindrances, and to quote from the latter:

**1** <sup>53</sup>Bhikshus, no other single thing do I see, <sup>54</sup>on account of which unarisen **sense-desire**<sup>55</sup> arises, and arisen sense-desire comes to grow in abundance, as on account of this, bhikshus, namely, a beautiful sign.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>57</sup>Bhikshus, through unwise attention to a beautiful sign, unarisen sense-desire arises, and arisen sense-desire comes to grow in abundance.

**2** Bhikshus, no other single thing do I see, on account of which unarisen **ill will**<sup>58</sup> arises, and arisen ill will comes to grow in abundance, as on account of this, bhikshus, namely, a repulsive sign.<sup>59</sup>

Bhikshus, through unwise attention to a repulsive sign, unarisen ill will arises, and arisen ill will come to grow in abundance.

**3** Bhikshus, no other single thing do I see, on account of which unarisen **sloth-and-torpor**<sup>60</sup> arises, and arisen sloth-and-torpor comes to grow in abundance, as on account of this, bhikshus, namely, discontent, apathy, fidgeting, indolence, after-meal drowsiness, and mental sluggishness.<sup>61</sup>

Bhikshus, on account of mental sluggishness, unarisen sloth-and-torpor arise, and arisen sloth-and-torpor come to grow in abundance.

**4** Bhikshus, no other single thing do I see, on account of which unarisen **restlessness-and-worry**<sup>62</sup> arises, and arisen restlessness-and-worry comes to grow in abundance, as on account of this, bhikshus, namely, an unstill mind.<sup>63</sup>

Bhikshus, on account of an unstill mind,<sup>64</sup> unarisen restlessness-and-worry arises, and arisen restlessness-and-worry comes to grow in abundance. **[4]**

**5** Bhikshus, no other single thing do I see, on account of which unarisen **doubt**<sup>65</sup> arises, and arisen doubt comes to grow in abundance, as on account of this, bhikshus, namely, unwise attention.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>53</sup> *Nāhaṃ bhikkhave aññaṃ eka, dhammam pi samanupassāmi yena anuppanno vā kāma-c, chando uppajjati uppanno vā kāma-c, chando bhīyyo bhāvāya vepullāya saṃvattati yatha-yidaṃ bhikkhave subha, nimittāṃ.*

<sup>54</sup> “See,” *samanupassāmi* = *saṃ* + *anu* + *passati*, lit “to see (*passati*) following (*anu*) the object in a fixed (*saṃ*) manner”; alt tr: “regard.” See D 1:69, 73, 2:198; M 1:435 f, 2:205; *rūpaṃ attato samanupassati*, “he regards form as self” (S 3:42).

<sup>55</sup> *Kāma-c, chanda.*

<sup>56</sup> *Subha, nimitta*, alt tr “a sign of beauty,” ie a sensually enticing sense-object, esp one that arouses sexual desire. Such terms here do not refer so much to an object as to the way one sees it or how one reacts to it. See SD 16.3 (5).

<sup>57</sup> *Subha, nimittāṃ bhikkhave ayoniso manasikaroto anuppanno c’eva kāma-c, chando uppajjati uppanno ca kāma-c, chando bhīyyo bhāvāya vepullāya saṃvattatī ti.*

<sup>58</sup> *Vyāpāda.*

<sup>59</sup> *Paṭigha, nimitta.* See SD 16.3 (5).

<sup>60</sup> *Thīna, middha.*

<sup>61</sup> *Aratī, tandī, vijambhikā bhatta, sammado cetaso ca līna, cittāṃ.* AA 1:33,27 qu Vbh 352,3.

<sup>62</sup> *Uddhacca, kukkuccha.*

<sup>63</sup> *Cetaso avūpasamo.* Lit “an unstilling of the mind”; alt tr, “an unsettled mind.”

<sup>64</sup> *Avūpasanta, cittassa.*

<sup>65</sup> *Vicikicchā.*

<sup>66</sup> *Ayoniso manasikāro.* See 1.1 above & SD 16.3 (6).

Bhikshus, on account of unwise attention, unarisen doubt arises, and arisen doubt comes to grow in abundance. (A 1.2.1-5/1:3 f), SD 16.3; see also S 46.2/5:64 f, SD 62.9

**3.3 THE 5 DOMESTIC HINDRANCES.** The importance of overcoming the 5 hindrances in lay life is pointed out in **the Patta Kamma Sutta** (A 4.61). In this Sutta, the 5 domestic hindrances are listed as follows:

- |                            |                                   |                               |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| (1) rampant greed          | ( <i>visama,lobha</i> ),          |                               |
| (2) ill will               | ( <i>vyāpāda</i> ),               |                               |
| (3) sloth and torpor       | ( <i>thīna,middha</i> ),          |                               |
| (4) restlessness and worry | ( <i>uddhacca,kukkucca</i> ), and |                               |
| (5) doubt                  | ( <i>vicikicchā</i> ).            | (A 4.61,7-8/2:66 f), SD 37.12 |

It is noteworthy here that only the first factor is different: here, instead of the usual *kāma-c, chanda*, we have *visama,lobha* (rampant greed), an expression also found in **the Cakka,vatti Sīha,nāda Sutta** (D 26). Evidently, these 5 hindrances apply not so much to meditation as they do to the wholesome progress of lay-life as a whole.

The Dīgha Commentary defines *visama,lobha* as excessive greed (or neurotic desire) by way of consuming things (*paribhoga,yuttesu pi thānesu atibalava,lobho*); in short, excessive materialism and consumerism) (DA 3:853). This definition fits very well into the context of the Patta Kamma Sutta in regards to the lay person’s progress. For, it says that should a householder (or lay person) live under the power of these hindrances, he would do what should not be done and fail to do what should be done.<sup>67</sup> This is a description of moral and economic decline on an individual and domestic level. The Cakka,vatti Sīha,nāda Sutta, on the other hand, describes moral and economic decline on a broad *social level*.

The Patta Kamma Sutta, furthermore, defines the lay follower’s success here and hereafter as comprising the attainments of faith, of moral virtue, of generosity, and of wisdom. Here, the lay follower’s attainment of wisdom (*paññā sampadā*) is defined as the overcoming of these 5 “domestic hindrances.” Having overcome them, the lay person would be doing what should be done, and abstain from what should not be done.<sup>68</sup> As such, we might call the 5 hindrances mentioned in the Patta Kamma Sutta as the layman’s hindrances to wisdom.

**3.4 PAIRS OF HINDRANCES.** **The (Nīvaraṇa Bojjaṅga) Pariyāya Sutta** (S 46.52) contains an important teaching on the 5 hindrances. It treats each of the hindrances as a pair, summarized here based on its commentary, thus:

<b><u>Hindrance</u></b>	<b><u>Internal</u></b>	<b><u>External</u></b>
(1) sensual desire	desire for our own aggregates <sup>69</sup>	desire for the aggregates of others <sup>70</sup>
(2) ill will	self-hate and related emotions	dislike of others and external conditions
(3) sloth & torpor	lack of initiative, “sinking” mind	unwieldiness, physical lethargy <sup>71</sup>
(4) restlessness & worry	regret or guilt (esp of the past), <sup>72</sup>	agitation (esp of the future)
(5) doubt	the “great doubt” <sup>73</sup>	our own aggregates <sup>74</sup>
		(S 46.52,17/5:110), SD 62.6; SA 3:169

<sup>67</sup> A 4.61,7/2:67 (SD 37.12).

<sup>68</sup> A 4.61,8/2:67 (SD 37.12).

<sup>69</sup> **The 5 aggregates** (*pañca-k,khandha*): form, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness. See SD 17.

<sup>70</sup> Incl, of course, inanimate objects.

<sup>71</sup> On this pair, see Vism 14.167/469.

<sup>72</sup> The “past” is internal because we have already experienced it, which is a form of worry. The future has not happened, and we try to anticipate it, which brings on restlessness.

<sup>73</sup> Doubt about 8 things: the Buddha, the Dharma, the Sangha, and the training; the past, the present and the future; and dependent arising.

<sup>74</sup> Whether they are truly impermanent, etc.

**Sensual desire** is of two kinds: internal and external. Internal sensual desire is the attachment to our own mind-body existence, especially our physical being, ranging from self-respect to narcissism, while external sensual desire is covetousness for what we see desirable externally or in others. These twin sensual desires, occurring in the same person, whether male or female, are clearly illustrated in **the Saññoga Sutta** (A 7.48).<sup>75</sup>

**Ill will**, too, can be dual: towards ourselves and towards others. Ill will towards the self is self-hate, which, surprisingly, is more common than we think. External ill will is directed towards others and the things around us, such as an event, the environment and so on. This external ill will can manifest itself as non-cooperation, disapproving speech, or anger, or escalate into actual violence, even the destruction of what we dislike.<sup>76</sup>

**Sloth and torpor** are the result of the oppressing effects of the first two hindrances, sensual desire and its opposite, ill will. While sloth is a mental unreadiness or rigidity (*cittassa akalyatā*), torpor refers to its bodily counterpart (*kāyassa akalyatā*) (Vbh 254). More specifically, sloth arises from the effects of the first two hindrances. Torpor, as bodily lethargy or inactivity, often arises as a result of over-eating or laziness (sleeping or lying down too much).

**Restlessness** is mostly a mental unease which in due course can lead to bodily unease, such as fidgeting and discomfort. It often arises on account of our thinking about the future or planning what to do next, so that we reflexively want to spring into action. Worry often arises as a result of recalling some past misdeed or unhappiness, real or perceived, so that we are burdened with regret and guilt.

**Doubt** is of two general kinds: internal and external. Internal doubts are mostly *psychological* or *philosophical*, that is, those regarding our own being, especially doubting whether our body, feelings, perception, karmic formations or consciousness, are impermanent, suffering, or non-self. External doubts, on the other hand, are mostly *ethical* or *intellectual*, that is, doubt over the nature of the 3 jewels and spiritual training; speculating about the past, the present and the future; and uncertainty about dependent arising.

An important point to remember here is that these hindrances do not work alone. If you are assailed by one hindrance, you are open to being assailed by the others. As such, it is vital to at once detect a hindrance as soon as it arises, and overcome it. Nip it in the bud. In summary, it can be said that there is really only one mental hindrance, namely, sensual pleasure. It manifests itself in different forms, and is divided up into 5 hindrances, and further into pairs of hindrances, to help us notice its symptoms as soon as it arises. Our initial meditation strategy, as such, should be to work on mainly overcoming sensual desire.

**3.5 THE 6 HINDRANCES.** The Abhidhamma, in its efforts to compile a comprehensive systematization of everything “regarding the Dharma” (*abhi, dhamma*), gives us a list of *six* hindrances. The Dhamma, saṅgaṇī, for example, is useful in its examination of every state of consciousness (*citta*) and mental factor (*cetasika*) in a more exhaustive manner than in the Suttas. This Dhamma, saṅgaṇī excerpt is a description of the states of mind or its signs in the presence of the hindrances.

## SD 32.1(3.5)

## Nīvaraṇa Gocchaka

The Group of Mental Hindrances

PTS: Dhs 2.3.2.8 = Dhs 1252-1262/204 f

Dhammasaṅgāṇi 2, Niddesa 3, Nikkhepa Kaṇḍa 2, Duka Nikkhepa 8

**1152** What are the hindrances?

They are **the 6 hindrances**:

- |   |                                      |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| (1) the hindrance of sensual desire         | <i>kāma-c, chanda nīvaraṇa,</i>      |
| (2) the hindrance of ill will               | <i>vyāpāda nīvaraṇa,</i>             |
| (3) the hindrance of sloth and torpor       | <i>thina, middha nīvaraṇa,</i>       |
| (4) the hindrance of restlessness and worry | <i>uddhacca, kukkuccha nīvaraṇa,</i> |

<sup>75</sup> A 7.48/4:57-59 (SD 8.7). For details, see *Kāma-c, chanda*, SD 32.2.

<sup>76</sup> For details, see *Vyāpāda*, SD 32.5.

- (5) the hindrance of doubt *vicikicchā nīvaraṇa*,  
 (6) the hindrance of ignorance *avijjā nīvaraṇa*.

**1153** (1) Therein, what is **the hindrance of sensual desire** (*kāma-c, chanda nīvaraṇa*)?

The desire for sensual pleasures, the lust for sensual pleasures, the delight in sensual pleasures, the love for sensual pleasures, the fever for sensual pleasures, the infatuation with sensual pleasures, the grasping of sensual pleasures.

This is called the hindrance of sensual desire.

**1154** (2) Therein, what is **the hindrance of ill will** (*vyāpāda nīvaraṇa*)?

It is the vexation that arises at the thought, he has done me no good; he is doing me no good; he will do me no good.

It is the vexation that arises at the thought, he has done no good to someone dear and liked by me; he is doing no good to someone dear and liked by me; he will do no good to someone dear and liked by me.

It is the vexation that arises at the thought, he has done good to someone unloved and unliked by me; he is doing good to someone unloved and unliked by me; he will do good to someone unloved and unliked by me.

Or, even when a vexation arises without any ground, that is, by way of the mind's vexation, resentment, aversion, aggression, ire, wrath, fuming, hate, abhorrence, detesting, a malevolent heart, anger, rage, fury, malice, malevolence, malignity, temper, reactive temper, ferocity, impatience, a disapproving mind.<sup>77</sup>

This is called the hindrance of ill will.

**1155** (3) Therein, what is **the hindrance of sloth and torpor** (*thina, middha nīvaraṇa*)?

There is sloth and there is torpor.

**1156** Therein, what is sloth?

Mental unreadiness, unwieldiness, hesitance, sluggishness, being stuck, sticking, clinging, stiffness, being unmoving, indifference of the mind.<sup>78</sup>

This is called sloth.

**1157** Therein, what is torpor?<sup>79</sup>

Bodily unreadiness, unwieldiness, clouding, shrouding, blocking up [inner obstruction], a torpor of sleep, sleepy nodding, sleepiness, dreaming, dreaminess.

This is called torpor.

Thus this is called sloth, and this torpor. This is the hindrance of sloth and torpor.

**1158** (4) Therein, what is **the hindrance of restlessness and worry** (*uddhacca, kukkuccha nīvaraṇa*)?

There is restlessness and there is worry.

**1159** Therein, what is restlessness?<sup>80</sup>

Restlessness of the mind, lack of stillness, mental agitation, turmoil of the mind. This is called restlessness.<sup>81</sup>

**1160** Therein, what is worry?<sup>82</sup>

Perceiving the allowable to be unallowable; perceiving the unallowable to be allowable.<sup>83</sup> Perceiving a fault as not a fault; perceiving what is not a fault as a fault.<sup>84</sup>

<sup>77</sup> *Yo eva, rūpo cittaṣṣa āghāto paṭighāto paṭighaṃ paṭivirodho kopo pakopo sampakopo doso padoso sampadoso cittaṣṣa byāpatti manopadoso kodho kujjhanā kujjhitattam doso dussanā dussittam byāpatti byāpajanā byāpajjitattam virodho paṭivirodho caṇḍikkaṃ asuropanattamanatā cittaṣṣa.*

<sup>78</sup> *Yā cittaṣṣa akallatā [vī akalyatā] akammaññatā olīyanā sallīyanā līnam līyanā līyitattam thinam thīyanā thīyitattam cittaṣṣa.* As at Vbh §546/253.

<sup>79</sup> For a discussion, see Dhs:R 110 f n, 287 n3.

<sup>80</sup> *Yā cittaṣṣa akallatā [vī akalyatā] akammaññatā olīyanā sallīyanā līnam līyanā līyitattam thinam thīyanā thīyitattam cittaṣṣa.* As at Vbh §546/253 f. For a discussion, see Dhs:R 110 f n.

<sup>81</sup> *Yaṃ cittaṣṣa uddhaccaṃ avūpasamo cetaso vikkhepo bhantattam cittaṣṣa.*

<sup>82</sup> For a discussion, see Dhs:R 289 f n3.

<sup>83</sup> *Akappiye kappiya, saññitā, kappiye akappiya, saññitā.*

Such forms of worry are those of being guilt-ridden, worried, regretting in the heart, a perplexed mind.<sup>85</sup>

This is called worry.

Thus, this is called restlessness, and this worry. This is called the hindrance of restlessness and worry.

**1161** (5) Therein, what is **the hindrance of doubt** (*vicikicchā nīvaraṇa*)?<sup>86</sup>

He doubts, is uncertain, about the teacher. He doubts, is uncertain, about the Dharma. He doubts, is uncertain, about the Sangha. He doubts, is uncertain, about the training. He doubts, is uncertain, about the past. He doubts, is uncertain, about the future. He doubts, is uncertain, about the past and the future. He doubts, is uncertain, about the specific conditionality in the nature of the dependent arising.

Such forms of doubt are doubting, doubtfulness, uncertainty, perplexity, dubiety, being stuck at a crossroads, grasped by lack of single-mindedness, mistrust, fearfulness, lacking depth [having no penetrating knowledge], inflexibility of mind, a perplexed mind.<sup>87</sup>

This is called the hindrance of doubt.

**1162** (6) Therein, what is **the hindrance of ignorance** (*avijjā nīvaraṇa*)?

A lack of knowledge of suffering, a lack of knowledge of the arising of suffering, a lack of knowledge of the ending of suffering, a lack of knowledge of the path leading to the ending of suffering, a lack of knowledge of the past, a lack of knowledge of the future, a lack of the knowledge of the past and the future, a lack of knowledge of the specific conditionality in the nature of the dependent arising.

Such forms of lack of knowledge as not seeing, not attaining, not awakening to, not fully awakening to, not penetrating, not grasping, not plunging into, not comprehensively seeing, not reviewing [not reflecting], not realizing, foolishness, immaturity, lack of clear comprehension, delusion, deludedness, confusion, ignorance, the flood that is ignorance, the latent tendency that is ignorance, the transgression that is ignorance, the barrier that is ignorance, the unwholesome root that is ignorance.<sup>88</sup>

This is called the hindrance of ignorance.

— evaṃ —

The Dhamma,saṅgaṇī adds a sixth hindrance—that of **ignorance**—probably in an attempt to give a more comprehensive list. (No such list is found in the Canon itself.) If we take ignorance (*avijjā*) and craving (*taṇhā*) as the twin roots of suffering,<sup>89</sup> we can then say that ignorance underlies all the 5 mental hindrances. While in the Canon, ignorance is implicitly latent in all the hindrances, the Abhidhamma lists it separately for the sake of comprehensiveness.<sup>90</sup>

**3.6 THE 5 MENTAL SHACKLES. The Ceto,khila Sutta** (M 16) and **the Saṅgīti Sutta** (D 33) list the 5 mental shackles (*cetaso vinibandha*), an alternative set of 5 hindrances.

What, bhikshus, are the mental shackles that a monk has not broken?

<sup>84</sup> *Avajje vajja,saññitā, vajje avajja,saññitā.*

<sup>85</sup> *Yaṃ eva,rūpaṃ kukkucçaṃ kukkuccāyanā kukkuccāyitattaṃ cetaso vippaṭṭisāro mano,vilekko.*

<sup>86</sup> Cf Dhs 425/85 f. For a discussion, see Dhs:R 106 f n1.

<sup>87</sup> *Yā evarūpā kaṅkhā kaṅkhāyanā kaṅkhāyitattaṃ vimati vicikicchā dvelhakaṃ dvedhā,patho saṃsayo anekamaṃsa-g,gāho āsappanā parisappanā apariyogāhanā thambhitattaṃ cittassa mano,vilekko.*

<sup>88</sup> *Yaṃ eva,rūpaṃ aññānaṃ adassanaṃ anabhisamayo ananubodho asambodho appaṭivedho asaṅgāhanā apari-yogāhanā asamapekkhanā apaccavekkhanā apaccakkhakammaṃ dummejjhaṃ bālyam asampajaññaṃ moho pamoho sammoho avijjā avijj'ogho avijjā,yogo avijjā'nusayo avijjā,pariyuṭṭhānaṃ avijjā,laṅgī moho akusala,-mūlam.*

<sup>89</sup> Take eg the famous statement found in every sutta of **Anamatagga Saṃyutta** (S 15), “Bhikshus, this samsara [cyclic life and death] is without beginning nor ending. A beginning point of beings roaming and wandering on, fettered by ignorance, fettered by craving, cannot be discerned.” (S 15.1-20/2:178-193); see SD 56.2-7.

<sup>90</sup> For other lists of hindrances, see Ency Bsm 7:186.

- (1) Here, ... a monk is not free from the lust, the desire, the love, the thirst, the fever, the craving for sensual pleasures ... (*idha...bhikkhu kāme avīta,rāgo hoti avigata,chando avigata,pemo avigata,pipāso avigata,pariḷāho avigata,tanho ...* )
- (2) Again, ... a monk is not free from the lust, the desire, the love, the thirst, the fever, the craving for the body (that is, his own body)... (*puna ca param...bhikkhu kāye avītarāgo hoti avigata,chando avigata,pemo avigata,pipāso avigata,pariḷāho avigata,tanho ...*)
- (3) Again, ... a monk is not free from the lust, the desire, the love, the thirst, the fever, the craving for forms (that is, the bodies of others) ... (*puna ca param ... bhikkhu rūpe avīta,-rāgo hoti avigata,chando avigata,pemo avigata,pipāso avigata,pariḷāho avigata,tanho ...*)
- (4) Again, ... a monk eats as much as he likes so as to fill his belly full, and dwells devoted to the pleasures of the bed, of lying down, of sleeping<sup>91</sup> ... (*puna ca param ... bhikkhu yāvad-attham udarāvadehakam bhuñjitvā seyya,sukham passa,sukham middha,sukham anuyutto viharati...*)
- (5) Again, ... a monk lives the holy life aspiring to some host of devas, thus, “By this moral virtue or observance or asceticism or holy life, I shall become a deva or other<sup>92</sup>... (*puna ca param...bhikkhu aññataram deva,nikayam pañidhāya brahma,cariyam carati, imināham sīlena vā vatena vā tapena vā brahma,cariyena vā devo vā bhavissāmi dev'aññataro vā ti ...* )

(M 16,8-12/1:101 f @ SD 32.14; D 33,2.1(20)/3:238)

On account of each of these shackles, his mind does not incline to effort so that these mental shackles remains unbroken.

These 5 mental shackles are actually *external hindrances* to mental cultivation and spiritual growth. The first three shackles are ramifications of the first mental hindrance, *kāma-c,chanda*. The fourth shackle clearly alludes to the third hindrance, *middha*. The fifth shackle expresses the monk’s lack of faith in the teaching, and as such is an expression of the fifth hindrance, *vicikicchā*. Understandably, such a monk would not be meditating nor be able to do so, as his mind is shackled by such wrong views and conduct. It can be invariably said that one who regularly shows symptoms of the 5 mental hindrances would also be bound by the 5 mental shackles.<sup>93</sup>

	<i>Nīvaraṇa</i>	<i>Akusala,mūla</i>	<i>Anusaya</i>	<i>Saṃyojana</i>	<i>Kūlesa</i>
1	<i>abhijjhā kama-c,chanda kāma,rāga</i>	<i>lobha</i>	<i>kāma,rāga bhava,rāga</i>	<i>kāma,rāga rūpa,rāga arūpa,rāga</i>	<i>lobha</i>
2	<i>vyāpāda</i>	<i>dosa</i>	<i>patigha</i>	<i>vyāpāda</i>	<i>dosā</i>
3	<i>thīna middhā</i>	<i>lobha &amp; dosa</i>			<i>thīna</i>
4	<i>uddhacca kukkucca</i>			<i>uddhacca</i>	<i>uddhacca</i>
5	<i>vicikicchā</i>	<i>moha</i>	<i>vicikicchā</i>	<i>vicikicchā</i>	<i>vicikicchā</i>

**Table 3.7**

[Cf Ency Bsm 7:186]

<sup>91</sup> Comy glosses *middha* as *niddā* (sleep) (MA 2:69): see further *Thīna,middha*, SD 32.6 (2.2).

<sup>92</sup> Comy explains that *deva* means “a mighty deva” (*mahēsakkha,deva*) (including arch-devas, deva lords, and brahmas) and *dev'aññataro* as “a deva of lesser might” (*appēsakkha,deva*) (ie one of a heavenly host) (MA 2:69).

<sup>93</sup> For other lists of hindrances, see Ency Bsm 7:186.

[Glossary: *abhijjhā* = covetousness; *arūpa,rāga* = lust for formless existence; *bhāvamrāga* = lust for existence; *dosa* = hatred; *kāma,c,chanda* = sensual desire; *kāma,rāga* = sensual lust; *kukkucca* = worry; *lobha* = greed; *middha* = torpor; *moha* = delusion; *paṭigha* = aversion; *rūpa,rāga* = lust for form-existence; *thīna* = sloth; *uddhacca* = restlessness; *vyāpāda* = ill will.]

**3.7 THE HINDRANCES AS DEFILEMENTS.** The various doctrinal sets and models, especially those of the mental hindrances are closely related to one another. It is useful to bear this in mind so that we are able to see the Buddha’s teaching as a cohesive whole. Let us now compare **the different categories of defilements** related to the *nīvaraṇa*.

**The hindrances** (*nīvaraṇa*) are a teaching model for meditation. It is clear that the first two hindrances—*abhijjhā* and *vyāpāda*—are found in some form in all the categories of defilements. The last hindrance (*vicikicchā*), too, is found in all the categories listed.

The simplest category is that of the unwholesome roots (*akusala,mūla*), which is a model for explaining how unwholesome conduct occur through the 3 doors: body, speech and mind.<sup>94</sup> *Abhijjhā* and its various forms fall under *lobha*, while *vyāpāda* is clearly a form of *dosa*, and *vicikicchā* is rooted in *moha*. *Thīna,middha* and *uddhacca,kukkucca* may be rooted in *lobha* or *dosa*, or both. These two twin hindrances are listed under *akusala*, as they are unwholesome whether as a mental factor or bodily state.

**The latent tendencies** (*anusaya*) model deals with our unconscious habits that overwhelm us if we lack mindfulness and wisdom.<sup>95</sup> Understandably, neither is listed under *anusaya*, as the two are not latent tendencies, but their manifestations. The *anusaya* category also omits *uddhacca,kukkucca* for the same reason.

Only six of the 10 fetters (*saṃyojana*) overlap in some important way with the 5 hindrances. As the fetters are mental defilements (that bind us to the various planes of samsara), *kāma,c-chanda* is taken as *kāma,rāga* (which keeps us in the sense-world), *rūpa,rāga* (which keeps us to the form world), and *arūpa,rāga* (which keeps us to the formless world). The remaining factors are identical, except for the omission of the more physical of the hindrances (*middha* and *kukkucca*).

The defilements (*kilesa*) are mental imperfections in general. Of the twin hindrance, *thīna,middha*, only *thīna* is listed as a *kilesa* because it is a mental factor, whereas *middha* relates more to the body. *Uddhacca* appears alone under *saṃyojana* and *kilesa*, without *kukkucca*, because *uddhacca* has a broader sense which includes *kukkucca*, and is abandoned only by the arhat.<sup>96</sup>

### 3.8 THE UNCONSCIOUS AND THE PRECONSCIOUS

**3.8.1** For the sake of convenience and expedience, I have used English technical terminology where they are available and suitable, but it is important to stress that although their senses may overlap in some ways, they are not necessarily synonymous. It is easier to flow with Buddhist usages of such terms by first forgetting about their secular definitions (which are themselves re-definitions of older words, of turning them into technical terms), and secondly keeping in mind the Buddhist contexts where they are used. In almost every case, there is a Pali term or terms for these western technical ones that I have employed.<sup>97</sup>

We can, for example, use some contemporary terms to explain the psychology of mental hindrances. Their roots lie deep in **the unconscious**,<sup>98</sup> which comprises the 3 latent tendencies (*anusaya*)—that is, lust (*rāga*), aversion (*paṭigha*) and ignorance (*avijjā*).<sup>99</sup> They are so called because we are simply unaware of them, even when they are operating. Thankfully human conditioning (that is, psychological, or social, or

<sup>94</sup> See **The Three Roots Inc**, SD 31.12.

<sup>95</sup> On the latent tendencies, see **Anusaya**, SD 31.3.

<sup>96</sup> On *uddhacca*, see **Uddhacca,kukkucca**, SD 32.7 (2.1).

<sup>97</sup> Cf the Buddha’s remark in **Dīgha,nakha S** (M 71): “Aggi,vessana, a monk whose mind is freed thus, sides with no one and disputes with no one. He uses speech that is spoken and current in the world without being attached to it.” (M 71,13/1:500) + SD 16.1 (4), on the Buddha’s use of language.

<sup>98</sup> See **The unconscious**, SD 17.8b.

<sup>99</sup> On the latent tendencies, see **Anusaya**, SD 31.3.

religious) can keep these latent tendencies safely where they are—in the dark depths of our mind—so it seems.

However, the latent tendencies assume more recognizable forms, as greed (*lobha*, or what we desire), hate (*dosa*, or what we dislike) and delusion (*moha*, or what eludes us), on a **preconscious** level [3.8.2]. These are the 3 unwholesome roots (*akusala,mūla*).<sup>100</sup> We may not be always conscious of them, but with proper training, we can effectively curb them. But when we don't, then they work on our minds, preventing us from focusing. Then we call them “mental hindrances” (*nīvaraṇa*).

**3.8.2** The word “**preconscious**” is a psychoanalytic term referring to “knowledge, emotions, images, etc, that are not momentarily in consciousness but which are easily accessible.”<sup>101</sup> In the Buddhist context, “preconscious” refers to that level of private thinking, planning, reasoning and deliberating that is basically known only to ourselves, and often applied upon evaluating the circumstances we perceive.

This level of mental processes is represented by such terms as *vitakka* (from *vitakketi*, he thinks),<sup>102</sup> *mañña* (from *maññati*, he conceives), *vicāra* (from *vicāreti*, he reasons), and *mano,pavicāra* (mental investigation).<sup>103</sup> Mental conceiving (*mañña*),<sup>104</sup> closely related to “mental proliferation” (*papañca*),<sup>105</sup> refers to a proliferation of thoughts and ideas arising from the 3 roots of conceiving or mental proliferation: craving (*taṇhā*), view (*diṭṭhi*) and conceit (*māna*).<sup>106</sup>

These defilements reinforce our greed (*lobha*), hate (*dosa*)<sup>107</sup> and delusion (*moha*), so that each time we allow an unwholesome act to occur, it is likely to recur. Buddhist training recognizes how habit-forming such negative karma<sup>108</sup> can be, along with their painful results. As such, we are advised to train ourselves to at least prevent these 3 unwholesome roots (*akusala,mūla*)<sup>109</sup> from goading us into *destroying life, from taking the not-given, from ourselves sexually, from speaking falsehood and from clouding up our minds*.

In short, we are advised to refrain from breaking the 5 precepts.<sup>110</sup> This moral training (*sīla,sikkhā*), as it is called, disciplines our body and speech as a basis for our mental training (*samādhi,sikkha*), especially by way of meditation. With proper learning and training, we would be able to break the hindrances, even for short durations, so that we attain profound mental calm, and if we train ourselves further with wisdom training, we can even attain spiritual freedom.<sup>111</sup>

## 4 Overcoming the mental hindrances

### 4.1 THE HINDRANCES AND THEIR ANTIDOTES

**4.1.1 The (Nīvaraṇa) Upakkilesa Sutta** (A 5.23) compares the 5 hindrances to the 5 kinds of metals<sup>112</sup> that corrupt gold. Just as gold that is freed of such impurities can be made into all kinds of ornaments, even so the mind that is freed from the hindrances is able to attain dhyana, and all kinds of spiritual powers, even freedom itself.<sup>113</sup>

<sup>100</sup> On the 3 unwholesome roots, see **(Akusala,mūla) Añña,titthiyā S** (A 3.68/1:199-201), SD 16.4.

<sup>101</sup> A S Reber, *The Penguin Dictionary of Psychology*, 1985.

<sup>102</sup> On *vitakka*, see **Vitakka,vicāra**, SD 33.4. On the context of the arising of *vitakka*, see **Madhu,piṇḍika S** (M 18,16/1:112 f), SD 6.14. On how when thinking stops, desires do not arise, see **Sakka,pañha S** (D 21,2.2/2:277).

<sup>103</sup> On the 18 investigations, see **Dhātu Vibhaṅga S** (M 140,10/3:239), SD 4.17.

<sup>104</sup> For an interesting n on *mannati*, see M:ÑB 1162:n6.

<sup>105</sup> On *papañca*, see **Madhu,piṇḍika S** (M 18) & SD 6.14 (2).

<sup>106</sup> Nm 280; Vbh 393; Nett 37 f.

<sup>107</sup> It should be noted here that hate or *dosa* is synonymous with ill will or *vyāpāda* (a hindrance) (Dhs 1154/204; Vbh 542/252), and its opposite is lovingkindness (Pm 1:163).

<sup>108</sup> See **Karma**, SD 18.1.

<sup>109</sup> **Sevitabbāsevitabba S** (M 114,8/3:50), SD 39.8; **(Kusala Kamma,patha) Cunda S** (A 10.176,5/5:265), SD 59.10. See also **Self & Selves**, SD 26.9 (2.5.3).

<sup>110</sup> See **(Akusala,mūla) Añña,titthiyā S** (A 3.68/1:199-201), SD 16.4.

<sup>111</sup> On the 3 trainings, see **Sīla samādhi paññā**, SD 21.6.

<sup>112</sup> Iron, copper, tin, lead or silver (eg S 46.33 @ SD 74.6).

<sup>113</sup> A 5.23/3:16-19 (SD 74.3).

**4.1.2 The Āvaraṇa Sutta** (A 5.51) compares the hindrances to how five dams across a swift mountain stream would slow it down or even stop its flow. Similarly, the hindrances check mental development and weaken wisdom. But when the dams are broken, the waters flow swiftly and rush powerfully down into the ocean.<sup>114</sup>

**4.1.3 The Nīvaraṇa Pahāna Vagga** (A 1.2) of the Aṅguttara lists the conditions for the abandoning of the hindrances as follows:

(1) <sup>115</sup>Bhikshus, no other single thing do I see, on account of which unarisen **sense-desire** does *not* arise, and arisen sense-desire is abandoned, as on account of this, bhikshus, namely, a foul sign.<sup>116</sup>

Bhikshus, through wise attention to a foul sign, unarisen sense-desire does not arise, and arisen sense-desire is abandoned.<sup>117</sup>

(2) Bhikshus, no other single thing do I see, on account of which unarisen **ill will** does *not* arise, and arisen ill will is abandoned, as on account of this, bhikshus, namely, the freedom of mind through lovingkindness.<sup>118</sup>

Bhikshus, through the freedom of mind through lovingkindness, unarisen ill will does not arise, and arisen ill will is abandoned.

(3) Bhikshus, no other single thing do I see, on account of which unarisen **sloth-and-torpor** does *not* arise, and arisen sloth-and-torpor is abandoned, as on account of this, bhikshus, namely, the rousing element, the persistent element, the exertive element.<sup>119</sup>

Bhikshus, through the rousing of effort [initiative],<sup>120</sup> unarisen sloth-and-torpor does *not* arise, and arisen sloth-and-torpor is abandoned.

(4) Bhikshus, no other single thing do I see, on account of which unarisen **restlessness-and-worry** does *not* arise, and arisen restlessness-and-worry is abandoned, as on account of this, bhikshus, namely, the stilling of the mind.<sup>121</sup>

Bhikshus, on account of a still mind,<sup>122</sup> unarisen restlessness-and-worry does not arise, and arisen restlessness-and-worry is abandoned.

(5) Bhikshus, no other single thing do I see, on account of which unarisen **doubt** does *not* arise, and arisen doubt is abandoned, as on account of this, bhikshus, namely, wise attention.<sup>123</sup>

Bhikshus, through wise attention, unarisen doubt does not arise, and arisen doubt is abandoned. (A 1.2,6-10/1:4 f), SD 16.3<sup>124</sup>

**4.1.4** The Saṃyutta Commentary gives a similar list of 5 ways of overcoming of the hindrances, thus:

<sup>114</sup> A 5.51/3:63 f @ SD 32.3.

<sup>115</sup> *Nāhaṃ bhikkhave aññaṃ eka, dhammam pi samanupassāmi yena anuppanno vā kāma-c, chando n'uppajjati uppanno vā kāma-c, chando pahīyati yatha-y-idam bhikkhave asubha, nimittam.*

<sup>116</sup> *Asubha, nimitta*, lit “non-beauty sign.” See SD 16.3 (5).

<sup>117</sup> *Asubha, nimittam bhikkhave ayoniso manasikaroto anuppanno c'eva kāma-c, chando n'uppajjati uppanno ca kāma-c, chando pahīyatī ti.*

<sup>118</sup> *Mettā ceto, vimuttim.*

<sup>119</sup> *Ārambha, dhātu nikkama, dhātu parakkama, dhātu*. These 3 are the stages in the cultivation of effort. The initiative element (*ārambha, dhātu*) is the first rousing of energy; the persistent element or endeavour (*nikkama, dhātu*) is the intermediate, where the energy has overcome laziness; and the exertive element (*parakkama, dhātu*), the most advanced stage, where the energy is unbreakable. These 3 stages are mentioned in **Atta, kāri S** (A 1.2.8/3:4 @ SD 7.6) as the way of overcoming sloth-and-torpor (*thīna, middha*). See VbhA 272. See esp SD 7.6 (2.1).

<sup>120</sup> *Āraddha, viriyassa.*

<sup>121</sup> *Cetaso vūpasamo*. Alt tr: “a settling of the mind.”

<sup>122</sup> *Vūpasanta, cittassa.*

<sup>123</sup> *Yoniso manasikāro*. See SD 16.3 (6).

<sup>124</sup> See also **Paṭhama Samaya S** (A 6.27/3:317-319), SD 73.2.

- (1) **Sensual lust** is suppressed by the first dhyana based on foulness and cut off by the path of arhat-hood (*kāma-c, chanda* here includes desire for any object (including views), not only for sensual pleasures).
- (2) **Ill will** is suppressed by the first dhyana based on lovingkindness and cut off by the path of non-return.<sup>125</sup>
- (3) **Sloth and torpor** are suppressed by the perception of light and cut off by the path of arhat-hood;
- (4) **Restlessness and worry** are suppressed by meditative calm; worry is cut off by the path of non-return and restlessness by the path of arhat-hood.
- (5) **Doubt** is suppressed by the defining of physical and mental states<sup>126</sup> and cut off by the path of streamwinning. (SA 3:174)

**4.1.5** The Commentaries give these sets of strategies for the overcoming or preventing of the 5 mental hindrances:

	<b>Hindrances</b>	<b>Factors that overcome or prevent them</b>
1	<i>kāma-c, chanda</i> (overcome by the faculty of <u>wisdom</u> )	<i>mindfulness of the body's unattractive aspects</i> (Vism 6) <i>meditating on them</i> <i>sense-restraint</i> <i>moderation in food</i> <sup>127</sup> <i>spiritual friends &amp; conducive conversation</i>
2	<i>vyāpāda</i> (overcome by the faculty of <u>faith</u> )	<i>acquaintance with lovingkindness</i> <i>cultivating lovingkindness</i> <i>reflecting on karmic consequences of our deeds</i> <i>constant wise attention</i> <i>spiritual friends &amp; conducive conversation</i>
3	<i>thīna, middhā</i> (overcome by the faculty of <u>effort</u> )	<i>not over-eating (knowing when to stop eating)</i> <sup>128</sup> <i>changing meditation postures</i> <i>mental clarity &amp; perception of light</i> <i>staying outdoors</i> <i>spiritual friends &amp; conducive conversation</i>
4	<i>uddhacca, kukkucca</i> (overcome by the faculty of <u>concentration</u> )	<i>a good knowledge of the suttas</i> <i>clarification of the suttas through inquiry</i> <i>being well versed in the Vinaya</i> <i>approaching experienced elders</i> <i>spiritual friends &amp; conducive conversation</i>
5	<i>vicikicchā</i> (overcome by the faculty of <u>mindfulness</u> )	<i>a good knowledge of the suttas</i> <i>clarification of the discourses through inquiry</i> <i>being well versed in the Vinaya</i> <i>strong commitment (great resolution)</i> <i>spiritual friends &amp; conducive conversation</i>

**Table 4.** Commentarial list of factors for overcoming or preventing the hindrances.<sup>129</sup>

<sup>125</sup> Only sensual desires are overcome here, but not the subtler mental desires and views.

<sup>126</sup> *Dhamma, vavatthāna*, Vism 18.3-8/587-587.

<sup>127</sup> Def as stopping to eat while there is still room for 4-5 morsels and drinking water.

<sup>128</sup> See prec n.

<sup>129</sup> MA 1:281-286 = SA 3:165-167 = AA 1:44-51 = ItA 2:176-182; VbhA 270-274. Cf DA 3:777-782; DA 216.

**4.2 BALANCING THE PRACTICE.** For meditation to progress effectively, it must be balanced and harmonious. **The Iddhi, pāda Vibhaṅga Sutta** (S 51.20) describes how sloth and torpor prevent the effective working of the 4 bases of success (*iddhi, pāda*), that is, enthusiasm (*chanda*), energy (*virīya*), mind (*citta*) and investigation (*vīmaṃsā*), by narrowing them internally (*ajjhataṃ saṅkhittaṃ*).<sup>130</sup> The same Sutta also teaches us how to overcome such a narrowing of the mind. The general idea is to balance our meditation practice, making sure that each of the bases of success—*enthusiasm, energy, mind* and *investigation*—“will be neither too slack nor too tense, and it will neither be narrowed internally [due to sloth and torpor] nor be distracted externally [due to sensual desire].”<sup>131</sup>

Once we are able to cultivate the 4 bases of success, we may go on to work with **the 5 spiritual faculties** (*pañc’indriya*), that is, faith (*saddhā*), effort [energy] (*virīya*), mindfulness (*sati*), concentration (*samādhī*) and wisdom (*paññā*). A significant point regarding these faculties, not mentioned in the suttas but discussed in the Commentaries, concerns their mutual and complementary pairing for the sake of a balance of the faculties” (*indriya, samattā*).

Faith is paired with wisdom, balancing the emotional and the intellectual sides of the spiritual life.

Effort is paired with concentration, balancing the activating and the restraining aspects of mental cultivation.

Mindfulness sits in the middle, as it were, moderating between each end of the two pairs of faculties, holding them together in a harmonious interaction.<sup>132</sup>

When the faculties are well balanced, the mind becomes focused and the resultant mental harmony of calm and clarity dispels the hindrances.

The 4 bases of success and the 5 spiritual faculties are not stages in meditation but serve as sets of closely-related strategies for harmonizing and directing our meditation so that they overcome all the mental hindrances. When the hindrances are removed permanently, the spiritual faculties mature into the spiritual powers (*bala*), that is, our faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration and wisdom are stable and natural: we have become saints.<sup>133</sup>

**4.3 FREEING THE MIND.** The initial task of meditation, especially sitting meditation, is that of balancing the practice [4.2] to overcome the hindrances, so that *the mind is free of the body*. Freed of the hindrances, the mind can then fully focus on itself. Using a modern driving imagery, we might say that overcoming the 5 mental hindrances is like repairing a stalled car. Once the engine is good and running, and the four wheels are all in good order, we are ready to drive in our car.<sup>134</sup>

Meditation is like driving, but is very much safer. Like driving, we cannot really progress, much less master it by merely following a manual, even the best one. We need an experienced instructor, especially at the beginning. Yet, even with an instructor, we may at first *be trying too hard*, compulsively trying to get focus, or the meditation sign, or dhyana itself. This is the working of **sense-desire** (*kāma-c, chanda*)—the first mental hindrance—that draws our attention to the object of desire, and thus away from the breath.

Or, we could be finding various faults with our meditation or the experience of breathing, and the dissatisfaction pushes the attention away from the breath. This is the effect of **ill will** (*vyāpāda*), the second mental hindrance, which is the opposite of sense-desire. Contentment is the middle way between but above the two extremes of emotional reactivity. When we stay on this middle course with the breath, joy and happiness will arise in due course.

Then there is the matter of effort. At the level just before the beautiful breath<sup>135</sup> [4.4], our effort should be directed only as *knowing* the breath, and totally keeping away from the *doing* (mental chatter or

<sup>130</sup> Cf *Thīna, middha*, SD 32.6 (2.1).

<sup>131</sup> *Na ca atilīno bhavissati, na ca atipaggahīto bhavissati, na ca ajjhataṃ saṅkhitto bhavissati, na ca bahiddhā vikkhīto bhavissati* (S 51.20,3/5:277), SD 28.14.

<sup>132</sup> **Kīṭa, giri S** (M 70,13/1:477), SD 11.1; also **Āpaṇa S** (S 48.50/5:225 f) esp SD 10.4 (2), see Diag 2.1.

<sup>133</sup> See **Pañca Bala**, SD 10.5.

<sup>134</sup> Seeb Reflection, “Driving meditation,” SD R227, 2012.

<sup>135</sup> This is Brahmavamso’s term for a mental and joyful experience of the breath when *pīti* (zest) has arisen: see **Ānāpāna, sati S** (M 118,19/3:83), SD 7.13 nn.

thoughts of accomplishing or controlling this or that). When our effort is channeled in this way, trying to control everything, then we are worked up so that we experience **restlessness** (*uddhacca*).

Or, some past thought could arise as we approach inner stillness, and we feel **worry** (*kukkucca*) or guilt over things done or undone, and such discursive thoughts cloud up our minds so that we lose sight of the breath. Restlessness and worry together form the fourth mental hindrance to mental concentration. But when we remove the effort from the mental doing, restlessness and worry begin to disappear.

When the knowing lacks energy, **sloth and torpor** (*thīna, middha*), the fourth hindrance, arise. Sometimes, the “doer” function of the mind takes away all our mental energy, so that the passive function of the “knower”<sup>136</sup> (present-moment awareness) is totally weakened. But when we direct enough energy into the knowing, then sloth-and-torpor turns into bright and energized “knowing,” which in due course will lead to joy and happiness.

**4.4 STILLING THE MIND.** The purpose of joy and happiness is to *still the mind*. Stillness is the absence of movement. But what is it that causes the mind to move? It is the will, that is, the doer. When the wind is blowing around a tree, even if you hold a leaf tightly, it will still tremble. Only when the wind stops that the leaf will be still. In other words, *you cannot will the mind to be still*. Stillness arises through the joy and happiness arising from letting go.

Mental stillness enriches the joy and happiness (*pīti, sukha*) of meditation. The deepening of joy and happiness, in turn, allows less opportunity for effort to interfere, and so stillness grows stronger. When this process continues unbroken, it leads to dhyana, where the joy and happiness is profound.

A common problem faced by self-taught meditators is that they tend to panic when they begin to notice their breath “disappearing,” and they are not sure what to do next. This is the fifth mental hindrance, that of **doubt** (*vicikicchā*). Indeed, when the breath “disappears” before the arising of the beautiful breath, it is a case of sloth and torpor [6.1], or weak attention. We should take a step back, as it were, to strengthen the “silent present moment awareness” [4.2], so that we put more energy into the awareness.

When **the “beautiful breath”** [4.4] has arisen, it feels very blissful and effortless to be mindful of the breath for long durations. As the mind grows more still, the perception of the breath becomes more subtle. There comes a point where there is no more perception of the beginning, middle or end of the breath. It becomes a single experience of subtle breathing that remains unchanged, as it were, from moment to moment. What has happened is that we have transcended the external or physical features of the breath, and are seeing the heart of our breath.

As our mental stillness grows, meditative joy and happiness (*pīti, sukha*) too will intensify. When the bliss is strong enough, the breath truly disappears. This is the stage of the “beautiful breath,” when the breath disappears, leaving only its beauty, its peace and clarity. We are a step closer to dhyana.<sup>137</sup> This kind of freedom from the hindrances, however, is said to be temporary, lasting only as long as the meditative effects last. But this may be enough for us to attain total samadhi, even dhyana. Let us now further examine how dhyana arises.<sup>138</sup>

## 5 The hindrances and dhyana

**5.1 HINDRANCES TO MENTAL FOCUS.** The 5 hindrances are *our resident spin doctors*. They dangle the carrots of pleasures before us and blinker us from seeing the true nature of things. Not only do the hindrances sugar-coat our sense-experiences, but they also dominate our consciousness with what is socially acceptable, pleasing conduct but which is unthinking and unchallenging.

The hindrances work behind the scene, in our unconscious, so that we are generally unaware of their handiwork. This is **ignorance**. They make us experience what we perceive as pleasurable, so that we see

<sup>136</sup> While the “doer” may be said to be the effect of our past conditionings, the “knower” is our present-moment awareness. In terms of the 5 faculties (*pañc’indriya*), the “doer” is a term for predominance of faith or wisdom, while the “knower” is the predominance of effort or concentration. They need to be balanced by mindfulness. For details, see SD 10.4 (2.1.3).

<sup>137</sup> See also Brahmavamso 2003:27-29; 2006:20 f, 30-33; 62 f, 89 f, 110 f.

<sup>138</sup> See Brahmavamso 2006:47-51, 176-184.

what we want to see. This is **delusion**. As such, when the hindrances are operating, and they usually do, we can never be sure that what we see is what we get. The hindrances work to hype up our sense-experiences so that we are drawn and addicted to them, or at least to be misled by them.

Only when all the hindrances have been removed, and even then, for some effective duration, will we really see things as they really are. The most effective way to remove the hindrances is to *anchor* the mind to a suitable meditation object, such as the breath. When the breath is comfortably focused and completely stilled, the mind begins to be clear of the clouds of ignorance and delusion. It is then that we go on to taste the bliss of dhyana.<sup>139</sup>

**5.2 PREPARING FOR DHYANA.** In the early texts, we are often told that the Buddha, when he teaches, would first ensure that the mind of the listener or the audience is well prepared by the gradual teaching (*ānupubbī,kathā*). In other words, the Buddha prepares the listening mind of the disciple before going on to higher truths. The well known stock passage found in the early texts runs as follows:

Then the Blessed One gave him a **progressive talk**—that is to say, he spoke on giving, on moral virtue and on the heavens.

He explained the danger, the vanity and the disadvantages of sensual pleasures, and the advantages of renunciation.

When the Blessed One perceived that the listener’s mind was prepared, pliant, free from hindrances, elevated and lucid, then he explained to him the teaching peculiar to the Buddhas, that is to say: suffering, its arising, its ending, and the path.<sup>140</sup>

Only when the listener’s mind is “prepared, pliant, free from hindrances, elevated and lucid” (*kalla,-cittam mudu,cittam vinīvaraṇa,cittam udagga,cittam pasanna,cittam*), does the Buddha teach the four noble truths and deeper teachings. The Commentaries explain the key terms as follows:

- “prepared mind” (*kalla,cittam*) — “a healthy mind” (*aroga,cittam*) (DA 3:92);
- “pliant mind” (*mudu,cittam*) — “a mind free of stiffness, rid of ill will by way of lovingkindness” (*vyāpāda,vigamena mettā,vasena akathina,cittam*) (UA 283);
- “free from hindrances” (*vinīvaraṇa,cittam*) — “an unobstructed mind due to non-agitation by the ridding of restlessness and worry” (*udhacca,kukkucca,vigamena avikkhipanato na pihita,cittam*) (UA 283; PmA 1:232);
- “elevated mind” (*udagga,cittam*) — “not faint-hearted, supported by the ridding of sloth and torpor” (*thīna,middha,vigamena sampaggaha,vasena alīna,cittam*) (UA 283);
- “lucid mind” (*pasanna,cittam*) — “the mind that is focused on right practice by the ridding of doubt” (*vicikicchā,vigamena sammā,paṭipattiyā adhimutta,-cittam*) (UA 283); “a mind brightened by faith by way of karmic fruit, by way of faith in the 3 jewels” (*ratana-t,taya,saddhāya kamma,phala,saddhāya ca pasanna,mānasam*) (ItA 1:73).

<sup>139</sup> On mental hindrances and dhyana, see further *Bhāvanā*, SD 15.1 (8).

<sup>140</sup> *Atha kho bhagavā...ānupubbīkatham kathesi seyyathīdam. Dāna.katham sīla,katham sagga,katham kāmānam ādīnavam okāram saṅkilesam nekkhamme ca ānisaṃsam pakāsesi. Yadā bhagavā aññāsi...kalla,cittam mudu,cittam vinīvaraṇa,cittam udagga,cittam pasanna,cittam, atha yā buddhānam sāmukkaṃsika dhamma,desanā, tam pakāsesi: dukkham samudayam nirodham maggam.* (Be reads *ānupubbīkatham* as either *anupubbim katham* or as *ānupubbim katham*.) See **Vinaya** (V 1:15, 16, 18, 19, 20, 23, 37, 181, 225, 237, 242, 243, 248; 2:156, 181, 182 x2); **Ambaṭṭha S** (D 3,2.211:110), SD 21.3; **Kūṭa,danta S** (D 5,29/1:148), SD 22.8; **Mahāpadānā S** (D 14,3.11/2:41, 43, 44), SD 49.8; **Upāli (Gaha,pati) S** (M 56,18/1:379 f), SD 27.1; **Brahmāyu S** (M 91,36/2:145), SD 63.8; **(Dāna) Sīha S** (A 7.54/4:186), SD 22.6; **(Vesālika) Ugga S** (A 8.21/4:209); **(Hatthi,gāma) Ugga S 2** (A 8.22/4:213), SD 45.15; **(Suppabuddha) Kuṭṭhi S** (U 5.3/49), SD 70.4. See also **Udāyī S** (A 3:184).

Basically, we see here that the Buddha, first of all, clears away any immediate issues troubling the listener, so that his mind is healthy (*aroga*), and other negative states, including the temporary suppression of unwholesome sense-desires (*kāma-c, chanda*) that is the basis for ill will (*vyāpāda*) and the other three mental hindrances (sloth and torpor, restlessness and worry, and doubt). Such a clear and light mind is, in fact, ready for dhyanic meditation, too.

For those who are unable to attain dhyana, a very effective way of abandoning the hindrances is by *the contemplation of impermanence*. When properly done, it leads on to the fading away of lust, the cessation of suffering, and the letting go of defilements, and we are truly able to look on at sense-objects with true equanimity.

**5.3 DHYANA.** The Commentaries take the overcoming of the 5 hindrances as being the first stage of concentration (*samādhi*), which it calls “access concentration” (*upacāra samādhi*). Although the term “dhyana” (*jhāna*) is sometimes used here, it is usually reserved for “full concentration” (*appanā samādhi*).<sup>141</sup> The concept of *upacāra samādhi* is unknown in the Pali Canon, although it seems to be implied in **the Kathāvatthu** (the latest of the canonical Abhidhamma works), which affirms that there is a break in between the progress from one dhyana to the next (Kvu 18.7/569-572). The earliest occurrence of the term *upacāra* in this sense seems to be in Upatissa’s **Vimutti, magga**.<sup>142</sup>

The Pali noun *jhāna* (Skt *dhyāna*) and its verb, *jhāyati*, are derived from the roots that mean: (1) to think, meditate; (2) to search; (3) to burn.<sup>143</sup> Thus the dhyanas are so called because they closely attend to the mental object, and because they burn up those states not conducive to mental concentration.<sup>144</sup> These adverse states are the 5 hindrances. In the Commentaries and later works, each of the 5 dhyana factors are presented as *suppressing a specific hindrance*, as represented in this table:

Dhyana-factor ( <i>jhān’anga</i> )		Mental hindrance ( <i>nīvaraṇa</i> )
(1) Initial application	suppresses	(1) Sloth and torpor
(2) Sustained application		(2) Doubt
(3) Zest		(3) Ill will
(4) Happiness		(4) Restlessness and worry
(5) One-pointedness of mind		(5) Sensual desire

**Table 6 Dhyana-factors and mental hindrances**<sup>145</sup>

It should be remembered, however, that the dhyana-factors do not function singly, but in tandem with one another. As such, they do not actually eliminate specific mental hindrances, but even at the first

<sup>141</sup> See *Bhāvanā*, SD 15.1 (9), on “the signs and the stages of zest.”

<sup>142</sup> Vimmi:ESK 1961:79 f. The term *appanā* however appears at Peṭk 168,5. See Cousins 1973: 118.

<sup>143</sup> The Skt cognate of *jhāna* is *dhyāna*, of which there are 3 roots:

√*dhī*, to think → Skt *dhyāyati*, P *jhāyati* (1a), to meditate, contemplate, think upon, brood over (with acc) (D 2:237; S 1:25, 57; A 5:323 f (+ *pa~*, *ni~*, *ava~*); Sn 165, 221, 425, 709, 818 (= Nm 149 *pa~*, *ni~*, *ava~*); Dh 27, 371, 395; J 1:67, 410; Vv 50.12; Pv 4.16.6.

√*dhyā*, to think → Skt *dhyāyati*, P *jhāyati* (1b), to search for, hunt after.

√*kṣa(y)* & √*kṣī*, to burn → Skt *kṣāyati*; P *jhāyati* (2), to burn, to be on fire; fig to be consumed, to waste away, to dry up (D 1:50 (= *jāleti* DA 1:151)); caus *jhāpeti* (VvA 38 = *jhāyati* 1a: to destroy by means of *jhāna*).

See Whitney’s *Roots*: <http://www.language.brown.edu/Sanskrit/whitney/>; Silananda, *Pali Roots in the Saddaniti*, 2001; Gunaratana 1985:7 f & also **Dhyana**, SD 8.4(3).

<sup>144</sup> See DhsA 410; DhsA:PR 519.

<sup>145</sup> On the dhyana-factors (*jhān’anga*), see SD 8.4 (6).

dhyana, all the hindrances are at least temporarily suppressed. One may be distracted by one particular hindrance, but once the first dhyana is attained, it is overcome. This correlation is an excellent academic exercise, and a useful model for a theoretical discussion of the hindrances and meditation. Then there is a need to rise above academic models and babble for a direct experience of inner clarity and stillness.

**5.4 OVERCOMING THE HINDRANCES PERMANENTLY.** The mental hindrances can only be properly observed *after* we have abandoned them. Mindfulness (*sati*) includes memory, and can take as its object an experience that has already passed. Mindfulness, as such, can take up a previous example of sensual desire and watch it long enough to penetrate into its true nature. What our mindfulness will notice is that each of these 5 hindrances are *only momentary events*, mere instances of still images that appear to move on a screen so that they are not “mine” nor have anything to do with “me.”<sup>146</sup>

An important discourse, called **the Kaṅkheyya Sutta** (S 54.12), says that only the learners (*sekha*), that is, the saints of the path (short of arhats), have really overcome the mental hindrances in some significant way: this is called “the learner’s abode” (*sekha vihāra*), that is, the saint’s life-style. Even then, only the arhats have fully “abandoned them, cut them off at the root, made them like a palm-tree stump, done away with them so that they are not subject to further growth”: this is called “the Tathagata’s abode” (*tathāgata vihāra*), that is, the Buddha’s life-style.<sup>147</sup> In other words, the learners (streamwinner, once-returned, non-returned, and arhat-to-be) have no problem being mindful, or understanding the nature of impermanence, but they still have to abandon various lesser defilements that prevent their full awakening.<sup>148</sup>

The Commentaries generally take the learner’s abandoning of the hindrances as the “abandoning by suppression” (*vikkhambhana pahāna*). The arhat’s uprooting of the hindrances for good is known as “abandoning by eradication” (*samuccheda pahāna*) (ThaA 1:14 f).<sup>149</sup>

**5.5 THE FREED MIND.** The overcoming of the hindrances is explained with similes in well known discourses such as **the Sāmañña,phala Sutta** (D 2) and **the Mahā Assa,para Sutta** (M 39).<sup>150</sup> The Sāmañña,phala Sutta, for example, says:

**68** OVERCOMING THE HINDRANCES. (1) Abandoning **covetousness**<sup>151</sup> with regard to the world, he dwells with a mind devoid of covetousness. He cleanses his mind of covetousness.

(2) Abandoning **ill will and anger**, he dwells with a mind devoid of ill will and anger, compassionate in the welfare of all living beings. He cleanses his mind of ill will and anger.

(3) Abandoning **sloth and torpor**, he dwells with a mind devoid of sloth and torpor, mindful, alert, perceiving light. He cleanses his mind of sloth and torpor.

(4) Abandoning **restlessness and worry**, he dwells undisturbed, his mind inwardly stilled. He cleanses his mind of restlessness and worry.

(5) Abandoning **doubt**, he dwells having crossed over doubt, with no perplexity with regard to wholesome mental states. He cleanses his mind of doubt.

**69** SIMILES FOR THE HINDRANCES.<sup>152</sup> (1) Suppose, maharajah, that a man, taking a loan, invests it in his businesses. His businesses succeed. He repays his old debts and there is a surplus for maintaining his wife. The thought would occur to him,

<sup>146</sup> Brahmavamsa 2002:35-38. See Gethin 2001:36-44.

<sup>147</sup> S 54.12/5:327 f @ SD 74.5.

<sup>148</sup> On the different types of saints, see **Kiṭṭagiri S** (M 70), SD 11.1 (5).

<sup>149</sup> See further **Sīla samādhi paññā**, SD 21.6 (5).

<sup>150</sup> See M 39.12-13/1:274 f @ SD 10.13 & App for comy explanation of the similes of the 5 hindrances (MA 2:318-321).

<sup>151</sup> *Abhijjhā*, here is synonymous with “sense-desire” (*kāma-c, chanda*), which is the usual term in the set of 5 mental hindrances. *Kāma-c, chanda* is almost identical with “a lustful mind” (*sa, rāgaṃ cittaṃ*) (M 10,12 (1a), SD 13.3). Both refer to sensual desire in general, and arise from wrong reflection on a sensually attractive sense-object. The exercise in §12 is simply that of noting the presence of such a state of mind. Here, one goes on to investigate how it arises, how it can be removed, etc (through right effort). See eg **Satipaṭṭhāna S** (M 10.36(1)/1:60), SD 13.3 (5D.2).

‘Before, taking a loan, I invested it in my businesses. Now my businesses have succeeded. I have repaid my old debts and there is a surplus for supporting my wife.’ Because of that he would experience joy and happiness.

**70** (2) Suppose, maharajah, that a man falls sick, in pain and seriously ill. He does not enjoy his meals, and there is no strength in his body. As time passes, he recovers from that sickness. He enjoys his meals and there is strength in his body. The thought would occur to him,

‘Before, I was sick. Now, I have recovered from that sickness. I enjoy my meals and there is strength in my body.’ Because of that he would experience joy and happiness.

**71** (3) Suppose, maharajah, that a man is bound in prison. As time passes, he eventually is released from that bondage, safe and sound, with no loss of property. The thought would occur to him,

‘Before, I was bound in prison. Now, I am released from that bondage, safe and sound, with no loss of my property.’ Because of that he would experience joy and happiness.

**72** (4) Suppose, maharajah, that a man is a slave, subject to others, not subject to himself, unable to go where he likes. As time passes, he eventually is released from that slavery, subject to himself, not subject to others, free, able to go where he likes. The thought would occur to him,

‘Before, I was a slave... Now I am released from that slavery, subject to myself, not subject to others, freed, able to go where I like.’ **[73]** Because of that he would experience joy and happiness.

**73** (5) Suppose, maharajah, that a man, carrying money and goods, is journeying on a road through the wilderness. As time passes, he eventually emerges from the wilderness, safe and sound, with no loss of property. The thought would occur to him,

‘Before, carrying money and goods, I was journeying on a road through the wilderness. Now I have emerged from the wilderness, safe and sound, with no loss of my property.’ Because of that he would experience joy and happiness.

**74** In the same way, maharajah, when these 5 hindrances are not abandoned in himself, the monk regards it as a debt, a sickness, a prison, slavery, a journey on a road through the wilderness.<sup>153</sup>

**75** When he is aware that these 5 hindrances are abandoned in him, he regards it as solvency, good health, release from prison, emancipation, a place of security.<sup>154</sup> (D 13,69-74), SD 8.10

Let us recap the 5 hindrances. *Sensual desire* makes us see only what we want to see, it bends the truth to fit our preferences. *Ill will* blinds us to whatever is disturbing or disconcerting to our views and it distorts the truth with denial. *Spiritual doubt* stubbornly refuses to accept universal truths, such as karma and rebirth, that are plainly valid but which fall outside of our existential comfort zone.

We have clear and direct experience when our measuring instruments, our senses, are steady, clear and bright. This happens when the hindrances of *sloth-and-torpor* and *restlessness-and-worry* are all overcome. Objective experience is that which is free from all biases. The three types of biases are desire, ill will and doubt.

**5.6 TREAT THE HINDRANCES WITH LOVINGKINDNESS.** Our mental hindrances are our *past* trying to shape what we are *now*, and so preventing us from becoming what we *can* become, that is, to realize our spiritual potential. Whenever we are faced with a mental hindrance, we should regard it with great loving-kindness. The enemies *within* are now *seen*, and by *befriending* them, we release them, freeing ourselves of them.

<sup>152</sup> This well known set of positive similes—embedded in the *peyyāla*—for one who has overcome the mental hindrances is also found in **Sāmañña,phala S** (D 2,69-73/171-73), (**Ānanda**) **Subha S** (D 10,2.6/1:207), SD 40a.13, **Mahā Assa,pura S** (M 39,14/1:275 f), and **Kandaraka S** (M 51,19/1:346 f). MA 2:318-321 gives a detailed account of each of the 5 similes. See Nyanaponika, *The Five Mental Hindrances*, BPS Wheel 26, 1961:27-34.

<sup>153</sup> MA 2:318-321 explains this section in some detail: see App to **Mahā Assa,pura S** (M 39), SD 10.13.

<sup>154</sup> *Ānaṇyaṃ yathā ārogyaṃ yathā bandhanā mokkhaṃ yathā bhujissam yathā khem’anta,bhūmiri.*

The point is that the mental hindrances can only be dealt with *when they have arisen*. As **Sumedho** notes, “It is only in the moment when a hindrance actually arises that we can really penetrate it and have insight” (1992:57). Hence, the practical value of meditation, the most spiritually nurturing way of self-training.

Our 6 senses, where the hindrances lurk, are like six wild animals, as detailed in **the Cha Pāṇā Sutta** (S 35.247). We need to hold on tightly to the leashes that hold these ferocious beasts. Their ferocity is only the manifestation of our own ignorance of them. As we begin to know them with the leash of mindfulness, they become tamed, so that in due course they lie peacefully near the solid sunken post of *sama-dhi*.<sup>155</sup>

Only after we have truly known the hindrances do we effectively overcome them. And having overcome them, only then can we really trust the data arriving at our senses so that we directly see things as they really are, arising and passing away. And in due course, we will be imbued with the bliss of dhyana.

**5.7 VIJITA,SENA THERA,GĀTHĀ.** Let us close this study of the mental hindrances with some inspiration from **the arhat Vijita,sena**, who came from a family of elephant trainers and mahouts:

355	<i>Olaggessāmi te citta āṇidvāre ’va hatthinam na tam pāpe niyojessam kāma,jāla sarīraja.</i>	I shall tie you, O mind, like an elephant to a small gate. I shall not prod you on to bad, you net of sense-desires born of the body.
356	<i>Tvam olaggo na gacchasi dvāra,vivaram gajo ’va alabhanto na ca citta,kali punappunam pasaham<sup>156</sup> pāparato carissasi.</i>	When tied down, you will not go, like an elephant not finding an open gate. Faulty mind, you will not wander over and again, with force, delighting in bad.
357	<i>Yathā kuñjaram adantam Nava-g,gaham aṅkusa-g,gaho bala ’vā āvatteti akāmam evam āvattayissam tam.</i>	Just as an untamed elephant, newly captured by a mahout [elephant-driver], strong, is made to turn against its will, so shall I make you turn around.

(Tha 355-359; ThaA 2:149)

070723 100105 100506 101201 111022 121009 130802 140322r 150922 161022 170210

<sup>155</sup> S 35.247/4:198-201 (SD 19.15).

<sup>156</sup> So Ee Ce Se; Be WT *pasakka*.