

The Five Hindrances: The Weakeners of Wisdom (*Nivarana*)

1. Sensual desire (*kamacchanda*),
2. Ill-will (*byapada*),
3. Sloth and torpor (*thina-middha*),
4. Restlessness and worry (*uddhacca-kukkucca*),
5. Skeptical doubt (*vicikiccha*).

The River Analogy

Sensual desire is a hindrance & obstruction that overcomes awareness & weakens discernment. Ill will... Sloth & drowsiness... Restlessness & anxiety... Uncertainty is a hindrance & obstruction that overcomes awareness & weakens discernment.

Suppose there were a river, flowing down from the mountains, going far, its current swift, carrying everything with it: If a person were to open watercourses leading off from both sides, the current in the middle of the river would be interrupted, diverted, & dispersed. The river would not go far, its current would not be swift, and it would not carry everything with it. In the same way, **if practitioners have not rid themselves of these five hindrances... there is no possibility that they can know what is for their own benefit, or the benefit of others, or both, or that he should come to realize a superior human attainment, a truly noble knowledge & vision...**

But suppose there were a river, flowing down from the mountains, going far, its current swift, carrying everything with it: If a person were to close off the watercourses leading off from both sides, the current in the middle of the river would not be interrupted, diverted, or dispersed. The river would go far, its current swift, carrying everything with it. In the same way, **if practitioners have rid themselves of these five hindrances... there is the possibility that they can know what is for their own benefit, or the benefit of others, or both, and that he should come to realize a superior human attainment, a truly noble knowledge & vision.**

Anguttara Nikaya 5.51

The Gold Analogy

When gold is corrupted by these five impurities, it is not pliant, malleable, or luminous. It is brittle or ready to be worked. Which five? Iron, copper, tin, lead, & silver. But when gold is not corrupted by these impurities, it is pliant, malleable, & luminous. Not brittle, it is ready to be worked. Then whatever sort of ornament one has in mind — whether a belt, an earring, a necklace, or a gold chain — it would serve one's purpose.

In the same way, when the mind is corrupted by these five impurities, it is not pliant, malleable, or luminous. It is brittle and not rightly concentrated for the ending of attachments. Which five? Sensual desire, ill will, sloth & drowsiness, restlessness & anxiety, and uncertainty. But when the mind is not corrupted by these five impurities, it is pliant, malleable, & luminous. It is not brittle and is rightly concentrated for the ending of attachments.

Anguttara Nikaya 5.23

The Water Analogy

Imagine a bowl of water mixed with red, yellow, indigo, or orange coloring, such that a person with good eyesight would not be able to see his or her face reflected accurately in the water. In the same way, when one's awareness is possessed by *sensual desire*, overcome with sensual passion, and neither knows nor sees the escape, as it has come to be, from sensual passion once it has arisen, *then one neither knows nor sees what is for one's own benefit, or for the benefit of others, or for the benefit of both...*

Now imagine a bowl of water heated on a fire, boiling & bubbling over, such that a person with good eyesight would not be able to see his or her face reflected accurately in the water. In the same way, when one's awareness is possessed by *ill will*, overcome with ill will, and neither knows nor sees the escape, as it has come to be, from ill will once it has arisen, *then one neither knows nor sees what is for one's own benefit, or for the benefit of others, or for the benefit of both...*

Now imagine a bowl of water covered with algae & slime, such that a person with good eyesight would not be able to see his or her face reflected accurately in the water. In the same way, when one remains with awareness possessed by sloth & drowsiness, overcome with sloth & drowsiness, and neither knows nor sees the escape, as it has come to be, from sloth & drowsiness once it has arisen, *then one neither knows nor sees what is for one's own benefit, or for the benefit of others, or for the benefit of both...*

Now imagine a bowl of water ruffled by the wind, disturbed, & covered with waves, such that a person with good eyesight would not be able to see his or her face reflected accurately in the water. In the same way, when one remains with awareness possessed by *restlessness & anxiety*, overcome with restlessness & anxiety, and neither knows nor sees the escape, as it has come to be, from restlessness & anxiety once it has arisen, *then one neither knows nor sees what is for one's own benefit, or for the benefit of others, or for the benefit of both...*

Now imagine a bowl of water stirred up, turbid, muddied, & left in the dark, such that a man with good eyesight would not be able to see his or her face reflected accurately in the water. In the same way, when one remains with awareness possessed by *uncertainty*, overcome with uncertainty, and neither knows nor sees the escape, as it has come to be, from uncertainty once it has arisen, *then one neither knows nor sees what is for one's own benefit, or for the benefit of others, or for the benefit of both...*

Samyuta Nikaya 46.55

The Analogy of Debt, Sickness, Prison, Slavery and Wilderness

Just as when a person taking a loan, engages in a trade, and succeeds, in the trade, he or she now not only disposes of old **debts** but also, beyond that, has a surplus for maintaining a family. And at that he or she rejoices, is glad at heart...

Just as when a person is **sick** and in pain, suffering from a grave disease, with no strength left in his body. But some time later the person recovers from that sickness and regains strength. And at that he or she rejoices, is glad at heart...

Just as when a person has been thrown into **prison**, but some time later, being released from prison, is safe, without fears. And at that he or she rejoices, is glad at heart...

Just as when a person is a **slave**, not independent, but dependent on others, unable to go where he or she likes, but then is set free from slavery, becomes independent, no longer dependent on others. And at that he or she rejoices, is glad at heart...

Just as when a person, rich and prosperous, travels through a **wilderness** where there is no food and much danger, but then has managed to cross the desert and gradually reached safely the vicinity of a village, a place of safety, free from danger. And at that he or she rejoices, is glad at heart.:

Similarly, so long as these five hindrances are not abandoned, a person is indebted, ailing, imprisoned, enslaved, traveling in a wilderness.

But when these five hindrances are abandoned, one is free from debt, rid of illness, emancipated from the prison's bondage, as a free person, and as one arrived at a place of safety.

And when one sees oneself free of these five hindrances, joy arises; in one who is joyful, rapture arises; in one whose mind is enraptured, the body is stilled; the body being stilled, one feels happiness; and a happy mind finds concentration.

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