

The Five Hindrances

Practices for the Second Month

Practicing with the hindrances is an important way to develop one's mindfulness practice. Having understanding and freedom from the hindrances is an aspect of maturity along the Buddhist path. The following exercises are offered to help give some direction to your exploration of the hindrance of desire. These practices can be done both in meditation and in daily life.

November 8 – 14: Relaxing through the Senses

Relaxation promotes health and healing. It is also important for developing mindfulness practice. Enjoying sense experience can be one way to relax. As you go about your days, please look for simple sense experiences that you can enjoy more than you usually allow yourself. It can be the sensuality of the water as you wash dishes or take a shower, or the smells of your food or drinks, or the color of someone's clothes. Explore how you can enjoy a sunset, a garden, natural beauty, music, food, etc, so that it is relaxing. How is it beneficial for you to relax with the pleasures of the senses? Are there healthy forms of sense pleasure it would be useful for you to cultivate? What is it like to experience the more refined sources of sense pleasure, e.g., refined music or art?

November 15 – 21: Mindfulness at the Sense Doors

For mindfulness practice, anything can be the focus of mindful attention. During this week, spend some time meditating on sense pleasures you can experience. It might be interesting to spend one day on each of the five physical senses. For example, spend 15 minutes focusing mindfulness on pleasant sounds. On a different other day spend time focused on something that is visually pleasant. As you stay mindful of sense pleasures stay with the physical experience, whenever your mind wanders in thought, bring it back to the pleasure. Try to experience the sense pleasure with your whole body. If possible, let the pleasure help focus and relax you.

November 22 – 28 Mindful Eating

While eating is a daily sense experience, it is common for people to be unaware of what motivates their eating. During this week, eat at least one meal a day more mindfully than usual. In particular, pause before you pick up each new bite of food. In that pause study the nature of your desire for the food. Is it a desire to alleviate physical hunger or are there other desires operating, e.g., the desire for pleasure, for comfort, for distraction. How strong is the desire for food? What do you notice if you pause to experience the desire instead of acting on it? How much of your usual eating could be called mindless or compulsive? What does it take for you to avoid succumbing to compulsion and temptation around food? What might you learn about the hindrance of sensual desire by studying your desire for food?

November 29 – December 5: Finding the Roots of Desire

Often, the desire for sensual pleasure is a surface manifestation of desiring something else. So, for example, we might want food, but the real desire is the idea that the food will make us feel better when we are depressed. On the surface, we might want alcohol, while deeper within we may want the lack of inhibition alcohol provides. Sexual desire is notorious for sometimes being the flaming tip of an iceberg of other desires. It is sometimes claimed that the root of all desires is addiction to the mind and thoughts. Many times it is not the object of desire we want, it is the ideas we have about the desired objects. The desire for beautiful and pleasing clothes may actually represent a deeper attachment to a self-image we think the clothes may provide. During this week do whatever you can to discover the root desires that may be the cause and fuel for your sense desires.

December 6 – 12: Watching Desire within a Sky-like Mind

When desires arise in meditation, try to open your awareness up so that the desire is held in a spacious, sky-like, awareness. Let the desire be like a cloud within the clear blue sky. Neither let go of the desire nor get involved in it. Rather, allow it to be within a watching awareness. This can be a challenging exercise in finding a relaxed, non-reactive observation that doesn't "do" anything with the desire. Don't investigate or give any special attention to the desire beyond watching it in a spacious manner. Notice what happens to the desire as you do this. Also, notice how you feel those times that desire floats free of your involvement with it. [If this practice doesn't make sense to you, try instead to sit as still as possible in the presence of desire. Don't act on it in any way except get as still as you can in the midst of the desire.]

December 13 – 19: Letting Go of Sense Desire

Look for opportunities to let go of sense desires. As if letting go is a muscle, spend the week strengthening that muscle. Notice what makes letting go difficult. Do you have beliefs that make you resistant to letting go? Physically, emotionally and mentally how do you feel after you have let go. If you don't somehow feel good after letting go, perhaps you have not let go thoroughly enough. Explore more deeply to find the roots of the sense desire. Try letting go of these root desires.