

## 16 BREAKING THE BARRIER

The Five Hindrances

15<sup>th</sup> of August 2001

The Buddha talked about the triple practice, of *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā*, virtue, concentration, and wisdom. In this monastery, especially at this time of the year, the community is keeping a very sufficient practise of *sīla*. Your restraint and the keeping of the precepts are admirable. One usually doesn't need to talk too much about that.

Solitude is one of the best ways of encouraging the maintenance of the precepts. The more often people meet, talk, and associate together, the more opportunity there is for breaking the precepts. Meeting other people allows the defilements of the mind to arise, and that is the cause of precepts being broken. In solitude the precepts are less likely to be broken. The stimulation of living amongst other people, of being in their company, is reduced. Therefore you are less likely to err.

So this is a time of solitude. It is a time for monks to be alone and not engage in conversations. It is a time for not doing so much. It is a time of great purity for your precepts. During the first half of the retreat I have focused on using whatever tools, skilful means, and tricks I have learnt in my lifetime as a meditator, to instruct, encourage, and inspire you on the path to the development of deeper and deeper *samādhi*. The purpose of *samādhi* is to overcome the five hindrances and provide the data for 'insight' to work with. That data, and that insight, will come later on in this retreat.

### **Liberating the Mind**

People often rush ahead of themselves. They start thinking and forming views about reality before they have any experience of such things as the *jhānas*, the deep meditation states of 'letting go'. Such speculation is merely *papañca*, the proliferation of the mind, its ideas, fantasies, and dreams. I usually like to leave that subject until much later in the retreat.

Having the deliberate idea of overcoming these five hindrances is very important. It

is the barrier of the five hindrances that blocks the door to both the *jhānas* and wisdom. It is the five hindrances that fuel *avijjā*, ignorance. The Buddha said that they are the nutriments, the food, of delusion. If the five hindrances are present in the mind, we cannot trust our ideas or views.

Everybody thinks they are right; that's a self-evident truth. There is not one person in this room who would say they have wrong view. We almost always think we are right. However, if we think we are wrong, then in that sense we are right. This is because we have finally seen that we were wrong.

It is fascinating to contemplate that. In the early years of my monastic life I wondered, 'why is it that good monks argue, and that people in this world have differences of opinion?' If we investigate we can see the reason why. It is because of the work of the five hindrances: they bend perception, bend reality, bend thought, and bend views to suit their purposes. Psychology calls that 'denial'. We see what we want to see. We perceive what we think is there. That's why there are so many people in this world who are so committed, absolutely sure, absolutely certain, that they are on the right path. Some people, who are committed absolutely, even believe that they are Stream-winners, Non-Returners, or *Arahants*. They can't see the truth because of the power of the hindrances.

So it is important to know and overcome these hindrances. There is an acid test to know whether or not those hindrances are overcome. That test is the ability to enter into *jhānas*. The hindrances are the very things that block *jhānas*. Using the metaphor of entering a building or a house, if the door is wide open, there is nothing stopping or barring a person from entering. If the hindrances are absent, really absent, there is nothing to stop a person from entering into the states of absorption. The reason these things are called hindrances is because they stop one from entering the *jhānas*. They fuel *avijjā* or delusion. The hindrances hinder not only wisdom; they also block the passage into *jhānas*.

Using these criteria tells us whether we are ready to develop the enlightening wisdom yet, whether we are ready to actually look into the nature of things, like the mind, the

body, and the other *khandhas*. This shows us not only whether we are ready to do these things, but also what these hindrances really are and how subtle they can be.

People sometimes think that they have overcome the hindrances. But they have not, because they are still too far away from being able to enter into a *jhāna*. Entering the *jhānas* is the acid test. That is why I can't see any reason for a person to stop at the entrance into a *jhāna* and say, "This is good enough! Now I can contemplate. Now I will be able to find out". The usual practice, the common practice, is to suppress the hindrances and then having as it were, the door of *jhāna* wide open to us. The *jhāna* just happens: the *jhāna* sucks us in or I should say sucks the mind in, sucks awareness in. It shows us states where the hindrances are overcome. It's a moot point whether we could stop at the gate into *jhānas* anyway.

I've mentioned on many occasions that there comes a time in the practise of *samādhi* when a snowball effect happens. We can neither stop the process, nor can we accelerate it. We become just an observer. With this wonderful focussing of the mind and abandoning of the world, that effect gets stronger. It gets stronger in the same way as a snowball that is rolling down a hill gets larger and larger. We might be able to stop the snowball somewhere near the top of the hill. But when the snowball gets right down to the valley, it's so big and it's so fast that I can't see how it can be stopped. We call that state *upacāra samādhi* (neighbourhood *samādhi*). It is the outside edges of the *jhānas* where there are no hindrances. I cannot see how the mind can stop and linger with *upacāra samādhi*. The process will pull the mind through into the *jhāna*. The *jhāna* is a state without hindrances, which can be clearly seen when one emerges from the *jhāna*. Those hindrances stay knocked out for a long time. If a *jhāna* has not been achieved, the five hindrances, together with discontent and weariness, of the body and mind invade the mind and remain.

When a *jhāna* has been achieved these things can't invade the mind. They can't remain, and there is freedom from the hindrances. This has classically been seen as the precursor to the arising of deep insight. Insight gives rise to the powers and the fruits of the practice. It happens because the five hindrances are overcome, and the mind can look back over those experiences, the *jhānas*. Standing on those

experiences, resting on them, based on them you have the data to actually see into the nature of the mind and the body – the nature of the five *khandhas*, and the nature of the sense bases. Without that data it's very hard to imagine how anyone would be able to see the truth.

So overcome those five hindrances and use that state of the *jhānas* as the place where one focuses one's investigation in order to discover why, where and how those states came about and what they mean. Suppressing the five hindrances is the key to this whole practice that we call the liberation of the mind. You've heard about these five hindrances often before, but they can always be restated and explained at deeper and deeper levels. Remember, these five hindrances are not just ordinary sensory desire, ill-will, restlessness and remorse, sloth and torpor, and doubt.

Sometimes we look at our minds and think: 'I've got no sensory desire. I don't really want anything. I've got no lust or greed. I'm not looking for a cup of tea or food, for women, or whatever. I've got no ill-will towards anybody, towards myself, or to anything. I haven't got any real restlessness or sloth and torpor. I've got no real doubts. I know I'm alright'. That happens very often, but it's not sufficient. We can't get into *jhānas* from that state. That's why I tell people that when we're meditating, if there is a blockage, if we can't get further, it must be because of one of the hindrances, one of the *nīvaraṇas*.

Be methodical in the meditation practise, don't waste so much time. Discover which hindrance is blocking progress, identify the problem, and actually find a solution. I've got tremendous faith in the Buddha's teaching. If there were six hindrances or seven hindrances or eight hindrances the Buddha would have said so. The usual list, the five hindrances, is sufficient to describe all the obstacles between the meditator and *jhāna*. So we should look at those and investigate them.

### **Sensual Desire**

*Kāmacchanda*, the most important hindrance, comes first. *Kāmacchanda* is not just sensory desire. There are times when the English translation of these terms leaves so much to be desired. People who just follow those English translations miss so much.

I learned a lot of Pāli from the Vinaya, the disciplinary and procedural rules for monks, because there these terms are given a very practical meaning. In Pāli, *chanda* is what we have to do if we cannot attend a meeting of the community of monks and we want to give approval and agreement to what's happening there. We give our 'chanda' to go ahead in our absence. *Chanda* is agreement, approval, consent, and it's much more subtle than mere desire. It means that we are really buying into this, giving in to this, wanting it, approving it. We are allowing it to happen. In the same way that we have *chanda* in the Vinaya, we have *kāmacchanda* in the five hindrances. We give our approval for the sensory world to be in our minds, in our consciousness. We accept it. We approve of it and we play with it. That's all *chanda*. We're letting sensual desire completely occupy the mind. That's much more subtle than just mere desire. The *kāma* part means all that is contained in *kāmaloka*, the world of the five senses. The *kāmaloka* realms include the hell realm, the animal realm, the ghost realm, the human realm, and the *deva* realms. *Kāmacchanda* is the acceptance, agreement, and consent for that world to occupy us.

The hindrance of *kāmacchanda* can be anything from the extremes of lust to just being concerned with how the body is doing. The thinking about the letter that we have to write, or the rain pattering on the roof, thinking about our huts or what needs to be built next or where we are going to go next, That is all in the *kāmaloka* world, is all sensual desire. *Kāmacchanda* also includes *kāma vitakka*, or sensuous thoughts about those things. It can be thoughts about family or health, about coming here or going there. Even thoughts about words are included because words are sounds; they're part of the sound base. All these things are part of *kāmaloka*, part of the five-sense world. Approving of those things is what keeps them interfering with your meditation. When we are trying to watch the breath and feelings come up in the body, it's because we're approving of the mind going out to the body. We're consenting to it. We're allowing it to happen.

One of the great antidotes to desire is *nibbidā* or turning away, repulsion or revulsion to that world. The Buddha gave some very meaningful similes for *kāmaloka*, the world of sensory desire. One of my favourite similes is the one about a bone smeared with blood and tossed to a hungry dog. That's so apt for the sensory world. If we pay

attention to the sensory world, we get a taste of comfort just for a moment. We scratch the itch and it feels good for a moment but it doesn't solve the underlying problem. In the same way, when the dog gets a bone smeared with blood, it licks it and it tastes as if it's a full meal, as if it's real meat. Of course, it only gets the taste and then there is no real sustenance. There is no body to it, nothing that gives the fulfilment of its promises.

It is the same with sensory desire. In its grossest form in the world – whether it's sexuality, food, or whatever else you desire – it never gives you satisfaction. Don't be a person who roams the world looking for the next bone smeared with blood. We go here or there and we get a bone smeared with blood, 'Oh that's not the right one'. We go to another monastery and taste that. That's not the right one either. We are always running around looking for the real meat, but we can't find that real meat in the sensory world. The *suttas* say we only reap weariness and disappointment. So all the weariness and disappointment that comes up in our life is because we are trying to go for a blood-smeared bone, not the real, full four-course meal which we get when we give up those things.

Another fascinating simile is the simile of a man climbing a tree to get some fruit. While he is up in the tree getting the fruit another man comes along also wanting fruit and chops the tree down. So even if it is unintentional, when you go for the sensory world, just by its very nature it is going to hurt and bring you pain.

Last night I gave a talk about conflict in the world. Basically there is no end to conflict in the world. That's what the world is about. Trying to resolve conflict in the world is impossible. To limit conflict is possible, but to stop it completely is not. As the saying goes in English, 'you can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear'. *Saṃsāra* is like that, and that's why the Buddha taught the Four Noble Truths. The first Noble Truth is suffering or unsatisfactoriness; the idea is to get out of *saṃsāra*, get out of conflict by not getting re-born again. Once we're born we have conflict: we have arguments with people, we have conflict with the weather, we have conflict with the food, or the food has conflict with our stomach. There are all sorts of conflicts going on in the world. I had a stomach ache today, so I know about conflict with food –

that's par for the course.

Understand that the sensory realm is dangerous. Even if people have no intention to hurt, harm, cause you problems, or irritate you, it's just the nature of the sensory world. If we climb up into that tree, sooner or later, someone with no bad intentions towards us is going to cut us down and almost kill us. We sometimes get angry with others or have ill-will towards others because we think that people are doing this on purpose. They don't do these things on purpose. It's just a result of being in the world. There are no bad intentions, it just happens. This is the nature of the sensory world: it's dangerous!

If we play around in the world we are going to get into trouble. Understanding that gives us aversion, *nibbidā*. It gives us aversion and disgust towards that world and for 'gnawing at the bones' which promise you so much but give so little. Aversion to the sensory world is not just towards the physical body. To turn away from the body, to get *nibbidā* towards it, we practise *asubha*. But there's also the aversion towards sound and all the things you hear from other people, the praise and blame – we have *nibbidā* towards both. We have *nibbidā* towards sights, smells, and tastes, towards all this food that we have. It's such a problem!

I remember years ago, a friend of mine said, "Wouldn't it be great if we could get some 'astronaut food'". He had heard that 'astronaut food' was just a few pills. You took one for protein, one for vitamins, and one for carbohydrates. We would just need to take the pills rather than having all these different types of food, which needs to be cooked, prepared, set out and then eaten. It would be great, wouldn't it, if we could just take pills once a day? It would be great! Monks taking bowls to the people who are on retreat wouldn't have so much to carry, just a little medicine bottle, "here's your *dāna* for today". It would be wonderful because it takes away all the problems that go with tastes. That would turn us away from the world of food. We would not be concerned about it. We would just put food in our bowl and eat it. We see things and we leave them alone. We turn away from all of that.

*Nibbidā*, which is revulsion to that world, is the way of turning off those five senses.

Instead of having *kāmacchanda* we have *kāmanibbidā*. *Kāmanibbidā* turns us away from that world. How long have we lived in that world? What has it ever given us? What we've got from that world are just problems. It gives us all sorts of problems: old age, suffering, and death, again and again and again.

If I've ever given you a problem, don't blame me; its *kāma*, the sensory world, that's given you the problem. If it's our body that is giving problems, it's not sickness, its *kāma*, the sensory world. *Having nibbidā to the sensory world is the antidote to the hindrances*. Not only will it stop us indulging in thoughts about things of the past and in the experience of the senses now, but it will also stop us making plans about them. Why do we actually do any planning? Because we think that we can control that world and gain happiness. That is a hopeless task. The whole thing stinks. Just throw it all away. We needn't worry about of the future, because we know it's going to be bad. The future is not going to give us much happiness. It's just going to be more trouble, with more problems.

Being an abbot I don't control anything. To try just gives me more trouble, more problems. Being the second monk, the third monk, or a junior monk is just more trouble, more problems in the sensory realm. So don't ever plan or think about the future when you're meditating. Have *Nibbidā* towards all of that. We should also develop *Nibbidā* towards food. We only eat because it sustains the body, because it's our duty to keep the body reasonably healthy. Follow the middle way – the Buddha's way!

When we have *Nibbidā* towards the five senses, they are very easy to turn off. This means that when you are meditating, feelings in the body don't come up so easily. We're fed up trying to get this body into a nice position. This insight came to me early on in my monastic life. I didn't know anything about it when I was a lay meditator. As a monk meditator, I was sitting down and my legs went to sleep. I had pins and needles. Every time that happened I would move and destroy my meditation. Finally one day I decided I'd had enough of this. I had *Nibbidā* towards always having to change position because of my legs going to sleep. I decided it doesn't matter if gangrene sets in or whatever. I'll just sit still. To my amazement I had



called the body's bluff, and the blood started flowing again. The pins and needles disappeared by themselves.

At other times, people, have called the bluff of the body. Sitting there with aches and pains, they just forget about it and then get into deep meditation. Afterwards the aches and pains aren't there any more. These aches and pains in the body, are they really aches and pains or are they a product of the mind? When we are in *samādhi* we can sit meditation for hours and there are no aches and pains at all. If we sit there for an hour or an hour and a half without *samādhi*, the body aches and is stiff. What's going on? After a while we lose confidence that the body always tells the truth. We lose confidence that the eyes tell the truth, that the ears tell the truth. We lose confidence that the nose or the tongue tells the truth. We have *Nibbidā* towards all of that. That means that these things no longer interfere with us. A sound comes up and we are not concerned. We turn away from those things. The same thing happens with ill-will, the second hindrance, when it comes up.

### **Ill-Will and Anger**

Ill-will is such a foolish hindrance; it's a crazy hindrance. I don't know why people actually get bothered with ill-will. What does it ever do for you? If someone upsets you, says something you don't like, or does something that you don't approve of, why allow them to give you a bad day? We don't have to allow them to spoil our happiness. Even if we have ill-will towards someone else, what does that actually achieve? It's just looking for revenge: 'They hurt me and therefore I'm going to hurt them'. So we go around planning, making waves, trying to upset them, or put them down. So much of speech, especially in confrontations, is just trying to give another person a bad day. Ill-will doesn't really help anybody. If someone else has done something wrong, if they really have broken their precepts or done something inappropriate, it's their problem, their *kamma's* problem. We don't have to have ill-will towards them. *Kamma will sort everything out!*

When we see ill-will, we see that it's wasting so much time in our life. We haven't much time to practise this path, but right now on a meditation retreat, we've got the best time of all. There are not many distractions for us. So why waste time with the

distraction of ill-will? Outside, when we are not on retreat, we are always *doing things* and there is even less time to meditate. So why waste even a second with ill-will? It's craziness. I think the Buddha described it as a sickness. With that sickness, there is no way you can get any wisdom. There's no way that you can get happiness or any concentration in meditation. So put ill-will aside. Use your insight and your intelligence to see that ill-will gets you nowhere. Just put it aside. Have revulsion towards ill-will. Reflect on just how much time it's wasted for you, how it's tortured you, how it's made you sick and weak, and then allow it to disappear.

Of course, ill-will goes very deep. It's ill-will that stops us having happiness. It doesn't allow us happiness. Ill-will can be very aggressive. There's a story about the anger-eating demon. I'm not going into the details here because you have probably all heard it so many times before. If we give the demon anger or aggression, it gets stronger. To clear some of the defilements we 'slap them around a bit', but if we try that with ill-will it gets even worse. Ill-will comes from a sense of self. So it's ill-will towards ill-will. That's not the way to deal with it. The Buddha said *mettā* or loving-kindness is the way to overcome ill-will. The monks on the River Vaggumuda doing *asubha* meditations got into so much ill-will towards themselves that they committed suicide. The Buddha had to say, "Monks, that's the wrong way. Balance your practise". *Asubha* meditation is great for reducing and suppressing sensory desire, *but ill-will needs loving-kindness*. Ill-will needs the softness of the mind and that has to be looked at in one's meditation.

Often people can't get into deep meditation not because of ill-will towards others but because of ill-will towards themselves or ill-will towards the meditation object. What that means is that when we are meditating, for instance when we are watching the breath, we have ill-will towards the breath. In other words, we're going to 'conquer' the breath. We are going to use our 'macho' power; we think, 'I'm stronger than you'. So we grab hold of the breath, like a bouncer at a night club. We're going to capture the breath and we're going to keep hold of it. That aggression is ill-will. We may be able to hold the breath for a short time, but because of *anicca* (impermanence), as soon as we loosen our grip the breath is going to 'run away'. It will run fast and not come back. The stress of that practice will never allow the mind to settle down.

That's why in meditation it is good from time to time to practise some loving-kindness. I don't mean by doing the 'may all beings be happy' as a verbal exercise, but by remembering what loving-kindness means. Bringing loving kindness up into the mind softens the mind. By directing that mood of loving-kindness onto the breath, we are meditating on the breath with *mettā*. *Mettā* and *ānāpānasati* just come together as one. We are watching the breath so softly, and we find that the breath will just stay there. We are not trying to grab hold of it; we are not holding it down with force. We're not fighting the breath like a soldier; we are being compassionate like a Buddha. With that compassion, that kindness, that softness, we find it's much easier to hold the breath and much easier to develop deep meditation.

One time, at the start of a weekend meditation retreat, I was very tired from all of the work I had done during the week, and from all the effort of getting to the retreat, and from giving the introductory talk. After the talk I thought, 'okay, now is the time that I can do some meditation'. It was marvellous to put *mettā* onto the breath and I had a wonderful deep meditation. I even dreamt of that deep meditation during the night. I got up in the morning and the *nimmitta* was right there as soon as I woke up. It's a marvellous experience to put loving-kindness together with the breath. It was obvious that evening, maybe because of my tiredness, that my hindrance was ill-will. But I spotted it and gave it the antidote of *mettā* with amazing results.

When we can see these hindrances and actually apply the right antidote it's amazing what happens. The only real way we can know if it is ill-will is to try using *mettā*. If it works we know, 'yes, that was ill-will'. After that we know how very subtle the hindrance of ill-will can be. We only know through the practice of *mettā*. I couldn't really see the ill-will I had that evening. I couldn't recognize it as ill-will. I just had the intuition to do loving-kindness meditation and it worked. Sometimes ill-will manifests and you just can't notice it. It's almost invisible. If the meditation immediately goes deeper by the use of loving-kindness, then you know, 'yes, that was ill-will'. Some of these hindrances are so subtle they are like an invisible man or a ghost that blocks the way. They are so refined and so subtle we can't really see them blocking the way. The remedies that the Buddha gave are the ones that work.

## **Sloth and Torpor**

Sloth and torpor are negativity, trying to escape through sleep. I used to visit the prisons. Prisons are very unpleasant places for people to stay in. One of the common phrases one heard was, “an hour of sleep is an hour off your sentence”. Here an hour of extra sleep is an hour of wasted opportunity. Sloth and torpor shows us that we are really not enjoying what we are doing. There is no happiness in our practice. *Asubha* practice, the aversion to things, can quite easily lead to sloth and torpor, unless you develop *asubha* meditation to the point where it arouses *pīṭisukha*. But be careful with that. If it arouses negativity, the mind will be inclined to go into sloth and torpor.

If you enjoy meditating, after a while, energy arises in the mind. Don't always look at the clock. Look at the present moment instead. Clocks can create sloth and torpor. “It's ten o'clock, it's eleven o'clock, it's my bedtime now”, and we start to yawn. If we don't look at the clock, who knows what time it is? Once, when I was a lay person, I went to the far north of Norway in the Arctic circle. It was light nearly all day and night. In twenty-four hours it never changed much and that really confused me. I didn't know the right time to sleep. It would be marvellous to have all the monks go up there for the Rains Retreat. We would find we would have extra energy. Why sleep when it's light? We would only sleep when the body told us it's really tired, not just because it's dark or because it's our bedtime.

One reason why, in this monastery, we don't have morning and evening meetings, is because I don't want you to be the prisoners of clocks. I want you to be free of that. So when the meditation is going well, just go for it! And then when it's time to rest, just rest. Remember though that sometimes if we push ourselves too much, we just get into sloth and torpor. It's much better if a person has clarity of mind and not so much meditation, than to have hardly any sleep and have a dull mind all day. Be careful with that. I've been through that myself. If we try to cut down on sleep to the point that, when we get up in the morning we just nod off or we fall asleep sitting up, then we're not getting enough sleep. Also, be careful not to have too much sleep, because here again, that leads to sloth and torpor. Get the right amount of sleep, the right amount of food, the right amount of exercise, and the right amount of happiness in your life. Then you won't have too much sloth and torpor. Negative people often

have sloth and torpor while those with a positive attitude have energy.

If you have sloth and torpor, bring up happiness. *Happiness is energy.* Bring up a happy or joyful object into the mind. If you enjoy chanting, chant. If you enjoy walking, walk. If you enjoy sitting, sit. If you enjoy reading, read. I'm not talking about sensory enjoyment, so don't go thinking about women. I won't tell you who it was, but one of the monks in a monastery in Thailand did that and he said he had no sloth and torpor, no restlessness at all. But that's not the way to overcome those hindrances. One hindrance is just being substituted by another one. Bring up a wholesome object that brings happiness and joy.

One of my favourite reflections is on *all the sacrifices, and all the goodness that I have done.* One monk reminded me today of all the wonderful people who came for my birthday. He said that they came because I'd done something for them. I had given them something. That was why they came. It was my *cāga*, my generosity, my giving that caused that. So we can reflect upon that instead of on being negative. Last year I thought, 'why is my birthday during the rains retreat? It's really unfair. Why can't it be some other time when we're busy anyway?' I should have had a more positive attitude and that would have given me energy, but I forgot to do that. So I was negative to my birthday. Next time, I'll reflect, 'isn't it wonderful that so many people come. They give so many wonderful birthday cakes'. That positive energy brings up happiness and joy to overcome sloth and torpor. Anything that gives joy energises the mind.

### **Restlessness and Remorse**

When we get to *uddhaccakukkucca*, the restlessness of the mind, we are all familiar with this one. We are meditating and the mind goes backwards and forwards. We try to make the mind stop thinking and going here and there, but it just won't settle down. Restlessness is very close to ill-will. But if we really look deeper we'll find that the mind has got into fault-finding and lack of contentment. That word 'contentment' is so powerful. If loving-kindness doesn't work then just try developing contentment. They are very close to each other. Contentment says to the anger-eating demon, 'Demon, you can be here as long as you like'. If the mind is running backwards and forwards, allow it to run backwards and forwards. Tell the mind, 'you can run

wherever you want mind, I'm completely content'. That takes away the force that keeps the mind moving. What is that force? It's always discontent: wanting something else, wanting to be somewhere else, and never really wanting what's happening here and now. We have judged what we are doing to be wrong. The mind is wandering all over the place and we think that is not good enough. But by developing contentment, we see that's okay. So just leave it. What arises passes away. The mind will slow down by itself eventually.

Contentment is undermining the 'doer' and that's very difficult to see. When we apply contentment more and more, when we apply it deeper and deeper, we find that it is an incredibly powerful tool for getting into deep *samādhī*. So, when we're watching the breath, we're just content to be with this rough old breath, which we're on now. We're absolutely content. We don't want anything else in the whole world, ever. All we want is just to be here now with this rotten old breath. Try that. *It is called 'letting go'*. Full contentment is like climbing onto the bus and letting everything just happen. The 'doer', the thing creating the problem, has been seen. 'Māra, I know you. You're just discontent and fault finding. I'm not going to follow you. I'm not going to buy into you whatever you want to do. Be off with you.' That tells Māra he's been seen, and he slinks away with shoulders hunched saying, "the monk knows me". That metaphor means that the disturbance 'slinks' away with 'shoulders hunched', and the mind settles because of contentment. There is no reason to make the mind move.

It's like Ajahn Chah's simile of the leaf fluttering in the tree – we've removed the wind. *Contentment has removed the wind of discontent, of doing*. When that wind has been removed, little by little the leaf flutters less and less. The mind settles down and so does the breath and before we know it we're just watching the 'beautiful breath'. We're so content to be with the 'beautiful breath', and that contentment becomes the inclination of the mind. It becomes established in the mind. We are so content that the 'beautiful breath' turns into a *nimmitta*, but we don't care. We're content if the *nimmitta* comes or if the *nimmitta* goes. However long it wants to stay, it can stay. We're so content we're not forcing the issue. We've let go and we're not driving the meditation. Because of that contentment, the *nimmitta* doesn't move.

Because it doesn't move it builds up more and more energy and we get into the first *jhāna*. Contentment still keeps on working to overcome *vitakka vicāra* and then one has the full contentment of the second *jhāna*. That's how far contentment can take you. It's a powerful antidote to restlessness, to that which moves the mind, and that which makes it wobble in the first *jhāna*.

So the antidote to restlessness is just knowing that we are finding-fault and being critical. Monks who are always critical – always finding fault with the monastery, with other people, with this or with that – should know that they will never find contentment in the world. They'll go to another monastery, but they'll take the fault-finding mind with them, and they won't be content there either. Even if they could find the Jeta Grove and the Buddha was sitting there, they would say, "Oh, he's just an Indian!" It's that fault-finding mind, which is the opposite of contentment.

Real contentment has a feel to it. When we practise contentment often in the meditation, it becomes not just a word, it becomes a whole territory in the mind. It's a territory, a place, a path, that leads to deep meditations. It's a very, very beautiful word. The more we reflect upon it, the more we allow it to lead us, the more we will know how powerful it is as a path into the deep meditations. It also shows us the path of an Arahant, because they are absolutely content.

The hindrance of *uddhaccakukkucca*, including remorse and worry, is very close to the hindrance of *vicikicchā*, doubt and uncertainty. We feel remorse about things that we've done, which we shouldn't have done. We all know the way to stop that is with forgiveness. Try to do your best and then just let it go. Everyone makes mistakes in this world. No one is perfect because the world isn't perfect. The body, feelings perception, volitional formations, and consciousness aren't perfect. So what do we expect? Any monk, any kangaroo, is the same. They are not perfect, they are just *khandhas*. So forgive and let go. What's been done is just 'par for the course'.

## **Doubt**

*Vicikicchā* or doubt is the last hindrance. It is the opposite of sloth and torpor; it is thinking too much. When you think too much you will always have doubts.

Wherever there's thinking, it goes in two ways. It could be this way, or it could be that way. That's duality. When there's no duality, there is a unity of mind and then doubt cannot happen. The antidote to doubt is just to devote ourselves to the instructions. Sometimes doubt can come up when we contemplate the Dhamma rather than the path. We contemplate the goal rather than the way to the goal. The way to the goal is quite clear. Everybody agrees on that, especially in our tradition. But people have differences of opinion on what is actually seen when we get there.

It's a waste of time having those differences of opinion. We have to get there first of all and then see for ourselves. So don't waste time having doubts about the goal and about what's going to be there. You know it's good. The Buddha went there and said that *Nibbāna* was a nice place to be. So follow the path and have confidence that this is the path of the *Ariyas*. It's the path you see in the *suttas*. It's the path that leads to *Nibbāna*. It's a gradual path, which means it gradually gets better and better, more and more powerful, happier and happier, more and more profound. We have the feeling that we are getting closer and closer to something that is very amazing, very wonderful and liberating. We are getting closer and closer to what we've always wanted. The more we meditate, the closer we get and the surer we are that this is the path. *Vicikicchā* is overcome gradually through practising, through the experience of what's happening. When eventually we get our first experience of a *jhāna*, all the doubt about what we need to do is usually abandoned. We actually see what's going on with this mind and body, and all doubt goes. We know what to do. There is no messing around, no wobbling, no faltering, and no hesitation. This is what we've got to do. *So get in there and do it!*

## **Conclusion**

These are the five hindrances to our meditation practice. Whatever is stopping us from enjoying the deepest meditation has to be one of these five hindrances or a combination of them. If it's a combination, one of them will be prominent. So don't mess around: know the obstacle, know the remedy, and apply it. In applying the remedy you will also be practising recollection of or reflection on the Dhamma (*Dhammānussati*). The reason why *Dhammānussati* leads to deep insight is because there are refined forms of craving, refined forms of *upādāna* or attachment, and the



five hindrances are manifestations of all these things. People in the world say all sorts of foolish things about what *upādāna* is, what craving is. But here we're seeing through bare experience what these things are. We're not just reading the menu, we taste the food. We see what craving is and how pernicious it is, how difficult it is to track down. *Upādāna* is really slippery but once we actually see through it that leads to the eradication of the five hindrances. Each one of these five hindrances is a manifestation of craving. Once we actually see that, we understand how craving is so deep and why it is so hard to uproot. The only way to uproot craving and attachment is through the practise of The Eightfold Path, culminating in the *jhānas*.

These are the insights we get through contemplating the five hindrances. We know the five hindrances completely. We know the antidotes and we become one who, as it says in the *suttas*, can enter the *jhānas* with ease, with no difficulty, with no trouble. We know the way in, we know the obstacles, and we know the remedies. Why should there be any difficulty? We're focussing on the practice that leads to *jhāna* and on the way we're gaining some very powerful insights into the nature of craving and *upādāna*.

So please bear these words in mind. May they bear fruit in your practice.