

MN20 The Removal of Distracting Thoughts  
Vitakkasanthana Sutta  
Dhamma talk by Bhante Vimalaramsi  
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Joshua Tree Retreat 3

It seems that I always start a retreat by using this sutta, or using part of this sutta, because it is particularly important for you to understand the hindrances and what to do with them.

Now, one of the things that can happen for people is that they get the idea that the meditation is sitting and then you can let your mind do whatever you want to when you're not sitting. When that happens, your progress becomes almost non-existent and you become dissatisfied with the practice. You think it doesn't work so well.

Now, keeping your daily activities and staying with your object of meditation - your spiritual friend and wishing them well - is very important. So, I want you to make sure that you keep up with that as much as you possibly can. Stay with your spiritual friend no matter what you're doing; stay with that feeling of loving kindness no matter what you're doing. Keep smiling all the time.

Now, when we're talking about hindrances there's basically five hindrances. You have lust: that's the "I like it, I want it" mind. You have hatred which is basically "I don't want it", the aversion mind. You have sleepiness and dullness which I'm sure that some of you have experienced today at one point or another. Welcome to the first day blues.

Ok. Now, please do not close your eyes while I'm giving a dhamma talk.

The next hindrance is the biggie, they're all biggies but this one is particularly a biggie because it is every distracting thought that you have, and that's restlessness. And the last one is doubt. Now, the doubt is "Um, I don't know whether I'm doing this right or not." This doesn't seem right."

Now, when any one of these five hindrances arise, the reason they are called hindrances is they will completely take your mind away from your meditation object and you'll get distracted for a period of time. But, I know a lot of meditation teachers that try to tell you that you need to force them away; you need to fight the hindrances; you need to suppress the hindrances. But your hindrances are where your attachment is. Your hindrances are showing you exactly how your attachment arises.

What's an attachment? Well, it's taking whatever arises personally. It's seeing that when this feeling arises or when this thoughts arise, this is my thought, this is who I am, and that's what attachment is. It is the belief, the personal belief, that whatever arises is yours and you own it, but in reality everything that arises is impersonal. It's just part of a process and you'll get to see that more later on. But it is part of a process and you didn't say "You know I haven't been angry for a long time, it's time for me to be mad, or sad, or anxious or sleepy". You don't plan these kind of things and say that's the way I'm going to be for a little while. They happen because conditions are right for them to happen.

What arises in the present moment dictates what happens in the future. The reason that something arises in the present moment is because of past action. Now, this can be past breaking the precepts in this lifetime or another lifetime. Who knows? Who cares? But what you do with what arises now, that's the key to what will happen in the future. If you take what happens now, and you take it personally, and you grab onto it, and you try to control it, or you try to make it be

the way you want it to be, you can look forward to that coming up over and over and over again, and causing more and more suffering along the way. We cause our own suffering. Nobody out there causes our suffering. We do it to ourselves. Why? Because of our perspective. What does that mean?

When you have a harmonious type of perspective, you are seeing everything that arises as part of an impersonal process. You're seeing that there is mind's attention moving from the object of meditation and getting caught by something, and then you see your natural habit of taking it personally, disliking it or try to control it, or liking it, or trying to push it down, or any number of different ways that we handle the hindrance when it arises.

When you have a harmonious perspective, you see everything that arises as part of an impersonal process. It's just a process that happens and as you make the conscious decision to let it be, and relax, and resmile, and then return to your object of meditation, and repeat... as you make that conscious decision to do that, the amount that you suffer becomes less and less; the amount or clarity that arises becomes more and more.

The 6Rs are amazingly, pertinent to everything that happens in life, everything. When you recognize your mind is caught up in something, you release it, you relax, you resmile, you return, you repeat. When you do that, what happens is you become more and more aware of how the hindrances arise and how the hindrances cause pain, and as you start using the 6Rs, it starts to become a flow. It's just recognize, release, relax, resmile, repeat... return, repeat. (laughter) I get tongue tied sometimes. But as it turns into a flow you become more and more alert with what's happening in your mind all of the time. It's not just a once-in-a-while thing.

Now, hindrances are not just when you sit. Hindrances arise all of the time. You can be doing anything and you can get bopped by a hindrance. While you're on this retreat it's real important to start recognizing the hindrances when they arise and use the 6Rs with them. It's real important, and it's important to carry this practice through all day. Why? Because this is teaching you how to recognize the hindrances, not only here, but when you go home. And that leads to more and more happiness for you and everybody else around you. Why? Because you become more clear. You start to see how anger arises or aversion arises or disgust or sadness or whatever the catch of the day happens to be. You start to be able to recognize that and you know when you practice enough while you're on retreat that when you get out there you'll be able to use the same process to let go of the dissatisfaction, the ups and downs of life.

So, you'll stop being on the amazing emotional rollercoaster that almost everybody experiences - "I Like this, I don't like that" "I like this, I don't like that" - and what happens after a period of time is you still have some ups and downs but they're gentle, and as you practice the 6Rs all of the time you start developing more and more equanimity into whatever you're doing, and that balance of mind is one of the things that the Buddha was real big on. He was real big on having a balanced mind.

Ok, so I'm going to start reading for a little while. This particular sutta, some of it is pointed away from the way the Buddha teaches and I'll explain that in a little bit.

MN:

1. **THUS HAVE I HEARD.** On one occasion the Blessed One was living at Sāvatti in Jeta's Grove, Anāthapindika's Park. There he addressed the bhikkhus thus: "Bhikkhus."—"Venerable sir", they replied. The Blessed One said this:

2. "Bhikkhus, when a bhikkhu is pursuing the higher mind, from time to time he should give

attention to five signs. What are the five?

BV:

We're going to give attention to one sign actually, and I'll explain it in a minute.

MN:

3. (i) "Here, bhikkhus, when a bhikkhu is giving attention to some sign,

BV:

In other words your mind is on your object of meditation

MN:

and owing to that sign there arise in him evil unwholesome thoughts connected with desire, with hate, and with delusion,

BV:

What is delusion? In the suttas, delusion is defined by the Buddha as taking everything personally. It's the wrong idea that there is a self.

So -

MN:

... then he should give attention to some other sign connected with what is wholesome.

BV:

Now, what are we talking about here? Your mind is on your object of meditation and it gets distracted, and one of the hindrances arises. Like I said, one of the most common hindrance really is the restlessness. It's all the thinking and all the stories and all of that stuff. So, what do you do? When a hindrance arises, the first thing you'll notice is that there's some thoughts, and what you need to do is let go of the thoughts. Now, how do you let go of thoughts? You don't keep your attention on the thoughts.

Now, what happens is your mind is on your object of meditation and then it starts to wobble a little bit and then it goes further and further and all of a sudden you're caught. Ok? Your mind doesn't just be on your object of meditation and now you're a thousand miles away. It doesn't happen like that. There is a definite process that occurs.

Now, when you let go of the thinking about or the story, whatever it happens to be, every time mind's attention moves there is tension and tightness in your mind and in your body, and you need to relax. Then you'll notice that there is a feeling of restlessness, it's a feeling of scatteredness, it's not a comfortable feeling at all. But it's ok for that feeling to be there. It has to be ok because the feeling is there. Now, what do you do with the feeling? Well, if you're like most people you try to shove it away and you try to stop it, and you want it to do what you want it to do when you want it to be like that, but actually what we have to learn is how to lovingly accept whatever feeling arises because the feeling is there.

Now, you allow the space for that feeling to be there, but you don't keep your attention on it. Now you relax that tension and tightness in your mind, in your brain, and you feel your mind kind of expand a little bit and then it becomes calm. You'll notice that there's no thoughts, you'll notice that your mind is exceptionally clear at that time. Now, you want to smile and bring your attention back to your object of meditation. You're bringing back the pure mind back to your object of meditation. This is a step that is left out by almost everyone that's teaching meditation these days. If you don't have that relax step, what happens? You bring that tension and tightness that's there back to your

object of meditation. You're not letting go of the craving anymore, you're bringing the craving back to your object of meditation, and that sends your mind in a different direction than what the Buddha was teaching. That sets your mind into a one-pointed kind of concentration, and it leads to real peaceful calm mind, but it doesn't lead to the cessation of suffering.

Now, any hindrance that arises, you treat it in the same way. You let go of the thoughts about and relax, allow the feeling, and relax, come back to your object of meditation. But the thing with the hindrance is that it's not going to go away right away. So, you're going to get to watch it arise again. Now, what we're trying to show you in the Buddha's teaching is to look at how mind's attention moves. Why your mind gets caught up in this stuff doesn't matter at all. We can leave that to the psychologists and therapists and that sort of thing. We don't care about why. We care about the process, how does mind's attention move from one thing to another.

So, when a hindrance arises your mind is saying "Hey, look at me, look at how I'm moving around!", and it's saying it over and over and over again, almost ad nauseam. The hindrance keeps coming back, but before long as you get familiar with how your mind's attention moves, you'll start noticing some things that happen right before your mind really got caught. So, you finally let go of that and relax and you come back to your object of meditation and your mind goes away again and you see that spot, you see that feeling, you see whatever it happens to be. And you release right then and you relax, and you resmile, and you come back to your object of meditation.

The length of time you get caught by the hindrance becomes less and less, and the length of time that you start staying on your object of meditation becomes longer. The hindrance is teaching you exactly how the process works. The hindrances are your teacher. I'm not the teacher. I'm a guide, I'm not a teacher. The hindrances are your teacher and they're your best friend as much as some people don't like to think that. (laughter) But they're showing you exactly where there's an attachment. Now, as you start to let go of that hindrance it starts to get weaker and weaker. Why? Because you're not feeding it with your attention, you're not feeding it with your desire to control, you're not feeding it with your craving, and your clinging, and your habitual tendency. You're seeing it for what it is "Ah, here it is again" let it be, relax, smile, come back, "There it is again, ok."

Now what are you doing? You're starting to develop a mind that has more and more equanimity in it, and you're purifying your mind at that time. Every time you let go of that tension and tightness in your head, in your mind, in your body, that is the Third Noble Truth. That is the cessation of suffering. Every time you let go of that tightness and you get that pure mind that's really alert without any distraction in it, that is the Third Noble Truth. The Third Noble Truth by some people is called Nibbana. So we're getting a little bit into Abhidhamma, not much. And you should have seen the uproar that I caused when I said that the Third Noble Truth is called the mundane Nibbana and supermundane Nibbana. What's a mundane Nibbana? It's a worldly kind of cessation, and you have to experience that many thousands, many hundreds of thousands of times before you get to experience the supermundane, which is the Nibbana that everybody thinks about, the big pie in the sky Nibbana.

So, when you're practicing the 6Rs, you are practicing Right Effort, and there's four kinds of Right Effort. Recognizing that there's an unwholesome state that has arisen, letting go of that unwholesome state and relaxing, bringing up a wholesome state - smiling and your object of meditation - staying with your object of meditation, staying with that wholesome state. Now, as you might have noticed I kind of snuck in the 6Rs, because the 6Rs and Right Efforts are one and the same thing. So, that's basically what this is telling you to do right here.

Repeats : "thoughts connected with desire, with hate, and with delusion, then he should give attention to some other sign connected with what is wholesome."

MN:

When he gives attention to some other sign connected with what is wholesome, then any evil unwholesome thoughts connected with desire, with hate, and with delusion are abandoned in him and subside.

BV:

So, this particular sutta is recommended very strongly by just about everybody that practices Theravada Buddhism, but they always seem to stress the last part of this. I'm going to read you the last part. Now, what I'm trying to show you with the hindrances is how to lovingly accept the hindrance and not fight with it then not try to control it. Just let it be and it'll start to fade away by itself, right? Ok, it says...

MN:

7. (v) "If, while he is giving attention to stilling the thought-formation of those thoughts, there still arise in him evil unwholesome thoughts connected with desire, with hate, and with delusion, then, with his teeth clenched and his tongue pressed against the roof of his mouth, he should beat down, constrain, and crush mind with mind. [121]

BV:

Does that sound like a peaceful kind of meditation to you? Now, what's happened is this particular sutta was added later, and they took part of this from another sutta. They took exactly the same words, but with this, what the Buddha is saying was "This is a practice that I tried while I was still a bodhisattva trying to become a Buddha, and I found out it didn't work". And it's exactly the same wording.

MN:

[Switching to MN36.20]

"I thought: 'Suppose, with my teeth clenched and my tongue pressed against the roof of my mouth, I beat down, constrain, and crush mind with mind.' So, with my teeth clenched and my tongue pressed against the roof of my mouth, I beat down, constrained, and crushed mind with mind. While I did so, sweat ran from my armpits. Just as a strong man might seize a weaker man by the head and shoulders and beat him down, constrain him, and crush him, so too, with my teeth clenched and my tongue pressed against the roof of my mouth, I beat down, constrained, and crushed mind with mind, and sweat ran from my armpits. But although tireless energy was aroused in me and unremitting mindfulness was established, my body was overwrought [243] and uncalm because I was exhausted by the painful striving."

BV:

Now, do you think the Buddha is recommending doing this or not? The whole thing with the Buddha's teaching is harmony and loving acceptance with whatever arises. Now, some people get a strange idea about "Well, if you're practicing metta that means that people can do anything they want to you; they could step all over you and you have to smile and take it". Practicing metta does not make you stupid. Ok? You don't have to take things. You can bow out of a lot of situations so that you don't have to be in that situation where people are taking advantage of you.

But the whole point of the meditation is learning how to have balance in yourself, and learning to recognize the hindrances and how they arise, starts to help you with your personality development. The personality development about things that used to get you angry and they don't get you angry anymore. A great for instance, we were driving here and we stopped at a place to get something to drink and it was one of the turnpike places in Pennsylvania or wherever it



happened to be, I don't know, and we went in and got something to drink and we came out and I'm looking at the car and I'm going "Somebody ran into the car. Side of the car is, somebody pulled in too close and then when they pulled out they turned the wheel too hard and they just scraped the whole side of the car!" And I said to Khema "Look at that, somebody hit the car!" And she said "Yeah". And I said "Ok, let's get in and go". (laughter) Now, what would have happened a few years ago is a little bit different story. Not for me so much, but for the nun that's travelling with me, she would have flipped her lid and complained all day that day and all day the next, and had really gotten into her anger, but because of practising the 6Rs and getting a sense of balance it's just "Um, ok, we'll have to take care of it when we get back". What more can you do?

As you learn how the hindrances arise, as you start paying attention to the process of the hindrances, you start learning where all of those little places are that cause pain and you start recognizing that I'm causing this pain to myself and you start letting it go. You start having more and more balance in your life and as a result, life becomes easier.

Now, it's a real interesting phenomena especially since I got back from Asia, which is turning into close to ten years now - blows my mind. Anyway, the big words when I got back from Asia were stress, and depression, and anxiety, and everybody was talking about it. Well, what are those? They're just simply hindrances. How do you handle a hindrance? Allow it to be, relax, smile, come back, and wish somebody happiness. Practice smiling. You start to notice that every hindrance that arises, they always arise in exactly the same way, and I can describe to you exactly how it arises. It doesn't matter whether it's anger or sadness, depression, whatever it happens to be. They all arise in exactly the same way. And I'll tell you something else, the Asian mind and the Western mind, there is no difference. It happens the same for every person.

There is contact, well let's do it this way... in order to see you have to have a good working eye, the good working eye has to touch the colour and form. When the good working eye touches the colour and form, eye consciousness arises. The meeting of these three things - the eye, the colour and form, and the eye consciousness - is called eye contact. With eye contact as condition, eye feeling arises. Feeling is pleasant feeling, painful feeling, neither painful nor pleasant. It's not emotional, doesn't have anything to do with emotion. Emotional is on down the way. With eye feeling as condition, eye craving arises. What is craving?

Craving always manifests as tension and tightness in your mind and in your body. The craving is the "I like it, I don't like it" mind. It's the very start of the ego identification. Right after craving, clinging arises. The clinging is all of the stories, all of your concepts, all of your opinions, all of your ideas about why you like or dislike that sight, or sound, or thought, or taste, or touch, or smell. This is where your mind really starts taking off, and this is where it becomes the belief that these thoughts and these feelings are mine personally really hit very big, very quick. With clinging as condition, habitual tendency arises. What's your habitual tendency?

Every time I see that kind of thing or think that kind of thing I always act this way. So, what is stress, what is depression? It's a painful feeling that arises, your mind says "I don't like it", that's the craving. And then it starts to get into all of the stories about why you don't like it, why you want it to be different than it is, and then you start acting in the same way every time this kind of feeling arises. But there's a habit that we get into that is really a problem and it's so ingrained in us that we won't even recognize it until we start seeing it ourselves with the hindrances.

Now, we're made up of five different things. The psycho-physical process is made up of: 1) A physical body. 2) There is feeling - pleasant, painful, neither painful nor pleasant. 3) There is perception - perception is a part of the mind that puts names on things. Perception is a part of the mind the when you look at this (the book in his hands) your mind says "book", and that has

memory in it too. 4) Then we have thoughts. 5) Then we have consciousness.

Now, when a painful feeling arises or a pleasant feeling arises - either one - but we'll take painful because that's the most obvious - what our habitual tendency is, is to try to think the feeling away. But if you'll remember with the instructions I gave you last night, I said the more you try to think a feeling, the bigger and more intense that feeling becomes. So, the first thing we have to do, especially when you're sitting in meditation and a pain comes up or a hindrance of whatever kind, the first thing we have to do is notice the thoughts about it, and let the thoughts go because if we try to control the feeling with the thoughts, the feeling gets bigger and more intense until it turns it into an emergency and you can't stand it anymore. Then you have to do something radical, move around or whatever. So, the first thing we have to do is recognize the thoughts, and let the thoughts be there by themselves, and relax.

Now you see the feeling for what it is. It's a painful feeling. Ok, so it's a painful feeling, so what? It's a painful mental feeling. Ok, that's an emotion isn't it? It's an emotion because we get involved with the thinking about, and identifying with, and taking all of the feelings to be ours personally, and then we want to control it. We want to control our feelings with our thoughts, but thoughts are one thing and feelings are something else. The two never meet. So we have to let go of the thinking, and relax, and allow the space for the feeling to be there without trying to do anything to make it different than it is. That is what true mindfulness is; observing how mind's attention moves from one thing to another; observing how mind has the desire to grab on and to control. We have to learn how to lovingly accept what arises in the present moment. Any time you try to fight with what arises in the present moment, any time you try to control what arises in the present moment, any time you try to change what arises in the present moment, you're fighting with the Dhamma, you're fighting reality, you're fighting the truth. The truth is, when a feeling arises, it's there! Allow the space for it to be there, "Yeah, but it's painful", ok so what? "But it really hurts", ok so what?

A lot of people have heard me talk about when I was in Burma, and this silver tooth right here (he shows the tooth), a dentist thought he was going to do me a favour and clean my teeth and he broke it. So, I had to have a root canal, but in Burma they don't clean their needles from one person to the next. I wasn't about ready to have them stab me with a needle so I could get AIDS, so I said "Ok, no pain killer, have a root canal".

There was pain, you better believe it. It was real painful, but I started being mindful of my mind and my body, and I started noticing that I was sitting with my hands on the thing and I was white knuckled. And I went "Ah, look at that" and I let go and I relaxed, and I noticed that there was all kinds of tightness in my buttocks and tightness in my back, tightness all over my body. So, I started relaxing that and letting go of the tightness, and then I relaxed the tension caused by that, and I had time to send loving and kind thoughts to the person that was causing me the pain, the dentist. And then he'd hit another spot and I'd jump and then all of this happened again.

So I was spending time continually relaxing more and more. The reactions to the pain were much less when he was almost done. He was still hitting the sore spots but it didn't make me jump so much because I was learning and it was figuring out how to lovingly accept even something as painful as a root canal. When they did the root canal of course they went in about that far (gesture) it seemed like anyway, and I think he was feeling so good that he actually extended the time he was giving me the root canal. (laughter)

But as soon as he was done my mind was clear, my mind was alert, my mind was filled with joy. Not because the pain wasn't there, but because I had let go of an attachment. And my mind was exceptionally clear for three or four days after that, I mean it was really amazing. So, you say "Well, it really hurts", yeah, ok, so what? It's only pain. So what?!

As you learn to develop your loving acceptance of the present moment, you start having more and more balance arise in your life, and you start noticing that there is personality development. And the personality development only occurs when you practice your daily activities with the 6Rs and you're able to notice the hindrances when they come up. You're able to not get so heavily involved with liking this or disliking that or that no good so-and-so did this or that.

Now, this is a gradual training. At first, you're going to get caught, you're going to get lost for a period of time, but as you keep practicing the 6R's, that period of time that you're caught by these hindrances becomes less and less. Now, I had a student in Malaysia that she really had a lot of anger. I mean, when she walked into the room, I wanted to walk out of the room, but she came to see me so how can I get away from that? So, I started talking to her and she said "I'm really angry at my husband", she has three children. "He got mad at me and told me he wasn't going to talk to me anymore, and he doesn't. And it makes me mad! What am I supposed to do with that?"

And I said "Well, you might as well start practicing some loving kindness, radiating loving kindness and see how that does". Now, when he would do something, she would get angry and she would stay angry for two weeks at first. And that clouded her perception of everything that she did. She was looking through the eyes of anger at everything, but as she started practicing meditation and she started practicing loving kindness, the length of time that she got angry started being less. So, instead of two weeks it was ten days, and after another period of time it was seven days, and after a period of time it was four days. And it kept going down as she was practicing her meditation, as she was practicing her daily meditation with her daily activities.

And it got down to, he would do something that was like she would be riding in the car with him and say "I have to stop at this store, I'll be there no more than five minutes, wait for me." And she would go into the store and he would take off. And she'd come out of the store and she'd look and he wasn't around and she'd go "I wish he wouldn't do that". And then she said "Well, it's a nice day for a walk", so she enjoyed her walk all the way home. She didn't hold onto it, she didn't have the repeat thoughts, she didn't have the disgust or the demands for control. Now, this did take a period of time because she was only able to sit about a half an hour a day, and she was never able to take a retreat because she was always taking care of her kids.

But when you take a retreat this is your intensive time to really pay attention to what your mind is doing all of the time. When you see an unwholesome state arise, recognize it, release it, relax, smile, come back to an object of meditation - to your spiritual friend, to the feeling of being happy, to smiling. You really need to practice smiling often. It doesn't matter what you're doing. This is really important because the more you smile the more uplifted your mind becomes. The more uplifted your mind becomes, the better your mindfulness becomes, the more clear your mind becomes, the more interesting watching how mind's attention becomes.

Now, I was just in Germany and gave a week retreat there, and I was amazed because I had everybody practicing loving kindness meditation and they'd all been practicing mindfulness of breathing. So, it was a real shock to them to hear that I was going to teach loving kindness. And after about four days there were men and women both, all of a sudden they were sitting there practicing loving kindness feeling really happy crying their eyes out. They were crying and they kept coming to me and saying "What is this, why am I crying, I'm happy?" "Well, you're just letting go of some old stuff, that's all. Don't stop it, don't control it, let it happen. If you get too wet get a blanket or a towel out of the fold here. And they all distarted?51;15 at me. Their faces became absolutely radiant. And their being German they weren't used to smiling much, but their being German meant that they were willing to try anything just to see how it works, and they did, they tried it. They would come and complain about "My jaw muscles hurt so much."— "Well, it's



because you're not used to smiling, that's all". (laughs)

Any time you see repeat thoughts in your mind, you have an attachment, taking it personally. So, let that be a key to remind you that "Oh, I have an attachment here". When we have repeat thoughts, they happen just like they were on a tape deck. Same words exactly, over and over again. Same feeling, same dissatisfaction with the feeling. Same want for it to be different than it is, but not willing to let it go. This practice is to teach you how to let this go, how to have an uplifted mind all the time. And the more you can smile into whatever you're doing - I don't care if you're at work - you can be happy while you're at work. You can have fun while you're at work. As a matter of fact, if you don't you gotta get a different job. (laughter) So, the more we can remember to recognize when our mind is distracted and release the distraction without getting involved in the story about, the more we can do that and relax into it and actually have fun while you're meditating...

I just gave a talk at Mark's house and there was fifteen or sixteen people there and I said something about having fun while you're meditating and I stopped and I said "When was the last time you heard that before? Have you ever heard it before?" Fun and meditation in the same sentence. Wow!

Now, there's another thing that is very helpful when you get caught by a hindrance, and guaranteed this works 100% of the time: laugh at being caught; laugh at your mind for being so crazy, for being attached. The more you develop your laughter about yourself the more your perspective changes from "I am that and I don't like it" to "Ha, it's only that." (Whish!) Easy to let go of.

I had one student that he started practicing loving kindness with me and he got into such a happy state that he would sit very quietly and before long he was kind of chuckling to himself. (laughter) And he was very softly just (snickering) and he was doing this for like two hours at a pop. (laughter) And he's sitting for two hours and he's snickering and laughing all the time. And he came to me with this real concerned look on his face and he said "Is it ok to do that"? And I said "Yeah"! And everybody else around him started doing the same thing. It was a great retreat. Everybody progressed really, really fast.

Developing a sense of humour about how crazy your mind can become, or is, is a skill that we all need to develop more because it takes it away from the personal. "I'm sad. I'm angry, I'm restless, I'm sleepy", it takes it out of the "I am that" and makes it "It's only this. What is that? Nothing!" So, it's a real interesting process and the more you start recognizing how mind's attention works, not why things arise the way they do, you're going to be able to let go of your old habits of always looking at things in this way or that way. And you start changing your perspective, changing your view of life itself.

Now, if you're angry and I walk up to you and I give you a rose, what's your reaction? "Ah, look at those thorns. Why are you giving me something that has thorns in it"? But I can take that same rose and walk up to you when you're happy, and you look at that and go "Wow, that's really beautiful". Now what's different? Same flower, what's different? Your perspective. One perspective is "I don't like" "I", "I", "I", and the other one is a sense of wonderment, a sense of beauty.

One of the reasons that people begin to practice meditation or Buddhism in general is because we all have all kinds of suffering, and we suffer along until finally you start going "Gah, there's gotta be a better way of doing it. This life is no good." So, you start developing your curiosity then, and as you start practicing more and you start seeing it work, your confidence starts to build. And as your confidence builds, your energy starts to improve, and with the improved energy, your mindfulness

becomes sharper, and with your mindfulness becoming sharper you start having more and more collected mind. And with that collected mind you start seeing the process of how dependent origination actually works.

It all starts from suffering and being curious about "there's gotta be a better way than this". But the thing that I found over the years is my curiosity hasn't gotten less. It's actually gotten a lot stronger than it used to be, "I want to find out everything. I want to know how everything works". With that curiosity you start developing an "I don't know" mind. You start developing a beginner's mind, the mind that says "I'm just curious how this works, I want to see it". It's not the mind that says "Ah, this is the same old stuff. It's just doing the same thing over and over again. I'm bored". But having the curiosity to see how the process works you start going deeper and deeper into your practice and it just gets more and more fascinating, and it really turns into a lot of fun. And that's what I'm talking about with the meditation, developing that sense of fun with the meditation and a sense of curiosity of "How does that work"? That's how you overcome the hindrances.

Now, what happens with the hindrance is every time you let it go and you relax, and you smile, and you come back to your object of meditation, every time you do that, that hindrance becomes a little bit less. And eventually you start recognizing things more quickly, and you start letting it go more easily, and you start staying on your object of meditation for longer period of time. One time that hindrance is going to arise and you let it go, and it's gone. That's it! Now, what happens after that, you have a very strong sense of relief. After the relief, you start feeling a lot of joy. Joy is one of the enlightenment factors.

I had almost twenty years of teachers telling me whenever I experience joy "Don't get attached". Geese, I didn't want to get attached, so I get joy and I just start stuffing it down "Nope, nope, we don't want this". That's not right. You don't get attached to joy when you start treating it like every other feeling that arises. It's a pleasant feeling. Ok, allow it to be there, relax, come back to your object of meditation. Don't try to hang onto it. Don't try to control it. Allow it to be there. Eventually the joy will fade away. When the joy fades away, you feel very tranquil, you feel very comfortable in your mind and in your body. This is what the Buddha called happiness, sukha. Your mind naturally stays on your object of meditation very easily. Now, you can still have a distracting thought because your mindfulness is not very strong at this point, but you'll be able to recognize it fairly quickly. Sometimes it's a whole thought, sometimes it's a half a thought, and you see it and you release, relax, smile and come back, and it's almost effortless staying on your object of meditation.

Now, what I just described to you is called the first jhana. Now, an awful lot of people have the idea that jhana means concentration. Jhana does not mean concentration. Jhana is a stage of the meditation. Jhana is the first stage of your understanding how the process works. There's other jhanas that you'll experience, but they're all stages of understanding. Your understanding goes deeper and deeper as you go deeper into the jhanas. It's not a word to be afraid of and when you start looking at the word jhana in the suttas you'll see it mentioned many thousands of times.

You'll see the word vipassana mentioned maybe a hundred times - I think it's a hundred and eight, but I'm not sure a hundred and seven, something like that - but vipassana about eighty times, when it's mentioned, is mentioned with the word samatha. Samatha means tranquillity. You gain deep tranquillity and samatha then you experience the jhana. So, the samatha and the vipassana they're yoked together just like a bullock cart. They have to be pulling equally in order to go in a straight line. The vipassana and the jhana are happening very much at the same time.

Jhana has had a lot of misunderstanding around it because there is more than one kind of jhana. There is actually two kinds of jhana. One kind of jhana is the one-pointed concentration. Now,

what happens when you experience the one-pointed concentration: your mind is on your object of meditation, it gets distracted; you recognize that and you let go of that distraction and immediately come back to your object of meditation. Now, what happens is your one-pointed concentration starts to develop, and it gets so good that the force of the concentration will suppress the hindrances, stop the hindrances from arising.

And I've just been talking to you about the necessity of the hindrances and why they're important. So, when you practice one-pointed concentration what you're doing is you're not letting go of the craving and you're bringing that craving back to your object of meditation. And you're experiencing deep concentration, but you're not learning anything from that. The kind of meditation that the Buddha taught adds one extra step. Your mind is on your object of meditation and gets distracted, same, let go of the distraction, same, relax, that extra step of relaxing the tension and tightness in your mind and in your body is very important. And then you bring that craving free mind back to your object of meditation. The end results are very different.

Now, when people talk about jhana because they're practicing one-pointed kinds of concentration they'll say: "Well if you're only practicing jhana practice, then you'll never attain Nibbana." And it's true, if you're practicing one-pointed concentration you won't experience Nibbana. Why? Because you still have that craving, you haven't let go of the craving. Your mind will go so deep, that's as far as it goes.

When the Buddha was a bodhisatta he was practicing one-pointed concentration and went as far as he could with it, and he still saw that there was something missing in the practice. And that something he later discovered was that extra step of relaxing. When you practice the samatha-vipassana you will have insights while you're in the jhana because the jhana that the Buddha was talking about doesn't go as deep, and you start seeing how the process of dependent origination actually does work. That's what the insights are.

Now, I know that there are commentaries, they say there's sixteen different insight knowledges that you have to experience. Well, with that particular form of practicing straight vipassana that might be right, but it doesn't lead to the experience of Nibbana, not the way it's being practiced and taught right now.

So, when we start practicing with this extra step of relaxing, and relaxing often, your mind naturally goes deeper more quickly than you can believe, but the thing is it's not just a sitting practice. It's an all-the-time practice. Watch what your mind is doing. I don't care if you're walking from here to there, I don't care if you're getting your food, or eating your food, or going to the toilet, or taking a shower. I don't care what you're doing, watch your mind, and when you start seeing your mind get heavy with thoughts, let go, relax, smile, return to your object of meditation. Carry your object of meditation with you as closely as you carry your skin, or closer if you can. (laughter)

So, the hindrances are actually your best friend. Don't fight with them. Don't try to force them to be other than they are. They help you to go deeper into your meditation. They help you to experience all these different levels of understanding. They help you very much with seeing how dependent origination works. They teach you a lot, so treat them like your closest friend, I mean they're precious. When you're saying "This anger I have is precious? What are you talking about? You're crazy". It is precious when you use it in the right way, when you start seeing how the process works and start using the 6Rs continually. You start having this pure mind more and more and more because you're letting go of the craving.

Ok, so, I've been talking for a while, and I wanted to know if anybody has any questions. Great teacher, huh? (laughter) Yeah?

S: ~

BV: Really appreciate your friend. The more you appreciate, the more closely you stay with your friend.

Now one of the things that happens is that if you start letting your mind ho hum a little bit, you're not being sincere in the wish, you're just kind of feeling the wish a way that turns: "Ah, yeah, yeah, yeah." Ok, that leads to dullness of mind. So what you need to do is really appreciate that person that you're sending it to. Like them! And feel like you're doing a good thing for them, because you are. Smile to your friend. Really wish them well. You're just not used to it. It will come, I promise.

(Let's share some merit then.)

May suffering ones, be suffering free  
And the fear struck, fearless be  
May the grieving shed all grief  
And may all beings find relief.  
May all beings share this merit that we have thus acquired  
For the acquisition of all kinds of happiness.  
May beings inhabiting space and earth  
Devas and nagas of mighty power  
Share this merit of ours.  
May they long protect the Lord Buddha's dispensation.  
Sadhu . . . Sadhu . . . Sadhu . . .

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