

# Hindrances and Assistances (4 of 5) Restlessness Vs. Pleasure

February 2, 2023

## **SUMMARY KEYWORDS**

remorse, challenge, flow, healthy, source, activated, strategies, enjoyable, vitality, upwelling, regret, energy, vitality

## **Gil Fronsdal**

Good morning. We are looking at strategies for how to live our lives and how to be with challenges. There are healthy and not so healthy strategies. I'm using the five hindrances as an example of the not so healthy strategies, and the opposite of the hindrances for healthy strategies. The significance of taking this point of view of strategies is that we can take the time to stop and ask ourselves: "What is my strategy here? What is my approach? How am I trying to get what I want? How am I trying to take care of myself here?"

Just taking that pause and asking that question might help you to see more clearly what you are doing habitually or unconsciously, without reflection. When there are challenges, whether we're a little stressed or

very stressed, sometimes we're responding from a gut reaction – an instinctual or neurotic reaction. We can get so involved in that reaction that we don't even know we are in it. It is very easy to lose ourselves, our wisdom, and our clarity, unless we are really tracking what is going on. Then we say things that we later regret, or we run around in circles. So simply pausing and asking this question is very significant. Then we can answer that question for ourselves. We can say, "Well, maybe that's not the best way. Let's see if there's a better way."

The hindrance for today is usually translated as "restlessness and remorse." Restlessness is a kind of agitation that can be very compelling. It can come with a lot of anxiety and a lot of force and power to keep us in its grip. Restlessness often arises out of something we're thinking about. Maybe we're having thoughts that are predicting danger, or thoughts that are challenging. How we relate to those thoughts is where the power of restlessness and remorse arises. When we kind of squeeze the thoughts – getting close in and becoming claustrophobic around them – that keeps them going, and keeps them flowing.

Remorse is the same way. In Latin, remorse means "to chew again." The rumination of remorse is like chewing over and over again what we've done, what we regret, and what we feel bad about. Again, our thinking has

gotten close, constricted, or tight in a way that feels uncomfortable. That discomfort and how we think about the thoughts are the fuels that generate more restlessness and more remorse.

If we do things when we're restless or filled with remorse, we tend not to do them in beauty. They are not a source of pleasure. They are very uncomfortable. Restlessness is not a good strategy for dealing with challenges. It is almost like avoidance – running around in circles, being trapped, not knowing what to do, and just spinning out. Restlessness is almost like the absence of a response. If we do respond, our response is confused, or impulsive, or not really attentive to what's happening. When we get lost in remorse, we tend to shut down the fuller picture of ourselves. Our whole definition of ourselves is now defined by what we feel remorseful about. There is a narrowing of attention, and we don't have access to pleasure or a sense of beauty.

When there's restlessness and remorse, there's a kind of energy that activates us, but the energy in the body feels off. It doesn't feel pleasant or enjoyable. It can be tight, hard, or constricted, or there is pressure behind it in certain parts of the body. But there is a whole other way of being energized. There is another source from which the energy can come, where the energy is not agitated, restless, constricted, and tight, as it is with

remorse. With this kind of energy, we are not caught by thoughts. We are not squeezing them or caught up in them. We let go of the squeezing – the preoccupation with and attachment to thoughts.

This kind of vitality comes from a place inside that feels wholesome, and feels like home. This place has a quality of pleasantness, pleasure, beauty, and a kind of ease. Restlessness and remorse are often very much in the head – in the thoughts and ideas. Sometimes restlessness can be purely physical, but that might not be the hindrance of restlessness. We might just be over-activated.

But there is another source for something very profound within us – another source from which our vitality comes. Rather than being activated and reacting through reactivity, we are supported by a flow of vitality – an upwelling of energy that feels good, even while we're taking care of something very challenging. We might have a huge challenge that is very painful and does not give us a sense of pleasure. But the source of this energy comes from a place of home – a place of beauty. It comes from a place that maybe we will call pleasant or enjoyable.

We do not sacrifice that vitality in order to take care of things that are terrible or horrible in the world. When things are terrible, we can pause to see where we're

coming from inside, and decide, “Well, maybe I can shift from the agitated, squeezing, tightening, tense place of restlessness and remorse, and come from a place of flow, of upwelling, a place of inspiration.”

Instead of getting caught in remorse when we’ve done something that we regret or feel bad about, the Buddhist approach is to learn from that. Instead of remorse – to *re-morse*, meaning we reengage, we go forward dedicated to doing better. If we identify with anything, we identify with the one who is trying to do better, not the one who did something that was not good.

The function of meditation is not just to make us calm, but to make us more familiar with the place inside where there can be a lot of joy. Sometimes it can feel very peaceful and at home. We can feel that there is beauty there. This place feels right. There is a wholeness from which animating energy can flow. We are not passive in this place. But the source of motivation here is very different from the source of motivation when we’re squeezed, tense, tight, restless, and filled with remorse.

As we learn to meditate, the idea is to begin appreciating this alternative source of energy. We learn not to sacrifice it for the strong messages we get from our anxiety, our restlessness, our remorse, our regrets,

or the strong messages we get from the pain that comes from the second, third, and fourth arrows we shoot at ourselves. They just make it even easier to get trapped. Some restlessness arises because we feel trapped by all the arrows we are shooting.

So we take time to pause and ask ourselves: “What is the strategy here? Where’s my source of activation, energy, and vitality?” In English, “activated” usually means “reactivated” – activated in an unhealthy way, or triggered. Instead, we can ask: “Am I inspired? Is energy flowing for me? Am I responding from a depth inside?” We pause to ask that question. If we have been meditating for a while and doing this foundational work on how to work with challenges, maybe it is reasonable to begin asking that question, and to begin switching over to the way that’s beautiful, that is closer to a place of pleasure, enjoyment, or at-homeness.

This human life of ours is very important. It is well worth it and appropriate for us to begin to discover a different place from which our energy flows, a healthy source within from which to live, and to learn to distinguish that from the unhealthy places from which we respond and react to the world. If you can come from this deeper source, from a place of beauty, a place of ease and at-homeness, the world becomes a better place. It is not selfish to do this. It is actually a contribution to the world.

We don't contribute to the world by worrying. We don't contribute to the world by being angry and hostile. We don't contribute to the world by diminishing our value, or by living under the weight of the belief "I'm a terrible person." We contribute to the world by putting all that aside and seeing if we can find this very natural place within. It is nature to have this upwelling source deep inside that has a flow, a joy, and a pleasure to it. Whatever pleasure we can feel is healing.

So if you're going through a big challenge, pause. If the situation allows, go and do something enjoyable. Don't stay in the middle of the challenge feeling trapped and spinning out more and more. If you have been in a challenging place psychologically and emotionally for some time, go find something to do that is pleasant. Go find someone's pet that you can pet. Do an activity that brings you a sense of pleasure, maybe cleaning, or cooking, or going for a walk. Pleasure is one of the great medicines.

It can also be one of the greatest escapes and avoidance mechanisms; that is the pleasure of addiction. But hopefully, that is not the kind of pleasure you find. Find healthy pleasures that you can do when you feel over-challenged by situations. Try not to stay stuck. Try to engage your vitality, your energy, and your capacity to do by finding healthy pleasures, and then

come back and address the challenge from a different place.

I hope that today you can spend some time exploring where your vitality is flowing from. Is it coming from a healthy place or not such an inspiring place? Thank you.