

A Hidden Treasure: The Relationship with the Hindrances
Practising the Jhānas
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Actually, what I want to do is talk about the hindrances, but a couple of things before that. As I said, it's difficult teaching this retreat. There's so much I want to communicate, and so much that feels important to communicate, because you're all in different places with different needs. I mentioned the walking practice yesterday, and Derek's just mentioned *mettā*.

Who is doing *mettā* as their basic practice? Anyone? Great, okay. When you walk, are you comfortable walking with the *mettā* practice? Like, you know how to do that? Yeah? Okay. What I want to say, I guess, is I will talk about *mettā* tomorrow, but again, what I want to introduce is doing *mettā* with the energy body awareness, which means that I might have phrases, I might have visualizations or whatever, but I've actually got this whole space, and I never lose that, and I'm sensitive to that (I'll talk more about this tomorrow), so that when I walk up and down, I'm walking up and down in that kind of awareness, with all the *mettā* and however I'm doing the *mettā*, yeah? Actually, that's all I want to say for now, and I'll talk about *mettā* tomorrow. Is that okay?

Second thing, very briefly, I was very rushed in the latter part of yesterday's talk, so I just want to make sure that something was clear. It might have been clear anyway, and I might not need to say this. But when I was talking about, you know, "Why are we doing *jhāna* practice?", and how we conceive of the reasons for doing *jhāna* practice, and therefore what we emphasize, I don't want to replace other emphases or what other teachers might emphasize – simplifying, or laser beam, or unwavering mind, or all that. I don't want to replace those reasons – more *add* to them, okay? So all those emphases are important, can get emphasized at different times, but I just want very much to add something that's not often talked about, that to me seems really, really important: these qualities of sensitivity, attunement, refinement, etc. It's more to add that to the possible reasons we're doing this, and the possible emphases, and actually, then, to allow those to be more prominent, or even the *most* prominent emphases and reasons. So I didn't mean to say, you know, we're getting rid of all that. It's more just a question of emphasis.

Okay, what I want to talk about, as I said, is the hindrances. Now, there are a few things here: one is that sometimes, in the suttas, it's almost – not quite a definition, but it's almost like, with the abandoning of the hindrances, there arises the first *jhāna*. So it's almost like part of the definition of the *jhāna* is the absence of the hindrances. It doesn't say, "With the unwavering concentration on this or that." It says, "With the abandoning of the hindrances."¹ That's quite interesting, and it's quite important. Again, it has implications. How am I thinking about what I'm doing here? But part of what I want to say about them is, it could sound like, "Okay, so working with the hindrances is something that applies pre-*jhāna*. And it certainly does, of course; it applies right from day one of anyone's meditation practice. But not *just* then. Once the *jhānas*, and even all eight *jhānas*, are maybe accessible and regular visitors or explorations, etc. – even once all that is kind of up and running and going and wonderful, the hindrances will still arise at times. Absolutely.

What I also want to add, and what's much less commonly talked about and acknowledged, is that they can arise very subtly, subtle versions of them can arise *in* a *jhāna* as well. Now I use that word *in*, in a loose way, kind of avoiding the silliness of this extra-sharp definition of what is and what isn't a *jhāna*. The point is, again, about subtlety, that even within a *jhāna*, there can be subtle hindrances around. And there's a sutta in the *Majjhima Nikāya* where the Buddha's teaching, actually, super, super-advanced meditators. They're doing all this whizzy stuff with psychic powers and all that stuff, and he's still talking to them about what subtle hindrances arise in that depth of *samādhi*.² So we have to have this idea of the hindrances, as I said earlier – they're part of the deal. They're part of the deal when, certainly, *jhāna* feels like a million miles away. They're part of the deal once we've already had a lot of experience in the *jhānas*. They'll be coming and going. And they're actually part of the deal in a subtle way even *in* a *jhāna*, therefore part of the work, part of the play, part of the whole. Again, when I say '*jhāna* practice,' I *mean* including the hindrances and all that.

I want to say something about insight in relation to the hindrances, but first thing I want to do is rattle through pretty quickly, because a lot of this is probably familiar to you. I want to rattle through some antidotes to the hindrances. First thing to say before that is, an 'antidote' is something we – you know, you apply something with a certain goal in mind: I want to get rid of something. I want an antidote to an illness, or whatever: let's hope to get rid of this illness. So there's, let's say, ways of practising insight meditation at times, when a hindrance comes up, and the view is, "It's fine. It's just here. I just watch it. I do the same with a hindrance as I do with a non-hindrance or anything else. I'm just watching it. It's not better or worse. And I'm just – it's okay." When you're doing *jhāna* practice, that's not the attitude. We want antidotes, and we want to work against the hindrances. And this is primarily, even in the *Satipatṭhāna Sutta* – this is actually the instruction of the Buddha – he's talking about what feeds the hindrances and what starves the hindrances.³ And we're clearly really interested in what starves the hindrances.

There's a slight kind of tilting, over the years of modern mindfulness teaching – but anyway. It's still a valid way of working at times, but in *jhāna*, in *samādhi* practice, no. We've got a different relationship, a different attitude. Again, watch out for the inertia. Watch out for the habit. If you have a habit of just, "Oh, it's just a hindrance. I'll just sit it out. I'll just watch it. It's okay. It's fine," we want to shake up that inertia a little bit, galvanize it. They're going to come. There's no way they're not going to come. If you come into an interview and you report to me that you just didn't have any hindrances, I'd just say you're not paying attention. Because at *least* the subtle ones are going to come, no matter how much practice you've done, and usually, as I'll explain later, also the not-so-subtle ones.

So, rattling off through the antidotes, the two most common hindrances are probably – they're given usually in a certain order, but let's start with the two most common, which are sloth and torpor, and restlessness and worry. I'm just going to throw out a bunch, and if you think of one that I've forgotten that's actually really helpful, then just shout it out. We'll put them all in a pot for everyone to use.

(1) Sloth and torpor: getting sleepy is the extreme, the head nodding like that. But like all of these, it has a range, so just dullness, fogginess, sleepiness, etc., lack of energy.

(a) Expanding the awareness to the whole body. There's a reason why I say that over and over and over. It's so, so, so important. It will affect the mind. It's impossible – if you're really expanding

the awareness and really filling it with attention, it's actually quite hard to be nodding. There's something about it that's the opposite movement. So expanding the awareness to the whole body and really filling it, again and again and again.

(b) As I've mentioned as part of a couple of the guided meditations, the in-breath is naturally energizing. The out-breath is naturally relaxing. So that if I want, if I need more energy, **a bit more attention to the in-breath**, and a bit more attention to the energization of the in-breath is going to energize things.

(c) **A long breath**, or longer breath, or very long breath will also energize. It will energize the body. You can think of it as oxygen or whatever, but if you think in energy terms, it's just there's more energy there. And that will energize the mind. So long breath, move to a long breath – if you're working with the breath, of course.

(d) **If you're working**, let's say, **with mettā**, then again, what's going to help? Could it be that **going back in the categories to the easiest person** might actually lighten things up, bring a bit of brightness, just because the *mettā* comes and it's easiest?

(e) Or might it be that **going to the difficult person**, because they're difficult, and the challenge of it keeps you awake?

(f) Or might it be that **expanding to all beings**, partly because of the spatial expansion – which I'll come back to in a second. The question is, do I need to **shift categories** if I'm doing *mettā*? And which way? And it's not like it's always going to be *this* one that's going to help. So I have to have that willingness to respond and experiment.

(g) **More pegs**, okay? We talked about pegs in the counting, right? Bringing back those pegs really gives the mind – keeps it busy, gives it something to focus on. It literally keeps it up from sagging, okay? **With the numbers and the counting, they're like pegs. With the mettā practice, if you're using phrases, the phrases are like pegs.** What can often be really helpful in the *mettā* practice – so let's say your first two phrases are “May you be happy” and “May you be peaceful.” So usually you go, “May you be happy. May you be peaceful.” Actually, if the mind needs a bit more pegs, if it needs more energy, or if it's getting lost: “May you be happy. May you be happy. May you be peaceful. May you be peaceful.” Say each one twice. First one, I'm not quite there. The second one, I'm a bit more there. So just small things like this, but they can make a lot of difference.

(h) You can also just **imagine**, actually, let's say, **your whole body filled with a bright, white light**, just like the sun – really, really useful. Again, when the mind gets tired, it gets dark, foggy.

(i) You can also **open up the awareness very, very wide** – much wider than the energy body size, which is just a little bit bigger than the physical body. You can open it up to the size of this room. It's a lovely, huge room. Or even wider to the sky outside, etc. When we get tired, the mind shrinks. It's actually what we do when we curl up and go to sleep: the mind pulls in on itself, in a way. And so, opening up that awareness, opening your eyes, open up the awareness. You have a sense of the whole room. You're kind of moving the mind, encouraging it in the opposite direction that it does when it contracts as it falls asleep or gets tired like that. Tired mind is a small mind. [12:47]

(j) You can also sometimes just **sweep through the body, paying attention to whatever sensations you feel there.** And again, *experiment*. Is it more helpful right now, with this hindrance right now, to **sweep really fast**? Sometimes it is, when we're tired. Just move the attention quite

quickly. Maybe it's more helpful **going up. Or maybe down. Or maybe both. Or maybe it might be helpful really slowly, really getting into a sensation.** Again, you have to experiment.

So those are some antidotes for sloth and torpor. We really want to use these.

(2) With **restlessness** – it's actually **restlessness and worry**, which refers to worry about ethical misdeeds that I'm worried I've done, or someone's going to find out this or that. But we'll leave that part. We'll leave that aside for now. But a lot of them [the antidotes] are interestingly quite similar, so:

(a) **More pegs** can really help.

(b) If you're working with the breath, the **long breath** tends to really help with restlessness.

(c) Or it could be like we just did. It's like, you **find a way of breathing or a way of construing the breath that feels soothing.** I mean, there's a place on your back, and it's almost like the breath and the sense of it comes, metaphorically, like someone just soothingly stroking your back, and that addresses the restlessness. It soothes the restlessness. Again, we can shape the breath with our imagination, the breath energy, and that can have a real effect on our energy, of course.

(d) Again, **expanding the awareness to the whole body.** So it's useful for opposite hindrances, if you like.

(e) And again, the **sweeping of the attention** can be really helpful when there's restlessness.

(f) One particular thing: if there's a lot of restlessness that is not so much mental but physical – in other words, it's not a lot of thought-proliferation, but just the body feels restlessness, and the mind won't settle down with that, then what can be really helpful, again, is **a really large awareness, as large as you can open it out.** But within that, you have a job to do. And the job is, let go of your primary base object, and you **become aware of the sensations of restlessness**, the actual prickly feelings that arise and pass in the body – you know, that sort of thing – in this big awareness, and your job is **completely allowing them**, and they'll be, moment to moment, arising and passing, unpleasant – and **completely welcoming them.**

Actually, technically what we're doing then is we're switching to what I would call a particular insight way of looking. But if you stay with that for a while, actually, for reasons I'll talk about later, it can settle the whole thing down. The whole system settles down, because we're then in a very different relationship with the restlessness. When restlessness comes up, we have aversion to the restlessness. It's unpleasant, the very sense of restlessness. And that aversion to the restlessness feeds the whole thing.

When you go wide like that, and you come into a mode of completely allowing, completely welcoming, we're almost, by definition, quietening the aversion. We're practising a non-aversive relationship. And it's that and the space that will really, really help. You just stick with it, stick with it, again and again. Actually, if you just do [that] – I remember playing with this years ago in the Hermitage, sitting – restless, restless, sitting while doing that – actually then ending up sitting for three hours, because that very practice just allowed everything to calm really, really, down. So all these things – they're quite powerful, if we find the right way to work with them.

(3) Okay, **sense desire** as a hindrance, third one (it's usually listed first, but I'll put it third).

(a) Let's talk about one particular kind of sense desire: **sexual desire**. Okay, there's desire for someone, or whoever it is. You know, you can go and take a cold shower or whatever, but I'd just like to offer this as a real possibility, especially as one develops more, and you're all experienced meditators. So oftentimes, what happens is there's sexual desire, and it goes to an image of having sexual contact in some kind of way – I have this person, or whatever it is. That's the bit that's not so helpful for *samādhī*. But the desire itself and the energy, there's a way of working with it.

For instance: okay, here's desire. It's gone to the image already. Is it possible to kind of feel the energy of sexual arousal? So I've got desire, I've got image (in the probably *not* imaginal sense, but an image there), and I've got sexual energy or arousal. Of course, they're related. We could say you've got three things. Of those three, if I can focus on and open to, actually, and feel the *energy* – so most people, the desire comes up, and then the image comes up, and then the feeling, and I'm lost in the image. I'm lost in chasing this sexual fantasy. I'm embroiled in it. If I just can kind of **focus more on the energy and actually open to it, allow that actual energy in the space of the energy body**, actually, it feels good. If it's not too tight, I open to it, and I enjoy it, it's actually quite close to *pīti*. It's quite close to the kind of good feeling. And oftentimes when people first experience *pīti*, they say, "Oh, it's like an orgasm." It doesn't have to be that intense, but there's a similarity there.

So what you're really doing is approaching this thing more energetically, feeling it, opening to it, and kind of riding it in a way that allows it to shape into something that's a more pure energy, which is actually very conducive and helpful to where we're going, or similar to where we're going anyway. I wouldn't necessarily, obviously, give that to complete beginners. But you guys have had a lot of experience, so if that's kind of desire coming up, that's good. It's a way of working with it. It can be very similar to *pīti* if I can kind of filter things out and emphasize and open in the right way.

(b) What about **desire for food**? Anyone got any suggestions? Sitting here, and I can't think of anything but lunch or tea. Does that come up for anyone? Okay, not a problem.

(4) **Ill-will and aversion** – I'll split this into two, this hindrance:

(a) **Ill-will** means, actually, I'm getting really upset with someone here, so much so that I wish them harm. (i) **Mettā**, obviously. You switch – if it's really strong, you know, if breath is your base practice, just switch to *mettā*. I need to deal with this ill-will. I absolutely [need to], because when that's there, it's not going to help. It's really going to get in the way. (ii) But there's another possibility within that, which is: when I have ill-will towards someone, or aversion towards someone, or I just don't like them, and the mind is in that kind of nasty state (however gross or subtle), actually, what I can do then – so first thing, I think, "Oh, I give *mettā* to that person," which is great. That might really help. But there's a second possibility, which is actually, bring the attention back to myself without trying to change the ill-will or how terrible this person is, or those kinds of thoughts and feelings. **Bring the attention back to myself, and actually notice and feel the *dukkha* of that ill-will here**. It's in *my* heart. There's a taste in my mouth. It's a flavour in my energy body and my consciousness. It's *dukkha*. It's painful. So I'm not trying to change the ill-will. I just come back, and I feel what's happening. Don't judge, just: "What does it feel like? Oh, it's *dukkha*." And feel the pain of it. I just have to let my consciousness touch the pain there.

If I'm doing that, if I'm just letting it touch it, then what can happen is, when I touch that pain, when I come into contact, it turns into compassion for myself, okay? Self-compassion. You think, "Yeah, but my problem is with the other person." It doesn't matter. Once there's self-compassion, there's compassion. It's a new energy in the system, and it will soften everything. So my self-compassion starts changing my relationship with this other person. That's really, really useful as well.

(b) What can also happen – and what you will, I'm sure, notice happening over the course of the retreat – is that **we get aversive at certain noises**: the heating, or the birds, the rooks, which are a lot quieter than they used to be, say, ten or fifteen years ago, for some reason. And it's like, "Oh, those crows are so *loud*," or whatever it is, and "I'm trying to meditate, and they're *bothering* me." Or this person is just, "Every time they get up, their bones creak," like my bones creak or whatever, something, or their breathing. Aversion at noise, which could include aversion at a person or another sentient being, or whatever it is.

(i) This is going to be really common, okay? I have to **remember the big picture, the goal**. Where am I going in practice? I'm certainly not going towards more aversion. I'm going towards less aversion. That's what I want. It's not even *jhāna* is my primary goal. **It's less aversion, less *kilesa*, freedom from the defilements**. Just remind myself, "What do I want? **I want to get to a place where there's less aversion, I'm less bothered by noise, I'm more open, there's more love**, etc." [23:31] So again, what does that imply about how I should practise the *jhānas*, and what kind of way I'm holding, and my view of the whole thing? Is it possible, can I find a way of practising the *jhānas* that is not so bothered, that kind of *includes* sounds, and coming and going, and noises? Not bothered, but not throwing out the baby with the bathwater: "Oh, I don't need to make an effort, then." So some attitude, view, or stance here that's really, really possible.

(ii) Sometimes what you can actually do is, again, **deliberately let the primary object go, and open up more to sound, and a sense of really including that**. And again, I'm doing the opposite thing of aversion. I'm opening to sound and including it. I'm not saying, "Oh, that's *other* than what I'm trying to do." I'm opening to sound, including it, and then that starts changing the way I feel about the sound. And then within that, keeping that openness, actually, then I can reintroduce the primary object, but I've got it in a much bigger space, and a much bigger attitude, a much bigger orientation.

(iii) You know, technically, we'll get to this when we talk about the second *jhāna*, but actually, technically, if in any moment, you could just quite significantly **turn down any aversion in the mind**, you would come very close to the second *jhāna*. *Sukha* would arise. Happiness would arise. With a lot of practice – or actually, maybe, again, this is just one of those things. Just try. I say, well, just try. Sometimes I say, "Okay, just turn down the aversion." You say, "What do you mean, 'turn down'? I don't know how to do it." Just try. Just try to turn down the aversion, because turning down the aversion can then just directly give rise to happiness, give rise to *sukha*.

(5) Okay, last one: **doubt**. We can doubt the teacher, we can doubt the teachings, and we can doubt ourselves. There's probably lots of other stuff, but those are the three sort of common ones. So what's the difference between questioning and doubt? **Doubt often involves an absence of questioning**, in fact, or an absence of letting questions blossom and grow into an inquiry that's actually helpful. Doubt tends to paralyse. We get stuck in a kind of confusion or this and that. We're not actually questioning

anything. The mind is just shuttling back and forth or going round in a circle. So sometimes, underneath all that, there's actually a question or two or three that need to get clarified and formulated, and perhaps asked to oneself or to a teacher. But we haven't let the question form yet. And we're just stuck in this kind of unclear shuttling back and forth. So is there a question there?

Once we've got a question, it's no longer paralysing. Even formulating it clearly will help. We'll feel unparalysed. And **then formulating and asking and engaging will be really helpful**. But doubt paralyses. And so, just one thing to bear in mind is timing, here. **When am I going to wrestle with this either question or doubt? "Outside of the meditation" is the answer.** In other words, yeah, there's something I'm really not sure about. I'm confused. I have a question, and I can't proceed until I have an answer. Just, "This is my meditation time, so I'm just going to put that aside. But I promise you, mind, that I will get to this question, and I will think about it, I'll ponder it, I'll inquire, I'll ask something later." You make a deal with the mind. It's like, "We're going to get to this. I'm not ignoring it." But it happens outside of the formal practice.

How many people have heard of the practice of **exchanging the happiness of self and other**? A few of you. It's a huge practice, infinite possibilities. I think there's quite a large section about it in the book I wrote, *Seeing That Frees*.⁴ At some point, you can visit that. I want to say it's a really, really beautiful practice. It's one of the most gorgeous explorations you can do as a meditator, and full of creative possibilities and lovely, luscious possibilities of transformation. In a nutshell, here I am, pretty miserable from some hindrance attack or whatever, and I say to myself, "You know what? I'll take this. I'll take this because somewhere, someone else – maybe someone I know, maybe someone I don't know and will never know – someone, somewhere else correspondingly, by magic, I'm taking their *dukkha*, and they can have the happiness." So again, technically, you could say, well, what am I doing there? Instead of the automatic, natural aversion to the hindrances, I'm actually saying, "Come, come, I'll take this." But it has heart in it. It has this, "I'm willing to take this suffering right now. I'm opening myself to the suffering for the sake of the release from suffering of someone else, somewhere." So it's a kind of, you could say, 'magical thinking' – it doesn't matter – using your imagination, whatever. There are all kinds of variations on that with emptiness and stuff, but that's the nutshell of it. It's a very beautiful thing.

And often what happens, with the hindrances around, is there's no heart as well. Everything's got squeezed, miserable, and there's no heart. One possibility is bringing the heart in, in that very beautiful way. So you could do that with physical discomfort as well: "I can take this pain right now. I *will* take this pain right now. I'm willing to take this pain for the sake of someone else's ease, someone else's well-being."

Like I said, we have to get clear a few things about the hindrances: one is that there are subtle hindrances as well. So everyone's used to really gross hindrances, and it's generally what we get taught about when you first hear about the hindrances on insight retreats and stuff like that. But they also manifest very, very subtly. And as I said, there's a sutta in the *Majjhima Nikāya* where the Buddha's talking, and he's talking about subtle [hindrances], and he lists all these subtle hindrances.⁵ So things like elation and inertia, fear, slight over-efforting, slight under-efforting – very, very slight, he's talking about. Desire, if it's not handled well. Perception of multiplicity – you know, just in a way, too much

awareness of different things. There's a whole list there. But the point is, there's a whole range of subtlety. And in a way, there's always something to play with and work with and experiment with, something that can be tweaked a little bit.

Of course, there are some times in *jhāna* practice where all that goes, and we're not actually aware of any hindrances. And that's fine. You don't have to go looking for them at that point. You just get into the enjoyment of it. As you get more into the territory of a *jhāna*, then you start to realize the kind of more subtle hindrances that might be there, or possibly be there at times, that at first you don't realize. It's not that we're always looking. We're not at all always looking for hindrances with *jhāna* practice. We're actually inclining more to what's pleasant and easeful, and enjoying. But they will come up subtly.

Let me point out something else that I want to come back to on the retreat, and actually emphasize quite a lot. And it's something that, I think, gets clearer through *jhāna* practice than through insight and mindfulness practice. And it's a kind of very common micro-negativity of the mind. So you might be sitting there with a very nice energy body. You might be sitting there with *pīti*, etc., whatever it is, and you might be quite used to it by that point. But it's still pretty nice. Most people would give their right arms for what you're experiencing in that moment. But you've experienced this kind of thing before, and "The other day it was *better* than it was today." [laughter] And "I know it *can* be a bit better." And in this kind of very subtle way, the mind is inclining towards what's wrong, what's not quite as good as it should be.

Part of that is okay. It's part of the shaping. It's like, again, the potter with the clay on the wheel. Of course! "So what's wrong? It's not ... it's a bit sort of ..." I'm kind of pressing it. But when it has a flavour of [low complaining noises], when it has that negativity – we're talking, this can get *incredibly* subtle. It's just a cup half-full, half-empty thing, but on a really, really subtle level. It's just this moment, there's something in the way I'm seeing this and relating to this actually really lovely thing, and I'm somehow spinning it with a negative – I'm seeing it through a negative lens. This is incredibly common, and it's what we might call, like, a really deep, deep, almost base-level *kilesa*, defilement, of aversion in the mind. This, you'll notice more and more as things go on, and it's something that's actually really important to address and work with.

The really good news is that we notice this much more in – you'd think you'd notice it more in mindfulness and insight practice; you actually notice it much more in *jhāna* practice. And you'll get much closer to it, and you'll see it working at a much, much subtler level, and you'll be able to do something about it. And what I want to say right now is – and I'll repeat this, and other things – we just notice it. Expect it, notice it, find the pleasure, get into enjoying it. Find what's nice, get into enjoying it. So we just make a micro-movement. We're talking about a micro-subtle defilement. We just make a micro-shift of relationship and attitude, yeah? But in a way, we could construe that as a subtle hindrance, absolutely.

Okay, and again, in terms of subtle hindrances, there are two forms called 'sinking' and 'drifting.' I don't know where these words come from. I don't know if they're originally in the Buddha; I've never come across them in the Buddha. I picked them up from – I think it was Kamalashila.⁶ I can't remember. But they're around now in Dharma culture. So, 'drifting' and 'sinking': what does that mean?

(1) **Drifting** is a sort of subtle version of restlessness, and really, what it means is, the mind is still alive, you're still mindful, you're nowhere near, like, jumping out of your skin or anything like that, or obsessed with worrying, or that kind of thing. The mind is present. Everything's good. It's kind of with its object. But there's just a bit more tendency for it to drift off the object, or sometimes it manifests as just a bit more thoughts and images in the mind, and a little bit more tendency of the mind to get pulled off into them. So again, we're talking about something quite subtle. (2) And **sinking** is the subtle version of sloth and torpor. Again, nowhere near nodding or falling asleep or anything like that; it's just a little bit of dullness comes in. It's not quite so present, so alive, so bright, so sharp.

These are interesting hindrances, because oftentimes, what they're most related to is effort levels. Again, we're back to this question, this issue of effort levels, and the fact that I cannot avoid that issue. I cannot avoid that parameter of practice. As you get deeper and deeper in *samādhi*, a tiny bit too much effort, just a little bit too much effort, or a little bit less so, makes proportionately more of a difference, and more of an impact. In other words, again, the deeper we go, the more sensitive the whole system is. And a bit too much effort, a bit less effort actually kinds of gets in the way, or causes problems, has more of an effect at a deeper level. [36:52] So with these subtle hindrances, sinking and drifting, one of the things that's really worth paying attention to is just the effort levels, and seeing, like what we were saying earlier today, what is it just to back off the intensity? Or perhaps to move, in my directionality, from more of a probing to more of a receiving. In other words, what I wanted to say is, both sinking and drifting can arise from *either* too much effort, very slightly, *or* too little effort – paradoxically sounding. We don't know. What do you have to do? You have to just get in there and play, play with that subtle effort: bit more, bit less, bit more intense, bit less intense, bit more probing, bit more receiving, bit more delicate – you know, whatever it is.

And sometimes, one of the ways I like to think about this is, for example, with the drifting, why is there more thought? Why does the mind go? We're squeezing the mind too tight, and (in a completely incommensurate image) it's a bit like squeezing a banana skin, and the banana comes shooting out. [laughter] Maybe that's not the greatest analogy. But again, going back to what we said before, the whole body can reveal the effort. Even just the size of the attention can also affect this.

So there's lots of things to try, but one main point to take is the *spectrum*. We're really talking about a spectrum. When we talk about hindrances, we're really talking about a spectrum, despite what the Buddha said as, "With the abandonment of the hindrances, with seclusion from the hindrances, arises the first *jhāna*." Yes, that's true, *and* at another level, we're talking about a whole spectrum here that's not going to go away, in one form or another. Sometimes even in *jhāna* – again, 'in' inverted [commas], using that word in a slightly loose way – you can be, here's the happiness. Here's the brightness, the luminosity, and the happiness, and it's as if at the edges of that happiness and brightness, at the edges of consciousness, there's like a whole little pack of little terrier dogs sort of yapping away. And it's not that they're in the middle causing mayhem or really loud, but you're just aware of them there. Are you in the *jhāna* or are you out of the *jhāna*? It's an irrelevant question, 'in, out' – where's the intelligence here? The question is, what do I need to do at that point? What needs to happen?

One of the things: what do I need to pay attention to? Let's say, here's this luminous happiness right there. Here are these little terriers yapping. I'm just going to really get into that happiness, and I'm going to open my body to it, open my mind to it. We'll talk about all this. Now, it might be that in

doing that, the terriers nicely quieten down and fall asleep or whatever. But it might be they stay there, and actually, that's as good as it's going to get right now. Okay. So I've got this really nice, lovely, yummy, juicy happiness, which the person who gave their right arm for the *pīti* would now give their left arm as well for. And don't worry! The terriers are there. It's not a problem. Just get into and enjoy it. And don't worry about this 'in' and 'out' business. It's just how *not* to consume the mind with questions that are not relevant. But also, sometimes, it's the terriers yapping, *da-da-da*, I'm kind of 'in,' *da-da-da* – but let me go to the terriers, see what they need, and see if I can do something that encourages them to do something else. So it's not like there's always a formula, but one formula is: "It's okay. This is the deal right now. This is as good as it's going to get."

Sometimes there are hindrances in different forms. Sometimes a hindrance arises, just – is it a hindrance? No, it's just that the energy body – it's not that my mind is consumed with this or that. It's just that the energy body feels a little constricted or blocked. I'm not obsessed with this, I'm not thinking about that, I'm not lost in desire or doubt or any of that. It just feels a little bit blocked. We could call that a subtle hindrance, if you want. Or it's just that the energy body kind of won't settle down, or the *citta* won't really settle down. It's not even from gross distraction or thought; it's something just a little agitated in the energy of the *citta* or the body. So that's a bit like the yapping terriers.

Or sometimes – and again, this is something that may be for some of you, or *will* be for some of you later, may be relevant for some of you now – sometimes it's amazing: if you have quite a lot of experience in and out of *jhānas*, sometimes it's just like, it's almost like you can just dive underneath something. So here, this is blocked, or it doesn't feel right. Something's not settled. And like I said, it's a bit like the radio frequencies or the wardrobe: the *jhānas* are there anyway, and you can kind of just point the mind to a level that's actually really peaceful. Now, it might not be pristinely, wonderfully, radiantly, overwhelmingly peaceful, but there's something that you recognize, like, "Well, *that's* the kind of peace that belongs to the third *jhāna*," let's say. I recognize that peacefulness. And you point the mind, and you just dive underneath a little bit. It's there. And then I'm tuning to that. I'm not getting caught up. Yes, this part of the body doesn't feel quite connected, or feels a bit constricted, or the mind – so I'm just pointing to that, I dive into it, and then what's my work there? I've dived in. Now I'm in touch with that peacefulness. Now what? Now I need to work with that, get into it, enjoy it, open to it, focus on it, etc. We'll talk about more of that. So it's not *really* that the *jhāna* is quite there, but something of a doorway to that, something of a trail of that *jhāna* is there, and you can pick it up and just kind of point the mind there and dive into it – with practice, with time. [42:57] So there it is. And once you get that trail or opening, then you work on staying there and stabilizing and absorbing into that, etc.

As I said, with *jhāna* practice, we really want this attitude of working with – working *against*, if you like – the hindrances. We really want this idea of antidote. But we also really want this idea of patience. So I'm *patient* while I'm *working with*. Really important. I'm playing with and experimenting with all that, and I can use all my ingenuity and creativity in how I relate to hindrances or what might help. And at the same time, I have a firm resolve. I'm not just going to give up now. I'm not just going to get up and walk away, or just sit through it and say, "Oh, whatever. Who cares." There's this

combination of working actively, of being creative and ingenious, and a firm resolve and patience, all together.

So it's not that we want to get kind of locked into a grim battle for hours on end with some hindrance or another. At a certain point, it's like, "All right. You win the battle. You're not going to win the war, but you win this battle, and I'm going for walk," or "I'm going for a cup of tea." Part of that is also just taking the pressure off and opening the mind. If I go for a walk, it's like the beauty, the air, the light, the spaciousness – I hope, by the end of this retreat, that everyone knows the beauty of rain, because you get a lot of practice with that. There's no reason that bad (or so-called 'bad') weather should affect your sense of beauty.

In a way, what we're doing is, the emphasis is more on cultivating well-being than kind of fighting the hindrances. We're doing both, but it's like, it's a certain way of thinking about it. That's the balance. And again, to those of you, or when you have more and more experience, after you've got quite a lot of experience in and out of different *jhānas*, you sometimes just get a sense of what's possible in any moment. So maybe I'm working on the fourth *jhāna*; it's where my playground is. But there are hindrances around, whatever, and I'm kind of stuck in the first or second *jhāna*, and you just get a sense: no, I can stay with this and shape it, and it will go deeper. Other times you get a sense: "This is as good as it's going to get right now." You just have a feel for it after a while. That takes practice. So still, that's great. You know, that's *really* good. Just the fact that there's a subtle hindrance blocking you from getting as far as you've got before – no problem. You take what you can get, what's accessible, and you kind of develop a sense of (I don't know what an analogy would be) what's possible in any particular situation. [45:56]

All right. To finish, some things about **insight in relation to the hindrances**.

(1) One thing I've already said: **the hindrances are spectra**. They're not on/off. There's a spectrum for each hindrance in terms of really, really gross, more and more, more and more subtle. That's partly just like, I know that, I understand, that's the territory that I'm dealing with. Partly, that has a couple of implications. One is that they will be common visitors. They will be coming and going. If I have the view that "They shouldn't be," or "They won't be," or "After a certain amount of practice, or once I've reached X *jhāna*, it won't happen," that's the opposite of insight. That's delusion. So there's just a certain amount of insight in recognizing they're spectra, and that means, in one form or another, in one level on the spectrum of grossness or subtlety, they will be coming. I'm aware of that.

(2) Second thing is, **it's not linear**. Yes, they'll be coming and going, and they'll be coming and going even after you reach whatever *jhāna*, you know, in terms of what's part of your practice. You might, in other words – how to say this? You could have a much harder time with the hindrances later on in the retreat than you did earlier, or something. Or you feel like, "Now I've got to this *jhāna* now. It was going so well, and then suddenly, I'm just in a hell realm," or whatever. I've said this before in many other talks. If someone comes in to me and they're doing *samādhi* practice, and they just describe this kind of smooth ascent, day by day, into the Tuṣita heavens, kind of uninterrupted linear graph like that, either they're lying, or they're, again, really not paying attention. It's more like *this*: okay, there's a trend, yeah, but it's more like *this*. [non-linear hand gesture] Actually it's more like *this*. [different non-linear gesture] We'll explain. But it's not linear. So again, just because (I'll come back to this in a minute) we had a great time for the last five days, and all this stuff was opening up, it doesn't mean that

I'm not going to fall down a hole into the hindrances tomorrow, or that they will not visit. Let's say that.

(3) Third piece about insight here is, we want to help ourselves to **get to a relationship with the hindrances where we're really not taking them personally**. They are aspects of being human, until, apparently, one is an arahant, and that means fully enlightened. They're aspects of being human. *Taking personally* – what I mean by that is, “Oh, I'm a bad meditator,” or “This means that I'm” – even worse – “a bad person, because I keep getting this or that hindrance. I keep getting aversion,” or “I keep getting desire. I'm really greedy,” or “I'm this or that.” Hindrances – don't take them personally. They're a human thing. They're like facts of being human, and the arising of a hindrance doesn't mean anything about my capability as a meditator or my worthiness as a human being. That's really, really important. So, can I encourage that attitude? And that's part of where we want to move towards. That's part of the gift of *jhāna* practice. We begin, after a while, to see: it's not personal. But we want to really encourage that, not taking it personally.

(4) The second thing, again, we want to move towards – this is the fourth insight piece now – is that we, more and more, **believe the stories that the hindrances spin less and less**. So less and less, over time, do we believe the stories that the hindrances spin. What happens is a hindrance arises, and we get convinced that it's actually about this person, that they are the problem. It's not the problem of my hindrance. It's about them. Or it spins a story about me, and oftentimes then it spins this whole *papañca* thing, that whole proliferation.

Actually what's happening is a seed of a hindrance arose, which is what happens for human beings. These hindrance seeds just keep coming up – defilement seeds, *kilesa* seeds, greed, aversion, delusion – in one form or another, manifest as the hindrances. They're little seeds. And then without wisdom and mindfulness, those seeds become huge, huge trees, forests, jungles – jungles, better. Partly what allows them to become a jungle, those seeds, is *believing* them: believing what they tell us, believing the perceptions, believing the stories that they spin. This is so crucial. As I said, if nothing else happened on the retreat, you didn't have a millisecond of an ounce of a nice feeling, but *that's* what happened on the retreat, that's really, really good. That would make a huge difference in your life – huge difference.

(5) And the fifth insight piece is that, in relation to what I just said, we actually **view the hindrances**: yeah, they're really unpleasant, but in a way, they're **kind of like gold dust or gold ore**. **There's something really precious here. I just need to find the right relationship with it.** I can turn it into treasure *if* I find the right relationship with it, in terms of view and wisdom. So they're really like gold dust, like something unrefined and filled with all kinds of not-so-great stuff. But actually there's a treasure there, because as I said, hindrances will come up in life. It's not just something in meditation. We think about, what about that creative project? What about that service project? What about your work? What about coming up in long-term relationship? Same things arise. The same hindrances arise, and they will get in the way of, they will 'hinder.' *Nīvaraṇa* is the Pali. It's literally what it means: something that's an obstacle, gets in the way of a going forward. They will do that in all of those other realms of our life. It's not just something about meditation. If I can get wise to them, if I can learn how to view them in a way that they lose their power – they might still arise as seeds, but they lose their power – that's absolutely huge, and absolutely precious.

And part of that is, also, I begin to understand something about emotions as well. And this is really interesting. Something that seemed like “It’s this emotion that I’m feeling,” I actually see, “Oh, sometimes it’s actually just a seed of a hindrance. And the mind has spun that into a story, and a certain emotion has arisen. But actually, in its root, it was just this hindrance, or mostly this hindrance.” Sometimes. So there’s something about understanding the hindrances that is actually really important in understanding our emotional life. I’m going to come back to that in a sec. [54:10]

The fact that they’re spectra – there’s a range – is part of this development of subtlety, because I recognize, they’re going to get more subtle. My attention has to get more subtle to even pick up on subtle hindrances, and then work with them. So when we talked yesterday about how, I would say, it’s so important, this development of subtlety and refinement and discrimination – that also happens in regard to the hindrances. In terms of our overall trajectory, this recognition and working with the subtlety of the spectrum of the hindrance is also part of that whole development of subtlety. Yes, it’s much nicer, attuning and discerning to subtle differences of *this* kind of exquisite peacefulness versus *that* kind of exquisite peacefulness, but in terms of developing the whole subtlety – which again, is so important for our emotional life and all the rest of it – that’s important too. It’s all subtlety. It’s all discrimination. It’s all attunement.

In terms of not taking hindrances personally and not believing them, can you hear that that’s about letting go? It’s about having insight into what they are. I see you, what you are, and I let go. I’m no longer dragged along by this story or this identification. There’s a letting go. It’s insight. Yeah?

Last thing: if you do enough of *jhāna* practice, what you’ll begin to notice is what seems like a kind of backlash – it’s as if it’s going really well, and maybe even a new territory opens up. I’ve gotten to a new opening or a new state or a new wonderful thing happened. And I’m in that for a little while, however long that little while is – half a day, three days, or whatever it is, a few hours, even – and then all hell breaks loose. And sometimes it can seem like, it’s almost like the very opening caused a kind of backlash, that there was a kind of reaction to it somehow. It’s not like every time, kind of expect it, but there seems to be something like that. There seems to be.

And it raises a lot of questions. I mean, again, I need to expect it, etc., don’t take it personally, and it’s not linear, all that. But is there some kind of catharsis, some kind of purification going on here? I know people who have exactly that view: that what we’re doing in *jhāna* practice is somehow allowing a kind of karmic purification of our *sāṅkhāras* and our emotions. Some people have that view.

I would be a little more cautious. So I don’t want to rule that out, but I would rather take both views: yes and no. Again, if I step back from that, what we want is a range. Remember this thing I said? I want you to have a range. Do you remember me saying that? I want you to have a range in regard to your emotions. We want this range in relationship to our emotions, and with regard to the ways of working and the ways of viewing emotion. I would like you to have a really big range. I can work with emotions in lots of different ways. I can view emotions in lots of different ways. And I have a whole range of emotions as well.

But if there’s a lot of *jhāna* practice, and if we’re allowing that *jhāna* practice – over a long time, I mean – to give rise to insight, we will begin more and more to recognize the fabricated nature of emotions. We tend to think, “An emotion is a real thing. It arises by itself. It’s there. And it’s just sort of, I have to deal with that because it’s a truth.” Over time – we may or may not get more into this, and

I know it's a sensitive [topic] – but it becomes almost undeniable that an emotion is a fabrication. Without me *doing* something, usually unconsciously, it cannot arise as that emotion. It cannot get fabricated. It cannot get constructed. So in the Buddha's words, we “see a hindrance as a hindrance,”⁷ and not necessarily as an emotion. We recognize what's there. It's a ‘fabrication,’ or in other language, it's actually ‘empty.’ An emotion is empty.

But if you remember back to the first night, I said, “I can see an emotion as empty, and I can see it as real.” I'm not parking in either one. I have the possibility to shift between views. To me this is absolutely crucial. Most often, people park in either one, and that becomes their view. For me, it would be catastrophic and tragic to *only* ever have the view, *always* have the view that emotions are fabrications. I would *never* want to *only* have that view. But both views become available. And therefore the view of catharsis, the view of, “Yes, something is purifying here. I may not even know what, but I sit through it as a purification,” and then I have a whole stance with that and relationship with it – or the view that “It's *not* that. They're fabrications, and I need to get interested in the fabrication.” They're both there. But as we practise certainly *jhānas* more and more, we begin to “see a hindrance as a hindrance” more and more, as the Buddha might say.

And what happens, as we said, is it's not linear. It's very up and down. But there is a movement, over a long time with *jhāna* practice, that what might manifest more as *papañca* – like really extreme agitation, and lostness in story, and believing everything, and self-view and all that – actually begins to manifest less as *papañca*, and more as just pure hindrance. So over time, there's this kind of sifting away, filtering away of the more *papañcizing* element of the mind. And it becomes: “It's just the hindrance.” It might still be quite strong; I'm really quite restless in the body, but there's no story attached to it. There's no lostness. What was usually *papañca* becomes more just, “I'm just dealing with a hindrance now.” And then over time, even the hindrances themselves – more and more, they tend to be on the subtle side of things, but they're still there. So, over a long time of *jhāna* practice, there is this movement of shaving away the gross, getting down to the hindrances, and then even more subtle. But they stay. They're part of the deal. And we need to be okay with that, really up for that.

Okay? [laughs] Sorry. I was going to take some questions, but we already had a couple, and I think it's probably enough now. So let's just sit for a minute together.

[silence]

Thank you, everyone. Enjoy tea, enjoy your evening practice, and I think there are a few interviews this evening. So if you haven't checked already, just check that that's not you. And see you tomorrow.

¹ E.g. DN 2.

² MN 128.

³ DN 22, MN 10. Also see SN 46:51.

⁴ Rob Burbea, *Seeing That Frees: Meditations on Emptiness and Dependent Arising* (Devon: Hermes Amāra, 2014), 322–6.

⁵ MN 128.

⁶ Probably the modern Kamalashila rather than the eighth-century Kamalāśīla. For discussions of ‘sinking’ and ‘drifting,’ see Kamalashila, *Meditation: The Buddhist Way of Tranquillity and Insight*, 2nd edn (Birmingham: Windhorse, 1996), 165–74.

⁷ Cf. the Buddha's statement at DN 22: "One dwells seeing phenomena as phenomena in terms of the five hindrances" (*dhammesu dhammānupassī viharati pañcasu nīvaraṇesu*).