



The SnowFlower Sun

January / February 2018

PRACTICING WITH THE FIVE HINDRANCES

From a talk by Gloria Green

Many things can hinder our sense of inner peace. Chief among them in Buddhism are the Five Hindrances: **DESIRE, ILL WILL, SLOTH & TORPOR, RESTLESSNESS,** and **DOUBT**. These energies cannot be ignored or wished away. Until we look closely at a hindrance, the stories that keep it alive and the emotions that live underneath it, will continue to 'disperse our attention and darken the quality of awareness to the detriment of calm and clarity' (Bhikkhu Bodhi). So, the hindrance must be recognized and acknowledged. We must understand that we are the one making it "real"! Here are a few steps for working with hindrances. Practicing mindfulness, metta, gratitude and compassion; meditate to become aware of the hindrance; examine the stories we are telling ourselves and validate by asking "Am I sure?" Look deeply beneath the stories to see what unmet need is asking to be met or find acceptance.

Desire – The "Want Monster"

Desire is wanting pleasant sights, sounds, smells, tastes, bodily sensations, and mind states. Desire itself is not a problem, but it can trick us into adopting the "if only" mentality. "*If only* I could have this or be that! The strength of a desire is determined not by the object of desire, but by the degree of attachment. Wanting is a self-perpetuating habit. We can't be where we are because we are grasping at something somewhere else. Even when we get what we want, by then we want something else. We have a sense that what is here and now is not enough, that we are somehow incomplete.

Ill Will – "Not Wanting"

Aversion, anger, ill will, hatred form the "not wanting" mind. Although we generally don't think of them as such, fear, judgment, and boredom are also forms of aversion, based as they are on dislike of some aspect of experience. Anger itself is not bad, and there are times when feelings of anger are justified. It is when we add layers of stories to the anger that we suffer. With awareness, we can turn off the radio and look deeply at the fear, grief, or shame which may be the underlying emotions. The Buddha said that holding on to anger is like grasping a hot coal with the intent of throwing it at someone else. You get burned first.

Sloth and Torpor

This hindrance includes laziness, dullness, absence of vitality, being foggy and sleepy. Sometimes there is apathy – a feeling of heaviness, everything takes too much effort. To counter this hindrance, the Buddha suggested reflecting on this precious human birth and on the fleeting nature of each moment. Such reflections can arouse curiosity and energy, interest in what is happening in the present moment. Setting small goals, moving our bodies or deliberately seeing what is new and fresh in each experience will also help. As noted by Buddhist teacher Gil Fronsdal, sloth and torpor can arise in those new to meditation or on the first day of a retreat when we lack the constant stimulation we are accustomed to.

Restlessness

With this hindrance the restless mind jumps from object to object, and our concentration is scattered and dispersed. Mindfulness practice calmly focuses our attention on what is going on right here, right now, and it becomes possible to question the validity of the stressful stories the mind spins.

Doubt

Finally, there is skillful doubt: don't believe everything you are told or hear. But when you're caught up in skeptical doubt, you're always looking for the flaw, and are afraid to make a decision. Jumping from belief to belief and not knowing what to do, may end in doing nothing at all!



Special Events

Thaypassana 2018

“Doing the Next Right Thing”

January 12-14, 2018

Led by Steven Spiro, Janice Cittasubha Sheppard and David Haskin
Holy Wisdom Monastery in Madison, WI

SnowFlower Annual Winter Potluck

“Celebration of Abundance”

Saturday, January 20, 2018 11:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.

Arboretum Co-Housing - 1137 Erin St., Madison 553715

Bring a vegetarian dish to pass.

Share your talent in the form of music or a reading.

Everyone is invited to enjoy the gifts of community and delicious food!

Volunteer to help. Contact: r.zachary.smith@gmail.com

January 2018

Sundays	Tuesdays	Wednesdays	Fridays
	1/2 Intro to Sangha Walt Keough Engaged/Applied Practice (or 5MT) Zach Smith	1/3 Answers from the Heart Host: Amy Krohn	1/5 Engaged/Applied Practice Zach Smith
1/7 No Death, No Fear Tod Highsmith Joan Braune	1/9 Midlife Wake-Up Kathleen Caron	1/10 Answers from the Heart Host: Amy Krohn	1/12 5 Mindfulness Trainings Karen Plum Thaypassana Retreat
1/14 No Death, No Fear Gerri Gurman	1/16 Surprise Topic Amy Krohn	1/17 Answers from the Heart Host: Amy Krohn	1/19 Surprise Topic Amy Krohn
1/21 Answers from the Heart Celeste Robins	1/23 Taking the View of the Other Steven Spiro	1/24 Answers from the Heart Host: Amy Krohn	1/26 The 3 Dharma Seals Susan O'Leary
1/28 Answers from the Heart Gerri Gurman	1/30 The 3 Dharma Seals Susan O'Leary		

Join the SnowFlower email list

Send an email listserv@snowflower.org, or Ann Varda at annvarda@gmail.com

SnowFlower Sangha Cancellation Policy

In case of inclement weather, an email will be sent to the listserv by 3:00 pm the day of sangha and a notice will be posted on the door of the Friends Meetinghouse.

February 2018

Sundays	Tuesdays	Wednesdays	Fridays
			2/2 Intro to Sangha Walt Keough 5 MTs Gloria Green
2/4 Answers from the Heart Pam Moran Dave Zeman	2/6 Equanimity: A Higher State of Happiness Gloria Green	2/7 Answers from the Heart Host: Amy Krohn	2/9 Part 2 – Why Buddhism is True Jon Reed
2/11 Answers from the Heart Gerri Gurman	2/13 Part 2 – Why Buddhism is True Jon Reed	2/14 Answers from the Heart Host: Amy Krohn	2/16 Stability and Insight: Mountain and Eagle Steven Spiro
2/18 Answers from the Heart Celeste Robins	2/20 Body, Mind & Spirit. Embodied Practice Rosebud Sparer	2/21 The 5MTs Host: Amy Krohn	2/23 Body, Mind & Spirit. Embodied Practice Rosebud Sparer
2/25 Answers from the Heart Gerri Gurman	2/27 Bodhisatvas and Engaged Buddhism Celeste Robins	2/28 Answers from the Heart Host: Amy Krohn	

Tuesday and Friday Sangha Meetings are held at The Friends Meetinghouse, 1704 Roberts Court, Madison, WI. 7 – 8:30pm.

Wednesday Daytime Sangha Meetings are from 1:30-3 pm every Wednesday at the home of Amy Krohn during the winter months. Specific information regarding this location and topic will be sent to the listserve every Sunday.

For info, contact Mary Gallagher (608) 274-2769. Wednesday Sangha includes sitting and walking meditation, followed by book reading and discussion.

Sunday Morning Sangha Meetings are held at the homes of SnowFlower members from 10 – 11:30 am. Information regarding location and topic will be sent to the listserve every Wednesday. Or, call: Tom Loomis (608) 334-4532, Finn Enke (608) 243-7971. Sunday Sangha includes sitting & walking meditation followed by dharma sharing and discussion.

SnowFlower Sangha Mentoring Program - It is natural that newcomers to the practice may have questions, and a mentoring relationship supports a newer practitioner by clarifying matters of personal practice and sangha practice. For 2017, a list of mentors is available from Karuna Namenwirth, who can be reached at (608) 832-6658. The logistics of the mentoring relationship (duration, frequency of contact, etc.) are up to the mentor and mentee.

Why do we study the Five Hindrances? Chiefly because these are mental states that can stand in the way of our freedom, our awakening. They talk about them from the standpoint of habit energy, as they can be very strong and compelling. One of the goals and fruits of our meditation practice is to recognize these hindrances when they are present, and begin to let them go. Through applying mindfulness and compassion, we can clearly loosen their grip and experience more equanimity.

It does, however, take mindful attention to loosen the hold of one or more of the hindrances. Their hold can be seductive: we might really want to hold on to our desire or our anger – it feels great in a sort of habitual way. Some teachers suggest, when we feel besieged, that we apply the RAIN formula.

- Recognize.
- Accept.
- Investigate. How does it feel in our bodies? Our emotions? Are there stories that come with it that we tell ourselves?
- Non-identify. “This is what we humans do.” “It is passing.” “It does not define us.”

Anytime I am kicking myself for having a misunderstanding with a friend, or spoken unmindfully, and obsessing about what I coulda woulda shoulda, I know that I am in hindrance territory. The good news is that sometimes, just recognizing that what we are experiencing IS a hindrance can be what is needed to have it dissipate and fall away.

Investigation can be incredibly fruitful when it leads to greater understanding of the habit energy now center-stage, and to practicing non-identification. Knowing the patterns, being compassionate with all involved, and knowing that this too is part of the human condition all bring with them more freedom. We are loosening old habitual knots gently and with compassion.

Vipassana teacher Jan Shepherd says that we can't take care of one hindrance by adding another. For example, if we see that restlessness or anxiety have arisen, we can't force it to depart through aversion and ill will. Her suggestion is to consciously cultivate the opposite energy of whatever hindrance has arisen.

Sufficiency for sense desire; Metta for anger or ill will; Stimulation for sloth; Mindful attention for restlessness; Calm for anxiety; Confidence for doubt.

Insightful similes are used by the Buddha in the Sangaravo Sutta. A pool of clear water [the mind] touched by desire is like water dyed with bright and alluring colors. The same water, when overrun by ill will, is like bubbling boiling water. Taken over by sloth and torpor the pool is now like stagnant water choked by weeds and algae. Stirred by the winds of restlessness and worry, waves and whitecaps appear on the surface of the water. Assailed by doubt, the water is now cloudy with mud.

The bottom line is that when there is suffering, there may be one or more of the hindrances present, and it is useful to know that there are tools to help us.

