

In contrast to the previous *satipaṭṭhānas*, contemplation of *dhammas* is particularly concerned with recognizing the conditioned nature of the phenomena under observation. In fact, the main instruction for most of the contemplations of *dhammas* directly mentions conditionality, while in the previous *satipaṭṭhānas* this happens only in the “refrain”. The prominence of conditionality in this *satipaṭṭhāna* brings to mind the well-known statement that one who sees dependent co-arising sees the *Dhamma*.¹³ Such “seeing” (*passati*) of the *Dhamma* may well come about through “contemplating” (*anu-passati*) *dhammas*, a suggestion which also squares well with the acquisition of the “method” (*ñāya*) mentioned in the “direct path” passage of the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* as a goal of practice.¹⁴

Thus contemplation of *dhammas* skilfully applies *dhammas* (classificatory categories) as taught in the *Dhamma* (the teaching of the Buddha) during contemplation in order to bring about an understanding of the *dhamma* (principle) of conditionality and lead to the realization of the highest of all *dhammas* (phenomena): *Nibbāna*.¹⁵

IX.2 CONTEMPLATION OF THE FIVE HINDRANCES

The first of the contemplations of *dhammas* is, in a way, a more specific version of contemplation of states of mind, since it turns awareness to five manifestations of the three unwholesome roots: the five hindrances. In contrast to the preceding contemplation of the mind, however, contemplation of the hindrances covers not only the presence or absence of a hindrance, but also the conditions underlying the presence or absence of each hindrance. In my exploration I will follow the two-stage pattern of this instruction, by focusing initially on the five hindrances and the importance of recognizing them, and considering subsequently the conditions for their presence or absence.

The *satipaṭṭhāna* instructions for contemplating the hindrances are:

**If sensual desire is present in him, he knows “there is sensual desire in me”;
if sensual desire is not present in him, he knows “there is no sensual desire**

¹³ M I 190.

¹⁴ Cf. page 107.

¹⁵ D III 102 speaks of *Nibbāna* as the highest of all wholesome *dhammas*; cf. also A II 34 and Sn 225.

in me”; and he knows how unarisen sensual desire can arise, how arisen sensual desire can be removed, and how a future arising of the removed sensual desire can be prevented. If aversion is present in him, he knows.... If sloth-and-torpor is present in him, he knows.... If restlessness-and-worry is present in him, he knows.... If doubt is present in him, he knows “there is doubt in me”; if doubt is not present in him, he knows “there is no doubt in me”; and he knows how unarisen doubt can arise, how arisen doubt can be removed, and how a future arising of the removed doubt can be prevented.¹⁶

The use of the term “hindrance” (*nīvaraṇa*) clearly indicates why these mental qualities have been singled out for special attention: they “hinder” the proper functioning of the mind.¹⁷ Under the influence of the hindrances one is unable to understand one’s own good or that of others, or to gain concentration or insight.¹⁸ Learning to withstand the impact of a hindrance with awareness is therefore an important skill for one’s progress on the path. According to the discourses, difficulties in counterbalancing a hindrance are a good reason for approaching an experienced meditator to ask for practical guidance.”

These five hindrances actually cover seven distinct mental qualities.²⁰ That these seven are subsumed under a fivefold presentation is probably due to the similarities in effect and character between sloth (*thīna*) and torpor (*mid-dha*), and between restlessness (*uddhacca*) and worry (*kukkucca*).²¹ According to the commentaries, this fivefold presentation makes it possible to correlate

¹⁶ M I 60.

¹⁷ Cf. e.g. D I 246; S V 96; and S V 97.

¹⁸ M II 203; S V 92; S V 127; and A III 63.

¹⁹ A III 317 and A III 321.

²⁰ At S V 110 a tenfold presentation is given, by distinguishing between internal sensual desire, aversion, and doubt, and their external counterparts, while the remaining two compounds are separated into sloth, torpor, restlessness, and worry. This presentation supports the notion of seven actual mental qualities. Cf. also Gunaratana 1996: p.32. A variation of the usual fivefold presentation can be found at It 8, which has a single hindrance, the hindrance of ignorance. Another variation occurs at Paṭi I 31, Paṭi I 103, and Paṭi I 163, where enumerations of the hindrances omit worry and give ignorance and dissatisfaction instead.

²¹ The similarity between sloth and torpor is noted by Vibh 254, according to which both refer to “inability” or “unreadiness”, with the difference that sloth is of a mental type, while torpor represents the bodily variation. Vibh-a 369 understands this explanation in the case of torpor to refer to mental factors, not to the physical body. But if one considers the antidotes listed for torpor at A IV 85 it becomes probable that to speak of “torpor” does refer to physical torpor. The similarity of the other two hindrances is mentioned at Ps-pt I 375.

each hindrance with one of the five mental factors needed to attain absorption (*jhāna-aṅga*).²²

The hindrances not only obstruct absorption attainment, they also impede the establishment of the awakening factors (*bojjhaṅga*).²³ This antagonistic relationship between the hindrances and the awakening factors is of considerable importance, since the removal of the former and the development of the latter are necessary conditions for realization.²⁴

Two sets of similes in the discourses depict the specific character and effect of the five hindrances. The first set of similes illustrates the effect of each hindrance through the image of a bowl filled with water and used as a mirror in order to look at the reflection of one's face. According to these similes, the effect of sensual desire is similar to water mixed with dye; aversion resembles water heated to the boil; sloth-and-torpor is compared to water overgrown with algae; restlessness-and-worry affect the mind like water stirred by wind; and doubt is like dark and muddy water.²⁵ In all five cases, one is unable to see one's reflection properly in the water. These similes vividly illustrate the individual

22 Vism 141 explains that concentration is incompatible with sensual desire, joy with aversion, initial mental application with sloth-and-torpor, happiness with restlessness-and-worry, and sustained mental application with doubt. (On this correlation cf. also Buddhādāsa 1976: p.112; and Upali Karunaratne 1996: p.51.) The point that Vism is trying to make here could be, in the case of the first four correlations, that unification of the mind through concentration is opposed to the mental diversification caused by sensual desire, that the mental bliss and physical ease caused by the arising of joy is incompatible with the mental rigidity and physical tension of aversion, that the clear grasp of the object through initial mental application counteracts the unclarity and mental fogginess of sloth-and-torpor, and that the mental contentment and physical tranquillity engendered by happiness does not leave scope for restlessness or worry to arise (cf. Vism-mhṭ I 165). As for the fifth hindrance, if doubt (*vicikicchā*) is understood more broadly, implying not only doubt but a generally distracted state of mind (cf. T.W. Rhys Davids 1993: p.615, where the corresponding verb *vicikicchati* is related to being distracted in thought), this would then find its counterbalance in the mental stability and undistractedness produced by sustained mental application. On the other hand, it should be pointed out that in the discourses a listing of the hindrances and the individual *jhāna* factors together occurs only at M I 294. This passage does not directly relate each hindrance to an individual *jhāna* factor, but merely enumerates both, and that in a sequence not corresponding to the commentarial correlation. This passage is moreover absent from the Chinese version of this discourse (cf. Minh Chau 1991: p.100, and Stuart-Fox 1989: p.90), which otherwise corresponds to the Pāli version. For a critical discussion of the *jhāna* factor analysis cf. also Rahula 1962: p.192.

23 This is especially the case for sloth-and-torpor versus energy; restlessness-and-worry versus tranquillity; and doubt versus investigation-of-dhammas (e.g. at S V 104). In numerous instances throughout the *Bojjhaṅga Saṃyutta* (S V 63-140) the awakening factors and the hindrances are presented as diametrically opposed mental qualities. Cf. also page 237.

24 A V 195. D II 83; D III 101; and S V 161 stipulate the same conditions for becoming a Buddha.

25 S V 121 and A III 230.

character of each hindrance: sensual desire colours one's perception; because of aversion one gets heated; sloth-and-torpor result in stagnation; through restlessness-and-worry one is tossed about; and doubt obscures.²⁶

The other set of similes illustrates the absence of the hindrances. According to this set, to be free from sensual desire is like being relieved from a debt; to be free from aversion is like recovering from physical illness; to be unobstructed by sloth-and-torpor is akin to being released from prison; to be free from the agitation of restlessness-and-worry is like being liberated from slavery; and to overcome doubt resembles crossing a dangerous desert safely.²⁷ This second set of similes provides additional illustrations of the hindrances: sensual desire agitating the mind is comparable to being heavily in debt; the tension created through aversion is quite literally a disease; sloth-and-torpor dulls and imprisons the mind; restlessness-and-worry can control the mind to such an extent that one is completely at its mercy; and doubt leaves one in a state of insecurity, not knowing which way to turn.

Since the first set of similes illustrates the presence of the hindrances (in terms of their debilitating effect), while the second describes the relief of being free of them, these two sets correspond to the two alternatives for contemplating the hindrances: awareness of their presence or of their absence.

IX.3 THE IMPORTANCE OF RECOGNIZING THE HINDRANCES

According to the discourses, if a hindrance is present and one does not recognize it, one is "mis-meditating", a form of practice the Buddha did not approve of.²⁸ But if one does recognize the presence of a hindrance and contemplates it as a *satipaṭṭhāna* meditation, one's practice will lead to purification of the mind.²⁹

A passage in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* demonstrates the importance of clearly recognizing mental defilements for what they are. This discourse reports the monk Anuruddha complaining to his friend Sāriputta that despite concentrative attainments, unshaken energy, and well-established mindfulness, he was

²⁶ Cf. also Fryba 1989: p.202, who suggests the following correlations: sensual desire distorts perception and fragments awareness, aversion creates divisions and cramps the mind, sloth-and-torpor befogs awareness, restlessness-and-worry consumes the mind with no sense of direction, doubt creates irresolute vacillation.

²⁷ D I 71 and M I 275.

²⁸ M III 14.

²⁹ A I 272.

unable to break through to full realization.³⁰ In reply, Sāriputta pointed out that Anuruddha's boasting of concentration attainments was nothing but a manifestation of conceit, his unshaken energy was simply restlessness, and his concern about not yet having awakened was just worry. Helped by his friend to recognize these as hindrances, Anuruddha was soon able to overcome them and achieve realization.

This technique of simple recognition constitutes an ingenious way of turning obstacles to meditation into meditation objects.³¹ Practised in this way, bare awareness of a hindrance becomes a middle path between suppression and indulgence.³² Several discourses beautifully illustrate the powerful effect of this simple act of recognition by describing how the tempter Māra, who often acts as a personification of the five hindrances, loses his powers as soon as he is recognized.³³

The ingenuity of this approach of bare recognition can be illustrated by considering the case of anger from a medical perspective. The arising of anger leads to an increase in the release of adrenaline, and such an increase in adrenaline will in turn further stimulate the anger.³⁴ The presence of non-reactive *sati* puts a brake on this vicious cycle.³⁵ By simply remaining receptively aware of a state of anger, neither the physical reaction nor the mental proliferation is given scope. If, on the other hand, one abandons the balanced state of awareness and resents or condemns the arisen anger, the act of condemnation becomes just another manifestation of aversion.³⁶ The vicious cycle of anger continues, albeit with a different object.

30 A I 282.

31 Gunaratana 1996: p.44; and Nāṇaponaika 1986b: p.21.

32 This function of *satipaṭṭhāna* as a middle path between sense indulgence and self-mortification is mentioned at A I 295.

33 Several of these episodes can be found in the *Māra* and *Bhikkhuṇī Saṃyuttas*, S I 103-35; cf. also the injunction at Sn 967 to recognize mental defilements as manifestations of Māra, the "dark one". Goldstein 1994: p.85, illustratively speaks of "wagging the finger at Māra". Cf. also Mārasinghe 1974: p.197.

34 Lily de Silva (n.d.): p.25.

35 A study with the help of Rorschach testing corroborates this, where Brown 1986b: p.189, comes to the conclusion that advanced meditators are not without the experience of conflict, but are remarkably non-defensive in experiencing such conflicts. This observation points to their ability to maintain non-reactive and equanimous awareness.

36 Goldstein 1985: p.57: "often there is a tendency to condemn the hindrances when they arise. The condemning mind is itself the factor of aversion."

Once the hindrances are at least temporarily removed,³⁷ the alternative aspect of contemplating the hindrances becomes relevant: awareness of their absence. In several expositions of the gradual path, such absence of the hindrances forms the starting point for a causal sequence that leads via delight, joy, tranquillity, and happiness (*pāmojja*, *piti*, *passaddhi*, and *sukha*) to concentration and the attainment of absorption. The instruction in this context is “to contemplate the disappearance of the five hindrances within oneself”.³⁸ This suggests a positive act of recognizing and even rejoicing in the absence of the hindrances, which then paves the way for deep concentration. Such a conscious act of recognizing and rejoicing in the absence of the hindrances is vividly illustrated in the second set of similes mentioned above, which compare this state of mental freedom to freedom from debt, disease, imprisonment, slavery, and danger.

Several discourses refer to such a tranquil state of mind, temporarily unaffected by any hindrance or mental defilement, as “luminous”.³⁹ According to a passage in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, to come to know this luminous nature of the mind is in fact an important requirement for the development of the mind (*cittabhāvanā*).⁴⁰

37 Complete eradication of all five hindrances takes place only with full awakening (cf. S V 327). In fact, when commenting on this part of the *Satipatṭhāna Sutta*, Ps I 282 correlates the “future non-arising” of each hindrance with corresponding levels of realization, these being in most cases non-returning or arahantship.

38 e.g. at D I 73. The use of the Pāli verb *sam-anupassati* in this instruction indicates that a form of contemplation (*anupassanā*) is intended here.

39 S V 92; A I 10; A I 257; and A III 16. These passages relate the luminosity of the mind to the development of a concentrated state of mind that is free from defilements and ready for realization. Cf. also D III 223, where a form of concentration leads to a mind full of “radiance” (*sappabhāsa*); M III 243, where “luminous” is related to a high level of equanimity; and S V 283, where even the Buddha’s body is said to be “luminous” as a result of concentration. Upali Karunaratne 1999c: p.219, explains: “what is meant by lustrous and pure mind (*pabhassara*) is not a state of mind which is absolutely pure, nor the pure mind which is synonymous with emancipation ... pure only in the sense, and to the extent, that it is not disturbed or influenced by external stimuli”.

40 A I 10. The commentaries Mp I 60 and As 140 identify the luminous mind with the *bhavaṅga* (subconscious life-continuum). Here it could, however, be objected that the term *bhavaṅga* in the context of the commentarial description of mental processes refers to a subconscious moment that occurs between each conscious part of the mental process. (In fact, sleep is referred to as *bhavaṅgam otāreti* at Ps-pt I 364.) In contrast, the luminous state of mind at A I 10 clearly refers to a conscious experience, since it is to be “known” (*pajānāti*). On *bhavaṅga* cf. the excellent exposition in Gethin 1994; also Harvey 1989: pp.94-8; and Sarachchandra 1994: p.90. The attempt by Wijesekera 1976: p.348, to establish a historically early existence of the term with the help of a passage from the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* and several occurrences in the *Paṭṭhāna* is not convincing, as A II 79

IX.4 CONDITIONS FOR PRESENCE OR ABSENCE OF A HINDRANCE

After the first stage of recognizing the presence or absence of a hindrance, the second stage of the same contemplation follows: awareness of the conditions that have led to the arising of a hindrance, that assist in removing an arisen hindrance, and that prevent future arising of a hindrance (see Fig. 9.2 below). The task of *sati* during this second stage follows a progressive pattern, proceeding from diagnosis, via cure, to prevention.

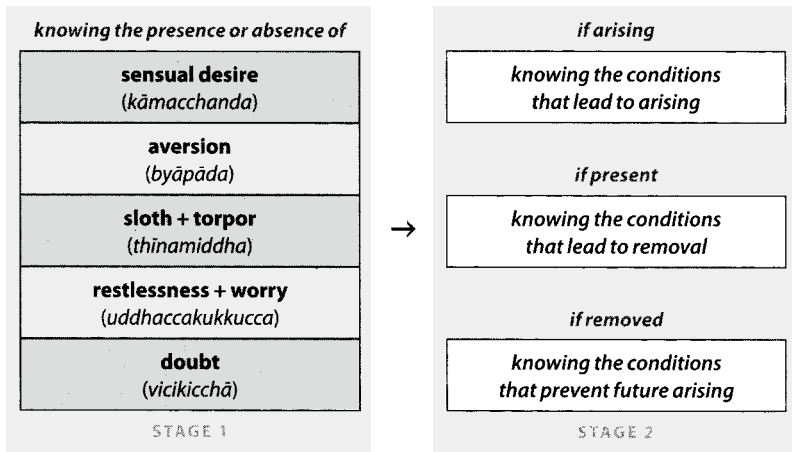


Fig. 9.2 Two stages in the contemplation of the five hindrances

By turning a hindrance into an object of meditation, the mere presence of awareness can often lead to dispelling the hindrance in question. Should bare awareness not suffice, more specific antidotes are required. In this case, *sati* has the task of supervising the measures undertaken for removing the hindrance, by providing a clear picture of the actual situation, without however getting involved itself and thereby losing its detached observational vantage point.

Clearly recognizing the conditions for the arising of a particular hindrance not only forms the basis for its removal, but also leads to an appreciation of the general pattern of its arising. Such appreciation lays bare the levels of conditioning and misperceptions that cause the arising of a hindrance, and thereby

in the PTS, the Burmese, and the Sinhalese editions invariably reads *bhavagga* (best of existences, which also fits the context much better) instead of *bhavaṅga*, and occurrences in the *Paṭṭhāna* could also be taken as betraying the comparatively late age of this part of the *Abhidhamma*; cf. also Nāṇatiloka 1988: p.246.

contributes to preventing its recurrence.

Sustained observation will reveal the fact that frequently thinking or dwelling on a particular issue produces a corresponding mental inclination, and thus a tendency to get caught up in ever more thoughts and associations along the same lines.⁴¹ In the case of sensual desire (*kāmacchanda*), for example, it will become evident that its arising is due not only to outer objects, but also to an inclination towards sensuality embedded within one's own mind.⁴² This sensual tendency influences the way one perceives outer objects and thence leads to the full-blown arising of desire, and various attempts to satisfy this desire.⁴³

The particular dynamic of sensual desire is such that, every time a sensual desire is gratified, the act of gratification fuels ever stronger subsequent manifestations of the same desire.⁴⁴ With detached observation it will become apparent that gratification of sensual desires is based on a misconception, on searching for pleasure in the wrong place.⁴⁵ As the Buddha pointed out, the way to inner peace and composure necessarily depends on gaining independence from this vortex of desire and gratification.⁴⁶

A passage in the *Āṅguttara Nikāya* offers an intriguing psychological analysis of the underlying causes of sensual desire. According to this discourse, the search for satisfaction through a partner of the other gender is related to one's identification with the characteristics and behaviour of one's own gender.⁴⁷ That is, to search for union externally implies that one is still caught up in the limitations of one's own gender identity. This shows that the affective investment inherent in identifying with one's gender role and behaviour forms an important link in the arising of sensual desire. In contrast *arahants*, who have eradicated even the subtlest traces of identification, are unable to engage in sexual intercourse.⁴⁸

41 M I 115.

42 S I 22.

43 S II 151.

44 M I 508.

45 M I 507.

46 M I 508.

47 A IV 57; on this passage cf. Lily de Silva 1978: p.126.

48 e.g. at D III 133. The eradication of sensual desire has already taken place at the level of non-returning.