

The Five Hindrances

Practices for First Month

Practicing with the hindrances is an important way to develop ones' mindfulness practice. Having understanding and freedom from the hindrances is an aspect of maturity along the Buddhist path. The following exercises are offered to help give some direction to your exploration of the hindrance of desire. These practices can be done both in meditation and in daily life.

Oct 10-16 – Being a Naturalist of Desire

During this week, look for opportunities to study your desire. Spend time noticing what affect desire has on your body, your mind, and your ability to pay attention. What parts of your body are activated? What kind of tension or stress comes with having desire? What mental states or moods tend to produce desire? How might desire prevent you from accurately seeing the object of desire?

Oct 17-23 – Cultivating Contentment

Actively develop contentment and appreciation for what you already have. Contentment is not just a way of evaluating or thinking about our lives. It also involves a relaxation of our body so that we are more settled here and now. See if you can find a way to rest within your body that supports contentment. Notice how contentment affects your desires.

Oct 24-30 – Riding out a Desire

During this week notice your stronger desires for sensual pleasure. Remember that mental pleasure is also a form of sensual pleasure. Some typical forms of sensual desire are desires related to food and drinks, sexuality, comfort, entertainment, exercise. Once you have noticed the desire, don't act on it or distract yourself from it. Rather bring mindfulness to what happens to the desire. Stay mindful of it until it is no longer present. How strong is the impulse to satisfy the desire? How does it change? What beliefs and justifications might come along with the desire? How long does it last? How do you feel once the desire has passed?

Oct 31-Nov 1 – Safeguarding the Sense Doors

One way to avoid getting caught up in desire is to safeguard oneself at the sense doors. This means two things: 1) To limit what we see, hear, or experience so these things don't trigger or reinforce our desires for them; and 2) To be attentive to sights, sounds and experiences at the moment we perceive them and then leave them alone – don't let the mind get pulled into desire for these things. During this week practice both forms of safeguarding. This practice is often more effective if you have a clear sense of the advantage of not being pulled into the world of desire.