

## THE FIVE HINDRANCES

“There are these five corruptions of the heart, tainted by which the heart is neither soft, nor pliable, nor gleaming, nor easily broken up, nor perfectly composed for the destruction of the corruptions.”

— Saṃyutta Nikāya

### Hindrance



*nīvaraṇa* (*ni + var*, to hinder, to obstruct) is that which hinders one’s progress or that which obstructs the path to emancipation and heavenly states. It is also explained as that which “muffles, enwraps, or trammels thought.”

There are five kinds of *nīvaraṇas* or hindrances. They are i. sensual desires (*kāmacchanda*), ii. ill will (*vyāpāda*), iii. sloth and torpor (*thīna-middha*), iv. restlessness and worry (*uddhacca-kukkucca*), and v. doubts (*vicikicchā*).

1. ***Kāmacchanda*** means sensual desires or attachment to pleasurable sense-objects such as form, sound, odour, taste, and contact. This is regarded as one of the fetters, too, that bind one to saṃsāra.

An average person is bound to get tempted by these alluring objects of sense. Lack of self-control results in the inevitable arising of passions. This hindrance is inhibited by one-pointedness (*ekaggatā*), which is one of the five characteristics of jhānas. It is attenuated on attaining *sakadāgāmi* and is completely eradicated on attaining *anāgāmi*. Subtle forms of attachment such as *rūpa tāga* and *arūpa rāga* (attachment to realms of form and formless realms) are eradicated only on attaining arahantship.

The following six conditions tend to the eradication of sense-desires: i. perceiving the loathsomeness of the object, ii. constant meditation on loathsomeness, iii. sense-restraint, iv. moderation in food, v. good friendship, and vi. profitable talk.

2. ***Vyāpāda*** is ill will or aversion. A desirable object leads to attachment, while an undesirable one leads to aversion. These are the two great fires that burn the whole world. Aided by ignorance these two produce all sufferings in the world.

Ill will is inhibited by *pīti* or joy which is one of the *jhāna* factors. It is attenuated on attaining *sakadāgāmi* and is eradicated on attaining *anāgāmi*.

The following six conditions tend to the eradication of ill will: i. perceiving the object with thoughts of goodwill, ii. constant meditation on loving kindness (*mettā*), iii. thinking that *kamma* is one's own, iv. adherence to that view, v. good friendship, and vi. profitable talk.

3. ***Thīna*** or sloth is explained as a morbid state of the mind, and *mid-dha* as a morbid state of the mental states. A stolid mind is as "inert as a bat hanging to a tree, or as molasses cleaving to a stick, or as a lump of butter too stiff for spreading". Sloth and torpor should not be understood as bodily drowsiness, because arahants, who have destroyed these two states, also experience bodily fatigue. These two promote mental inertness and are opposed to strenuous effort (*virīya*). They are inhibited by the *jhāna* factor (*vitakka*, or initial application), and are eradicated on attaining arahantship.

The following six conditions tend to the eradication of sloth and torpor: i. reflection on the object of moderation in food, ii. changing of bodily postures, iii. contemplation on the object of light; iv. living in the open, v. good friendship, and vi. profitable talk.

4. ***Uddhacca*** is mental restlessness or excitement of the mind. It is a mental state associated with all types of immoral consciousness. As a rule an evil is done with some excitement or restlessness.

***Kukkucca*** is worry. It is either repentance over the committed evil or over the unfulfilled good. Repentance over one's evil does not exempt one from its inevitable consequences. The best repentance is the will not to repeat that evil.

Both these hindrances are inhibited by the *jhāna* factor *sukha* or happiness.

Restlessness is eradicated on attaining arahantship, and worry is eradicated on attaining *anāgāmi*.

The following six conditions tend to the eradication of these two states: i. erudition or learning, ii. questioning or discussion, iii. understanding the nature of the *vinaya* discipline, iv. association with senior monks, v. good friendship, and vi. profitable talk.

5. ***Vicikicchā*** is doubt or indecision. That which is devoid of the remedy of wisdom is *vicikicchā* (*vi*, devoid; *cikicchā*, wisdom). It is also explained as vexation due to perplexed thinking (*vici*, seeking; *kicchā*, vexation).

Here it is not used in the sense of doubt with regard to the Buddha etc., for even non-Buddhists inhibit *vicikicchā* and gain *jhānas*. As a fet-

ter, *vicikicchā* is that doubt about Buddha etc., but as a hindrance it denotes unsteadiness in one particular thing that is being done. The commentarial explanation of *vicikicchā* is the inability to decide anything definitely that it is so. In other words, it is indecision.

This state is inhibited by the *jhāna* factor *vicāra* (sustained application). It is eradicated on attaining *sotāpatti*.

The following six conditions tend to its eradication: i. knowledge of the Dhamma and Vinaya, ii. discussion or questioning, iii. understanding of the nature of the vinaya discipline, iv. excessive confidence, v. good friendship, and vi. profitable talk.

