

Five Hindrances

Insight Meditation South Bay

www.imsb.org

Five Hindrances (*nīvaranas*)

Key Ideas

- The five hindrances are mental states that impede progress in meditation, reducing opportunities for insight, wisdom, and enlightenment.
- These are conditioned mental factors, not personal failures. Understanding them thoroughly, skillfully working with them, and overcoming their influence are the challenges and opportunities of practice.
- The Buddha taught five practical ways to investigate hindrances (*Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta, Majjhima Nikāya* 10.36)
 1. Recognize when a hindrance is present
 2. Recognize when a hindrance is absent
 3. Understand the conditions that cause a hindrance to arise
 4. Understand the conditions that cause a hindrance to cease
 5. Explore how to prevent it from arising again in the future
- The Buddha offered several vivid similes for the hindrances. "... [W]hen these five hindrances are not abandoned in himself, the monk regards it as a debt, a sickness, a prison, slavery, a road through desolate country. But when these five hindrances are abandoned in himself, he regards it as unindebtedness, good health, release from prison, freedom, a place of security." (*Samaññaphala Sutta, "The Fruits of the Contemplative Life", Dīgha Nikāya* 2)

English Term	Pali Term	Characteristics	<i>Jhāna</i> factor which overcomes each hindrance
Sensual desire	<i>kāma-chanda</i>	Thoughts in favor; craving, especially sensual pleasure	<i>Ekaggatā</i> – One-pointedness, concentration, collectedness
Aversion or ill-will	<i>byāpāda, vyāpāda</i>	Thoughts against; judgment, censure, disliking, malice toward others	<i>Pīti</i> – Rapture, delight, pleasure
Sloth and torpor	<i>thīna-middha</i>	Dullness, boredom, lack of energy, sluggishness and weakness of consciousness and mental factors, may manifest as sleepiness	<i>Vitakka</i> – Applied thought, initial attention
Restlessness and anxiety	<i>uddhacca-kukkucca</i>	Distracting thoughts that inhibit calmness, remorse, worry	<i>Sukha</i> – Happiness, joy, contentment
Doubt	<i>vicikicchā</i>	Absence of trust or confidence; lack of faith; unwise skepticism	<i>Vicāra</i> – Sustained thought, examination