

The Five Nīvarana.

Anyone coming to meditation practice soon realizes that there are difficulties involved. These are collectively called '*nīvarana*,' which means, hindrance, or obstacle, and what is hindered or obstructed is progress. There are five *nīvarana* manifesting as the wandering mind, the dull and drowsy mind, the doubting mind, the sensual mind, and the negative mind. These aren't 'moods' of the mind, rather they're the source our mood changes come from. The *nīvarana* themselves emanate from the three 'root' defilements, or pollutions, known as *lobha*, *dosa*, and *moha*, or greed, aversion, and delusion, which defilements are the result of the way we've been living our lives almost from birth. We, once we've been introduced to the possibility by whoever brings us up, will have indulged in a constant seeking after the exciting, the stimulating, in whatever form we find most pleasing. It's this kind of behavior that gives rise to and develops the 'root' defilements, which ever afterwards will exert a profound influence over our everyday lives, in that they will pervert the way we understand the things we experience, at the same time dictating our responses to them.

The roots we could say are 'sub-conscious' patterns of behaviour which enter conscious experience in different ways, one way is likened to a 'flowing in,' one to a 'flooding in,' while the other - the one we're concerned with here - is more like a 'seepage' of defilement onto the conscious levels. Because of this the *nīvarana* aren't obvious during the living of everyday life, although they, in some form or another, are always active. It's only when we try to control the mind, try to meditate that the problems of wandering mind, the dull and drowsy mind, the doubting mind, the sensual mind, and the negative mind, become really noticeable. And they do because at such times we're attempting to go in the opposite direction to the one we've been going in from the very beginning of our lives. The habit of stimulation-seeking becomes very strong, when we try to meditate, to still the mind, then we're trying to break that habit and get the mind to take an interest in something which is far from stimulating, meditation objects never are, so obviously there's going to be resistance, the resistance manifests as the five *nīvarana*.

Uddhacca-kukkucca, restlessness and remorse; two words here, the 'wandering' mind and the conscience-stricken mind. The wandering mind is the more apposite for people living in the world, remorse here being more monastically aimed. The mind wanders around when we try to fix it on some object of meditation, like the breathing for instance. It does this because it's not happy, and it's not happy because it's being denied its usual playthings. So, like a naughty child it misbehaves. What to do? First of all we need to try living in a more controlled manner by observing the five basic Buddhist trainings, known as the *pañcāśīla*, briefly: try to live restraining the desire to do harm, to steal, to indulge sexually, and to speak carelessly. That, if we're diligent, will reduce the problem significantly over a period of time. More immediately we can apply what's known as an 'antidote meditation,' a technique designed specifically to

pacify the wandering mind. In this case the antidote meditation is long breathing - deliberately making the in and out breaths long, soft, and gentle, controlling the breathing making it calming and relaxing, thus giving the mind a soothing, more stable object to focus on. If we're following Buddhādāsa's version of APS this one will be quite easy to generate. It needs patience, of course, a lot of patience, but it does work, and the restless wandering mind can be pacified by using this method. Other than that we can try observing the mind wandering here, there, and everywhere. By 'observing' we mean that we try to watch the mind as it thinks in this, that, and the other ways, but without getting involved with whatever the mind happens to be thinking about – we just stand back, as it were, and observe. This is much more difficult to do, the level of mindfulness required being advanced.

Thīna-middha, again two words here, one, *thīna* means mental dullness, while *middha* is mental drowsiness. Both added together cause the mind to be listless, tired, and lacking in energy. Again this problem comes from our way of life, we like to be excited and now we trying to avoid that, but the mind won't play the game, it, again, wants its old playmates, so it misbehaves, but this time it responds by becoming tired, listless, energy-less. The antidotes are several in this case, but the best one is to visualize some bright object – the mind is dull and drowsy, so we try to brighten it up. The best way to do that is stare at something bright until the eyes begin to smart, and then to close the eyes and try to maintain the image of the thing we were staring at. A candle flame would be good here, but anything bright enough will do as long as it's not stimulating in any way. We can also try doing more walking than sitting meditation, the movement will help to wake the mind up. Or we can stand and try to meditate; we could even go and do some work, which is tough to do but does work very well, in that it seems that forcing the body with to do some kind of physical labour tends to make the mind wake up. Visualizing, however, doesn't require that we move from our sitting place, so it's probably the best way to deal with this problem. Other ways which have been used over the years include using a damp cloth to wipe the face and hands, which can have a freshening effect on the mind, and pulling down on the ear-lobes, which some claim is effective. Whichever way we choose patience is a requirement.

Vicikiccā, doubt, confusion. Again this emanates from our chosen life-style: running around after stimulation necessarily excites and disturbs the mind so that we never have any real clarity of mind. Because of that we'll find it hard to listen properly, and to absorb instructions accurately, like meditation instruction, for instance, so doubt can easily arise regarding that. The problem with doubt is that it makes us think too much, and the more we think the more doubtful and confused the mind's likely to become. Unfortunately there's no clear-cut antidote technique available for overcoming doubt and confusion of mind. The only way out is to try and get some sort of advice which satisfies us. We can also, as mentioned, try to observe the mind, try to observe it being doubtful and confused, which will work but which requires a lot of mindfulness. The positive side of doubt is that it does make us investigate more than we would normally be inclined to. It also tends to be a problem which passes away quite quickly.

Kāma-chanda, sensual desire. Again, this comes from the lifestyle we indulge in, and is most often dealt with in the specific form of sexual desire. That problem comes about because sexual stimulation is very popular, and, these days, the objects that provoke it are very easily acquired. Sex - doing it, thinking about it, or whatever, can stimulate the mind very easily. The problem has its origins in the way we understand the human body. We have a tendency to see the human body as desirable as stimulating, especially the reproductive organs. So we need to find some way of countering that tendency. The way this was done in days gone by was to contemplate a rotting corpse, an exercise which tends to turn off sensual desire rather abruptly. Time when this kind of meditation was a possibility, these days perhaps it isn't so easy. But we can probably acquire photographs, there is an internet and there are bound to be some web sites specializing in such things. Sounds odd, I know, but it's always been the way to overcome sexual desire. So, acquire some pictures, and, when necessary use them to counteract the problem. This method works, although it sounds like a tough way to do things, but sexual desire can be a very big problem, so it needs a powerful antidote. Again we can also try to observe the feeling of sexual desire, just let the mind observe itself desiring. If it's some other form of sensuality, say that associated with food, then the approach is much the same. We tend to see food in the way we see sex – as a stimulant, which is why we eat what we do instead of what it would be better for us to eat. Again something which will turn off the desire for sensual stimulation where food is concerned is required. Actually corpse meditations can do the job here too, but it's probably better to use something more food-specific. Think, for instance, about what the food looks like once it's in the stomach and being worked on by the gastric juices. I once saw a film of someone eating toast and jam. The film was taken inside the mouth, and, believe me, that was disgusting. Antidote meditations always present the mind with something opposite to whatever's troubling it.

Byāpāda, ill-will. The negative mind is what's meant here. We could call the mind afflicted by *kāma-chanda* the 'positive' mind, because that's a greed-based problem which usually promotes a positive mood of mind. *Byāpada*, on the other hand, usually translated as ill-will, promotes a 'negative,' a 'bad' mood. Loving kindness, *metta* meditations of the various kinds are the antidote meditations of choice here. *Metta* meditation needs to be properly understood. It has a specific purpose, and all people should make use of *metta* to reduce negativity, but certain types of individual should exercise caution. If irritation is an often occurring problem then *metta* is a must for such a one – who, however, might find it rather difficult to accept *metta* as being anything other than twaddle. That's quite the normal attitude towards things like *metta* for people who have too much negativity and therefore too much of the root of aversion. Some people, however, those who find *metta* most attractive, who gravitate, apparently naturally, towards such a practice should beware, and be restrained in the way they practise it. These types usually have an imbalance on the side of greed, and practising too much *metta* isn't going to solve that problem, rather it will make it worse. Generally speaking *metta* is a must for us, but not as an indulgence. There are many ways of practicing *metta*, one simple method is to reflect on all people as being prone to dukkha, so that we're all in the same boat as it were, then we can

perhaps become more balanced in the way we deal with the people we meet - it's a mindfulness thing again.

These are the five *nīvaraṇa*, the five hindrances, or obstacles that make meditation practice difficult. These are the problems that, if we're to ever concentrate the mind, have to be conquered to some degree, and preferably conquered completely. As long as the five are active we'll have problems with our practice. If we want to be able to sit and get some regular result from our sittings then the five hindrances are the things to be overcome. If we can do that then we can recognize just what sort of a problem they are, because the mind attained to real concentration, the mind in which the hindrances have been neutralized, is as different from the mind in its normally disturbed state as life is from death.