

Householder Series:

Hindrances of the Householder (I)

I've asked old students, people who have sat in meditation for quite awhile, what kinds of things they were working with after five or ten or fifteen years of practice. They say, "I'm working with fear" or "I'm working with habit and desires that arise over and over" or "I'm working with laziness" or "I'm working with irritation" or anger; common kinds of energies. What I hear even from people who have sat in meditation for a long time is the same list of the five basic hindrances that are discussed in the second day of every retreat. It seems that they stay around for awhile. So I'd like to look at them in the context of people who have been practicing for awhile and living their lives, and see how we can continue to work with them since they seem to be part of our family life, so to speak, or inner family life anyway.

How can we understand the hindrances or the traditional difficulties in meditation in our daily life? First of all, it is important to understand, as you go on in the path of spiritual practice, that often the weaknesses or difficulties that we encounter are the places that most wake us up. The places where we seem most successful and the best of things are often also the places that are the strongest part of our self image or our "ego" in some kind of Eastern sense of that word. And it's the places that are our very difficulties and our vulnerabilities that often allow us to grow in a more genuine way when we look at them, when we work with them.

There was a wonderful paper that was written a few years ago by Seymour and Sylvia Boorstein for the Journal of Transpersonal Psychology, and it was called "The Five Hindrances of Marriage." It talked about the difficulties that the Buddha described in meditation -- desire, anger, restlessness, laziness or sleepiness, doubt -- and it describes the process of marriage as encountering these exact same forces. Desire for something else or better. Irritation and anger, especially when you discover that that person really isn't behaving in the way that you expected and hoped and planned for them, and all the irritation and frustration that comes from that. The third hindrance of sleepiness or laziness, discovering after awhile that one can get complacent in relationships. Or the opposite -- restlessness, the traditional Seven Year Itch; after a certain cycle in a relationship, one gets restless for something new or something different. And doubt. "Is this the right person?" or "Is this the right way to be living?" and the same forces which arise when one sits in meditation and tries to open one's eyes inwardly, and one's heart and mind seem to arise in relation to the people we're closest to, and all the other people at distances from us.

Can you recognize that? Can you see that there are parallels between the sitting and other things around? There are all kinds of stories that we make up about these states. "He did," and "she did," and "I will," and "she should," and so forth. It's useful to see that those stories are based on kind of

myths that we build about ourselves and the world, identities that are created mostly by thought, and, in fact, things are a lot simpler than that.

This is from Achaan Chaa:

Traditionally the Eightfold Path is taught with eight steps such as Right Understanding, Right Speech, Right Concentration, and so forth. But the true Eightfold Path is within us: two eyes, two ears, two nostrils, a tongue and a body. These eight doors are our entire Path and the mind is the one that walks on the Path. If you know just these things, and the states that arise with them, all of the dharma is in front of you.

We all have these stories about experiences, but actually our experiences, if we want to live more in the moment, are much simpler than that, much simpler than our stories.

Let's talk about the five hindrances a little bit and maybe reflect in some ways how they arise, not just while sitting, but all the rest of the time, which is what practice is for. You sit and practice in order then to live it. That's why it's called "Practice."

Desire is the juiciest one of them. As Oscar Wilde said, "I can resist anything but temptation." It's the one that we get caught up in in different ways. It's amazing, wanting is a very powerful habit. We can want anything, and it changes from one thing to another. We desire one thing and then we desire another. In the retreats, as you know, there's the phenomena of things like The Vipassana Romance where people are silent and not looking at anyone and just paying attention, and they notice some interesting shape or something out there, and then they just sit, and all of a sudden the whole idea comes, what it would be like to maybe meet that person, and talk with them, perhaps after the retreat to go out and meditate together, or some other activity like that. And that goes on, you know -- marriage, children. In California it usually includes divorce as well, if you really play it all the way out. And without making eye contact with that person, the mind spins out this fantasy of things that will fulfill it better than whatever experience is here, with the breath, or the body, or whatever is actually here.

That same movement can be observed, if you look, all the time in our life. It's called the "If-Only Mind." It's the mind that arises in the moment of experience and says, "If only I had something else," "If only I had a different partner," or "If only they behaved in a different way," or "If only I had a different job," or "If only I had more free time," or more money, or a house more in the country, or a house more in the city, or "If only I were younger," or "If only I were older," or whatever. It's always the same state. I watched it when I was a monk and all I had were a few books and a robe and bowl. Possessions were really minimal. Even so, I found myself thinking, "If only I had a little nicer robe." It has nothing to do with what's around us. It's this movement inside of feeling like what's here is not enough. Do you know what I'm talking about?

Nasrudin says:

Never give people anything they ask for until at least a day has passed.

Someone said, "Why not?"

"Experience shows they only appreciate something when they have the opportunity of doubting whether they will get it or not."

One of the interesting things when you start to look at and work with the hindrance of desire is to see that what relieves it, what makes one finally happy about it, is not so much the thing that you get, or the person, or the experience that you get at the end - this is important, so listen to this - it's actually the fact that the state of desiring has ended. I'll give you a simple example. Suppose you have a craving for some food that you really want to have. It can be pizza or ice cream or cannelloni, you name it, whatever it happens to be. You go and you get it. You do all the things. You get in your car, you go, you finally get it, you have it in your hand, and you take the first bite of whatever it is. And usually the moment that you taste it, there's this great sense of delight and release, and so forth, and part of it may be because it tastes good and it's pleasurable, if it's part of your fantasy -- but the main piece is, in that moment, finally the wanting stops. Do you understand that? And that a good deal of the joy of fulfilling desires is not so much of the getting of the thing, because you have it for a little while and then you want the next thing -- it's endless -- but rather that there's a moment where the wanting itself stops. If you look closely in yourself, if you let yourself look, you find that the very process of wanting is painful; that the very state of not being complete or content or present with what's here is what the pain is about.

That's a familiar hindrance. Let's talk about some of the others, and then talk about ways one could work with them in one's life. Of course, the first piece is just beginning to understand how these operate in ourselves.

The next four are quite interesting. Anger, sleep, restlessness and doubt -- even desire to a certain extent is included -- I tend to see them all as states of avoidance. They're really states which arise so that we can avoid something, some aspect of what's true in our experience. Maybe I can explain that as we go along.

Anger, which includes irritation and judgment and boredom, not liking what's present, fear -- all of those are the movement of anger. It's a very painful state, for the most part, if you look at it. The body has a lot of tension, there's heat, there's burning if you're angry. Even irritation has a lot of tension in it. Yet in some way we do it again partly out of habit. Another reason that we do it is because it makes us feel right in some way. You know what I mean about being right. That's the favorite feeling of many people because it's the feeling that most authenticates the sense of yourself.

Two weeks ago when we talked about Forgiveness somebody stood up or raised their hand and said something that was really powerful. They said, "Here we are, stewing and raging and angry about something that someone has done, and very often they're off going about their own business enjoying themselves. And who's suffering? It's us because it wasn't that way, and we're so angry, and it should have been, and so forth. And who is doing the holding on at that point? I'm not saying that you shouldn't be angry -- you can be angry or hold grudges; you're welcome to do anything. -- We're just looking at the laws of how it operates.

I remember I was sitting at this one monastery for a long time meditating, and I had a bout of anger about something, which I have regularly, and I went to the teacher and told him how angry I was about something. It was in the hot season and he was wearing those little flip-flop sandals. He got up and went over to the table where we were sitting and he kicked the table leg. It looked like it hurt him. Then he held his foot and he hopped around for awhile. Then he sat back down and kind of massaged his foot. Then he looked at me and he shook his head. That was his response to my being angry. He just kind of acted out what we do. Just like desire, where we can desire anything, and it doesn't matter what it is, the force is there, and we get our food, or our relationship, or our car, or our vacation, or our time off, whatever it is, and then we look for the next thing because it's so powerful. The same with anger. We can get angry at anything, including things that are already past and nothing can be done about them. And even more, we can imagine something which somebody is going to do, and sit there and get really angry at what they might do. Have you ever seen yourself do that?

We project our righteousness on other people in some way. We project our pain, is really what it's about; that we're in some kind of pain, and we make it somebody else's fault. Also there's as much suffering in the world as we experience at certain times, and we don't want to take it in because it's so hard for our hearts, and our culture is one that doesn't train the human heart very well to deal with the measure of pain that's part of life.

I got quite angry today. In fact, I was really yelling at somebody. I won't talk about the specifics so much. I felt so indignant and I felt so right that it was very hard not to do it. It's interesting to observe. It's not like anger is some terrible thing, or that it won't arise, or that all these other states won't arise, or that there might not even be an occasion where it was appropriate. There are some occasions for that, especially if you're able to let it move through you instead of storing it as resentment and all kinds of other things, or if you use it in a way that isn't really intended to hurt other people. That's a whole other talk about anger.

But here we are, living in a pretty busy and complicated world, and we see this state of being angry, or being irritated, or judgmental, arise very often, and yet we are the victims of it. It's we who suffer from it. The question, when it comes, is: How can we relate to it? It's really the pain in us that we're talking about. If we can look at that, then we can touch the world and heal it a little bit. It's very difficult to do without healing our own pain.

Let's talk about laziness, and so forth. I said all of these are avoidances. Very often anger is really a way of not feeling the pain of someone else or what our own experience is. Judgment and fear are the same things. Sleepiness is the same. Sleepiness, the habit of going unconscious. When is it that sleepiness arises? There are three basic causes for it. It comes when we're tired. That's the first one. And that's a good signal. You sit in meditation or you find yourself at other times having sleepiness arise for you; then take a look and see what are the causes. Now, if it's just that you've been working kind of hard and you're tired, that's one thing. Then you just respect your body and maybe take a rest.

But because we're in 80's in California, in a Western culture, how many people when they get sleepy or tired are living in such a way that it's really a signal? How are you living your life, how

busy is it, how full is it; where are we going that we fill it up so much? Does that make sense to any of you? So that's a signal. It's a signal even if it is just tiredness. Let's look at what pace we live at, or let's look of how we fill up our lives, and what we might be avoiding in some way in doing that.

One part of sleepiness is just that we're tired. The second is that we are unaccustomed to stillness, that our culture moves so fast and we get into that rhythm. Then when it's time to stop, and you sit to meditate or you walk outside, or you go home you kick your shoes off, you start to think, "Maybe I could meditate. No, I'm too tired to do it." The way I put it in retreats is: When we start to get quiet, there's some little voice in there that says, "Oh, it's quiet; it must be bedtime," because it's one of the few times we stop. It's a response in us, when we start to get still or concentrated or quiet. And sometimes the fear comes, "Oh, this is too quiet, what will I do with this? It's too empty, there isn't enough activity for me to know who I am," because we define ourselves by our activities.

The third reason that sleepiness arises is that it is a kind of resistance. You will notice yourself becoming lazy or sleepy at certain times in your spiritual life not because you're overtired or not because it's too quiet. And that's an unfamiliar state that you need to work with, to learn to open again like a child; but because there's some pain or sorrow or grief or difficulty or conflict that's kind of hard to feel, it's easier just to be sleepy about it. Has anybody noticed that happening in their lives, or how often it can happen?

Our culture is amazing. Not just our culture, it's worldwide. There are ten million drug addicts, and 20 million alcoholics, and 50 million people who are close to those drug addicts and alcoholics -- and their families or family-systems, who are really painfully touched by that; deeply so. And more than half of all the car accidents where people are killed and 80 or 90 percent of child abuse and the great majority of fires at home, and all of those things, are involved with alcohol and drugs. And the level of pain, if you start to work with people around the family systems of alcohol and drugs, and so forth -- it's extraordinary. Yet, the purpose of all of that, for the most part, is to cover pain. A friend of mine who worked in a drug program for many years said that generally speaking the amount of drugs and alcohol used is equal to the amount of pain in the person, not to be too simplistic about it. So that's what I mean by avoidance; that there are states that arise for us that keep us from feeling.

Restlessness is a different one. The vibration, the movement, the habit of our culture is to be speedy. TV, shopping, eating, traveling, the telephone, all of these things, where we keep ourselves busy because we don't know what to do. We're not taught as we grow up how to nurture ourselves in stillness, how to listen more to the breeze, or the clouds, or the trees, or the children, or the people around us, or how to just sit on our porch and rock in our chairs a little bit and watch stuff go by, as people used to do, instead of constantly being busy with it. I have to confess I'm one of us in that one. Somebody from Europe who heard my dharma talks wanted to sit a long retreat and came to a three-month retreat. They said they were so disappointed in me because I tend to move pretty quickly, and they said I seemed more like an Italian shoe salesman than a calm meditation teacher. And it's true.

Someone who has done a lot of vipassana practice and has worked with eating disorders, has titled one of her books feeding the hungry heart. A lot of our busyness is because we're looking for

something to fulfill us. So we eat or go shopping or travel, or pick up the phone, or turn on the TV really compulsively at times, because there's something we want -- and it doesn't quite do it. That's the kind of restlessness. The ability to just stop and be, like when you're in a traffic jam where you say, "Here, I am on the Golden Gate Bridge; I might as well feel the bridge vibrate and kind of look at what the shipping is doing, instead of thinking of where I could be or being frustrated." It's to be with what is.

There have been a number of movies from Australia. I remember one called the last wave, with pictures of the aborigines. One of the things that most struck me about them was that when the aborigines sat down, they sat. It was like they sat and they could have been on a rock, Ayers Rock or something, and they just sat there, and they could have sat all day and all night and all week. But you don't see that in our culture; you see this sense of movement almost to the extent where people can't sit still, can't pause, can't stop because of what would they feel.

Someone asked Nijinsky about his dancing, how he could dance in such a marvelous way, and he said that there had to be some stillness in it. He said:

It's really quite simple. I merely leap and pause.

What a description, "I merely leap and pause." Can we learn to stop a little bit? Maybe that's all that meditation is about, just to stop. Then the last hindrance is doubt, confusion, tension, kind of wondering, "What should my work be, how should my spiritual life go, am I in the right relationship, am I in the right workplace, am I in the right part of the country." We Americans have the curse of choice. That's not a trivial thing. It enlivens and it enriches the culture and our lives, but it's a very difficult thing and it's not so for most cultures. And usually when doubt arises strongly it does so because our heads, our thinking apparatus is not connected with our heart. If you look in the moment where there's a lot of confusion or doubt, it's there because there's much thought and not much connection to the heart, to what we might do based on our deeper values.

Another way to put it is: when there's a lot of doubt, often connected with it is a lack of love for ourselves or a lack of love for the other, for the world around us. If we're in touch with that love, our path becomes pretty clear. Do you remember the question I asked the night of the talk on Forgiveness that came from Gandhi's tomb along the Ganges in Delhi where the question was inscribed in stone:

Think of the poorest person you have ever met, and then before acting ask if or how this act will be of benefit to that person.

Confusion generally comes when we're not in touch with what we really value in life. And again, it requires a stopping, an opening, a listening inside.

These are the hindrances. Are they familiar? Certainly they are. They are our companions in the journey. We see them over and over in sitting, we see them over and over in the world outside, in the cause for war. When I was angry there was a very strong impulse in me to call and register a complaint and try to solve something. And then being met by aggression, it was very easy to see if

someone chooses to be your adversary how easy it is to take up the banner and say, "Alright, I'll do it. I'm a man. Why not?" or whatever it is. That's one of the problems, yes. But it's worldwide -- prejudice, greed, fear and desire; these same forces that create war or that create grain elevators full of food in one place and hungry people in another.

The question is: Are they workable? Can one work with these forces? Lama Yeshe in that excerpt that I've read about his time being in the hospital and going through all the great difficulty with his heart attack, said:

Can you learn the basic precept of transforming your unwanted sufferings into the path of practice?

If you can learn that precept, it will serve you in any circumstances. Can you learn to do that? Can any of us do that? What does it take? A key thing that it requires is faith. It is so important -- faith in the human heart, faith in the power of awareness. The Dalai Lama was asked what was the most important thing one can do as a teacher of dharma, what's the most important thing you can communicate, and he said "Faith." Not faith in the Buddha or faith in something from India or some ancient system, but really faith in our own true nature. Rock bottom understanding of that, not just with words but because you know that it's true that human beings have this capacity to deal with the sorrows of the world and with adversity, and that the heart is greater than all of that, and that the power of awareness is such that we can grow from any of it. That's what we have to discover -- in ourselves, in our sitting, in our families, in our lives. Faith, not so much in doing but in stopping, in listening, in not doing so much, and letting ourselves stop avoiding things that are difficult, not getting so caught by the stories of what we want or what we don't want. That's all the mind. Minds do that, it's sort of their job -- you pay them a little bit and they just think all the time.

Rilke talks about it quite beautifully in a poem which he calls, "I Have Faith in Nights."

You darkness that I come from,
out of which all things come,
I love you more than all the fires
that fence in the world,
for the fire makes a circle of light for everyone,
and then no one outside learns of you.
But the darkness pulls in everything,
shapes and fires, animals and myself.
How easily it gathers them,
powers and people.
It is possible a great energy is moving near us.
I have faith in night.

Amazing poem, darkness out of which everything comes.

Can we stop -- in our practice, in our lives with our families -- and start to listen, and let ourselves be a little emptier, a little more silent, more in touch with the spaces between words or between

desires or between frustrations? There is something really mysterious that reveals itself as soon as we stop. It doesn't take very long, and maybe there's a certain pain that one has to go through in putting on the brakes, if you know what I mean -- each time, again and again, too -- but when you do it, then things become mysterious again like it is for any child.

Walt Whitman said:

As to me I know of nothing else but miracles
when you're still enough.

The source of our happiness is not through our doing, it's really much more through stopping. How can we work with our hindrances very specifically? First of all, if you identify the most popular ones in your own personal repertoire, it helps a lot. If you're going to go to the theater, you might as well know what play is on. I've talked on some nights about Buddhist personality typology, which is based on our responses that come out of the sense of separateness itself; and the three roots in Buddhist psychology are the greed type, the aversion type, and the deluded type.

Just to remind you in a simple way, we all have all of it in us. I'm a great example of the greedy type. The general response of the greedy type is to go into a new situation and see what we like about it, and see how we might get more of it, what's lovely about it or what we appreciate. Forget the rest. Now, the aversion type -- my wife is more in that category -- is somebody who goes into a situation and sees what's wrong with it, which is a very different response, painted wrong, the colors are wrong, and people are behaving wrong, and so forth. And then the deluded type whose tendency is to go into a new situation and not know what to make of it, not know what their place is.

Does this make sense to you? Do you understand these types of either wanting or being critical or not knowing your place in it? There's a lot more. -- There's the Buddhist families, Ratna, Padma, Vajra, all these styles which I might talk about a little bit more. What's interesting is that each of these also has a positive side, which we'll get to later, things that can be transformed in us. The point about this is that it begins to become useful if we want to work with the hindrances in our daily life to start to see what our own patterns are. Is it our tendency to get irritated all the time, or is it our tendency to go to sleep all the time, or is it our tendency to eat to avoid, to use desire in that way, or is there some other tendency?

My teacher Achaan Chah used to be very forthright about it. It was part of his teaching style. He would kind of give nicknames to a number of his monks and people around. It was a little bit like The Seven Dwarfs _ Sleepy and Dopey and stuff like that. "This is a monk that's always into eating. Oh, here's my monk, why don't you meet him? This is Sleepy. Whenever I visit, go to his cottage, he's always sleeping," and so forth. He did it with a lot of humor.

You've got to start to look at what is your particular way of not being present. The thing is that they're not bad. You don't have to say, "Well, I'm a bad person," because this is just the nature of being born with a self-structure or having it develop in early childhood. What's important is to see that it's actually very alive, and that if you can begin to work with it, it's interesting. Aren't you

interested in yourself? Fess up! Come on! Why not look at the patterns that we use in relating to things? It's really juicy and it can be transformed.

The first thing is to see what are the popular patterns in oneself. So I ask you that for yourself -- which are the ones that you use? Then the second, after you recognize that, which helps you to kind of keep on the lookout for them, is to begin to identify mindfully the state or the experience as it arises in the moment, or as close to the moment as you can -- the wanting or the fear or the desire or the doubt. And a little while later you say, "Oh, here I am in it," and to identify it by acknowledging it. It's very useful to use a label, "fear, fear" or "desire" or "wanting" - just give it its name in a neutral way. You really see the force as an opportunity to learn. "Alright, I've had 29 years or 48 years of this mostly being my pattern. Let me really look at it. How soon does it come? What situations cause it to arise? What does it feel like in the body? What's going on with me in that moment? What's the experience like?"

So the second thing is to identify it, the best you can, without judgment. It's hard because we tend to say these are bad -- it's bad to be irritated or to be fearful or to be angry, or it's bad to be desiring or wanting. If we want to learn about them, the key is to be mindful, which is to say, to see and observe them as if you were studying a different person. Say, "Gee, this is an interesting force. How is this operating?" It's also important to see that they're workable. When you identify or label it, it changes from being overwhelming to, "Oh, this is just the dark night of the soul." It's difficult, but you know what to call it. Or in your relationship, instead of saying, "Oh, this is not going right, I should look for another partner," it might be, "Oh, this is just a state of doubt or restlessness. Let me see if I can look at that in myself."

Then the third piece is to make friends with it, to really receive it with your heart as well as your attention, because if you dislike it, even in a subtle way in your heart, when you say, "desire, desire, desire" or "aversion" or whatever, it's not going to go away or change. You won't even learn much about it because you're still in struggle with it. The more that you struggle with pains or experiences, actually the more real they become inside.

The fourth is to observe how it changes -- the more carefully, the better. Maybe you should study one a week. Pick one and observe what does it feel like in the body. How long does it last when you label it? How many labels long? What triggers it to arise? What state usually follows it? What is it like if you're working with desire and you note "desire, desire, desire," or whatever it happens to be? What's the moment like when it stops? I keep thinking of this cartoon that was in mad magazine: Alfred E. Newman was at the blackboard, and he was writing, he was down to about his hundredth time, and it said, "Cessation of desire, cessation of desire, cessation of desire," It was his assignment for that day. Look at and see if you're examining desire or fear or whatever, see what it feels like, and see if you can notice the moment when it changes. Very interesting moment, because at that moment you begin to realize not only its impermanence, but also that it's very impersonal, it comes according to a certain story or forces. It doesn't last very long unless we keep telling the story over and over.

You can practice with little ones. You can practice with annoyance with your partner or your spouse. Practice watching when you feel yourself to be right. Just practice watching for that little

impulse that says, "I'm right." It's a very interesting one. Or practice carefully with certain desires that arise that you know, those are the ones you'd like to learn about, and see what it's like as it arises.

First is to look at key patterns and sort of recognize the territory for yourself. The second is to identify the experience in the moment. The third is to touch it with your heart as well as seeing and labeling it, to really let it in and not condemn it so much. The fourth is to notice how it changes, notice it's process, beginning and end, what comes before and afterward. Take little things to work with; practice easy ones.

The next -- and this is really a key -- is see if you can discover or observe what it hides you from, what it distracts you from, what it covers up, what's the fear. When I said these are all forms of avoidance, if you let yourself feel desire, or fear, or boredom, or doubt, or restlessness, and you observe it, see if you can listen inside yourself a little more deeply, or even on a cellular level somehow, and see what it is that you're moving away from, that you run from. Some of it is moving away from being "just this much," as Achaan Chaa says. We're always at war trying to make life more than it is, make it bigger, or grander, or happier, or sadder, or longer, or shorter, or lighter, or darker.

We move away from hunger, we move away from loneliness, we move away from grief, or unfinished business, or pain in our heart, or the fact that we haven't really been intimate in our relations at times, and that's difficult to acknowledge, so we distract ourselves, or we move away from pains that are unfinished in the past where we haven't forgiven, or meaninglessness, or we move away from fear that things are out of control. They are! Or we move away from space; it gets quiet and the whole sense of oneself which is built on busyness starts to go away, and that's scary, so we distract ourselves.

It's not only to observe the hindrance or the state, but also to listen more deeply and see what you would experience if you let yourself just get here. What might you be avoiding? It's a little bit like going through a layer of ice that's a little painful, if you want to go into the water and explore the depths of it. There's all kinds of amazing things. But you have to stop skating, and then there's a moment where you say, "Whoops, I think I'm going to break through the ice," and you do. It's okay to stop and feel what's actually present. This is a big part of practice, to open your body, to use your breath, your attention, and your heart, and feel what's here, and stop moving; to come to rest in the moment. This is where it gets very delicate. It's called, Watching the Movement of Mind.

I'll close again with something from Achaan Chah. He talks about the Middle Way:

On one side it's like you're being kicked on one side with desire, and the other is aversion, left and right. One who follows the Middle Way says, "I will not get caught by the pleasure or pain. I will let go of each as they arise, accepting one moment after another. But it's hard. It's as though we're being kicked on both sides, like a cow bell or a pendulum knocked back and forth. We're always besieged by pleasure and pain, and then we follow by a response, "I don't like it, I do like it."

If you observe this, use your heart for guidance. You'll see that when the heart is in its natural state, it's unattached, it's accepting. When it stirs from the normal it's because of various thoughts and ideas, the process of construction, of images. This is the illusion.

Learn to see this process clearly. When the mind is stirred from its normal state it leads away from this moment into past, into future, into right and wrong, into indulgence and aversion, creating more illusion, more of movement.

Good and bad arise only in the mind. If you keep watch on this, studying this one topic your whole life, I guarantee you'll never be bored.

He says in another place:

Just take one seat in the middle of the room and don't get up, and see the things as they come and go.

So working with these states in one's sitting practice, in driving in a traffic jam, in the supermarket, in one's marriage, or one's intimate relations, in the workplace -- they're the same forces. Begin to work by identifying them, start to see what your common patterns are, maybe take a look and see what you're avoiding by having them there, and see if you can bring your heart into them as well, because for the most part they arise out of some place of pain. If we can open and soften to that, to kind of melt to it, there's a much deeper place of well-being that is our Buddha-nature, that is our birthright, and it's there for anybody who stops.

This is Emily Dickinson:

When much in the woods as a little girl,
I was told that the snake would bite me,
that I might pick a poisonous flower
or mushroom, or the goblins would kidnap me.
But I went along and met none but angels.

I guess the second half will wait until another night. We have a few moments for thoughts, comments, questions. And in the second half we'll take more time because I'd like to hear from you about common hindrances that you discover in your daily life and how you've learned to look at them or work with them.

THE AUDIENCE: A question about depression. I've read that depression can be stated as anger turning inward. Any comments about that, regarding anger being one of the hindrances?

JACK: Is this for yourself particularly?

THE AUDIENCE: Yes.

JACK: So at times you experience depression and you wonder how it relates to anger? Is that it?

THE AUDIENCE: What's going on?

JACK: It is often the case, although not always, that depression is a cover for anger; that one has had some circumstance in life that first brought a lot of pain, and then the response to that pain is anger. If that's unexpressed in people, the energy to keep that anger down is as strong as the anger itself, and it bottles up a great deal of energy, and then one can feel fearful, depressed, lacking any sense of personal empowerment. So often, although not always, in working with depression, you might look to see where you've really cut yourself off from your true feelings or your true inner relationship to things around. That's not the only cause for depression, and it's important to see that it's a very personal process that we're discussing; that there isn't some rote formula. For someone else it might be loss and there might be a bit of anger but there could be some other sense of grief or loss, possibly other reasons as well. So it's more an inquiry. What you might do is look at what time of day it gets the strongest or in what circumstances, and then stop and sit. Say, "Alright, I'm going to feel this," and see what images come, where you feel it in your body, what images might arise.

Do you feel it in your body when you're depressed?

THE AUDIENCE: Yes. Then it becomes sleepiness.

JACK: So you get sleepy. So that's one function. Do you feel it in any particular place?

THE AUDIENCE: All over.

JACK: So then you might sit with that and feel the sleepiness and see what's under that, what would come up if you weren't sleepy. Just pay careful attention. If you really want to go further, see if you can feel the strongest sensation in your body, and then let an image arise, whatever image wants to come out of it that may show you a picture of what that inner conflict really is.

It's a good question.

THE AUDIENCE: What would be an interesting discussion one night is talk about when we're happy. It seems to seduce us away from the inner work. I mean, me.

JACK: What seduces us away?

THE AUDIENCE: Happiness. When I'm feeling really happy and things are going right, some things are going right, it's like, "Well, I might not have time to go to meditation."

JACK: I'd love to talk about happiness some night. I see it much broader than that. That's a very good point, that at times happiness can lead to a kind of complacency. However, there are other kinds of happiness that are very genuine and really nurturing of spiritual life, that touching them actually gives us the strength to deal with difficulties. So it's a whole range, and there can be great joys that come out of spiritual practice as well. Seeing the layer of things that we've avoided, there's a very deep level of joy that can come. It's a good topic to talk about.

THE AUDIENCE: One of the things that hurts me, you naming them, I know all of them, is that it's like I'm paying attention.

JACK: People do have all of them. They're all common human forces that operate in each of us. There may be ones that we tend to have more than another, but they're all the elements of the make-up of the normal human mind. So it's not so much a question of which we have or don't have. Some people have them all at once, what's called, A Multiple Hindrance Attack. What's important in meditation is not what the experience is, but what is our relationship to it as it arises. So as we get to see what are our top ten tunes, and the popular ones for us, then we can also begin to look at whether we can develop a mindful or a skillful or a passionate relationship that leads us to freedom in relation to that. It may be that we all have to work down the list or up the list, depending on where you want to start. I think that's true.