

Householder Series:

Hindrances of the Householder (II)

We have begun to look at what the Buddhists traditionally call "hindrances" or difficult energies which arise in the mind and in one's life as a part of meditation practice, particularly as householders, and how we might look at them, deal with them, and work with them.

I want to read a passage from an article by a woman named Portia Nelson. It's called *Autobiography in Five Chapters*.

Chapter One:

I walk down the street. There is a deep hole in the sidewalk. I fall in. I'm lost. I'm helpless. It isn't my fault. It takes forever to find a way out.

Chapter Two:

I walk down the same street. There is a deep hole in the sidewalk. I pretend I don't see it. I fall in again. I can't believe I'm in the same place, but it isn't my fault. It still takes a long time to get out.

Chapter Three:

I walk down the same street. There is a deep hole in the sidewalk. I see it is there. I fall in. It's a habit. But my eyes are open. I know where I am. It is my fault and I get out immediately.

Chapter Four:

I walk down the same street. There's a deep hole in the sidewalk. I walk around it.

Chapter Five:

I try walking down a different street.

It somehow speaks very directly to our human experience which is not that one sees and immediately learns, but that in some sense our spiritual practice and our life of growing in general is a process of making mistakes and confronting our demons, and oftentimes looking at the same patterns and difficulties. They are the forces that the great Christian Desert Father Teacher Evagrius described attacking those people who went out to meditate in the desert in Egypt in the second century A.D. There they talked about them in terms of demons. They would be assailed by the demons of desire, wanting to go back to Alexandria and have a pizza, or whatever they served in Alexandria at that time, or wanting a soft bed, or the demons of aversion and frustration because it was too hot or too cold or what we call the Noonday Demon, which is the demon of sleepiness that would creep up in the middle of the day to want to take them into unconsciousness. Or if you got rid of all those, the demon of pride who would come only after you were successful in routing the

other demons, to say, "See how good I am? I got rid of desire, frustration and anger, and I'm really a good meditator."

Of course, what one discovers is that what was available and in fact a part of meditation in Egypt in the 2nd Century A.D., or in ancient India, or in China, are exactly the same forces, the same demons one encounters here, in our lives, in our work, in our families. As I mentioned, there was an article that articulated this very well that describes the traditional hindrances of desire, anger, judgment, restlessness, sleepiness, laziness and doubt in terms of marriage. In fact, in relating to anything, whether it's our meditation, our work, our financial life, the same states of mind will have the tendency to arise.

What's important to understand is that these very states are the place of practice. The doubt, the fear, the difficulty, the anger, that arise in our life are what make practice juicy. If you could just sit and be peaceful and get up, your meditation wouldn't take you very far in terms of opening a heart of very deep compassion, or in terms of some inner centeredness, a capacity to relate to birth and death -- and all of the changes that are inevitable in life -- with wisdom, with deep understanding.

In the Buddhist tradition there are a number of different strategies for dealing with these hindrances or difficulties. An image that's used is of these hindrances or difficulties being the same as a poisoned tree. One strategy is that you go and find the poisoned tree and you cut it down; you chop it down and try to get rid of it. We'll talk about working with that strategy. A second strategy is to simply put up a sign near the tree that says, "This is a poisoned tree. Don't eat the berries, don't eat the leaves," and instead of killing it, to take shade in it, and to enjoy it for what there is of value in it, to have some friendly relationship to it rather than one based on fear. The third and the most interesting strategy is the person who comes along and says, "Oh, a poisoned tree of this kind, just what I've been looking for. These berries make the best medicine for curing a number of illnesses, including the illness of greed, fear, desire, anger and doubt.

It's the person that takes the very energies that are difficult and learns to work with them or distills them in their own body and heart until something more valuable comes to them. The phrase that Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche used was, "These difficulties are manure for *bodhi*, manure for awakening or enlightenment." The most famous biographer of Sigmund Freud, Lou Andre Salome, at one point in the introduction wrote a statement -- This is a paraphrase. I didn't have it to look up but I basically remember it -- When we look at the life of a great person, rather than condemn their faults and weaknesses, should we not be grateful and awestruck that such light could shine through in spite of them.

It's a very different spirit of relating to difficulties, when seeing them as who we are, to see that there is some light of our being, of our wisdom, of our heart, that can shine through even in the midst of these, even in spite of them.

As we talked about hindrances and difficulties before we found that mostly as they arise they're based on stories we tell ourselves -- he did, she did, they did, I wish, if only -- and as we begin to look at the nature of mind, we can see what storytellers we are. I mean, I'm a storyteller by profession. In part, that's what I do. But I don't think I'm the only storyteller in the room. It goes on

and on inside there.

The stories do a couple of things. They make us right, they make us feel better, they justify, they make us feel more comfortable, and they also help us to avoid feeling things that we don't want to feel, or facing things that are just here in front of us. These hindrances, in a sense, are an avoidance of what is present in the reality of the moment.

One philosopher wrote:

Millions of people long for immortality who do not know what to do with themselves
on a rainy Sunday afternoon.

It's nice to have visions of eternal peace or whatever one's spiritual ends might be, but in fact, it's really more about facing our life each day, each hour, and each moment.

How can we relate when these different forces arise during the day? Here are a number of strategies one can work with in meditation and in one's daily life. The first and the major way to relate in terms of skillfulness is to identify with the present and to become mindful of it, whether it's fear, judgment, anger or desire. If you want to, you can work with mental notes or labels, "fear, fear, judging, judging, anger, anger, irritated, irritated," not just when you're sitting on a cushion, but try it if you're in an argument with somebody, or if you're feeling frustrated over something, or if you feel very confused one morning, note, "Okay, I'll look at this and label it, 'confused, confused,'" and see what that experience is like. To pay attention to it means to let yourself experience what arises in the body, in the feelings, and in the mind, all of them. Confusion might arise and there will be a physical sense with it. It will arise and there will be a certain feeling, a state of being confused. There will be a quality of pleasant or unpleasant. In most cases it will probably be unpleasant. There also might be an aversion or judgment, "I shouldn't be confused. I wish it would go away." If you try to make it go away, what happens? Anybody ever try it? It generally gets worse, plus which you add more judgment, "I shouldn't be judging, I shouldn't be confused, I'm really not doing it right, if only this would go away," and all of a sudden you have four more judgments on top of the first one.

There was a person at a retreat who came to me because she noticed in her mind that in most everything she did there was a voice of judgment. So I asked her in a simple way, a 15-second psychotherapy, what were the first names of her parents. It turns out to be this person and that. Did that voice in her mind remind her of either of those? It could have been someone else, but in this case it happened to be her mother. She grew up in an Italian family. I said, "Alright, every time you hear that voice saying you're not doing it right or you should do more, or whatever, first of all, count the judgments for awhile just to see them." She tried that and she was still fighting with them. I said, "Alright, say 'Thank you, Mom.' Whenever that voice comes, you should do a little bit more, you should get that better, 'Thank you, Mom.'" She said, "That's not really right because I called her 'Mama' and I would have spoken to her in Italian. It's more like 'grazie, Mama.'"

She wrote this note after a couple of days of trying it.

Dear Jack:

The judging process and saying, "Grazie, Mama," was very useful and even became amusing. At one point the judging process of mind seemed to be a giant web of interconnected judgments. Once I started counting them, there were so many. I counted during two sittings all told about 220. Many of them were repeats. But it got to be fun after awhile.

She also had difficulty in walking meditation. She would get bored or frustrated. So I said, "Instead of walking a little bit, do a long walk. Take an hour and a half or two hours and just walk back and forth and die. Whatever arises, you just keep walking."

I also did the hour and a half walking this morning. It was preceded by an hour sitting in dread anticipation, frustration, anger at you, and irritation at the upcoming walk. The walk itself was like all things, good and awful. The first 15 or 20 minutes I really got into it and thought, "This isn't too bad." Then a lot of aversion came out, mostly impatience, then rage, then calmness, then sort of psychedelic nature stuff, then pride, lots and lots and lots of pride, over and over again, then planning on what I'd write you in this note, then more pride, I did it so well, then back to my feet and legs and sensations, then irritation, then "Grazie, Mama," again. Then it all started all over.

I noticed that most of my unawareness occurred during the time between sitting and walking, so I realized that's the place for me to focus on next in my practice.

Anyway, after ten years of sporadic vipassana, I touch for a moment into beginner's mind.

Grazie.

The first spirit of it, whatever it is that you're dealing with, whether it's fear, whether it's judgment, whether it's anger, whether it's doubt or confusion, is just to begin to name it and identify it. You might find that it fits your habitual tendency like some people's tendency to move out of the present through desire all the time; others have a tendency through judgment or aversion or disliking; for others it might be through confusion. It's useful just to begin to be aware of what your habit is, what your strategy is. Basically, it's a strategy to deal with what's uncomfortable. For certain people when it's uncomfortable there will come desire, for others there will be aversion, for some there will be spacing out and confusion. Begin to be aware of that and notice just what's there.

As you start to look, like our friend here, you see how amazingly frequent it is, how many mind moments we spend desiring, judging, irritated, sleepiness or doubting. It's really quite a lot. Has anybody ever noticed that? Then you say, "Oh, my God, this is an impossible task. A little mindfulness to overcome all of that?" But it's really universal. It was true in Egypt 2,000 years ago, and it was true in India 2,500 years ago with the Buddha, and it's true in the monasteries on Mt. Athos, it's true in the Zen temples of Japan, and it's true in Fairfax, San Raphael, Sausalito, Berkeley. It's the same thing. It's really universal and it's just part of what the mind does.

There's a book that I've been reading on three-year olds and it's entitled, *Three-Year Old, Friend or Enemy*. It is written by a well-known psychologist writing on this particular stage. Three-year-olds have a lot of aggression and a lot of testing of limits and a lot of periods where they regress and get very needy and they go through all these things. I see myself in her, it's not just that she does that, but there she is acting out all this stuff that I find in myself. There are times when I just get completely frustrated with her and want to just throw her out the window.

I remember teaching at Esalen and there was a whole group of us in one large room. There was some conversation about spiritual life. One of the people there had their child. It was a young two- or three-year-old who was crying and making a lot of noise, being very difficult at that particular time, and finally just started to wail and cry. The mother picked it up and carried him out of the room, and there was this kind of, "Ahh," a relief of everybody in the room. One woman among the many who had children, just said exactly that. She said, "Do you remember the time when you really just wanted to pick them up and throw them out the window, and you didn't care how far down it was to the street?" Everybody in the room who had children laughed because they all remembered that moment. It's not that you do it, mind you, but that it just comes along with everything else that arises.

What you need to do is to see that it's human and begin to look at it directly anyway, to label it, to acknowledge, "Well, there it is, there's aversion, there's irritation, there's judgment, there's confusion" or "there's fear." Actually, when we see it truly, the moment that we can name it, it's like we turn around and face it rather than being caught or running away. We say, "Oh, I know you." Maybe it's the dark night instead of psychosis, or maybe it's just boredom after being with a person for some years. Instead of saying, "Oh, I've got the wrong relationship" or the wrong marriage, when you don't face it, it seems much bigger and worse, but when you turn around and actually look at it, it's not as bad as it seemed.

That's the first step. Things become workable when you simply acknowledge what that energy is that has arisen in that time in your life, in your practice. To work with these forces, in addition to naming them and being aware of them, you really have to let yourself touch them with your heart. It's not just to name it, but somehow it's to let it in, to let yourself connect with it from a place of tenderness or caring, somehow to make friends with it or at least not to be upset or judgmental of it, whatever it is.

If you find that there's anger, or fear, or desire, maybe it's your food craving, and you eat over and over again, and you say, "Oh, I wish I didn't do it," or maybe it's the way you treat your body in some other fashion, maybe it's the relationship with some person in your life, you look at it and say, "Ugh, I hate that." See if you can acknowledge what that state is. Is it judgment, is it aversion, is it dislike, is it fear, and then in acknowledging it, send some loving kindness, send some *metta* to it or embrace it. Let your heart connect with it as if it were a poor down-trodden dog or something like that, that generally whenever it came you kicked it, and instead you are going to be nice to it today and touch it in some way with more tenderness. If we can't let things into our heart, we don't really let ourselves grow and there is still some sense of aversion or trying to get over them or rid of them.

See it and identify it, let yourself be touched by it without pushing it away, and as you open to it,

notice its nature and then study it as if you were a botanist or a biologist. It's a part of the nature of mind. It's what every mind does. Every mind doubts, every mind gets restless, every mind gets confused, every mind judges. Anybody who doesn't have all of those things? Not a single person back there.

So you look at its nature. When does it begin? What's the middle of it? How intense does it get? What's its end like? Is there something you want to learn about? What's the most powerful point of it? What are the body sensations like, if you want to learn to deal with this particular energy? What triggers it, what's the thought or the image that generally comes right before it? What's the story line that goes along with it? There you are driving and you're annoyed by some driver for doing something for the umpteenth time. What's the story that goes through your mind? "California drivers are this . . ." or "People who drive on the road should . . ." or what is it? Just look at not only what the event is but what's that inner thing that triggers it. See what the story is. Just look at it, and then ask yourself one other question. Who is making up the story? Very useful question at that moment. It's really beginning to observe the movement or the dance of the mind.

This is called, "The Cosmic Dance" or in other traditions, "The Dance of Shiva," or "The Dance of Maya."

The restless waters of the lake appear to make the moon dance.

It's our own storytelling that makes things move. You pay attention and you watch its beginning, its end, its nature, what it feels like in the body, if it is painful, if it is pleasant. If you want to learn, if you have some hindrance or difficulty in your life that you want to learn about, particularly study the moment when it just ends. Suppose it's desire. We'll take a simple one. You have a desire for something you want to eat. Maybe you have a chocolate craving, and you decide to go out and get an extraordinary triple fudge Swiss chocolate cake, or whatever it is, and you fantasize and you imagine, and finally you get to that place that specializes in catering to people just like you. They know you're coming and they put all the extras on, and there it is. Instead of just going for the cake, this time you're going to watch. You feel the desire in the body, you watch the salivation in the mouth, you imagine the pictures and the satisfaction. You really let yourself look at it and you feel it. It's tense. In that very craving, there's a certain amount of tension and pain. That's alright, you're going to get it satisfied. You get in your car, you go to the ultimate bakery and you get that thing. You don't even take it to your car. You sit down at the table, you take your first bite, and then all of a sudden there's this whole shift that happens in your body. From this place of tension, it all just softens and relaxes. That chocolate touches your tongue and it melts some in your mouth, it tastes delicious, it's really good. At that point, it almost doesn't matter whether you have any more than that. That's probably just about enough. If you watch, the desire moves at that moment and the desire ends. Why is that? Anybody have an answer? Because the great happiness of it is not just the pleasure, although there's pleasure and that comes from sense delight, a certain happiness, but the great happiness comes because the desire ends.

If you want to learn something really powerful about the mind or about particular energies that are arising in your life, whether it's in relation to food, people, love, work, look at it and discover what happens at the moment in your mind when that anger, that confusion, that doubt at a certain

moment ends -- it is a very, very interesting place to study. There is where you learn a lot about its nature.

It doesn't happen easily. Whatever this is, it requires practice. How many times have these states arisen in our lives? Countless, unbelievable number of times. So you practice. Maybe you start with little ones. Remember that quote of William Blake?

If one is to do good,
it must be done in the minute particulars.
General good is the plea of the hypocrite,
the scoundrel and the flatterer.

To do anything well, it has to be done here immediately, in this moment, rather than with some ideal -- "I'll get rid of this," or "I'll change the world." How do we actually relate to our family, to the people nearest to us, to our coworkers, to the people that we encounter in the day, or to the immediate circumstances of our life? I regret to say this about Mr. Blake, but I also have a quote from Catherine, his wife, who was asked about William, particularly about the quality of his company. She replied:

I regret to say I have very little of Mr. Blake's company. He's always busy in paradise

Some person who I know whom I will not name said:

If you really want to know about a master, a Zen master or otherwise, talk to their spouse.

Actually, this was a woman. She said, "Talk to their wife," but there are a number of female Zen masters. That's really where you learn about yourself, and that's also where you learn about what it means to be free. It's not in the theory but in the nitty-gritty, in the little things. In traffic, as I said, when somebody cuts you off or does some idiotic thing which only a human being could do, and they do it, that's the place that you learn. You have that argument with your lover or your husband. Maybe you come home and you know you want to argue. Have you ever seen that one? If you look at it, there is a desire to make contact, but not too close. It's sort of a safe way to make a connection and still keep some distance at the same time, or maybe to discharge something because you're grumpy at someone else, or some other reason. These are very interesting places to learn about our minds, to learn about how things operate.

The desire to be right, you might just listen for that voice. I don't know if any of you have that. I just love to be right, it feels so good to be right. Do you know what I mean? You notice that voice that comes, and you feel its quality, what's it like in the body, what does it do in that moment to the relationship, and what is the sense of self that is built around that story that I'm right and therefore somebody else is not. You look at it.

This isn't anything new, is it? There's nothing new in tonight's talk. It's really old stuff. Here it is again. It's the nature of mind, and we're learning to relate to mind in a friendly, compassionate and

wise way, not to stomp it out or get rid of it. You need it for certain things, like planning a few things here and there, writing once in awhile. It has its place.

What is interesting is watching as you begin to allow yourself to look at these energies and not just act them out habitually. You might just pick one for the next week or two. Pick one hindrance or difficulty in your life and study it. Maybe we can have a little botany lab work here. At the end of a couple of weeks we could have a meeting and we'll share. We'll have a little time and people can share which particular hindrance they picked and what they learned about it as they observed it.

As you look you also discover that each has a beautiful side. Isn't that interesting, that each has some creative energy locked up in it? For example, the Tibetans talk about those forces of greed, hatred and delusion, in terms of Buddha families or types of personality energies -- if you will, archetypes. The *padma* energy, which is that of greed and seduction, when one learns to work with it and doesn't get quite so personally caught up in it, turns instead to incredible creativity and a beautiful sense of esthetics and beauty that's not oriented toward manipulation or grasping but can be part of something creative and skillful. Or the *vajra* type of mind which is in its negative or its difficult aspect portrayed as cold, hard, judgmental, and seeing what's wrong with everything, when one learns to work with that energy and open it and not be so afraid and learns how to use it skillfully, it becomes transformed into what's called "discriminating wisdom." Instead of being something that's undermining, it's the clarity of mind to see exactly what is going on and to know how to relate to it wisely. It is depicted as the sword which cuts through all illusion and all nonsense. Similarly, the Buddha family type which is associated with delusion and being spaced out, not being so present, avoiding things, when one learns to work with that energy and allows it without getting caught in the story, it moves to a place of great peacefulness, of spaciousness, of a kind of mirror-like quality which can receive everything in the world without doing battle with it.

What if these things are strong, what if desire, fear, anger, judgment and so forth, are very strong, and it's really too hard to pay attention, how can you work with them? There are five traditional strategies that are also listed as ways to work with them.

The first strategy is called, "Letting it go." It arises, you see it, and you just let it go. Terrific if you can do it. The thing is it is not so easy to do. There's also a danger in it that letting go of the judgment, or the desire, or the fear, or whatever, often gets twisted in our minds a little bit until it becomes, "I can't wait to let go of this," which is to say, "I can't wait to get rid of it." It becomes an aversion, "I don't like that." A better phrase for it is to "let it be," better than "letting go," more the quality of "letting be." To be mindful and just see it, see that "it's mine," and let it into the heart rather than resisting it.

What is interesting if you let things be is first of all they come and go on their own. It's quite terrific if you really watch them. They do that all by themselves. Secondly, if you pay attention and you really let them be and let them in, what you see is not so much greed, hatred, delusion, desire or restlessness. Even those, deep though they are, are something more superficial or on some medium level, and underneath what you touch when those arise is pain, emptiness, loneliness, fear, some grief or sorrow, or some kind of contraction. All those things arise as a strategy to not feel something.

When you let them be, it's not only to let that state be, but to really open yourself to feel what is present, and to soften your heart enough so that you can get just to the bottom of it, whatever that particular energy is, and that's what begins to heal you. That's what begins to allow you to work with it in a different way. That's the first strategy. Suppose that doesn't work, what other ones can you use?

There's a second one. That first strategy is like turning the poison into something valuable, into insight. That's the strategy of making it into a useful medicine. A second strategy is one of balance. For example, if there is a great deal of desire, you can reflect on the brevity of life, on death and impermanence, and think, "Is this something I really want?" or "What really matters to me? If I only had another month or another six months to live, what would I be wanting to do with my body, heart and mind? How would I want to live?" Very often it puts desires into perspective. The balance for doubt is faith, to seek out some inspiration. If there's confusion and doubt, to read something or to speak with someone -- it just reminds you of another part of yourself that's a counter to that, so then you come into enough balance to watch it.

The balance for anger and judgment -- and it's a difficult one -- is forgiveness. You can't do it too soon, but some time when you're ready. At first you can extend maybe a little, and then maybe a little more, with forgiveness to yourself or to another person. You can work with forgiveness when the anger is too strong to just observe.

The balance to sleepiness or laziness is to do those things which raise energy.

This set of strategies, if it's too strong, you can kind of cool it out a little by raising energy when you feel yourself being too sleepy or dull, or by working with forgiveness when the anger is too strong to just observe.

The third strategy is suppression. Very interesting that this should be listed in here. It is generally talked about as a bad thing. You don't want to suppress things because it makes you sick and it just comes out some other way anyway. This is like the old adage of counting to ten when something is difficult. You just stop and you count to ten.

I'll give you a better example. Suppose you are a surgeon and you're in the middle of having an argument with your husband. You're on call that day and your beeper goes off. He did something, and you're quite upset. It's time to go the hospital. You get in your car and drive right over. Someone is lying on the table and they need open heart surgery. You get scrubbed, you get your gloves on, and you're about to do surgery. That's not a very good place to ruminate and think about that argument and try and finish it up. That's a very good place to put it aside and just complete your task of surgery and wait until there is a skillful place, a place that's the right container, where it feels safe, where there's the support or the time to let yourself solve it. Sometimes it is a skillful strategy, when something is very strong, to put it aside, especially if you're willing to say, "I will come back to it when a better or a safer opportunity arises after this circumstance is over." It requires patience.

There's letting things be and being aware of them, that's the first one. Bringing some balance is the

second. The third strategy is suppress them if necessary or put them aside for awhile. The fourth is sublimation, taking the energy and transforming it into something else.

The traditional example, if you're very angry, is to take that and do something useful with it, to go and chop the firewood that you need for the woodstove for the winter and get some of it out of your system, let go of it and also do something useful. That's externally. Internally, you can work with it in the same way. For example, if there is a lot of lust and sexual desire that's really compulsive, just as you can move it outwardly, you can also through some practice move the energy in your body and take it from being just sexual up into your chest and heart in some way that the desire is still there but it is transformed more into the desire to be loved or to love or to connect in some way. It is to find some other outlet for it that is skillful.

The last of these categories is the most interesting and dangerous one. They actually get more dangerous as you go down the list because suppression is dangerous if you don't work it out later, and sublimation is dangerous also or can be because it can be an avoidance. The most dangerous, but also the most interesting, is the category where you exaggerate it. If you haven't learned, it is, "Alright, let's do it; let's look at it." I don't mean particularly if it is going to be harmful to someone. There are two ways to do this. First is just put in your mind Part A, where you take that desire or anger, whatever it is, and you imagine taking it to its extreme. What would you do? How far can you imagine taking it? Instead of resisting it, you play it out to the umpteenth degree. The only way that this is a spiritual practice is if you do it and you pay attention. If you do it and you're not very mindful, then it is reinforcing it and pretty soon you'll go after that unconsciously. It can be done very skillfully. If you have that desire or that anger, imagine what you would do to that person. If you have a desire and imagine getting it a hundred times as elaborate as can be -- see what it's like. There, you've ended the 100th time, and how do you feel? There you are in the same place. Does it arise again? Can you really see that it's endless if you just try to fulfill it?

The second part, Part B, is to actually act it out, which we do all the time anyway. It's nothing terrible to say that most of the time we act on our desires, and that's fine. Even for these difficult ones, go out and indulge that thing, whatever it is, see, but just do it by paying attention as well, and learn from it -- not just automatically.

The story I usually tell with this is one of Munindra, Joseph Goldstein's teacher in India, who had this incredible craving for Indian sweets, particularly for gulabjaman. Gulabjaman are so sweet, they're in this sugar water and they make baklava seem like dry toast. He loved them. After each meal he would want to go and have his gulabjaman. Finally, he was tired of this craving, so he went into town, brought some money with him, and he ordered something like 20 or 30 rupees of gulabjaman, this enormous plate full of it. He sat down. I don't know how far he got into it, but I don't think he could eat very much before he started getting really sick, and certainly sick of gulabjaman. After that he said he could take it or leave it, as one would say.

If you're going to do it, okay, pay attention. At least learn from it. As one Zen master said:

This life is a series of mistakes. True practice is one continuous mistake, one after another anyway.

The only difference is that you pay attention so you learn from it.

I hope you can hear in going through these strategies of letting it be, of observing it, feeling it in the body, of noticing what the loneliness or pain or fear or contraction is out of which it comes, of sublimating it or transforming it in some way, or even acting it out and observing it, that if you're willing to do it with the experience or particular hindrance in your life, it starts to make the practice quite alive. That is where it becomes juicy, where you learn from it. It frees a tremendous energy. Instead of running away or acting habitually, you start to evoke and allow this inner energy that's been bound up in these patterns to be understood and to become more a part of your conscious being.

In all of these, in all of them, what's important is to learn to watch the movement of mind, the mind that wants to close or is afraid, that wants to defend itself or to avoid opening to the fact of whatever is actually here, to the "just this much" of the moment, to the spaciousness of it or the meaninglessness of it in certain moments, or the emptiness of it, or the birth and death of it, the loss, and the next thing that comes.

The whole process of working with these states of mind and these energies, is to finally learn to come to rest, to open to this moment, one after another, as it is, and find a kind of stillness that allows for all the coming and going of the ten thousand joys and the ten thousand sorrows, and it brings an ease and humanness and compassion.

I close by reading a letter. This is from one of Munindra's students, a woman who was in a prisoner of war camp in Europe during World War II, and involved at that time in very painful and horrible things that were happening in the war camps in Europe. She finally escaped as a teenager at the end of the war and moved to Australia. She wrote him this letter after doing some years of meditation practice. She said:

A few weeks ago I was sorting out old files with notes and stories and thoughts which I had written down over the years. Reading through them before destroying them, I was more amazed than I have ever been in my life of so much misery and unhappiness. How is it possible that a human being could live for 55 years through so much fear, despair, unhappiness, morbidity, depression, pain, suffering, and not be utterly destroyed by it? I must have been stronger than I thought. And when I look back over the past four years, since the first time I came to practice in India, life has become simple and so serene that it's unbelievable.

She's a very fine yogi. She is one of Munindra's greatest students.

After reaching the first deep stages in my mental development, I lost my depression. My headaches, fears and nightmares went away, and after doing deep practice for another year, during my second visit to you, I don't even understand anymore what all the fuss was about, those first 55 years of my life.

I just live life as it is and as it comes in a calm wholeness with some equanimity and I

find myself content with whatever arises. Sometimes I meditate, sometimes I don't meditate at all, but you see my life has become more of a meditation because I try to live each minute of the day in mindfulness and openness, and somehow nothing seems to be able to touch me in the same way anymore. It's like living on two levels. The outer level to make conversation with people and say the right things at the right time, but under that is a second level where there is a core of untouched and untouchable stillness, of quiet attention and peace, because somehow life is so simple, uncomplicated, and all those old upheavals were after all really just of my own making, weren't they. You only get upheaval through the ways you react to things, and once you react the right way, the direct and simple way, there aren't problems left, and somehow the right way of reacting is most of the time not reacting at all.

I hope this makes some sense to you. I'll tell you a little story to show you what an enormous success you are as a teacher.

I think her success was that she had suffered so deeply in some way that she brought that strength and that genuineness that had gotten her through that to her spiritual life. She said:

A few months ago the man who I love more than any in the world, and who was for the past 17 years as close to me as any man and woman could be, died rather suddenly. If that had happened before you started to teach me, I'm sure it would have completely destroyed me. I would have committed a quick suicide and ended it all. But now of course I felt sorrow about losing this man's close love for me and I missed his company, but for the rest, a stone thrown in the water would have caused more ripples than his death.

I accepted his death with an amazing serenity and detachment. He's just finished this life trip of his and they have already started another one. I don't know that, but apart from this personal loss and his companionship, there isn't the kind of upset and conflict in me about death. I am not afraid as I used to be.

Apparently I've always been able to see and understand other people's problems and help them somehow, but in the old days other people's miseries tore out my heart and gave me stomach ulcers in my pity and concern for them. But now when people come to see me with their miseries, I can listen to them, sometimes help them, and have a much deeper compassion, but when they leave, it's over and done with, and they haven't torn my guts out in the process.

I've been working with an alcoholic this past month or so, and for some odd reason my willingness to listen seems to help him in his struggle to stay away from alcohol and find his true spirit again.

I think you can be proud of yourself as a teacher and content with me as your pupil.

There is something really wonderful and joyful about working even with the pains and difficulties

in one's life and mind, for that moment when you realize, "For that little thing, I don't have to take it so seriously. I really can be free to touch that." It makes practice wonderful.