

The 5 Hindrances

SENSUAL DESIRE

ILL-WILL

RESTLESSNESS AND REMORSE

SLOTH AND TORPOR

DOUBT



In a concentration practice such as mindfulness of breathing, hindrances of sensual desire, ill-will, restlessness and remorse, sloth and torpor, and doubt often arise to obsess one’s mind. One way to deal with them is to replace them with their opposites:

1. **Sensual desire** should be replaced with the perception of repulsiveness. For example, a craving for food could be replaced with the thought of spitting out the food before swallowing. A lust for the opposite sex can be replaced by contemplating the 32 impure parts of the body.
2. **Ill-will** should be replaced with the thought of loving kindness and forgiveness.
3. **Restlessness and remorse** should be replaced with steadying the mind on the breath by counting the breath.
4. **Sloth and torpor**, or dullness of the mind, should be replaced with the perception of light by looking at it. The light will brighten the mind.
5. **Doubt** should be replaced with faith and confidence through discussion with a competent teacher.

SS If these antidotes fail, try to *ignore* the hindrances when they arise. **Do not pay attention** to them. Instead, increase your effort to direct your mind back to the breath.

Application of Mindfulness and Wisdom

We also can deal with the hindrances in a most direct way—by incorporating mindfulness and wisdom into the concentration practice.

Mindfulness comes face to face with any one of the hindrances that is arising at the moment, but does not react to it. When the mind does not react to the hindrances, they immediately lose the power to overwhelm the mind. Mindfulness is like the brake system in a car—it can slow down our compulsive reactions.

However, mindfulness alone is not enough. **Wisdom** is also needed to contemplate the dependently arising and insubstantial nature of the hindrances. For example, if you doubt your ability to achieve concentration: first, mindfulness becomes aware of the doubt, then wisdom investigates the cause of it. Wisdom can soon understand that doubt is just a phenomenon that arises due to causes and conditions, probably owing to one’s improper attention—attention on discursive thought (doubting) rather than on the breath. Understanding thus, you will not grasp doubt as “I” or “mine.” *It is through grasping it as “I” and “mine” that doubt seems real and persisting*

Apply the same method to other hindrances. In this way, you can **transform the hindrances into a path of awakening.**



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