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The Wisdom of The Buddhist Teachings: The Hindrances and Our Health

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We can teach about and explain the Buddhist teachings and disciplines in different ways depending on what we think is most important or suitable to our students and their interest, level and ability to understand.

Other factors such as the environment and situation in which we teach and the amount of time available will also influence what we say and how we say it.

Some teachers may emphasize the importance of meditation, while others stress the need for compassion in all situations and to all people.

Ajahn Chah, a forest monk of both great humility and repute in Thailand some years back always emphasized right speech to the lay people who came to see him, as he knew that they did not have the capacity, interest or time to devote themselves to meditation.

He recognized that speech is something that has great power over the present and future actions of both the person who says things and those people that he or she may say things about.

An approach that this writer has used with some success in making individuals more mindful about Buddhist teachings and disciplines is to make them aware of what those things are that the Buddha teaches us are the causes of our suffering.

These are the mental defilements, known as the kleshas, and their offspring, the mental hindrances.

In teaching the mental hindrances to people and giving examples of how they create problems, individuals are given a good foundation for their understanding and practice of Buddhism, as they see what it is that they must work against and try to both weaken and destroy. It allows us to clearly see what and who the enemy is and we find something that has always been the case throughout the history of mankind, that being that these things are within.

The hindrances are fivefold. They are sensual desire, ill – will, restlessness and worry, sloth and torpor and doubt.

Since in these modern times we have a deeper understanding of the relationship between our states of mind and our health, and we are also more likely to accept such a thing, we can see that these hindrances can create a range of both physical and behavioral problems and disorders which may in the long - run compromise and harm our health.

A physical problem can be something such as high blood pressure, diabetes, chronic tension and migraine headaches, constipation, excessive anxiety and worry, and backaches, among other things.

Behavioral problems can be something such as chronic overeating or using food as an escape from uncomfortable states of mind and feelings, daily, excessive and habitual use of drugs and alcohol, compulsive and obsessive shopping, tendencies to sexual promiscuity and using sex as an escape from uncomfortable states of mind and feelings, engaging in sexual activities that demean or harm other people physically or

mentally, excessive television viewing and chronic and addictive attitudes to gambling, among others.

There is a relationship between the play and fluctuations of the defilements and hindrances and our mental and physical health and our behavior.

Sensual desire can lead to attachments and obsessions that create addictions or a lack of feeling of peace or satisfaction unless we are engaged in a specific action or activity.

Ill-will can create tendencies to hostility, fear and anger that bring about disharmony within and in our relationships with others. It is easy to see how we can act on that in ways that will only be harmful to all.

Restlessness and worry keeps us from finding focus and peace at the moment and applying ourselves to things that can bring us both joy and a development of our mind and consciousness. It can keep us from educating ourselves and instead allow us to think that lazy and restless acting and living is somehow worthwhile to pursue or overindulge in.

Sloth and torpor keeps us from doing things that need to be done and many times if we do those things, we do them with an air or feeling like we are being victimized, or with resentment, or even anger. In addition we may not do them as well as we should or could do them. We may also find ourselves needing stimulants such as drugs or alcohol in order find peace or enjoyment in life.

Doubt can keep us from finding the esteem and confidence within that many of us need to live life with a focused and enthusiastic purpose. It also does not allow us to work

or live based on a set of healthy and constructive values, instead making us cynical or people who do things only based on our moods and feelings of the moment.

Any of these states of mind and consciousness can bring about an over or under stimulation of our nervous and endocrine systems which can affect both our health and behavior in a detrimental manner.

In learning and studying about, and dealing with the play of the hindrances, we benefit when we understand two other points. The first is what we achieve from such an effort, and perhaps more importantly how we minimize their affect on us in a negative manner.

The main weapon for combating the play of the hindrances is mindfulness, a state of mind that we all possess but one that is both compromised and strengthened through our actions each day.

We have to work to cultivate mindfulness.

This cultivation occurs through study and reflection in addition to the performance of various actions on a mental, verbal, physical and behavioral level.

We achieve and strengthen it through meditation, the performance of Yoga postures and other Yoga techniques, compassion and loving - kindness to other people, healthy and respectful relationships and interactions with others, and a wise and balanced use of our free time and energy.

To understand and see the play and fluctuations of the hindrances is an important stage to achieve in our practice of Buddhism.

In achieving such a thing and applying mindfulness to stop their movement is something that truly works to bring about the purification of mind and consciousness and the accessing and cultivation of concentration, tranquility, balance, insight and wisdom.

On a more desirable, practical and understandable level for some, it allows us to live a more mentally, physically and behaviorally healthy life.

The two attached charts may be helpful for some in developing their understanding of and ability to deal with the hindrances.