



This document is an extract from the full chapter which is available for download in the table via this [link](#) and is intended for use by participants of meetings.

37 - The Five Hazards: overview

Charting troubled waters

“When the mind is obstructed by the Five Hindrances, it cannot see clearly. It is like water that is boiling, dark, covered by algae, stirred by the wind, or muddied with clay.” ~ Gotama (the Buddha – paraphrased)

“The obstacles to peace are not the storms themselves, but our failure to see them as passing weather.” ~ Christina Feldman

Recognising the storms and the still sky

In this third phase of the RAFT journey – Freedom – our attention turns inward to the ‘Five Hazards’ (traditionally called the Five Hindrances). These are not moral flaws or personal shortcomings, but universal inner weather systems: evolved patterns of mind that temporarily cloud clarity, balance, and wise choice. Like fog, wind, or heavy seas, they do not destroy the vessel – but they can obscure direction, dull awareness, and make skilful navigation harder if they go unrecognised. When seen clearly, they are known for what they are: passing conditions, not permanent truths.

The real danger of the Five Hazards lies not on the meditation cushion, where they may appear as mild distractions, but *off the cushion*, in the press of ordinary life. Here they exert a powerful gravitational pull, collapsing awareness at precisely the moments it is most needed. Under their influence, inhibitory

control weakens, perspective narrows, and the mind slips into automatic pilot. When we are ‘covered’ by a hazard, the light of intelligence is briefly eclipsed, leaving us vulnerable to reactive urges and impulsive decisions. Freedom begins not with eliminating these inner storms, but with learning to recognise them early, stay present within them, and steer the raft with steadiness until clarity returns.

Navigating these dangers asks us to recognise that these inner storms are not merely background weather but active threats to the stability of the raft itself. When we are caught in the *siren song* of desire or the *tempest* of ill will, perception becomes radically distorted – like trying to steer by a compass submerged in boiling or muddy water. In such moments, our usual sense of direction cannot be trusted. What feels urgent, justified, or irresistible is often the very signal that awareness has narrowed and control is slipping.

Self-reflections

1. Which of the Five Hazards most often visits the mind?
2. What signals the arrival of a Hazard – body tension, specific thoughts, or a shift in mood?
3. What supports navigating through a Hazard? What does the body-mind feel like afterwards?
4. How can the Five Defenders help stabilise the mind when hazards arise?
5. What are some specific ways the mind unknowingly ‘feeds’ a predominant hazard (for example, scrolling, rumination, specific company)?
6. Can the experience of freedom from these storms – the debt paid, the illness cured – be recalled?
7. How does viewing hazards as passing weather change the relationship with them?

Journaling prompts

1. **Hazard log:** Record episodes when sensual desire, ill will, tuning out, anxiety and agitation, or immobilising doubt arose. What conditions fuelled

them?

2. **Moments of calm:** Describe times the mind was free from hazard. How did that clarity feel?
3. **Turning points:** Note what helped each hazard release – forgiveness, curiosity, breathing?
4. **Feeding versus starving:** Identify one way the mind feeds a specific hazard and one concrete way to starve it using appropriate attention this week.
5. **Doubt and confidence:** Write about a time when trust replaced confusion. How did that shift feel in the body?
6. **Hazards and compulsion:** Reflect on how these hazards connect to cycles of reactive behaviour. Does craving often arise when the experience of restlessness, ill will, or tuning out is present?
7. **Lessons from the storms:** What has each hazard taught the mind about the nature of impermanence and the requirements for freedom?

Remember to remember

The Five Hazards are the common storms marked on the navigational chart of the mind. Learning to recognise these storms when they arise is the crucial first step in learning not to be shipwrecked by them. Remember, these Hazards are temporary, conditioned states, not permanent features of the seascape or fatal flaws in the vessel. They are rooted in evolved tendencies, but it is attachment and reactivity to them that causes suffering.

The task of mastering the Five Hazards is akin to a sailor studying the specific characteristics of five types of storm – the sudden boiling squall of ill will, the thick algae-like fog of tuning out, the choppy waves of restlessness, the coloured water of desire, and the muddy darkness of doubt. By knowing the conditions that feed each storm and the skillful actions that starve them, the navigator shifts from reacting to the weather to steering by the stillness that exists between the gusts.

“Each moment of awareness is an island of safety.” ~ attributed to Thich Nhat Hanh

“When you understand the hindrances, they lose their power.” ~ Bhante Gunaratana

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