



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.

40 - The Five Hazards: Tuning Out

Re-awakening the mind's brightness

"When sloth and torpor are present, one should arouse energy, examine the danger, and gladden the mind." ~ Gotama (the Buddha)

"The faculty of voluntarily bringing back a wandering attention, over and over again, is the very root of judgement, character, and will." ~ William James

Understanding the fog and the energy dip

In early Buddhism, Tuning Out – the Hazard traditionally called *sloth and torpor* – refers to a specific dimming of vitality. It shows up as a sinking of both body and mind. The body feels heavy or inert, while the mind becomes foggy, dull, or drowsy. Interest fades, focus loosens, and the heart quietly withdraws from what matters most.

Like ill-will, this Hazard can appear mild or even harmless on the meditation cushion. Yet its real danger lies off the cushion. Tuning Out is not simply being tired; it reflects a subtle turning away rooted in delusion. Its effects reach into daily life, dulling our engagement in relationships, work, and ethical choice – especially in moments that require care, clarity, and presence.

Tuning Out often arrives with a seductive promise of relief: *"Just close your eyes, just drift – it will be peaceful."* But this comfort is deceptive. Like nectar that lures and ensnares, attention slips into a sticky fog where clarity and vitality are

slowly drained. What looks like rest becomes disengagement – not only during practice, but precisely when alertness and wisdom are most needed.

Self-Reflection Questions

1. What are the earliest bodily cues that Tuning Out is happening (for example, heavy eyelids, slumping posture, shallowness of breath)?
 2. Which conditions (time of day, specific tasks, environment) most reliably predict 'Tuning Out' for the mind?
 3. How does knowing the *seductive promise* change the understanding of dullness? Does it feel seductive?
 4. When 'Tuning Out' is present, what specific actions, memories, or values might awaken vitality?
 5. What is the observable cost to the heart's values when the mind is 'lost in the fog' of Tuning Out, and how does this state impact the capacity to remain present for others?
 6. How do the 'Five Defenders' help the mind meet low energy without self-criticism?
 7. What small environmental tweak (light, temperature, posture) most helps the being move away from Tuning Out?
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Journaling Prompts

1. **Tracking the arc of dullness:** Describe a recent episode where foggyiness appeared. Trace the sequence: trigger > first bodily and mental signs > remedy applied > result.
2. **The Diagnostic Test:** Reflect on a time you thought you were tired but perked up immediately for something fun. What does this reveal about the mind's resistance?
3. **Remembering purpose:** Write freely for ten minutes on the theme: "*When the mind remembers why, energy returns.*" Which values naturally enliven the being?
4. **Light as a support:** For one week, record morning light exposure and the time of practice. Note any patterns in alertness.
5. **A gladdening litany:** Create a short 'gladdening list' of three wholesome things accomplished today. Journal any changes in tone or willingness to

engage.

6. **An If–Then plan:** Draft a stability plan: “*If heaviness appears, then awareness will [stand up / splash water / open eyes] for five minutes.*”
7. **The moment energy returned:** After any session where dullness lifted, describe the exact moment vitality re-emerged. What changed first?

Remember to remember

Tuning Out is the mind’s quiet drift into low energy, fogginess, and disengagement. Like algae on still water, it hides the mind’s reflective capacity. Recognizing its presence – and understanding it as a seductive *carnivorous plant* that promises false peace – is the key first step.

Tuning Out becomes a signal, not a failure. When the mind recognizes the onset of *the Doldrums*, awareness can apply the antidote: restoring brightness, stability, and purpose through the Five Defenders and Seven Supports. This process requires gentle activation and wise effort – walking the path like one carrying a full jar of oil, relaxed yet fully attentive – shifting from avoidance to the energy and aliveness that make the heart fully awake.

“Small changes in posture, breath, or environment can shift the entire state of the mind.” ~ Rick Hanson

“Just as a person might be confined in a prison cell, unable to move or act freely, so too does sloth and torpor confine the mind. When this heaviness is abandoned, it is as if that person has been released from prison, finding ease, safety, and the energy to move toward the far shore.” ~ Gotama

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