

Insight Pentad (2 of 5) Disenchantment

December 13, 2022

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

unfolding, momentum, meditation, allow, disinterest, lottery, disenchanted, entranced

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This is the second day of this series on the insight pentad. The gladness pentad, which we discussed last week, and the insight pentad are descriptions of a natural unfolding in Buddhist practice and meditation practice. First, there's the idea that we don't have to always be in the driver's seat of our meditation, controlling it, making it happen, measuring it. There's a time and place where we want to allow a natural process to unfold that unfolds better if we start giving up control and allow something to happen.

But this giving up control and allowing best happens when there's already some centeredness in the present moment, some momentum of being focused here and present; where there is very little tendency to get distracted, and a lot of interest in being really connected to our experience and to the breathing. If the momentum of being present exists within us, then letting go and giving up control, we're letting go into that momentum and something can begin happening. But without some opening and allowing something to happen, there's no room for it to happen sometimes if we're always trying to operate from our control and desires.

With time, as we settle in, there is insight: we see something really clearly. Exactly what we see varies from person to person. Classically, one of the key things to see is how changing our experiences are moment by moment. We can't hold on to it. We just allow for its changing nature.

Some people don't understand why that is so significant. Some people have other insights and understandings that are key.

What is interesting to see is what these insights lead to. The kind of insights we're looking for lead us in a certain direction and open to something. If we understand what they're opening to, we can look back and have a personal understanding of all the kinds of insights that might support that opening.

What it opens to is usually translated in English as disenchantment. It's a strong disinterest in continuing with some of the usual things that the mind-heart does. Disenchantment is kind of a healthy "enough already, I've done this enough," a healthy weariness or tiredness of "enough already."

It can happen, for example, if you meditate every morning for half an hour, and after 252 days, you realize that every morning you are obsessing about lottery numbers. That is all you are thinking about. So you get to the 253rd day, and you realize: "Wait a minute, a good part of this last year, I've been thinking about lottery numbers to no avail. That hasn't helped me win any lottery. I haven't had a single accurate number in any lottery on the planet. I'm spending an inordinate amount of time in meditation thinking about lotteries, let alone outside of it. Maybe that's enough already. I feel tired from all this thinking, figuring, and calculating I do in meditation. I'm really getting tired of this now."

There's disenchantment and disinterest because maybe you haven't won any lotteries. You were so enchanted and entranced with the possibility of what would happen if you did win. But finally, after 253 days of that, you start becoming disinterested. You start falling out of the trance of instant wealth that a lottery might provide.

We call that disenchantment. I like the word disenchantment because it implies that we've been enchanted, we've been under the spell of something. We can be under the spell of our desires, our fantasies, and certain beliefs – "If only my partner behaved better, I would have a good life" (the "if only" spell).

There is the spell of conceit. There are all kinds of ways in which we are overly interested or caught in ideas about how terrible I am, how wonderful I am, how mediocre I am. There are all these ways of being entranced with that.

As we sit and meditate, sometimes we start seeing the repetition of those same kinds of thoughts, behaviors, and interests more and more clearly. We start seeing that has a high cost: “I’ve been resentful for 252 days. I didn’t realize I was doing it every day. Now that I meditate, I see it.” And only because of the familiarity and seeing the regularity of it in meditation, do we understand the cost of that daily resentment.

Then there starts to be a disenchantment and disinterest, and our attention or life energy doesn’t go into those thoughts. Our attention is more available for this momentum that we’re talking about in practice: the momentum of concentration, the momentum of mindfulness, the momentum of being more settled. This momentum has a chance to operate because we’re not activating ourselves.

So, to become disenchanted with craving, discontented with ill will, disenchanted with all kinds of fantasies we have, disenchanted with conceits. Disenchanted with self-preoccupation, “Boy, I’m always self-preoccupied.” Some of that might be okay. It’s not especially wrong. But to see its regularity and how little it does for us. Not only does it not benefit us, but it’s also sometimes deleterious for us.

The opportunity of meditation – to sit quietly, dignified, valued, respecting ourselves, and see in this kind of embodied respect and presence: “Wow, there’s a lot of nonsense in this mind. I had no idea.” And we start maybe becoming disenchanted, disinterested.

This movement towards disinterest, some of that comes from starting to see more clearly the difference between the events in the world and our relationship with them. As I said earlier in the meditation, we might have troubles in the world. For instance, our car has a flat tire; that’s troubling. Or the troubles might be bigger. We might have family members who are ill, and we have to care for them. It’s a trouble, a challenge, a problem to figure out how to do that well.

There are troubles, and there is the *being troubled* by them. Just that distinction, separating those two, we can start seeing the feeling of being troubled as something that we’re contributing to, something that is subjective and arising within us. We might not feel like we have much choice or ability to do anything about it. But when we sit and meditate regularly, bringing a lot of mindfulness to our experience, we see how often we’re troubled and start to get a handle on it – seeing it clearly and being able to observe it, not being in it, not being absorbed in it – our relationship to feeling troubled might change. We might become disinterested and disenchanted with the value of feeling troubled. Some of the energy that goes into it, the tension that we hold around it, begins to soften and relax. Then we might discover that we can take care of the issues we have to take care of much better if we don’t feel the tension, burden, and weight that comes with feeling troubled.

So we can become disenchanted with some of the reactivity and responses within us to events in the world. We can become disenchanted with the second arrows we shoot at ourselves.

This idea of becoming disenchanted is considered to be a form of wisdom that will support the momentum and the deepening of freedom in our lives. It has tremendous value. It arises out of insight into seeing something clearly. So whatever you see clearly enough that allows for this deeper movement of disenchantment, maybe that is insight for you.

This can be your homework for today. What wisdom, understanding, and insight do you have about what’s happening for you and how you react, respond, think, feel, and desire that might awaken or support a healthy disinterest and disenchantment with some of the things you have been caught up in? Give yourself some time today, maybe having tea or going for a walk, and consider this topic of disenchantment. How might a healthy disinterest be evoked more strongly so that it supports you in your life?

We’ll take this another step tomorrow. As this healthy disinterest, disenchantment, begins to take hold, what does that allow for next on this journey to freedom? So thank you very much.