

Insight Pentad (4 of 5) Liberation

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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

fading away, psychological states, releasing, resistance, clinging, desires, process, conditions, meditation, calm, constructed, absence, freedom, flow, evolution, seeing, clearly, impermanent, disinterested, disenchanted, attachments, peacefulness, ease, letting go, trust, ceasing, nonreactive, awareness, relaxing, gladness, inspiration, cat, mouse hole, conceit, centering, settling, melt, thaw, greed, hatred, envy, avariciousness, disrespect, enlightenment, natural, artifices

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My friends, we have come to the fourth talk on the insight pentad – the five movements of evolution and growth in the practice that flow from having insight. The word “flow” suggests that this process is not something we do, construct, or make happen, but something that arises as we see clearly what we are doing and what is happening in our minds – our beliefs, our attachments, our desires, our aversions, our resistance. As we see clearly and deeply into the impermanent, changing, constructed nature of our minds, we begin to let go. We begin to be disinterested. We start changing our relationship to our mind. We are not so wedded to it or invested in it. There is a divestment process that goes on, and a fading away of the desires and attachments that keep us caught and keep us from being free.

The consequence of this is greater and greater calmness, peacefulness, and ease. There is a reward – we are not simply left in some undesirable state of destitution. As the fading away of attachment and clinging happens, it leaves us freer and freer. What is significant about this freedom or liberation is that it is part of the evolution and the flow. It is not something we do. It is not a letting go. It is not something for which we find the key or the combination to the lock, turn it, and release something, then we are finally free. But rather, it is the result of the fading away – the process of calming, relaxing, not resisting, not asserting, not being tense, not wanting. We have radical trust in just being fully here, present in a calm, relaxed way, and allowing things to fade away.

At some point, something inside of us releases. Something that we're not doing lets go and stops. It ceases. Sometimes this can be a moment's shift, like a quantum flip in the mind, where something in the mind just stops. Now everything is clear, open, and free. Perhaps the heart finally settles, opens and is at home in itself. The heart finally has lots of breathing room. The heart feels like it can sing, it is so free, so light, and so easy.

But the process operating here is not something we do, and we can't exactly take responsibility for making it happen. We take responsibility for setting up the conditions for that freedom. A huge part of Dharma practice is creating the right conditions to allow the Dharma to move through us – allowing it to develop, open, release, and move through us.

This process begins right at the beginning of the gladness pentad that precedes the insight pentad. We begin with enough trust and inspiration to start being present for experience in a nonreactive way. Finding this presence feels good. Joy, happiness, and calmness come. We get calm enough and still enough to see deep enough.

I used to sit in meditation like a cat at a mouse hole, waiting to see if I could see the letting go, the releasing happen – looking for the magic point where I could finally penetrate something and everything would let go. Over and over again, I found out that there was a process of fading away and ceasing, and things disappearing. But I didn't always see when that moment happened. Sometimes the meditation practice set the conditions for it to happen, and then the releasing happened after meditation. I did not see it happen, but at some point, I recognized: “Oh, they're gone. The resistance, the desires, the clinging, the conceit, the things I was caught up with – wow, they're gone. That's phenomenal!”

We set up the conditions for the fading away, the calming down, the centering, and the settling. We do this not for its own sake, but so that the suffering inside of us, which comes from tightly clinging, holding, or resisting, has a chance to melt away and thaw. Sometimes I think of the process of fading away as like thawing – being

really cold and slowly warming up, melting, and dissolving. It is a process of slow change that we allow for. If we are in meditation, we have to sit in meditation long enough, still enough, and regularly enough to allow for this deeper process to happen.

This is a meditative process – a place where, for most people, a deeper kind of fading, settling, and releasing can happen than in daily life or in any other kind of circumstance. The fading away deepens as we meditate and learn to sit still, letting go of resistance, letting go of clinging, letting go of tension, and trusting that things are fading away, settling, quieting – letting go of our thoughts and coming back, letting go of our thoughts and coming back, letting go of our thoughts and coming back. We do this in a gentle, quiet way, setting up the conditions that allow the mind to feel at ease, peaceful, and comfortable.

It becomes invaluable to learn to have mindfulness that is nonreactive – awareness that is not for or against anything, not despairing, upset, or resisting anything, and not critical when the mind wanders off. We keep coming back to this non-resistant awareness that gives space for things to release, settle, calm, and open. At some point, you will recognize that what encumbered you – the inner movements of tightness, fear, resistance, holding on, expecting, wanting, and projecting – wow, they are not there. This is a kind of liberation.

In the teachings of the Buddha, he gives a whole list of 17 or 18 very specific things that people can discover are gone. He lists things like greed and hatred, also envy, avariciousness, conceit, and disrespect. But what I am emphasizing here is that he names particular mental states that fall away and stop. This is not a generalized, vague idea of what liberation is. He specifies different states of mind and emotions. The list is very psychologically specific: “Oh, look at that! My envy is gone. Look at that! My resentment is gone. Look at that! My remorse, my desires, my greed, my lust, and my self-criticism are gone.”

In reference to these particular psychological states, the Buddha says: “Oh! Liberated, liberated, liberated.” That liberation can grow and become more and more complete. But we need to recognize it: “Look, there – it’s gone.”

When I learned about this part of the Buddhist teaching where he names specific psychological states, I was struck. This was eye-opening for me, because I only then realized that I had some vague idea that there was some great experience of enlightenment out there. I did not know what it was, but it certainly must be good and desirable, and certainly would free me from all my suffering. When I read about the 17 different mental states that, according to the Buddha, were each seen to be absent, I decided, “Let’s appreciate the specificity of what liberation I have. Let’s not be held by and captivated with the idea of some grand big bang theory of enlightenment, where what actually happens is vague. Begin appreciating the liberations of specific things that have bothered me – memories, stories I hold onto, relationships I hold onto – and see: I am free of that.”

This is a process of fading away, then discovering: “Oh, it’s not there anymore. Wow.” Appreciate the not-there-ness of suffering, of painful psychological states that were there. When you are free of them, that is nourishing. It is very important to see that now they are gone.

First, we have insight – we see clearly enough to start becoming disenchanted. Then comes the fading away of the psychological drives that kept us enchanted. Finally, they fade away enough that we feel free of them. This is a wonderful, natural process. It is not something we have to make happen. “Natural” means it is built into who we are. It is almost a consequence of not doing the unnatural things. What I mean by “the unnatural things” is those things that are the artifices of our own mind – that we create, make, and construct. And the inner states that are not artifices – freedom.

Some homework for today: at different times throughout the day, notice the absence of difficult psychological states – suffering, clinging, desires, resistance – that you have had at some point in the past (earlier in the day, yesterday, last week, etc.) Notice the absence of them, and take in how good it is that something that was difficult is not here now. You might have other difficulties now, but appreciate the ones that are no longer here, and see what happens to you when you feel that absence. Thank you very much.