

Insight Pentad (5 of 5) Knowing Liberation

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We come now to the fifth and last talk on the insight pentad. These are the five qualities that flow together from having insight. They arise together, not as something that is constructed or made to happen, but as something that is conditioned by one another. Each quality leads to, awakens, or triggers the other qualities.

Many people think that the insight pentad would end with liberation, the fourth of the insight pentad qualities. Shouldn't liberation be enough? But liberation is the condition for the arising of a fifth quality – the knowledge that one is liberated, the knowledge that the mind is liberated.

Some people have some degree of realization, liberation, or an experience that sets them free. They know that they have had some significant experience, but they don't really know it. They don't understand what has happened. This knowing of it is to understand something profound about it.

Many times, for the Buddha, it is to know something specific. It is not some generalized, vague idea of what liberation or freedom is. Some people will have a profound feeling of peace, calm, or some letting go that feels so relieving and releasing, but they don't understand what they have let go of. They don't understand what they have opened up to. What is this experience really like?

Without knowing that, it is hard to find the path there again. It is hard to know what this path is really about. Some people will have a wonderful experience of peace. They will think, "Well, that is the point," and try to get back there. But they don't understand the conditions that led to it. They don't understand in particular what they experienced or what came along with that peace so they know what they are working towards or what it is about. What is the North Star that they are working for?

Yesterday, I started talking about the list the Buddha gives of 17 specific psychological states that can be

known. These are 17 painful states that we can know when they are here and when we are free of them, when they are absent. Seeing that specificity of it: “This was afflictive; this was painful. And now, wow, it is no longer here. It has been released.” This is part of the insights. It is also part of liberation, which shows the circular or spiral nature of it.

Consider the psychological state of hate. We might experience a clear sense of the falling away, the ceasing of hate. We experience ourselves and take time to know that this is the absence of hate – not just know that it is peaceful, but to really know the absence of hate. We then start to get information on what hate is about and its alternative. We become increasingly disenchanted with hate. Increasingly the underlying tendency to hate starts to fade away. Now there is a qualitatively different way of releasing hate. Once we know we have released it, that can be an insight for the letting go to develop further and further.

I want to read this list of the 17 specific states. The Buddha teaches that one can know their presence and when they are absent. For the Buddha, this is very significant. It is in a discourse called “The Simile of the Cloth,” found in the *Middle Length Discourses*. The list is covetousness, unethical greed, ill will, anger, resentment, contempt, insolence, envy, avarice, deceit, fraud, obstinacy, rivalry, conceit, arrogance, vanity, and

carelessness or negligence. Some of these English translations might not be the exact Pali wordage. We might find other words that are a bit more meaningful to us.

These are called afflictive because it hurts when they are present. When one practices, one can know that they are here and feel the pain. It is possible to let them go – or somehow they fade away, they disappear. They are not here.

First, we must know that they are here, really know. Sometimes, it feels like this is bad news to know that I have contempt. But in the Dharma, you want to know the so-called bad news in an open, nonreactive way. It is really important to feel and know the states of mind that are afflictive, that are causing pain. We don't want to pretty them up, deny them, or ignore them. "Oh, here I am living with contempt, with resentment, or maybe with greed."

Something about clearly knowing that these states are here then allows the mindfulness, the awareness practice, to make room for them to fade. We become disinterested, and these states fade away. That won't happen when we ignore them and don't admit to ourselves that these states are here.

Here we find an example where the Buddha is being, in modern terms, psychological about the discussions of the path. He is very specific about the psychological states that are being addressed. This is what we can know, and then we can know when they are let go of – when they are absent.

The knowing of their absence in this text is inspiring. It is inspiring to know it is possible to be free of these states, even if it is temporary. To experience the mind free of these afflictive states. “Wow, I have been with this for a lifetime, for decades. I had no idea there could be such a good, quality experience of them not being here.”

So allowing ourselves to know that we are liberated and to recognize the absence, the freedom from something, can give birth to inspiration and confidence. The Buddha called it a verified confidence or verified faith. It is verified because we know for ourselves, this is possible. Even if some of these states come back, the confidence is there. The trust is there that this is valuable. This is a direction to go. This is important.

In this text, the Buddha goes on to say that this confidence, this inspiration that this is possible, is the catalyst for the gladness pentad – the five qualities I talked about last week. They also have a natural flow to them. When there is inspiration, there is gladness.

When there is gladness and we are present and allow for the practice with it, that morphs or changes into joy. That changes into tranquility, physical tranquility, and peace. And that can open up a deep, subtle feeling of happiness or contentment. That is a foundation for becoming unified, for *samādhi*. That unification of *samādhi* that has focus and clarity leads to the insight pentad – insight, disenchantment, fading away, liberation, and knowledge of liberation, knowing it.

As I have said before, they kind of spiral and support each other – moving on and on. The liberation is of particular mental states, even if it is very temporary. This is something that we can identify and know for ourselves. Otherwise, some people have such a vague idea of what enlightenment or freedom is that it always seems like a mythic event. It is like it is not so relevant to me. It is good for the great meditators who go live in caves, but what about my everyday life where I am dealing with getting the kids to school, work, and all kinds of things? By naming the psychological states, the Buddha was making them relevant. This is what is important here.

Then he goes on in this phenomenal text and talks about this natural flow of arising. He teaches that from inspiration comes the gladness pentad, and from that, *samādhi*. Unification gives rise to loving-kindness (*mettā*). And so *mettā* and then the *brahmavihāras* are

all part of this natural flow. It is almost like these are inherent qualities, capacities, or potentials within that can be set free. They can be opened and allowed to flow through us. They are not something that is constructed, made to happen, or engineered, but something that we allow for.

The underlying theme of these two pentads, the gladness pentad and the insight pentad, is that there are natural forces within us. They can be unleashed and opened up. We open up to these wonderful states of deepening practice.

So it is insight: insight to what is, insight to what is no longer there, insight to the absence of afflictive states that have bothered us for a long time. The absence of those afflictive states might give us the possibility to become more aware of how we know – how we are aware of something. Then how we are aware is not afflictive. How we are aware doesn't partake or share in the greed, ill will, aversion, contempt, or resentment that might be with us, and influences how we know.

We begin to find a knowing which is freeing – a knowing which has qualities of freedom, ease, and peace. We then use that way of knowing to practice mindfulness and be aware. The very act of knowing is part of the path to freedom.

So, insight – the insight pentad. May your mindfulness practice lead to insight, and may insight open this world up to the Dharma moving through you.

So thank you very much. I look forward to seeing you and being with you again on Monday.