

Disenchantment

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One of the traditional principles of the teaching is that when the mind gains concentration, it's able to see things as they are. Actually the Pali term means "seeing things as they've come to be." There's an interesting passage where the Buddha makes a distinction between *bhava* and *bhuta*. *Bhava* means a state of being, becoming, the process of becoming, which is a combination of past karma plus our present karma. But then *bhuta* means things as they've come to be: the raw material that comes in from the past before we've added our hype, added our salt-and-pepper and mustard and ketchup to make it what we want.

The trick is in learning how to see things as they've come to be before you dress them up, so that you can move on to the next step, which is disenchantment. Because as long as all you see are the things that you've dressed up and put all your condiments on, you're going to want to eat them. But if you see the raw material before it's been dressed up, before it's been fixed up, you lose your taste for it. It's like that Far Side cartoon. A group of cows is out in the pasture. One of them lifts up her head and spits out the grass and says: "Wait a minute. This is grass! We've been eating grass!" It's the same with us human beings. We've been eating form, feeling, perception, thought constructs, and consciousness. This is a lot of what clinging means. It means feeding and taking our sustenance off these things. But if you look at the raw materials and you think of what kind of happiness you're trying to build out of them, you realize you've set yourself up for a fall. The raw material simply can't provide it.

One of the biggest issues in life of course is lust. If you actually look at what's involved in the sexual act, it's pretty disgusting. And so people spend a lot of time dressing it up. This last week I heard a group of people complaining when they heard about the whole idea of disenchantment and dispassion: Can't we still have sex? In other words, if I get to the point where I don't want it any more, can I still have it? This is the kind of thinking that comes from focusing entirely on how you can dress things up, taking pleasure in the dressing up without really looking at the raw materials that you're dressing up. If you look carefully at just what's there, without all the hype, without all the added condiments, you really lose your taste. And it's very difficult for people to look at what's already there, because there's so much involved in the adding on.

Look at dependent co-arising. It's interesting to note that the Buddha doesn't start everything out with sensory contact, because contact comes at least one third of the way through all the factors. A lot of other things come even before you've had your first contact at the senses. There are all these attitudes, these intentions, ways of paying attention, and all the different forms of fabrication: These already color the way you're going to approach sensory contact. And these are the factors that make all the difference between whether it's going to cause stress and suffering or whether it's not.

So normally we bring this huge parcel of attitudes to apply to the present moment, to shape the present moment. And one of the main purposes of concentration is to learn how to pare that down, so at the very least you know

what you're bringing. You look at fabrication. The bodily fabrication is breath. Verbal fabrication is directed thought and evaluation. Mental fabrication is feeling and perception. These are the basic elements the Buddha has us focus on as we concentrate.

First, of course, we learn how to dress them up in a new way. In other words, bring the directed thought and evaluation to the breath, to create feelings of comfort. You use your perceptions to maintain that sense of comfort. So these elements—the fabrication and intention that we normally bring out of ignorance: We're now shaping them with knowledge, with awareness, so at the very least we can be clear about what we're doing. It's only when we're clear about what we're doing that we can begin to pare away the unskillful things in what we're doing: the intentions that lie to us, the mental verbalizations that lie to us. We begin to see right through them. "Okay, this is a lie. This is not the way things actually are. This isn't how the way things work." We begin dropping those things, dropping those things. We're looking at the nuts and bolts. We're looking at the processes that we bring to the present moment, that we bring to sensory contact. And as we look more directly at the processes, we begin to see how false and artificial they are. This is what helps to bring about *yatha-bhuta-ñana-dassana*—the knowledge and visions of things as they've come to be.

So you look at the raw materials and you realize you've been eating grass. You thought it was something really special, but it's just grass or even worse. And when you can let yourself look at that consistently enough, that's when knowledge leads to disenchantment. The word *nibbida* sometimes can be translated as disgust: the kind of disgust that comes not because things in and of themselves are disgusting, but simply because we were trying to feed on them. We haven't really been paying careful attention to what we've been feeding on. We begin to see that the things we've been drawing nourishment from really don't have the nourishment we thought they provided.

As Ajaan Lee once said, it's as if most of the flavor comes from our own saliva, like a dog chewing on a bone. The only flavor the bone has to offer is the dog's own saliva. That's what we've been bringing to it. You see that it's a futile process, and seeing that is what leads to dispassion. The reason why dispassion makes such a difference is because we've been so involved in the activity of dressing things up and making them into something that they're not. When you develop dispassion for that process, you don't want to get involved in that makeup, make-believe dressing up kind of activity. And so your own experience of what's actually going on really changes. You see things from a totally new light, and the whole thing just stops because you're no longer keeping it going. It's not that you've been watching a TV show and you decide you don't like it, and so you turn it off. It's more like realizing you've been in an interactive game and you've been playing it really poorly. The game itself doesn't have that much at all to offer anyhow. So you lose interest in the game. And the game stops.

So the reason we're concentrating the mind here is to get more sensitive to what we're bringing into the present moment, seeing all the hype that we add to the raw material that our past kamma has created for us. We realize no matter how great we are in hyping things, the raw material simply cannot provide what we're looking for. No matter how skillfully we try to make it into something that's lasting and reliable, the materials are ready to fall apart all the time, all the time.

One of the reasons why we don't stop it is that we're afraid that there would be nothing, life would be pabulum, it would be porridge without any condiments. That's what our fear is. This is why we are so loath to let go. But the Buddha's great discovery is that when you stop dressing things up you open up to something that doesn't require any dressing up at all. It's much better to begin with. And all this effort to make things delicious was getting in the way of the happiness you actually wanted. This is when things open up, this is where dispassion leads to release. And it's a release that you can know. It's not like you're blanking out. If that's all it was, if we just blanked out totally, what would you know? Nothing. But the happiness of release is something you can know. You can know this freedom. It comes from taking all these processes apart.

So this is why we meditate. This is why we bring the mind to concentration. Not so that we can just hang out here and have a good time, but so we can see the processes of the mind: how they try to create happiness out of raw materials that simply can't provide it, or at least not in the really lasting reliable way that we want. The Buddha's advice is to use them in a new way, to create a path. After all, what else are you going to work with? How would you create a path unless you took those aggregates that you were using for one purpose and use them for another? Meditation is a different way of dressing up the present moment using form, feeling, perception, thought constructs, consciousness as tools. You dress them in a different way. But in the process of dressing them in a different way, you get to see processing as it's happening. You come to realize that this kind of happiness that you create by following the path is much greater than what you had before. Ultimately it will take you to a point where you even let the path go. As Ajaan Lee said, that's where it gets really good.