Becoming

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One of the Buddha’s basic concepts is something called bhava, or becoming. What it means is taking on an identity in a particular world of experience. Ultimately, it’s something that we want to get beyond because, as the Buddha pointed in the Buddha’s teachings, they are plural. They come from cravings. And every craving that leads to becoming also leads to suffering. But we use them in the meantime. A large part of the skill in the meditation is learning which of your becomings is something to go with and which is something to go away from, which is something to drop, or which are the becomings you go with and which are the ones you drop. Like right now, you’re focused on the meditation. There is a sense of you in here. You can’t deny that. And the world of experience for you right now is just you inside the body. You want to inhabit your body as fully as possible. See if you can be aware of the whole body as you breathe in, the whole body as you breathe out. You may have to start with one spot or one area of the body, and see if you can get that comfortable. Once it is comfortable, then see if you can expand the range of comfortable breath energy. Because the breath here, of course, is not just the air coming in and out of the lungs. It’s a sense of energy flowing throughout the body. And it is a skill, learning how to inhabit your body this way and be alert to the breath and not slip off to other becomings. In fact, that’s the main difficulty as you’re meditating, because there are lots of other becomings. Because these worlds of experience are not just the physical world outside, but they’re also the worlds in your mind. Every time you think of a particular situation or a particular person or yourself in relationship to a particular person, a little world appears in your mind, and then you go into it. These worlds can float away. They’re like bubbles. They can float very far, farther than most bubbles. They can take you around the world in just a few seconds. And here you are, you’ve been pulled away by a bubble. This ain’t nothing of bigger things. So just let the bubble pop and you’re back here. Try to establish this as your identity or the person meditating or the awareness meditating. The less of you in here, the better for the time being. Think about who you are. Just a sense of awareness filling the body. Identify with the awareness for the time being. And then see what you can do. In other words, see what you can do with the breath energy in the body. See what you can do to get this sense of being in here stronger and stronger. That’s the fabrication of concentration. And it is based on desire, and it is based on the sense of you in here. That’s a case where you’re using becoming as a tool for the path. Because as this sense of becoming gets stronger, you begin to look at the other ones in the mind as well, and you begin to see that there are all kinds of them. That’s why we talk about a committee of the mind. It’s made up of all your senses of who you are based on different desires. And sometimes they come thronging in. Especially if you come and you’re just beginning to meditate. You’ve been having an active life outside of the monastery, and you come to the monastery and all of a sudden it’s like this big vacuum. Nothing’s rushing in to keep things down inside your mind, and so these things have a chance to come flowing out. If they do, just think of them as flowing out and dissipating, flowing out and dissolving away, while you stay here with a sense of you being inside the body. Let your thoughts just be vaporous as they pass away. Learn how to question, because these are the becomings that you want to learn how to avoid, the ones that would pull you away from the path. To really understand them, you have to see what their allure is. What are you getting out of them? Because each one is based on a desire. And you’ve been keeping a stable of these things because you learned in the past that certain desires lead to at least a little bit of pleasure. Certain types of thinking, certain types of situations, when you think about them, give you pleasure. And so you keep that in store. Get the mind into concentration. It’s like having an animal, a big stable full of animals that you thought that you could use, you could ride, and take wherever you want. And they start turning on you, they start sampeding you, they start eating you up. But the stronger you can make your concentration, the more interest you take in the breath, the more you’re able to resist those other animals inside, the ones that’ll pull you away. And the more you can identify with this one right here. This identification, of course, will have to be abandoned at some point. But it’s a lot easier than a lot of your other ones, because the ones that are most difficult to abandon are the ones that involve unskillful habits. All too often you try to hide them from yourself. You try to deny them. You say, “They’re not there, they’re not there, this is not me, not me.” And yet they keep hanging around. Because another part of the mind likes to have them. And if you don’t see the allure, if you don’t understand why they’re being fed, you’re never going to be able to get past them. You’re never going to be able to let them go. You have to give them their freedom. You’re not holding on to them, you’re not identifying with them anymore. That’s when they can go. And when they go, then your mind is a lot clearer. Whereas the sense of self that’s developed around concentration, as long as it’s not based on comparing yourself with other people, if you’re going to be in competition, be in competition with yourself. In other words, how good was your meditation yesterday? Can you make it better today? That kind of competition the Buddha doesn’t criticize. If you say, “I’ve got this concentration, I’ve got this aspect of the practice, and I’m better than those other people,” because of that, immediately you’ve destroyed your attainment. That turns into something else right then. But if your competition is with yourself, it’s a matter of learning how to be more skillful. How can I be more solidly here? How can I have a sense of energy that keeps me going? Because one of the problems that comes up in the concentration is your concentration gets weak, and that’s when the animals inside can come out. Whether they’re fine-looking animals like horses and elephants and lions, or more ferocious ones, or more abusive ones, you’ve got all kinds in there. But you want to learn how to get past all of them. And taking a real interest in this world of the body as you sense it from inside is going to be one of your main weapons. That’s what the Buddha calls form, i.e., the body as you sense it from within. And the pleasure of form is something that he doesn’t criticize. It’s the pleasures of the senses. Those are the things he criticizes. But this, he says, is part of the path. So learn to use this identity. Don’t over-interpret it. It’s a provisional identity, as all your other identities are. But it’s one that you can rely on in a lot of difficult situations. So if you find yourself slipping off into another world of thought, remind yourself that that world of thought doesn’t take you anyplace you haven’t been before. This world here, inhabiting the body fully, having a sense of stillness and ease and confidence, firmness here in the present, that’ll take you. It’ll take you someplace you’ve never been before.

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