Always on the Move

April 3, 2017

The mind is constantly on the move. It can never stay in place. It keeps going, going, going. The Buddha saw this tendency and he called it samsara. We tend to think of samsara as a place, but actually it’s a process. We tend to think of our doing actions in worlds, that are already there, but it’s actually our actions that create those worlds. This process of creating worlds, that’s a samsara. And we tend to do a pretty bad job of it. One of the reasons the Buddha has this practice is so we can get better at it. Because his image for the practice is also a movement, it’s a path, that’s going someplace. The thing about general samsara is that it twists around and turns back on itself. It doesn’t seem to be going anywhere particularly at all, whereas the path does go someplace. But it’s up to us to make up our minds that that’s where we want to go, because we are creating the worlds to which we go as we go along. And it’s with any process that you make up as you go along. If you don’t have a firm idea of where you want to go and how you’re going to do it, you end up destroying some of the good things you’ve made and then suffering from what you’ve done. Like that old phrase, “If you don’t like the news, go out and make some of your own.” Well, if you don’t like the past karma or the results of your past karma, well, try to make some good karma right now. Even meditation is a kind of karma. Sometimes you hear that meditation is a matter of being rather than doing. But what we are is also a result of what we’re doing. As you meditate, there’s directed thought and evaluation. These are all activities. If you don’t see them as activities, you’re not going to be able to get beyond them. But first you have to use them. Look at what you’re doing right now. That’s what the directed thought and evaluation are for. As you focus on the breath, how are you breathing? The breath is one of the fabrications that goes into a state of concentration. Then there’s the way you’re talking to yourself about it. The Buddhist term is directed thought and evaluation. Think about the structure of a sentence. You pick a topic and then you comment on it. The topic here, of course, is the breath, and your comments are, “Is it going well or is it not going well?” What can you do to make it better? Keep nudging it in that direction. Then you can look at how you picture the breath to yourself in your mind. That’s another kind of fabrication called perception. And look at the feelings that result. Are they feelings you like? If not, go back and look at the way you breathe, look at your directed thought and evaluation, look at your perceptions. You circle around here. This is why the meditation does sometimes feel like you’re not doing anything or going anywhere. You’re just circling around. Well, you’re circling around in a good place, and you’re learning to get to know it better and better and better. John Lee’s image is of a path that you go over again and again and again. Because you’re used to it, you begin to notice the tiny changes that have happened. The plants that weren’t there yesterday are the ones that were there and are not there now. The animals that might be there, just as long as you don’t get complacent. No matter how many times you’ve been over a path, it doesn’t necessarily mean there’s always going to be a good path or a safe path. So you’ve got to keep your eyes out. But still, here with the breath, it’s all pretty harmless. The only things that may come up that might distract you are visions, but you have to tell yourself you’re not here for the visions. Whatever it is, wish it goodwill and let it go. Your business is with the breath. You’ve got to learn how to get your mind centered here and spinning around this one thing. An image that one time John uses is that as you spin around, it’s like a generator. It sits in one place, but it spins and it creates a lot of energy. We’re talking today about the force field that develops around an electric current as it goes through a wire. Actually, throughout the body there is a kind of a force field. You’re fully inhabiting the body and allowing things to flow smoothly. Once the breath gets good, you’re going to have something good to spread around. And the fact that you’re still circling around this one spot creates a kind of energy. John Lee’s image is of standing and holding with one hand, holding on to a post and spinning around and around the post. When you hold on, you don’t get dizzy. It’s when you try to spin around without holding on to anything tight or anything solid. That’s when you get dizzy. But you can run around the post, no problem. So here you’re running around the breath. And there’s a kind of power that comes with this, and you create a good world around it. Our activities do create worlds. That’s what the Buddhist teachings on becoming are all about. We also can have unintended consequences in the worlds that we create. You see this very clearly when people have addictions. They start out and they find a pleasure in something that’s not all that healthy for them. As they get more and more tied up in the addiction, whether it’s alcohol or drugs or gambling or porn or whatever, they change as people. And the world around them is a changed world, too. So that’s a negative process. You want to make this a positive process, where you become more alert, more mindful, more sensitive to what’s going on inside, and more sensitive to the results of your actions. That creates a new world and it creates a new you. We’re not here necessarily for the new you, but we’re here to learn the knowledge that comes when we do things skillfully. So as you continue wandering on in your life, try to wander in a clear direction. Make it a path that goes someplace good. Watch out for the paths that seem good but go to bad places. The Buddha says there are many different kinds of paths in the world. There are the paths that go to the realm of the hungry ghosts, that go to the realm of the animals, paths that go to hell, paths that come back to the human realm, paths that go to the deva realm, paths that go to nirvana. We’re all on a path of one kind or another. So make sure you see the signposts clearly. The Buddha set them out. Focus again and again on your actions, because it’s the actions that create the path, the actions that create the world through which you move. That’s the samsara. This is why, when he started out his teachings, he said, “Mr. Ahula,” he focused on actions first. He didn’t say, “Well, the world isn’t permanent. Just learn how to accept things as they are.” He said, “Your actions are what shape the world.” So be very careful about what you intend to shape. And then watch yourself as you’re doing, and then look at the actual results. And if you see any unintended, bad consequences, okay, you’ve got to go back and go back to the drawing board. Figure out what you did wrong. Consult with people you trust. Make up your mind you’re not going to repeat that mistake. So everything comes out of action. Who you are is an action. The world in which you live is the result of an action, or lots of actions. So wherever you go, your emphasis, your focus should always be on, “What am I doing right now? What am I becoming as a result?” That’s one of the questions the Buddha has. The monks ask themselves every day, days and nights, fly past, fly past, “What am I becoming right now?” What you’re becoming is the result of what you’re doing. And you want to make sure it’s going in the right direction.

<https://www.dhammatalks.org/Archive/y2017/170403_Always_on_the_Move.mp3>