

Seeds of Becoming

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Try to put aside all your other issues. Just focus right here, because all the big issues in life get played out right here. In fact, the seeds for all of them are right here in the present moment.

I've said a number of times that the Buddha's teachings on causality are like modern teachings on chaos theory. One of the basic principles of chaos theory is called 'scale invariance,' the principle that what's happening on the macro level is the same thing as is happening on the micro level. No matter what the size of your frame of reference, no matter what your focus, the pattern is always the same, simply writ large or writ small. This makes things convenient for us, because when this principle applies to our awareness, it means we can watch the small things happening right here, right now, and they teach us the lessons we need to know about the big things happening over time.

This is why we come into the present moment, not because it's a nice place to be. After all, that's not always the case. Sometimes the present moment can be pretty miserable. But, the important issues that are happening in life are happening right here. The Buddha's teachings on *bhava*, or becoming, get played out right here. *Bhava* is the basic condition for birth and the whole round of aging, illness, and death.

It's a hard word to translate. "Becoming" isn't ideal, but I can't think of a better equivalent. It's basically a state of being, and it can be either at the micro level, the little worlds the mind creates for itself, or at the macro level, the human realm as a whole: That's a *bhava*, and the seeds for the large ones are right here in the small ones, the little worlds the mind creates. You can think about, say, your home, and there it appears, right in your mind: the world of your home. Not the whole thing in all its details, but enough of a facsimile to say, "Yeah, that's my home."

Then you can enter into that little world and adjust it and interact with the various elements in there. After a while, you might lose interest, and the mind creates another state of becoming for itself, another little world, and it goes from world to world to world like this. Or, a better way of saying it is that these worlds appear and then they disappear, and another one appears in its place. It's because the mind does this that it takes birth, that it provides the causes for larger levels of becoming and then takes birth in them.

This is the process we need to understand if we want to get beyond aging, illness, and death. If we want to stop going through the cycles again and again and again, we have to know what's going on—how the little cycles behave—and in that way we learn how the big cycles behave, what exactly is the process that keeps these things going.

As the Buddha once said at the moment of his awakening, “House-builder, I have seen you, through countless births, building these homes. Now that I’ve seen the house-builder and taken apart the house, the house-builder will never build another house again.” You want to see that process of how the mind creates these little homes for itself, with such force of habit that if it can’t create a good one for itself, it’ll create a bad one for itself. All it asks is that you have a place to go. Because the mind is afraid of having no place to go.

This is what’s called *bhava-tanha*, craving for becoming. It’s one of the forms of craving that leads to suffering. Then there’s *vibhava-tanha*, which is a more controversial term, because it’s not defined anywhere in the Canon. Some passages indicate that it’s desire for annihilation, in other words that you not have anything that has to go anywhere, you’re tired of going to these different places, so you want to end up in a place where everything gets destroyed, or everything stops so there’s no more becoming. But the Buddha said that that kind of desire leads to suffering as well, because it takes the mind to a strange kind of becoming. It doesn’t end the process. It just freezes it for a while. It’s like those cyborgs in science fiction movies that get frozen for a number of centuries and then come out still functioning. The mind goes into these strange states where you can freeze the process, but that doesn’t end the process. It can start up again.

But the macro level is being played out here on the micro level, so let’s look at it. And we do that by creating a good state of becoming. It’s what we’re doing as we practice concentration. We create a little inner world for the mind. First it’s just a spot in the body and then you expand it to fill the whole body. Then you try to maintain it. In doing that, you engage all the forms of fabrication: physical, verbal, mental. There’s the breath, which is the physical fabrication; then there’s directed thought and evaluation, which are verbal fabrications; and then there are feelings and perceptions, which are mental fabrications. These are the basic building blocks from which you create this world, the world of a concentrated mind.

You use your powers of directed thought and evaluation to work out the disturbances, to filter them away or comb them out. Any sense of tension or tightness in the breath, any feelings of blockage in the mind: Work through them so that the elements of disturbance get more and more and more refined. That

way, you can see the process of becoming in and of itself as clearly as possible, in terms of its basic building blocks. And that way you can begin to take it apart, because you see that there's really not much there, even in a good state of concentration.

Don't be too quick to take it apart, though. If you get a little a bit of concentration and take it apart too fast, then the mind has no place to settle down. I knew a monk one time in Thailand who, after a couple of years of meditation, finally got his mind to settle down in a really nice state of concentration. He went to tell another friend of his—they were both out in the forest—and the friend said, "Watch out, you're going to get stuck on that. Make sure you don't get stuck on the concentration." So the monk stopped, and did his best not to get into concentration. He was told to start analyzing things, to develop insight, so his mind just started going all over the place, looking out, out, out, and wasn't able to come back in, in, in. By the time I met up with him, he'd gotten to the point where he couldn't get his mind to concentrate at all. It was a real shame. Eventually, he disrobed.

This is what happens when you abort the process. You have to get attached to the state of concentration for you to really understand it. You want to keep coming back, coming back, coming back, because the more familiar you are with it, it's like a road you travel day after day after day. The opportunity is there to know it in detail. Now, what happens a lot of times when people travel on a road day after day is that they start blanking out, they actually stop noticing things. That's like a person who gets into a state of concentration and then doesn't want to develop any discernment, just likes the blanking out, or the stillness, and so holds on to that and gets oblivious to other things. It's like a person who drives the road from the Valley Center to Escondido every day, and after a while doesn't notice anything. That's where a lot of people are. Their brains go into automatic pilot.

As a meditator you want to learn *how* not to go into automatic pilot, so that you can get to know this territory as well as you can. Keep at it. Try to figure out how you can maintain this state of concentration in all sorts of different circumstances, because you never know when the precise effort that you're putting into it becomes really clear. You see, "Oh, this is how it's done. This is what's happening. This is how those raw materials are being turned into something else"—this little world of Texas, or the world of Thailand, or wherever your inner world happens to be at the time.

The more consistent you are in maintaining this state, whatever your activities, the greater the chance that you'll gain insight into exactly how it's created and

how it's maintained, what its uses are, and also how you can take it apart. As the Buddha said, you understand the origination and the passing away of these things, you understand their allure, you understand their drawbacks, and you understand the escape from them. That's when it really gets good.

You take the state of concentration as your model for all your other attachments, all your other cravings, and all the states of becoming in the mind that are built on attachment and craving. You take this as your model and you study it again and again and again, to get really, really sensitive to what it's like to have the mind settle down, to be in a good state of concentration, how it can create that concentration, how it can maintain it, how it loses it. When you understand the whole process, you begin to see precisely where in the process the craving and the attachment or craving and clinging kick in.

So these are some of the things that can be found right here in the present moment. The larger issues of birth, aging, illness, and death; and rebirth, re-aging, re-illness and re-death: They get played out here, moment by moment by moment, right here in the present moment. If you learn how to look right here, you can see them right here. The more still you can make the mind, the easier it is, both to be in a position to look and also just to see what you're looking at as well. You're in a much better position to see even the slightest movements.

It's those slight movements that build up, get re-iterated again and again, to build up into large movements: That's how small states of being and becoming in the mind build up eventually into large ones. When you leave this life, and everything in this state of becoming begins to come rushing in at you and you've got to get out of the way, the mind will naturally try to create another state of becoming. It'll go for another state of becoming, whatever comes up in the mind. If you haven't trained the mind to be mindful and alert, you just jump right at whatever comes.

But if you've trained it, you don't have to jump. You can step aside, get out of the way, and not jump on these things as they happen. That opens up lots of new possibilities in the mind. If you haven't yet seen the deathless, maybe at that point of death the possibility will open as you keep yourself mindful and alert not to jump at states of being and becoming as they form. But that's a skill that has to be developed. The more it's developed, the better your chances are of having that skill in your repertoire when you really need it.

So, this is why we keep focusing back in at the present, the present, the present. We talk sometimes about the future, we talk sometimes about the past, but the main point is to focus on what you're doing right here, right now.

Everything you're going to need to know is right here, right now, so really get to know this spot as thoroughly as you can. Spend a lot of time here. Be observant. The Buddha commented on how, in getting to know other people—getting to know their virtue, their resilience, their honesty, their wisdom—you have to focus on the right aspects of their behavior and you have to be observant. That takes a lot of time. Well, the same point applies to your own mind. You have to focus at the right spots, where craving and clinging give rise to becoming; you have to be observant; and you have to be willing to put in a lot of time. Only then will you really see. If you try to get other people to see it for you, they can't solve the problem of craving, clinging, and becoming. The person who looks is the one who solves the problem for him or herself.