

As They've Come to Be

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The Buddha said we suffer from the craving that leads to becoming. So, that's what we have to focus on: What is becoming? What is that craving? And how do we get out of that situation? He says it's a special problem because the craving that leads to becoming includes craving for sensuality, craving for becoming—which makes sense—and then also craving for non-becoming, which stands out. It means that if you try to destroy a state of becoming—if you have a state of becoming in the mind and you try to put an end to it—that's actually going to create more becoming.

So, how do you get out of that dilemma? The answer is that you watch things as they have come to be. And, particularly, you look at the processes of fabrication as they come together before leading to a state of becoming.

There are many steps. That's what dependent co-arising is all about.

You learn how to look at the steps leading up to becoming and you realize that they're not really worth it. You can just let them go; you don't have to destroy any becoming already there. You attack the process at the cause, not at the result.

So, how does that relate to what we're doing right here, right now? When the Buddha teaches breath meditation, he talks a lot about fabrication: You get sensitive to bodily fabrication and then you calm it down; you get sensitive to mental fabrication and you calm it down.

Learning how to see the way you breathe as a fabrication is not just a given. I was talking this evening to someone who said, "What's the big deal? Why don't we let people breathe naturally?" Well, the nature of breathing is that it is intentional—it is fabricated—and you don't really realize how fabricated it is until you start doing it consciously. Then you begin to realize the subconscious ways in which you adjust your breath.

As for mental fabrication, we're trying to give rise to a feeling of well-being, and then we notice how that has an impact on the mind. We use different perceptions to get the mind with the breath; that's also mental fabrication. And here again, you get sensitive to that and then you try to calm it down.

So, you're combining tranquility and insight in that way, seeing things as fabrications—they're put together. The nature of fabrications is that they're going to be inconstant, but here you're trying to create something constant out of them, to push against the inconstancy. They tend to be stressful, but you can learn how to find some pleasure in them. And, ultimately, they're not worth seeing as your

self or yours, but you're going to try to get them under control as much as you can, so that you can study these processes in the mind. If you're going to step out of a state of becoming, first you have to realize that it's not worth staying in. And, to see that it's not worth it, you create a *better* state of becoming. This is what you're doing as you get the mind in concentration.

You've got a sense of "you" right here, where you're focused. The world in which you're focused at the moment is the world of your awareness of the body. That particular becoming is going to be really useful for stepping out of other becomings.

Because, you know, in the Buddha's descriptions of establishing mindfulness there are two activities. One is staying focused on, say, the body in and of itself, or feelings in and of themselves, or the mind in and of itself; and the other is putting aside greed and distress with reference to the world. The first emphasizes the focus; the second protects the focus, but each combines tranquility and insight in a different way.

The Buddha recommends a five-step program to take apart the becomings that tend to form in the mind, and it's good to master that program because you're going to need it as you age, as you grow ill, and particularly as you die. At that point, the mind will be pushed out of its human-level becoming and it's going to want to find another becoming—a new identity in a new world of experience. At the very least, you want to do that skillfully.

Otherwise, as the Buddha said, it's like a fire that's been blown from one house to another. It latches on to the wind and goes wherever the wind can take it. Sometimes the wind can take it just anywhere, so you want to have some control over the process. If anything unskillful appears in the mind at that point, you want to be able to take it apart. So, your test case here is distractions. Anything related to the world outside right now you regard as a distraction.

That was another question I was given this evening: "What about the world outside? Here you are all hiding away in this corner; why don't you do any service?"

Well, where are the problems of the world coming from? They're coming from these states of becoming that everybody creates, and most people don't do a very good job of it. So, if you want to help other people so that they don't have to suffer from the craving that leads to becoming, you have to learn how to master your own—which means, for the time being, that anything having to do with the world outside is a distraction.

It's important that you keep that set of values in mind.

How do you take those distractions apart? The first step is to look for the origination. What causes those things to come up in the mind? And don't look for the origination out there in the world; it's in the mind. When the Buddha uses that word, "origination," nine times out of ten he's talking about causes coming from the mind.

So, say that there's a bout of lust coming up in the mind. What inside the mind sparked it? Remember Ajaan Lee's analysis: It's not so much that things out there come in to disturb the mind; we go out, flowing out after them. What sparked that desire to go out?

You come to realize that, whatever it was, it doesn't last; it's going to pass away. That's the second step: watching it pass away. Sometimes it passes away because you've lost interest in it—you saw something else more interesting. You may come back to it but, for the time being, something else comes in and interferes. Other times, it passes away because the nature of fabrications is that they last only so long and then they die away on their own when their conditions run out. You have to watch out for the fact that you may want to pick them up again, to continue the story.

That's where you have to go on to the third step, which is to look for the allure. What is it about the lust that you find attractive? At first you say, well, the object out there is really attractive. But then, when you realize that the mind generated the lust from inside, what did it find attractive about lust in and of itself?

This is where it's useful to look in terms of the three fabrications again. You breathe a certain way around it; you talk to yourself about certain things around it; you have feelings and perceptions that go around it as well. These tend to cluster around.

Advertising people have noticed that this is how the mind works, which is why, when they're advertising products, a lot of times you don't even see the product in the advertisement. You see a life style; you see a certain person you would aspire to want to look like or act like or be like. In other words, they create perceptions—mental fabrications—for you, so that you associate them with whatever they're trying to sell. Well, the mind is the same way with itself.

So, you want to see: What's the bodily fabrication? What's the way you breathe around this? What's the verbal fabrication? What's the mental fabrication in this allure? It'll take a while sometimes to see these things, because often you're embarrassed about them, so the mind will whisper to you and then disappear for a bit—leave a little hint here and there, a little subliminal message, and then pretend like nothing happened until it's gathered its forces. Then you go. When you see that, you understand, "This is what sparks all that."

Then you want to look for the drawbacks—all the suffering that can come from that. This is where you bring in the three perceptions of inconstancy, stress, and not-self to help you reflect on the drawbacks.

Or you can think of all those images the Buddha gave for the drawbacks of sensuality: It's like a dog gnawing on a chain of bones—a lot of effort goes into it but what does it get? No nourishment at all. The only flavor it has is the flavor of its own saliva as you drool over whatever it is you're lusting for.

There's the image of the hawk carrying off a piece of meat; the image of the bead of honey on a knife blade. The hawk carrying the meat has other hawks chasing it and, if it doesn't let go, it's going to get torn apart. The bead of honey, of course, is very sweet. But try to lick it off the blade of the knife, and you're going to get cut.

Then there's torch you're carrying as you're going against the wind, with the wind blowing the flame back at you.

The purpose of all these images is to make you realize that, in spending all your time trying to base your happiness on sensuality, you're basing it on something that, one, is out of your control and, two, is going to harm you and lead to a lot of suffering.

You can think of all the stupid things you've done under the power of lust, until something in the mind finally says, "Enough. It's not worth it." That's the fifth step—the escape: dispassion.

These are the steps in taking apart a state of becoming—the becoming, say, around the lust. The same thing would apply to anger, jealousy, greed. These are the skills needed for getting outside the state of becoming, to see how artificial it is, and how it's really not worth all the effort that goes into it.

This is how you take apart your craving that leads to becoming, and this, too, involves tranquility and insight. With breath meditation, we're working with seeing things as fabricated and then calming the fabrication. This tackles tranquility and insight in a different way. You gain insight into the processes of becoming to the point where you see they're not worth it. Then, as you let them go, the mind goes to a deeper state of peace.

This is why the Buddha has you think about bodily fabrication and mental fabrication when he's giving the breath meditation instructions, because those are precisely the tools you'll need to take apart the processes leading up to becoming so that you lose your interest. It's when you lose interest in it: That's when these things can fall apart or fall away.

This has a parallel in the Buddha's approaches to many of the hot issues of his time that people would argue about: whether the world was finite or infinite;

eternal, not eternal; the nature of the soul—questions like that. The Buddha wasn't interested in the content of the issues because he saw that, no matter what your answers to these question, they pulled away from the real problem, which is that we're creating our own suffering and yet we like it. Instead, his way of looking at these views was to see the processes by which people create clinging and suffering around them: That, for him, was the real issue. We suffer from the things we like to create.

The processes in the mind—the craving in the mind—that we take as our friend, we take as our companion, that we follow wherever we go: We think it's what gives pleasure in life, but the Buddha points out, No, it's what actually causes the suffering.

So, we have to learn how to change our allegiance here, which is one of the reasons why we have to get the mind into concentration. Not only does the stillness of concentration allow you to see these processes, but the sense of well-being also allows you to look at them with a lessened sense of interest. You've got something better; why go for *this*?

This is how you step out: not by pushing these things away but simply by letting them fall from your grasp. You hold on to them because you think you're going to get something good out of them. But, when you finally realize they don't give anything good at all, and you've found something better, you let them go.

So, as you're working with the breath, remember, you're working with bodily fabrication, mental fabrication, verbal fabrication. Learn how to see the processes of the meditation in these terms. You get hands-on experience and then you can use these fabrications as tools, not only to get the mind to settle down but also to fend off its distractions.

A lot of the discernment comes from fending off the distractions, so don't be too irritated by them. Learn to understand the process of how you step out of them, because that will teach you how to step out of other things as well.

Even with the path: There are passages where the Buddha talks about applying the same five-step program to the five faculties. Conviction: It's a good thing, but even it has its limitations. There comes a time when you have to see its allure and see its drawbacks and let it go, develop dispassion for it. The same with persistence, the same with mindfulness, the same with concentration; even discernment.

But, for the time being, you hold on to these activities. They're your tools. In an image that's common to a lot of the ajaans, it's like being a carpenter. You're working on a piece of furniture and, as long as you're working on the piece of furniture, you've got to hold on to your tools properly. But when the chair or the

desk or whatever is done, then you put down your tools and enjoy the results of your labor.