

Location, Location

August 24, 2022

Tatratatrābhinandinī: delighting now here, now there. That's part of the description of the craving that gives rise to suffering. It has a location. It focuses on a spot, and in that spot it creates a little kernel of what you want. Around that kernel comes your sense of who you are to get that thing, and the world in which you're going to get that thing. That's how becoming comes from craving.

That sense of location is important, because sometimes it goes here, sometimes it goes there. It's very hard to track down. As the Buddha points out, often we're not really clear about where our cravings are. These are the things that run our lives, yet often we don't even know what we're craving.

You may have a desire for a person and think that the desire is focused on the person, but maybe it's focused on your perception, or maybe on the way you talk to yourself about the person. Maybe that's what's the real allure.

This is one of the reasons why interpersonal relationships can be so fraught. You think the other person wants you, but they don't want you, they want their idea of you. Or they're attracted to a narrative they create around you, and it involves their identity. And of course you're doing the same thing to them, too.

This is why the Buddha has you stop and think. There's a passage where he says, *Something you've never seen before, is there any craving there?* Your first reaction would be, *Well, yeah, there are lots of things I haven't seen that I crave.* But when you stop to think about it, it's not really the thing itself that you crave. You crave your mental image of it, your anticipation of it, how you paint that picture in your mind. That's where the craving is focused.

So you really do want to pay careful attention to where your cravings are, because they can lead you astray. You know that image the Buddha gives of rebirth as being like a fire going from one house to another, clinging to the wind. If your craving is totally unknown to you here, you're giving your next life over to a force that you don't even know. It's a scary thought.

So he lays out the various places where craving might be focused: any of the six senses; any of the objects of the six senses; and then contact at the senses; consciousness at the contact; feeling born of the contact; perceptions for sights, sounds, smells, taste, tactile sensations,

ideas; intentions for those things; directed thoughts; evaluation—the way you talk to yourself—around those things. Craving itself can be an object of craving. So you see how slippery it is, and how it can be focused just about anywhere.

When you stop and think about it—that when you die, as I said, this will be the force that leads you on—and when you see how fickle craving is, it makes you really want to figure out some way to get beyond it.

This is one of the reasons why we practice concentration: to get to know our cravings. And we start by *craving* stillness of mind.

It's a perfectly legitimate attitude to have toward the path. Sometimes you're told that you should practice the path without any desire, without any sense even that you're doing the path. Well, the path's not going to get done on its own that way. You have to develop the desire of right effort to do the work—the desire to prevent unskillful qualities from arising or, if they have arisen, the desire to abandon them; the desire to give rise to skillful qualities, and once they're there, the desire to maintain them and develop them. That effort is directed here at getting the mind into concentration.

As you give the mind a location, you give your craving a location. You're going to stay here with the breath and you're going to watch over it to make sure it doesn't move. And, of course, it will move, but you want to be alert to it.

You're beginning to understand: This is what craving does. It focuses here, delights now here, then delights over there someplace else—it's pretty fickle. We complain about the objects of craving, saying that they're impermanent or inconstant, but the craving itself is pretty inconstant, unreliable. Still, it is something you can tame.

As you tame it and use it to keep the mind concentrated, you get to know it better and better. You see what it means to have a location, and how the mind creates a sense of identity around that location: you as the meditator, and the world inside the body as the world in which the meditator functions. You're seeing all the processes of becoming, the ones that can eventually lead to birth again. But at the same time you're making your gaze a lot more refined and a lot steadier.

That way, you can sense when the location of your craving moves and you can exert some control over it. That, at the very least, is what you want to be able to do as death approaches, so that craving doesn't just run off, taking you someplace you don't anticipate at all, or you suddenly find that it's been lying to you all the time.

You're making honest people out of your cravings by making them steadier, more focused, more reliable. Then you learn how to understand them. It's through understanding them by working with them that you can take them apart.

This is what the Buddha means by comprehension: You see why craving leads to a state of becoming by creating that sense of location. You see that precisely as it's happening because you're trying to make it happen right here, so you know it really well. I think it was Kant who said, "We know best the things that we do."

So you're going to do the craving consciously rather than in ignorance. That way you can begin to see through it. You see how it creates locations—and how the sense of location is something that's not necessarily there.

After all, when you get rid of craving, as the Buddha said, you're released everywhere. There's no *there* there. As he says in one spot, "It's neither here nor there nor between the two." There's no sense of space or the dimensions of space, because there's no craving there to create locations.

We think that craving simply finds locations, and it does, but then it creates them, too. When you get really skilled, you can find out what it's like not to have a location. That's when you're free.

This is one of the reasons why we work so hard at getting the mind into concentration and keeping it here: so that we can know this process of creating a location—exactly how the mind does that—and so that we can take it apart.

So don't be afraid to desire concentration. Don't be afraid to desire to do it well, because it's in doing the concentration, and desiring it, that you learn what desire does. When you see the subtle stress even in a state of concentration, and the mind inclines to something better than that, you've raised your sights. It's when the mind is inclined in that direction that the opportunity for the deathless will open up.

This is how we use desire to put an end to desire, how we use craving to put an end to craving. We use it so that we can understand it, because only when you understand it can you get past it to be free.