

## *Becomings*

*October 23, 2022*

The Pali word for meditation—*bhāvanā*—means to develop, to bring something into being, or to develop something that’s already there. In this case, we’re trying to develop qualities of mindfulness, alertness, and ardency, to get the mind into concentration. You’re mindful of the breath coming in going out. You keep remembering to stay here. Try your best not to go someplace else.

And then you’re alert. On the one hand, you’re alert to the breath itself: what it’s doing, how it feels, where you notice it most clearly in the body. On the other, you’re also alert to the state of the mind, because sometimes the mind will stay with the breath, and sometimes it decides it wants to go traveling around. You’ve got to watch out for that, because you want to make sure that it stays here, or if it does start traveling around, you want to bring it right back.

That brings in a third quality, which is ardency. You’re trying to do this well, so that while you’re here you’re really sensitive to the breath—because the more sensitive you are, the more interesting the breath becomes; the more satisfying, the more nourishing it feels just to be here breathing. At the same time, you want to be clearly alert to the fact that when the mind goes away, you bring it right back. You don’t wait. You don’t peek into each little thought as if it were a present, saying, “What’s inside the wrapping here? What’s inside the wrapping there?” You open up the box and you suddenly find yourself swallowed in.

Which relates to another word that’s related to *bhāvanā*, the word *bhāva*: It means *becoming*. In the Buddha’s analysis of becoming, you’re taking on an identity in a world of experience. And both the identity and the world are based on a desire.

For instance, you’re sitting here, and suddenly you decide you’re hungry. You think of going out and getting some pizza after the meditation is over. All of a sudden you find yourself in that world, the world where pizza is the main object. The things that are relevant to the pizza are part of that world. Things that are totally irrelevant to your quest for pizza are not part of that world at all. For

instance, the fact that you have the means to get the pizza, or the means to make the pizza, that's part of that world. If there are any obstacles to getting that pizza, that's part of that world, too. But things that are totally irrelevant to the pizza, they're not part of that world at all.

Then there's the identity that you take on: On the one hand, there's the *you* who hopes to consume the pizza. There's the *you* who hopes to be able to produce it, get it, obtain it. And then there's the *you* who's watching all of this, trying to decide: Have you decided on the right pizza? Have you decided on the right way to get it? Is there a better way of doing this? There are three senses of *you* right there.

Of course, the fact that you're meditating is also a becoming. The desire here is to get the mind to settle down. The world here is the world of your body, from the top of the head down to the soles of the feet, and all the sensations you have inside that body. What you're trying to do is to mingle the sensations, adjust the sensations as you breathe in as you breathe out, so that this is a good place to stay.

Then there's the *you* who's going to be doing the meditating: That's the producer. There's the *you* who's going to be enjoying the results: That's the consumer. And finally the *you* who's the commentator, watching over all this to make sure you're doing it well, offering suggestions if you're not doing it so well.

So you've got a state of becoming right here. You want to maintain this one, because when you set up in your mind that you're going to maintain a particular state of becoming, that's when you see the process of becoming a lot more clearly.

When another becoming appears in the mind, you can recognize it: "Okay, this is beyond the pale." In the beginning it's going to be hard to resist because the mind's tendency is just to go traveling around. That, in fact, was Ajaan Suwat's definition for becoming: the places where the mind travels.

If you're just traveling around with no particular purpose in mind, you hardly notice what's going on at all. Things just seem to slide from one thing to the next, to the next, and it's all part of the same process.

If you could ask yourself afterwards, "Where did you go?" it'd be like asking a child at the end of the day, "Where did you go?" If the child just happened to wander around in line with its likes and dislikes with no clear purpose, it'd have a

hard time saying where it went. But if the child had been given a task, say, “Go down to the store, buy this, and you come right back.” Then you can quiz the child, “Okay, did you actually stay on the path to the store or did you wander off the path? And did you come right back?” The child will probably remember a lot better because the child had a purpose.

So give the mind a purpose here. The purpose is to settle down with the breath, make it comfortable. This is the *good* becoming you want right now, so that you can see the other becomings as they form, and recognize them for what they’re doing. This way, in the course of getting a place for the mind to settle down and get a sense of well-being from settling down, you’re also learning about the mind, about all of its processes. And these are particularly good processes to know because as the Buddha pointed out, when you die and go on to another life, it’s the same processes.

We all know that the Buddha taught rebirth, but what’s interesting is that he never has the word *rebirth* in his vocabulary—he just talks about birth. But he does talk about a process he calls *further becoming*. That’s the process that leads to another birth, and that, he says, is like a fire going from one house to another.

In those days they believed that fire, in order to burn, had to hold on to its fuel in order to burn, and so in between the two houses it’s holding on to the wind. The wind stands for craving, and it’s these cravings that take us to another life. The problem is that the cravings taking us to another life are also the cravings that lead to suffering, that *cause* suffering.

There are three altogether. There’s craving for sensuality, craving for more becoming, and then craving for the destruction of whatever becoming you have. All three of these can take you to places you may not want to go.

On the one hand, imagine yourself on your deathbed: You’re facing your death, and you start thinking about all the pleasures you’re going to miss. For most people who haven’t been meditating, the only alternative they have to pain is sensual pleasures, so they’re thinking about sensual pleasures. When the time comes that you have to leave the body, you may just latch on to a sensual desire and follow it wherever it might take you. It could take you anywhere, good or bad, in the sensual realm.

Or you may realize that you're leaving this body, you're leaving this identity, you're leaving this world, and you're afraid of being annihilated, so if the opportunity appears for another body in another world, another identity—you'll go for it.

Or given that the pain and sorrow that often happen at death, some people decide they'd just rather be snuffed out, totally annihilated. That, they say, would be peace. But what happens is there's the *you* who wants the peace and then the world in which that *you* operates, so that you're actually creating a new state of becoming with that type of craving.

It may sound nice that you're going to go in line with your cravings. You think, "Whatever I crave must be good, must be desirable," but you know what happens to cravings. They get waylaid. They get twisted around. As the Buddha said, there's nothing as quick in nature to reverse itself as the mind. You think you're heading to a place you want, but then something else happens, something interferes, there's an obstacle, and you end up finding yourself, out of desperation, just latching on to anything. That's a scary thought.

Just as scary is the thought that you could actually go where you really crave to go, but then you learn the fine print only after you get there, and the fine print is all about more aging, illness, and death.

So you want to be able to understand these processes as they're happening right now so that you don't get deluded by them, so that you don't latch on to them out of desperation and just be willing to go anywhere. This is why we meditate here and now: We get to see these processes as they're happening.

Each time a new thought appears in the mind, you can see it begin to form. You're trying to make sure you don't go with it. As you zap it—in other words, once you sense there's a stirring of a new thought or a new little world inside the mind, you just breathe right through it—it'll go away.

Part of the problem, though, is there's part of the mind who wants to see "What is this?" It's like you're getting a present. You open up the wrapping to see what's inside. The problem with these presents is that when you open up the wrapping, it sucks you in. Just because something comes in a nice-looking package doesn't mean that there's going to be something nice inside.

So you want to train the mind, one, so it's not desperate. This is one of the reasons why we focus on breathing in a way that's comfortable. And, two, train the mind so that it knows what's going on. These steps that go from craving to clinging, from clinging to a state of becoming, and then from becoming to taking birth in that becoming: That's what's going to happen at the end of life.

And that's what's happening in your mind all the time, so you want to study it, understand it right here and now. That way, you won't be deluded by it. Ideally, you want to get to the point where you don't have to follow any of these processes at all. But in mastering the processes, you begin to realize, as the Buddha said, craving for annihilation is also a cause for suffering.

So what do you do? As he says, there's a different kind of desire, the desire to gain escape from this. That, he says, is actually a good desire. It's part of the path. It comes under right effort. You focus that desire on understanding the steps that lead up to becoming.

What causes clinging? Craving. What causes the craving? Feeling. What causes the feeling? Contact. Try to take the process apart into these impersonal things, without any sense of you or a world around them. You begin to see that these are the raw materials from which that becoming was created, and there's not much there: just things that arise/pass away, arise/pass away. Nothing of any substance, nothing that you could really rely on. Hoping to find happiness out of these unreliable things is like hoping to build a good house out of really flimsy materials. As you develop a sense of dispassion for the whole process, that's what liberates you.

So we're here in the present moment not only for the sake of a sense of well-being and peace in the present moment, but also to understand what's going on in the mind. How does the mind create these states of becoming, and why does it suffer every time it does? And why does it keep on doing it?

When you've seen that, you've gained knowledge that's going to be really useful all the way through life—and all the way through death. So even though you start out just hoping to have a sense of peace for a little while, there's a lot more to learn here, a lot of really valuable things you can learn about yourself. So give this your full attention—mindful, ardent, alert—and see what you learn.