



What are you becoming?

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This talk is based in part on a meditation, *As Days and Nights Fly By*, by Thanissaro Bhikkhuⁱ
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Why is “What are You Becoming?” an important question? Do you need to become anything? The truth is that we are becoming all of the time. It is just a question of what. How do we become? What does the Buddha recommend that we become? We will be exploring these questions in order to realize our freedom and true happiness.

Reflection

Reflect on your life. What were you becoming in your teens, 20’s, 30’s and so on? What were your intentions for living your life? Did they change and, if so, how? What are your present intentions?

What is becoming?

Becoming means to begin to be or come to be something specified: to begin to have a specified quality. Qualities are what you or others perceive that you are. And the qualities that you become are dependent on your intention (aim or purpose). The Buddha noted the difference between skillful and unskillful intentions: “And what, monks, is right intention? Intention for renunciation, intention for non-ill will, intention for harmlessness: This, monks, is called right intention.”ⁱⁱ In other words, the Buddha is saying that that for a person who holds the unskillful intentions of clinging, ill-will, harmfulness, his/her deeds, words, plans, and purposes grounded in that view will lead to suffering, while for a person who holds opposite right intentions of letting go (renunciation), non-ill will and harmlessness, his/her deeds, words, plans, and purposes grounded in that view will lead to happiness.

The process of becoming

We become through how we are influenced by our mind. And our mind influences us based on our experiences in life. Simply put, an experience begins when one of our sense organs (body, eyes, ears, nose, tongue and mind) comes into contact with a sense object. For example, we become conscious of our eyes seeing a person. The mind, having become aware of this experience, compares it with our stored memories and beliefs. Based on the results of the comparison, the mind communicates via a bodily sensation of pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral feel and mentally with a perception (identification) of the experience. From this, we may experience mental formations (emotions) and as a result, we may react in a certain way.

The Buddha called these recommendations of the mind, fabrications, because they are invented or made up. They are not necessarily true.

As an example, your eyes see a person which whom you have had unpleasant experiences. The mind compares your present experience of just seeing this person to previous memories of experiences with this person and beliefs about those experiences. The mind then communicates by causing an unpleasant feeling to arise in the body along with an unfavorable perception (mental impression). As a result, you feel ill-will (anger) arising both in the body and mind. All of this just from seeing a person! Your mind has influenced you to react negatively because of the comparison it has made from the story of memories. This fabrication of the mind may not be true. How do you know that this current encounter will be unpleasant? Rather than believe the mind, you might think of possibility.

The mind communicates with you through physical feeling and mental perception. Think of the mind as being like a friend making a recommendation. The problem is that you may not be aware that this is only a recommendation. You do not have to accept it! However, we do because we think that we are our mind and that we believe it.

How can we consciously become?

Thanissaro Bhikkhu notes that painful experiences occur: “Even though they’re inevitable, and potentially very painful, you don’t have to suffer from them.....The question is, how do you learn not to suffer from those things? And the answer is that you develop qualities of mind, and you also develop a certain attitude toward life. This is crucial. You need to gain a sense of what’s really important in this limited span of time that we have when the body’s still healthy, still relatively young, still functioning—at least to some extent—and still alive. What’s really worth doing in this life?”

He goes on to say: “So the Buddha doesn’t have you reflect on, “**What am I gathering up as days and nights fly past?**” but, “**What am I becoming?**” What kind of person are you becoming? What qualities of mind are you developing? Are you developing desire, ill-will, laziness (complacency), restlessness and worry, or doubt? Or are you developing heedfulness? Are you developing mindfulness? Because as the Buddha said, the things we tend to think about form an inclination for the mind—or as we would say, ruts for the mind: ways in which you tend to act, ways in which you tend to think, that as you keep repeating them become harder and harder to leave.

For a lot of people, as days and nights fly past, all they can think about is, “How can I cram in as many pleasures and memories as possible? I want to make sure I’m not missing out on anything.” Of course, when you do one thing, you’re missing out on something else. Like packing a suitcase: The more you cram in, the more other things are going to spill out. If you take the attitude that the value of life lies in having lots of memories, well, we all know what the process of memory is like. We stash away certain ideas, and as they get brought up from the mind to reflect on, each time you put them back in the mind they get changed. After a while your memories get distorted and deformed. So what’s left? A lot of lies the mind is telling itself about the past. They may look like gold, but they’re fake.”ⁱⁱⁱ

So, if we are not aware, what we become over time can be a product of accepting our mind’s recommendations from stored memories and beliefs. If we aren’t mindful of what we are becoming and

always let the mind choose for us, we will inevitably fall prey to one of the hindrances – desire, ill-will, dullness and drowsiness, restlessness and worry, doubt.

If we are aware, what can we do?

Here are four recommendations from the Buddha (from the Eightfold Path):

1. Adopt the Buddha's recommended intentions
2. Be mindful of your mind and make choices
3. Become a Bodhisattva
4. Add good memories to your storehouse.

Adopt the Buddha's recommended intentions

What does the Buddha recommend that we become? His prescription is called the Eightfold Path which, if followed, allows us to develop that mental skills that Thanissaro Bhikkhu is referring to. The Buddha, in one step of the Eightfold Path, Skillful Intention, recommended three intentions to master: letting go, loving kindness, and compassion. All of these arise from Love.

Be mindful of your mind and make choices

We can't change our memories, but we can be mindful of their impact and choose whether or not to believe our mind when they arise and influence our behavior. The key word is "choose." There is a quote attributed to Victor Frankl:

"Between stimulus and response, there is a space.

In that space lies our freedom and our power to choose our response.

In our response lies our growth and our happiness."

That space appears when you are aware that the mind is communicating to you through the bodily sensation of feeling (pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral) and through the mental perception (mental impression). Once you are aware of this communication, you have a choice. Do I believe this or should I remain open to possibility? As in the above example of your eyes seeing a person with whom you have had unpleasant experiences, how many people have you met that at first you had an unfavorable impression that turned out to be false?

If you don't know whether to believe the mind or not, talk with a friend and get a second opinion!

Become a Bodhisattva

A bodhisattva is an ordinary person who takes up a course in his or her life that moves in the direction of the path to joy, contentment and peace. A bodhisattva lives by vow of the three intentions of letting go, loving-kindness and compassion. Tara Brach phrased the Bodhisattva's aspirations as "May my life be of benefit to all beings" and "May all circumstances serve to awaken compassion."^{iv}

From The Way of the Bodhisattva:

"All the joy the world contains

Has come through wishing happiness for others.

All the misery the world contains

Has come through wanting pleasure for oneself."^v

Add good memories to your storehouse.

Another step in the Eightfold Path, Skillful Effort, teaches us to cultivate and maintain our positive states of mind.

There are a number of ways to bring up wholesome or positive states of mind:

- Remember any skillful act that you have done in the past and the pleasant (positive) states of mind that went with that action.
- Recall your past successes in battling greed, hatred, or delusion.
- Apply your mind to figure out what actions created the pleasant (positive) mental state.

Rick Hanson Ph. D and Richard Mendius MD, have shared some excellent exercises in *Train Your Brain: Positive Emotions and Taking in the Good*.^{vi} Check these out.

In summary, keep reflecting on What are You Becoming? The Buddha has given us a path to follow. Bhikkhu Bodhi notes: "(The Buddha) calls his Dhamma ehipassiko, which means "Come and see for yourself." He invites inquirers to investigate his teaching, to examine it in the light of their own reason and intelligence, and to gain confirmation of its truth for themselves. The Dhamma is said to be paccattam veditabbo viññuhi, "to be personally understood by the wise," and this requires intelligence and sustained inquiry."^{vii}

ⁱ [As the Days & Nights Fly Past Meditations6](#) Dhamma Talks by Thanissaro Bhikkhu 2014

ⁱⁱ [An Analysis of the Path Magga-Vibhaṅga Sutta](#) (SN 45:8) (edited)

ⁱⁱⁱ Thanissaro Bhikkhu. *Meditations6* Metta Forest Monastery

^{iv} Brach, Tara. *Radical Acceptance* (p. 223)

^v *The Way of the Bodhisattva* Chapter 8 Meditative Concentration 129

^{vi} Hanson, Rick Mendius, Richard [Train Your Brain: Positive Emotions and Taking in the Good](#)

^{vii} Bhikkhu Bodhi [The Buddha and His Dhamma](#)