

## Time and Being

We are all born as body-beings. Then we evolve into time-beings. If we learn to breathe, we become mind-beings. As mind-beings, we are capable of becoming higher beings. If we choose to – and we should – we are capable of freeing ourselves from existence itself to rise above and beyond all things.

At birth, we are all like any member of the animal species. We are all **body-beings**. We only have a body with our very rudimentary senses, with our minds still unformed. We are all rooted in ignorance, so that we can only predictably respond to external stimuli: sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch.

As new-born body-beings, we have these nascent senses. They become more habitual so that we could, as it were, “will” them into existence. We open our eyes, we see light; through our ears, we hear sounds; our noses bring smells; our tongues, tastes; and our bodies, various sensings, such as heat and cold, dry and wet, lightness and heaviness, and movement. We merely sense these without knowing really what they are.

From the moment of birth, our bodies start decaying, and we cry out for life. The fire of life has started burning. This is the fire that warms us, burns our food that we feed on or are fed with, and it ages us. So our bodies grow and become better formed. But we still do not know how well to use them, except for basic actions like moving our limbs about, or turning over or around. We still do this anyway.

As we notice the habituality of the senses, we become conscious of them, and more familiar with them. We begin to see shapes, colours, and faces; to hear familiar sounds; to smell familiar smells; to taste familiar tastes; and to feel touches. We learn to associate such sights, sounds, smells, tastes and touches with “things.”

In time, we learn to relate these “things” to words: our humanizing process begins. Our parents or carers make sounds at us, calling us with soothing and loving words. We begin to accept these sounds and the faces that make them to be pleasurable, and might even smile at them. We are given gadgets that have shapes and colours, and even make sounds – they are called “toys.”

Our first impulses are simple: we try to put them all into our mouths. We seem to be caught up in simple choices: Are they edible or not? Food means survival, and so do the familiar faces, sounds, smells and touches. We have learned to like and to dislike. Our first aesthetic notions have arisen: we know pleasure from displeasure. We have begun to feel. But that’s about all we know; we are still basically helpless beings.

As we begin to understand our senses better, they become more sensitive. The more connections we make with “things” and the senses, the better and faster our senses seem to grow. We might call this a kind of “intelligence.” With this growing intelligence, we begin to “know” more about what we like or do not like.

As we grow out of infancy and become children, we continue to associate names with things. Our choices are very clear and simple: we desire things that bring us immediate gratification. We find using the right names, or making certain gestures, would often grant what we desire or remove what we dislike. Most of us still do this somehow.

As we grow out of our bodies and become more aware of the external world, we learn more names for things around us. Using the same choices between liking and disliking, we continue to crave – through words and gestures – what we think we lack. We learn to grasp on to what we have. We feel as if these things are a part of us. When these things are removed from us, or we *think* that we are losing them, we feel a great fear of losing a part of ourselves.

Through our craving for things, we learn to fear losing them. As our intelligence – how we relate names to things, and see them as pleasurable – we extend these to other bodies, too. First, we feel safe with those who feed us and comfort us. Now we are able to connect with others like us. We learn to play or spend time with others, and form more human connections. This process is still developing in us even now, and many of us remain forever in this stage.

Our mothers humanize us; our parents socialize us; early schooling is an effort to civilize us. To be “civilized” means to grow beyond the family, that is, to live harmoniously and fruitfully as a group, a tribe, a business community, a human society, a global community. Since we have to work fruitfully together, we need an effective common language, and a proper regimentation of time.

Work, especially as business enterprises, is often seen today as progress, which means status, concrete structures, and measurable wealth. For work to be effective in bringing progress and wealth, our efforts, too, must be measured. Ironically, we too are measured: how useful are we, and for how long? We have thus become **time-beings**. Our time is now being measured down to nanoseconds and beyond, and yet we have less time for ourselves.

Organized religions try to broaden our hearts so that we grow out of the biological family into a spiritual or more universal family. They try to bring us into human time (here and now), or even heavenly time (eternity). The problem with “eternity” is that it is just a way of talking and looking at time. Whatever exists must exist in time; hence, everything that exists is impermanent. As such, it is not very helpful to speak in terms of eternity, except for purposes of blind belief and tribal control.

In an important way, the worth of a religion is how well it can free us from being merely time-beings. If we are able to rise beyond merely being time-beings, then we are evolving beyond the tribe. We then become **mind-beings**. We then begin to understand and appreciate what we are discussing here.

Our minds have made us what we were and shape our dreams of the future. If we understand our minds well enough, we would truly see the present moment, this window of opportunity for true being. But it is a moving window, never still for a moment. The past is gone, the future never comes. We can only plan for the future; but never shape it. All we really have is the present. Yet in mastering the present, we will understand our past and shape our future.<sup>1</sup> We only need to realize this, and to act on it.

We cannot know this present moment with our bodies alone: our bodies are our senses, and they are, as a rule, past-oriented (even when we envision or plan for the future). In other words, we need to be at peace with our bodies. To do this, we must free our senses, let them go, as it were.

The beautiful breath is the best way to calm and free our senses. The secret to this is deceptively simple: simply watch the breath. As the breath becomes more peaceful, so does the mind; as the mind stills itself, the breath stills itself even more so. There comes a point where there seems to be no more breath: only the “beautiful” is left. This is truly peaceful and sublime. From this arise beauty and truth. With this realization, we break through the shell of our hyphenated existence and awaken into **free beings**.

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[an occasional re-look at the Buddha’s Example and Teachings]

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<sup>1</sup> Some, such as historians, might argue that we need to understand the past in order to understand the present, but then it depends who is writing the history. Here, we are referring to understanding our minds.