The Making Of

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You may remember the days of the DVDs. When you get a movie and they had extra space on the DVD, they’d have a video on the making of the movie. And often the video is more interesting than the movie itself. Explain how they had their special effects. These are more interesting before the days of computer graphics. Things they would have to do to create an impression. And our approach to our thoughts as we meditate is like that. You get into the thought world and that’s like being in the movie. Allowing yourself to be deceived by the appearances. But the Buddha is having you step out and look at the making of your thoughts. That’s where you get some reality. Because the thought world is basically make-believe. There’s the word “sannyā” in Pali, which means perception. It’s been taken over into Thai, where it also means an agreement. And Ajahn Suet was commenting one time on how both meanings actually come together. When you agree that X means Y, you’re agreeing to make-believe. So when you’re in your perceptions, you’re in an agreement to make-believe. And we want to learn how to step out of that, because those thought worlds, those are states of becoming. And as the Buddha said, when you have a craving for becoming, that craving is also going to create suffering. So we have to change our values. Often we liken our thought worlds because they’re entertaining. We use our thoughts to figure things out. And sometimes not just to figure things out, but to have some fun. And we think it’s innocent fun. It’s like that novel written by a friend of mine one time. It’s a novel about Chinese deities. They’re the male deities and the female deities. They’re having a storytelling contest. And in the novel you see the politics among the deities themselves. And you also see the story as it goes from chapter to chapter. And then at the very end, it’s a miserable story. People are suffering all over the place. They kill off characters just for the fun of it. And then at the very end, a Kuan Yin appears, representing Buddhism, saying, “Okay, now that you’ve made up this story, now you’re going to have to go down there to live it.” And the final scene is the deities falling from heaven down to earth, where they have to play the roles in the story. And it’s the same with our states of becoming, our thought worlds. It’s because of this pattern of making thought worlds that we get reborn, and come back again and again and again. And the thought worlds that you like to go for are the ones that you’re going to probably go for when you die. Because you’ve created these grooves in your mind. So think about that when you find yourself entertaining thoughts while you meditate. That’s much more interesting to figure out how these things are formed. Look into the making of these things. That’s why the Buddha taught dependent co-arising. You’ve got these states of becoming. Based on how you trace them back, you’re clinging to something, you’re craving something. There’s some contact with the senses that sparked a thought, sparked a craving. But those contacts wouldn’t have sparked a craving if you hadn’t had some tendencies in that direction already. That’s why dependent co-arising doesn’t start with contact. It goes back further and further through name and form. Consciousness. Fabrications. We learn how to see these things in these terms. That allows you to step out. We get practice in these terms as we try to get the mind into concentration. That’s with fabrication. There’s bodily fabrication, which is your breath. Verbal fabrication, directed thought and evaluation. And mental fabrication, perceptions and feelings. These are the things that create the illusion of a thought world. But they’re also the things we focus on as we create a state of concentration. You focus on your breath. You think about the breath. Ask yourself, “Where is the breath comfortable? Where is it uncomfortable? How is it fitting in with the mind? How is the mind fitting in with the breath?” And with these, what do you do with it? In the Buddha’s image for the different jhanas, the first jhana has the only image, which is a conscious agent doing something. The bathman spreading the water through the pile of soap powder, mixing it so that it’s perfectly mixed. All the powder is moistened, and all the water is absorbed by the powder. And as the Buddha said, that’s a symbol for allowing the ease and the well-being, the rapture and pleasure, to seep throughout the body. You have to work it through the body. And that “man” stands for directed thought and evaluation. Then there are perceptions and feelings. Of course, there’s the feeling of pleasure. And that perception allows you to be with the breath, with a sense of ease, with a sense of belonging, and allowing the breath energies to fill the whole body, so that that ease and rapture have a medium that spreads them throughout. And while you’re doing this, there may be some thoughts in the back of your mind that you are the person doing it, but primarily you’re focused on your actions. You’re trying to do it well. You want to learn how to keep thinking in those terms. The same with name and form. It’s another one of the factors of the pinnacle arising that comes before contact. You’ve got the form of the body, sitting right here, and it’s composed of sensations of warmth, energy, solidity, liquidity. You’ve got name, attention, intention. You’ve got your intention, to stay with the breath, and the act of attention, where you’re actually paying attention to what’s going on, asking questions, to help solidify your concentration. And of course, there are more perceptions and feelings. So you’re learning how to think in terms of the pinnacle arising as you get the mind into concentration. This gets you to be more and more aware of the making of concentration. When you’re aware of this, then you can start looking at your thought worlds in the same terms. The making of a thought of yesterday, and the making of a thought tomorrow, about tomorrow. The making of the thoughts about your duties here at the monastery. The making of thoughts of things you’re going to do when you leave the monastery. The mind is doing this making of little films, all the time. And we’re so used to just falling into the film, enjoying the illusion of being someplace else, doing something else. But it’s all make-believe. What’s more interesting is how you make the make-believe. That’s more real. That’s where you begin to see things in terms of the Four Noble Truths, where the Buddha talks about the clinging that is suffering, and the craving that goes into the clinging. And ideally, you get a sense of dispassion, seeing the allure of these thought worlds, but also the drawbacks of just wandering around from thought world to another, to another. Like hobos, hopping from one train to another. Ending up where? North Dakota? Where do your thought worlds take you? They drop you here, drop you there. But they keep dropping you, but you don’t mind, because you’re going to make another thought world, and then another one, and then another one. That’s the attitude most people have. They’re not interested in the making of thought worlds. And so they fall for them continually. So how much longer do you want to fall for them, knowing that they do have their consequences? You find certain thoughts have a real pull, and you allow yourself to be pulled. They have their hook, and you allow yourself to be hooked, like a fish. And then when the body is weak and is about to die, those old habits will come back. So what kind of habits do you want to develop? Do you want to have the habit of falling for the thought worlds, or being able to step back and look at the making of thought worlds? If you can have that perspective, even at the moment of death, the result is going to be much better. You can learn how to stop fooling yourself, stop falling for your illusions, because you see how they’re made. They’re like being on two arms. They really did look like little robots, because you couldn’t imagine a human being fitting into that space. Well, it turned out what they’d done was put out a call for people to have their legs amputated. And they dressed them up in these little robot costumes, and their proportions were not like a regular human being, and it created quite an illusion. But you realize that they had to find people with no legs to do that. So not all thought worlds are innocent in the same way. So you’re in the innocence, human ones. You have to watch out for them, because they get you addicted to your inner films. Then you get some other films that would actually involve some suffering for yourself or for other people. Think about that as you find yourself interested in your thought worlds. Take an interest, but take an interest in the making of the thought world. And you’ll actually learn something of real substance.

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