

## *Antidotes to Craving*

*September 9, 2020*

Every evening at sunset, the Buddha has you remind yourself: “This could be your last sunset. You might go tonight. Are you ready to go?” Then you look into your mind. If you see that there’s anything in there that would pull you back, make it difficult to go well, work on that.

So look into you mind. What do you have here? There’s another place where the Buddha said that when you go from this body to another body, you cling to craving. You often hear about clinging to the five aggregates. But here he said you’re clinging to craving—the craving that led to the clinging to begin with. You turn around and hold on to that. That’s what pulls you along.

So you look at the kind of cravings you might have at that point, and three big ones stand out—the ones that the Buddha said are the cause for suffering: craving for sensuality, craving for becoming, craving for non-becoming.

Craving for sensuality usually comes from our attachment to our sensual pleasures and our fascination with thinking about sensual pleasures. At the moment of death, of course, you’ll be pulled back to pleasures of the past. There can be a lot of nostalgia. You miss this, you miss that—this person, that situation. And it’s painful.

As the Buddha said, you’ve got to see the drawbacks of sensuality. You could come back and have those pleasures again. But many times, the particulars of the pleasures that you really enjoyed are gone forever. I notice every time I go back to Thailand how much things have changed, and I keep thinking, “Where is the Thailand I used to know?” Yesterday someone sent me the transcription of the talk I gave about the old woman who died a few weeks ago at the age of a hundred. I started thinking about the way we lived back in those days when I first met her and her family—how simple life in the countryside was. Although there were hardships, still there’s a lot to get nostalgic about. And if you let yourself get nostalgic, it’s painful. As the Buddha said, you have to develop lack of nostalgia, *analayo*, for your cravings.

So if you see anything come up—that you wish you could have this back again, or that back again, or you start going for sensuality that might be better, saying, the things I wish I had that I never got this time—you’ve got to learn how to let it go. Remind yourself of all the work that goes into that.

Ajaan Fuang had a good contemplation for that. He says the sensual pleasures that you really long for are ones you’ve had before. You long for them because you

miss them. Think about that. You miss them, so you try to get them again. And then, of course, you're going to lose them again, and you're going to miss them again. He says if you think about this, it's enough to make you want to go for release.

So learn to think in that way. All the particulars you go for: You're going to have to lose them again and again and again. And you have to ask yourself: When will you have had enough? Because pleasures of this sort never really give satisfaction. There's always something lacking.

There's a spot in the North Rim of the Grand Canyon, a meadow that I really like. Last year, I was there at the North Rim, so I took a hike, got to the meadow, and had given myself a certain amount of time. Then I was going to have to turn around and go back. I got there and I realized I had only ten minutes for the meadow. My first thought as I sat down was, "I hope I can come here again." I hadn't even been there for a minute and already I was thinking about the next time. That's what you've got to watch out for: the thoughts that say, "I'd like to have that again."

Or, again, as I said, there are pleasures that you missed. You say, "Next time around, I'd like to come back for that pleasure": beauty, wealth, power, anything that has to do with the senses. Your nostalgia for it, or your disappointment that you didn't get it this time and you'd like to try it again: That's going to pull you back, and it's going to pull you down.

So see the drawbacks of sensuality. Think of all the work that has to go into it, and then it's just going to slip through your fingers. All too often, in gaining sensual pleasures, we end up doing unskillful things either to get them or to keep them. And they still go through our fingers, and we're left holding nothing but the karma. That's one form of craving you've got to watch out for. If you find yourself clinging to it, you've got to learn how to pry loose the fingers of the mind. They keep wanting to hold on.

Then there's craving for becoming. You think about the different things you didn't get to do or be in this lifetime, and you say, "I'd like to take on that identity." This was a topic of discussion I had many times with some of the farmers back in Thailand. I'd try to get them to meditate. They'd say, "We're in no great a hurry to meditate right now. We want to make merit, be generous, so we can come back wealthy next time."

One of the advantages of being a monk is that you meet members of all levels of society. You meet wealthy people and you begin to realize: They suffer too. They suffer in a different way from the poor people, but they suffer. People with power suffer. I knew a monk in Thailand who had psychic powers for a while, and

he was not very circumspect in how he showed them off, so he attracted some very high-ranking government officials. They would come to him and they'd complain about one another, basically—their opponents or rivals in trying to govern the country. And he told me one time, “It’s like talking to four-year-olds, talking to these people: the resentments, the feuds, the desires for revenge.” So poor people suffer the way poor people suffer. Rich people suffer the way rich people suffer. Devas have their suffering. Everywhere you can go, there’s going to be suffering.

That chant we have on the five recollections: It’s only a part of the sutta. The other part of the sutta says, “It’s not just me. All beings everywhere are subject to aging, subject to illness, subject to death, subject to separation. And they live by their karma.” When you reflect on those five recollections only with reference to yourself, the Buddha says it makes you heedful. When you reflect on the fact that wherever you could go in the universe, whatever state of becoming you could take on, is subject to these five principles: That, he says, gives rise to the samvega that gives rise to the path. So remember, whatever identity you could take on could have some pretty nasty details in the fine print. If you can think of it that way, it’s easier to let go of the desire to come back and do anything at all in any world.

Then there’s craving for non-becoming. A good way to look for this is to look at times when you think back on things you did and you regret, or things you didn’t do and you regret: the stupid things you said, the stupid things you did. You realize that that particular identity is one that makes you very uncomfortable. You don’t like the idea that that’s you, and you’d like to destroy that memory, destroy that identity. Well, in doing so, you take on a new identity. As the Buddha said, one of his great insights was seeing that in the desire for non-becoming, there was becoming.

So if you find the mind slipping in any of these things: nostalgia for sensual pleasures, or the desire for new sensual pleasures you didn’t have, the desire to take on any state of being on any level of the universe, or the desire to destroy some aspect of you in terms of things you did and said, where you look back on it and you said, “I wish I could just get rid of that memory”: All these things—you’ve got to see them as burdens that are going to weigh you down.

So you take the proper antidotes. For sensuality, if it has to do with lust, you start with the contemplation of the body. And then you look at the drawbacks of sensuality in general. For becoming, you remember: Everything is subject to aging, illness, and death—every identity. And as for any desire to destroy a particular memory of something you did unskillfully, that’s going to give rise to more becoming, which goes back to aging, illness, and death all over again. So these are the things you have to watch out for. And these are the antidotes you use.

You have to use them again and again and again for them to really sink in. As with any directed thought and evaluation, if you do it once, it's not going to go very deep into the mind, because here you are, talking to yourself. It may be with a voice that you're not used to hearing or an attitude or a perspective you're not used to seeing things from. So you have to work on it again and again and again until these thoughts come more easily, more quickly. After all, at the moment of death, you're going to need them to come fast because your cravings are fast. They see they can't stay here, and they're going to immediately look for something else. You've got to make sure they don't pull you in the wrong direction.

So work on these antidotes and take a good dose of them every day: contemplation of the drawbacks of sensuality, contemplation of the undesirability of any state of being, any state of becoming, and the realization that regret about how much you want to destroy that memory, destroy that sense of who you were, will take you back to states of becoming all over again. Keep these antidotes in your medicine chest, and take a good healthy dose every day.