AN 3.76 — Bhava Sutta: Becoming (1)

English translation by Thanissaro Bhikkhu.

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Changes: Presentation only: original HTML markup reflowed into plain text; wording, numbering and source repetitions retained. No repetitions expanded.

Completeness: ABBREVIATED. Every source-unit character is preserved, including introductions, notes and verse structure. Thanissaro's collection-level note explicitly states that repetitions were cut: https://www.dhammatalks.org/suttas/about.html. This is evidence about the translation method, not an assertion that every individual unit contains an omission; no repetitions reconstructed.

Text

Then Ven. Ananda went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, bowed down to him and sat to one side. As he was sitting there he said to the Blessed One, "Lord, this word, 'becoming, becoming' — to what extent is there becoming?"[1]

"Ananda, if there were no kamma ripening in the sensuality-property, would sensuality-becoming be discerned?"

"No, lord."

"Thus kamma is the field, consciousness the seed, and craving the moisture.[2] The consciousness of living beings hindered by ignorance & fettered by craving is established in/tuned to a lower property. Thus there is the production of renewed becoming in the future.

"If there were no kamma ripening in the form-property, would form-becoming be discerned?"

"No, lord."

"Thus kamma is the field, consciousness the seed, and craving the moisture. The consciousness of living beings hindered by ignorance & fettered by craving is established in/tuned to a middling property. Thus there is the production of renewed becoming in the future.

"If there were no kamma ripening in the formless-property, would formless-becoming be discerned?"

"No, lord."

"Thus kamma is the field, consciousness the seed, and craving the moisture. The consciousness of living beings hindered by ignorance & fettered by craving is established in/tuned to a refined property. Thus there is the production of renewed becoming in the future. This is how there is becoming."

Notes

1.

Notice that the Buddha, instead of giving a definition of becoming (bhava) in response to this question, simply notes that becoming occurs on three levels. Nowhere in the suttas does he define the term becoming, but a survey of how he uses the term in different contexts suggests that it means a sense of identity in a particular world of experience: your sense of what you are, focused on a particular desire, in your personal sense of the world as related to that desire. In other words, it is both a psychological and a cosmological concept. For more on this topic, see The Paradox of Becoming, Introduction and Chapter One.

2.

In this analogy, "kamma" apparently means intention and the result of intention, both past and present. This would thus cover the six sense media (SN 35.145), the first four of the aggregates (SN 22.54), and the four nutriments for consciousness (SN 12.64). As the analogy here suggests, these elements of experience create the range of possibilities for a sense of becoming. If your past and present kamma don't contain a particular possibility, a corresponding type of becoming can't be developed. The only becomings you can experience are those from within the range of possibilities provided by your kamma. Consciousness and craving locate a particular opportunity from those possibilities that, through the nourishment of craving, they develop into an actual state of becoming. A similar analogy appears in SN 22.54. For more on this topic, see The Paradox of Becoming, Chapter Two.

See also: AN 3.77.