

Vasanas

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Imagine this situation: on the first day of creation a mountain shaped like a perfect cone thrust out of the earth and the first drop of rain struck the very tip of the mountain. In which direction would the drop flow? Because there is no precedent, each potential path is as likely as any other, so the drop slid down the south side and left an imperceptible little trail. After some time a second drop fell. What path would it take? High odds favor all paths, but marginally greater odds favor the south side. It followed tradition and etched the existing path a little deeper. After thousands of rainstorms, other paths developed and the mountain sported canyons, ravines and gullies all around. And the original path became a great river valley.

We obviously cannot go back to the time when our psyches were perfectly clear like the consciousness of which they are a reflection, but let us pretend we can. On the day the first mountain sprang up, the first man strolled out of his cave and looked around. A few minutes later the first hungry bear wandered out from behind the first tree, spied the man and decided to have lunch. They grappled with each other for a while but the man got the upper hand when he grabbed a big rock and hit the bear so hard it died. And in life's first irony, the first man lunched on the world's first bear burger.

Was it a good or bad bear burger? Because it was his first burger experience he had no others with which to compare it, so he could not say. As the day progressed the bear experience replayed in his mind several times, gradually diminishing in intensity and frequency. When evening fell, it left his consciousness entirely and he dropped off to sleep.

On the second day the first man bumped into the first woman, one thing led to another and they made the first love, a delightful experience. When he fell asleep after dinner, the memory accompanied him and cooked up delicious dreams. The next few days saw many experiences, some good, some not so good. One morning, a week later, he woke up, ate his porridge and looked out the entrance to his cave to see the world's second hungry bear looking in. Suddenly an exciting and emotional replay of the encounter with the first bear flashed in his consciousness and he understood what to expect if he ventured out.

Each experience, no matter how trivial, leaves a trace, like an elementary particle carving a track in a cloud chamber. The deep memory that saves experience, unlike intellect's facts and figures memory, is the causal body, the unconscious mind, which not only retains the essence of each experience, but also the subjective reactions to it: the feelings, emotions and thoughts arising in the mind during the experience.

What a blessing to have the knowledge from his experiences stored out of his everyday consciousness and appear when he needed it! He could get up in the morning, eat his porridge and venture out into the light of day without having the past intrude, very much like the first day. But as time passed he noticed a change. One day, as he was walking along without a care, he began to feel a little uncomfortable. It was a new feeling. Heretofore he did not even know he had a mind; his attention was riveted on the pristine world outside. But now it became

involved in this feeling. And then suddenly it made sense. A picture of the first woman appeared in his mind and the experience of their tryst vividly flooded his consciousness. Because the memory was so pleasurable and the first woman had run off with the second man, he became unhappy. He wandered about in this state for several days when, as luck would have it, he met the second woman of the world, one thing led to another and first man was happy once more.

After repeatedly cataloguing the love experiences, the causal body realized it was running out of storage space and edited the extraneous details: the color of her hair, the cut of her garment and her name, saving only important facts like the big moment when the world stopped. As more experience flowed in, it merged the experiences of many different women into the essence of woman, compacted myriad episodes into the essence of love, and created a file marked "high priority." Though the memories were meant to remain subconscious, the woman-memory eventually took on a life of its own, popping into his conscious mind with disturbing regularity. Moreover, each repeated memory deepened the scar in the pristine landscape of his subconscious until it resembled the great river valley on the side of the first mountain after millions of years of wind and weather.

Now, sadly, when first man awoke, he had an agenda. Unable to sit blissfully in front of the cave enjoying the scenery as he had done before, he passed his days longing for a companion. Just as rain tends to flow down a mountain's deepest valleys, our hero's consciousness gushed wildly down the deep groove in the causal body, filling his conscious mind with desire.

His routine changed and he became increasingly indifferent to the practical details of life. Instead of enjoying random walks through the forest, staying home patching cracks in his cave or stocking winter stores, day and night he haunted the first bar hoping to find love. The more he thought about a mate, the more he thought about a mate. His emotional state was recycled too. As he obsessed over the memory of love, his longing increased. And with each wave of longing the love channel in the causal body got deeper and deeper, flooding his mind with fantasies, tossing it hither and thither like a small boat in a storm.

Furthermore, he began to notice a strange connection between his all-consuming desire and the probability of meeting a first-woman type. Were these the chance encounters they seemed? In the beginning, outer life seemed to be creating his inner reality, but now his cravings seemed to be influencing his destiny. Eventually he reached a point where his inner reality became as vivid and real as the outer reality.

The traces etched in the causal body by repeated experience are called *vasanas*, impressions or tendencies in Sanskrit (the literal meaning is "fragrance"; *vasanas* are the fragrance, or subtle effects, of our actions). When they accumulate, *vasanas* become *samskaras*, deep grooves, and generate terrible internal pressure. Instead of waiting to see what comes, we try to make things happen that we think will give us relief. *Samskara* means "formation" and is similar to the psychological idea of a complex, an amalgam of subtle tendencies and proclivities that produce a particular mental/emotional condition.

The causal body determines the nature of the individual's experiences and the quality of those experiences, hence the word "causal." No thought, feeling, emotion, memory, fantasy, dream, desire or idea appears in the subtle body that has not sprouted from a causal seed.

Whether life is a spontaneous reaction to external factors, a subjective compulsion to manipulate external factors based on the nature of the *samskaras* or a combination of the two, attention is always riveted on what I want and on the aspect of the field that is meant to satisfy my wants.