

Confidence in the Buddha's Teachings

by

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Preface

Acharn Sujin and her sister Khun Sujit were invited to Vietnam at the end of December 2014 by Tam Bach and other Vietnamese friends for a ten days sojourn. They sponsored their flight and hotel accommodation. Friends from Thailand, Australia, Canada, the U.S. and myself joined this journey. In Vietnam Tran Thai made the travel and accommodation arrangements for all of us. Afterwards we returned to Thailand for more Dhamma discussions. We went twice to Kaeng Krachan, to the place where Acharn Sujin and Khun Duangduen regularly stay, and here other friends joined us for Dhamma discussions. Towards the end of my stay there was a brief journey to the North, to the mountainous regions of Chiangmai and Chiengrai.

In Vietnam the discussions took place in Saigon, in a large hall of the hotel where we stayed, and since about hundred people attended the discussions every day the place became rather crowded. Among the audience were two monks and many “nuns”, that is to say, women who wore robes and observed eight precepts¹. They all were listening very keenly while Tam Bach translated into Vietnamese what Acharn explained in English. Sarah and Jonothan assisted Acharn Sujin untiringly with further explanations of the Dhamma.

Our Vietnamese friends took care of us with great hospitality and every day they left fruits and biscuits on tables set out in the hall. They also gave us large packages with sweets and different objects which were thoughtfully selected.

Throughout our time in Vietnam and in Thailand Acharn repeated that theoretical knowledge is not enough. Without developing understanding of the reality appearing at this moment all book knowledge is in vain. “It is now, it is now”, she said time and again. Many times she spoke about the Buddha’s enlightenment and his compassion to teach. Without his teachings we would not understand anything about our life. We should have confidence that it is worthwhile to study his teachings so that we shall know realities as they are, as non-self, anattā. She explained that confidence will grow along with right understanding. We should live in order to understand realities. That is the goal of our life.

¹ In addition to the five precepts there are others. Among the eight precepts are: refraining from eating after midday, refraining from lying on high beds, refraining from entertainments and from adorning oneself.

Chapter 1

The Dream of Life

Acharn Sujin came at the first session immediately to the essence of the Buddha's teachings: "The truth is here and now but it is hidden. It is difficult to find out what it is. There is seeing and visible object, but no one is there. Visible object could not appear without seeing."

If the Buddha had not realized the truth of all phenomena of life we would be still in darkness. We would be dreaming about all that occurs in life. We cling to people and we believe that all that we experience can stay, at least for a while. The Buddha woke up to the truth and he taught that whatever object is experienced has to fall away, that it is impermanent. He taught that there is no person, no self, only ever-changing mental phenomena and physical phenomena.

Because of ignorance and clinging we keep on dreaming about life. The Buddha spoke time and again about seeing and the object that is seen, visible object, hearing and sound, smelling and odour, tasting and flavour, the experience through the bodysense and tangible object, and the experience of objects through the mind-door. There are six doorways and through each of these doorways an object can be experienced.

As the Buddha taught: there is seeing and visible object but there is no one there. This is his teaching of non-self, *anattā*. We are taken in by all objects we experience and we take them for something that exists, for self. He taught in detail about two kinds of reality: that which experiences, in Pali: *nāma*, and that which does not experience anything, in Pali: *rūpa*.

We are used to thinking of our mind and our body as if they were existing. Mind is actually a momentary reality, it arises and falls away all the time. It is *citta* or consciousness that is accompanied by mental factors, *cetasikas*. Only one *citta* arises at a time and then falls away immediately to be followed by the next *citta*. The arising and falling away of the *cittas* that succeed one another is so rapid that it seems that there is one *citta* that lasts. It seems that seeing lasts, but in reality there is a rapid succession of *cittas*.

Every *citta* is accompanied by several *cetasikas*. After seeing there may be like or dislike of what is experienced. Like and dislike are not *cittas* but *cetasikas*. *Citta* is the chief in knowing an object and the *cetasikas* that accompany *citta* perform each their own function while they share the same object.

Every *citta* experiences an object. Seeing experiences what is visible, visible object. Hearing is another *citta* that experiences sound. Smelling is again another

citta that experiences odour. Visible object, sound and odour are sense objects, objects experienced through the senses. These objects do not know anything, they are experienced by cittas. We are so absorbed in the objects we experience that we forget that they could not appear if there were no citta that experiences them.

Acharn emphasized time and again that we may think and speak about realities that do not experience anything, and realities that experience an object, citta and its accompanying cetasikas, but that this is only book knowledge. The Buddha taught about these realities so that one would attend to their characteristics when they appear at the present moment. Acharn would always help the listeners to attend to the characteristic of what is appearing right now. She often spoke about seeing and visible object since seeing and visible object appear time and again, at the present moment. We believe that we see people and many different things such as trees and mountains, but we are mistaken. Seeing only sees what impinges on the eyesense, visible object. It arises and falls away very rapidly and afterwards thinking of what is seen arises. Since cittas arise and fall away so rapidly, it seems that seeing and thinking appear at the same time, but this is not so.

We should study very carefully and respectfully each word of the Buddha's teachings. Today we may understand very little of what he taught, but when we listen to his teachings again and consider again, understanding can grow very gradually. We shall have more confidence in his teachings when we see that what he taught can be verified in our daily life.

Those who attended the Dhamma sessions listened very attentively and as the days of discussion passed by, there was an increasing number of questions asked by the listeners. They were used to thinking that a quiet place was necessary to have an attentive mind, but now they heard that understanding of realities can be developed no matter where one is and no matter when. In fact, there is no attentive mind, only different cittas that arise because of their own conditions. Nobody can cause the arising of seeing, and even so, nobody can cause the arising of understanding of the present reality.

In the morning there was a session of two hours and in the afternoon again another session of two hours. Tam Bach was an untiring interpreter, translating every day, until her voice needed a rest for one day, and then "Tiny Tam" took over. Every day we went out for a delightful luncheon at a different place. Our Vietnamese friends took great care so that everybody was well served. When we went out on our way to a restaurant we saw an old church built in the time of the colonization by the French and we passed a lane of trees that were taller than the

houses, dating from the same time. There were not many cars, but the streets were crowded by motorcycles.

The motorcycles managed to follow each their own way and one wondered how they could do this without collisions. Sarah made a simile, saying that no policeman could make an effort to try to direct the traffic, that everyone went his own way. Even so, nobody can direct his cittas, they arise because of their own conditions and then fall away. Cittas proceed according to their own ways, they are not directed by a self, they are anattā.

We are bound to confuse seeing and thinking on account of what was seen. The Buddha taught what is real in the ultimate sense and what is not real but only a concept we think of. Without his teachings we would not know this. There are two kinds of truth: conventional truth (sammutti sacca) and ultimate truth (paramattha sacca). Visible object can only appear because there is seeing, a mental reality. Seeing arises because of conditions: if there were no eyesense, a material reality, rūpa, and visible object, another rūpa, there could not be seeing. We are immediately absorbed in what is seen and we often forget that if there were no seeing we could not think about visible object. Sound could not be heard if there would not be hearing. Nothing could appear if there were no citta that experiences an object. We are inclined to take the reality that experiences for self.

Because of remembrance we recognize persons and we know that this is a motorcyclist and that is a tree. We believe that all these things can stay. But in reality all phenomena, mental phenomena and physical phenomena, arise and fall away immediately. The whole day we live in the world of illusions, of dreams. In our dreams we see people who speak to us and we speak to them. Our impressions are very vivid, our dream world seems real. However, when we are dreaming our eyes are closed and visible object does not impinge on the eyesense. We are merely thinking, not seeing. Also when we are awake we believe that we see people, mountains and lakes, but this is not seeing, only thinking of concepts. Seeing only sees visible object that impinges on the eyesense.

Because of listening to the Dhamma there are conditions to gradually learn to attend to the different characteristics of realities that appear now. We can learn what is real in the absolute or ultimate sense: citta, mental factors (cetasikas) arising with the citta, and rūpa, physical phenomena. Everything else such as persons or tables are merely ideas formed up on account of what was experienced through the senses and the mind and these are concepts, not realities. When we know the difference between realities and concepts or ideas, there will be more understanding of what life really is: realities, elements devoid of a self.

There is no mind that can stay and no body that can stay. We may think of ourselves: “I am sitting”, but in reality there are only different bodily phenomena,

rūpas, that arise because of their own conditions and fall away. We speak of our body and different postures it can assume, but these are notions of conventional speech.

Realities appear one at a time through the six doors. A rūpa such as hardness appears through the bodysense. When something is touched, it appears. We do not think of it, it can be experienced without naming it. Its characteristic is always hardness, no matter how we name it, its characteristic is inalterable. It arises and falls away immediately. But we can think about hardness and the cetasika remembrance (saññā) which accompanies every citta remembers that it is for instance a chair that is touched. A chair is a concept, not a reality.

We could not lead our daily life without thinking of concepts. We have to know what different things such as a chair or a computer are used for. But we can learn the difference between realities and concepts. When we cling to a “whole” such as a person or the body, we are ignorant of ultimate realities. Ultimate realities appear one at a time through one of the six doorways. There is the world of visible object, of sound, of odour, of flavour, of tangible object or of objects experienced through the mind-door, thus, six worlds. They appear one at a time. When several objects seem to appear as a whole, as a collection of things, we are thinking of concepts, not attending to ultimate realities. We are often entranced in the general appearance and the details of things.

We read in the “Dialogues of the Buddha” (Ch 2, the Fruits of the Life of a Recluse, 64) that the Buddha said to King Ajātasattu:

“And how, O king, is the bhikkhu guarded as to the doors of his senses?”

“When, O king, he sees an object with his eye he is not entranced in the general appearance or the details of it. He sets himself to restrain that which might give occasion for evil states, covetousness and dejection, to flow in over him so long as he dwells unrestrained as to his sense of sight. He keeps watch upon his faculty of sight and he attains to mastery over it.”

The same is said as to the other sense-doors and the mind.

Before hearing the Buddha’s teachings we were ignorant of the six worlds. We only knew the conventional world with people and things which seemed to last. Acharn explained that if one does not understand the reality appearing at this moment one cannot understand the teachings. There would only be thinking of “my seeing”, of person or self. There could never be the eradication of ignorance and attachment to what appears now. Understanding of ultimate realities

grows extremely slowly and we cannot expect to understand immediately everything the Buddha taught.

Life is seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching and thinking. There is no self who can see, hear or perform any function. This is the Buddha's teaching of anattā, non-self.

One of the days in Saigon we had a session in a meditation center in a high-rise apartment and after the session our host had a delicious luncheon prepared for us on the roof of the building. People listened very attentively during the session and one girl started to cry because she found the idea of non-self unbearable. Only the sotāpanna who has attained the first stage of enlightenment² has eradicated wrong view and he does not cling to the idea of self anymore. This shows that it is a long way to develop right understanding of realities.

We read in the "Kindred Sayings on Sense" (Ch 4, § 85, Void) that Ānanda said to the Buddha:

"'Void is the world! Void is the world!' is the saying, lord. Pray, lord, how far does this saying go?"

"Because the world is void of the self, Ānanda, or of what belongs to the self, therefore it is said 'Void is the world.'

And what, Ānanda, is void of the self or of what belongs to the self?

Eye... objects...eye-consciousness etc. are void of the self. That is why, Ānanda, it is said 'Void is the world.' "

The Buddha explained that the world is the eye, visible object, seeing, in short, all realities that appear in our life. Nobody can create seeing, it arises because of its own conditions. Seeing is not hearing, they are different dhammas arising because of different conditions. Nobody can create his body. What we take for our body are rūpas that are conditioned by kamma, by citta, by temperature or by nutrition. They arise and fall away very rapidly. Eyesense, earsense and the other sense-bases are rūpas conditioned by kamma, they are the result of a deed done in the past. When we speak or move our hand, there are rūpas conditioned by citta. Furthermore, heat and nutriment condition the arising of rūpas time and again. When we understand the conditions for the phenomena that arise, it will

² Those who have developed understanding to a high degree can attain enlightenment. At that moment nibbāna, the unconditioned dhamma, is experienced and defilements are eradicated. There are four stages of enlightenment, and at each stage defilements are successively eradicated until they are all eradicated at the stage of arahatship.

be clearer that there is no person who owns them or who is master of them. This is the beginning of understanding the world according to the Buddha's teaching.

Chapter 2

What is Pariyatti

There are different levels of understanding. One classification is: pariyatti or intellectual understanding, paṭipatti or direct awareness of realities, and paṭivedha or the direct realization of the truth.

Pariyatti is intellectual understanding but it is not theoretical; it always pertains to the reality appearing at this moment. It is not merely knowing terms, but it is considering the dhamma appearing now, be it sound, visible object, seeing or attachment.

Acharn Sujin said: “When we read or listen to the teachings we believe that we understand, but actually there is no understanding. Seeing seems very common, everyone sees. But is there any understanding of it? Usually there is the idea of ‘I see a body or a table’.”

Acharn spoke many times about seeing and visible object, because there is seeing time and again, but we know very little about it. Seeing sees only visible object that impinges on the eyebase, no people, no things. There can be more intellectual understanding, pariyatti, of seeing and visible object while we are seeing. I said to Acharn that I try to see visible object, and she answered that trying is useless, that we are wasting our time. We try with attachment, lobha, to find out what it is, but that is not understanding. It is good to be reminded of the truth. Seeing that it is wrong to try to know realities is the beginning of right understanding. Pariyatti is not trying to know or doing something specific in order to have direct understanding. When we listen and we consider carefully of what we hear there can be more understanding of what appears now.

Acharn said: “Develop the understanding that there is no one there, only different realities... Seeing is the experience of what appears now. Without the eyebase there can never be seeing. This is the beginning of more precise understanding of what is real at this moment. Seeing is not that which is seen. That which is seen cannot experience anything. From now on we learn to understand the moment of seeing, even without using any words. Seeing sees and that which is seen appears now. These are two different kinds of realities: a reality which experiences (nāma) and a reality which does not experience anything (rūpa). Realities are always uncontrollable. Where is the self who can control anything?”

The idea of self is bound to come in time and again, until it is eradicated at the first stage of enlightenment, the stage of the sotāpanna. When seeing appears it

is time to carefully consider its characteristic, and then no words are needed. Seeing is a citta, it is different from the rūpa that is visible object. Citta is an element that knows something. It cannot be seen, it has no shape or form.

Acham remarked: “There is no hearing, then there is hearing, and then no hearing. So what is the use of hearing? Hearing is gone and the sound is gone. This is life from moment to moment. No thing, no one, only the arising and falling away of realities by conditions.”

If there were no specific conditions for the arising of dhammas, they could not arise. Another way of reminding us of this truth were her words: “There is nothing, then something and then nothing again.” Realities seem to appear out of nowhere, they arise because of their appropriate conditions and then they are gone immediately, never to return. It is unpredictable what reality will appear the next moment, no one can prevent it from arising. Kamma, a deed done in the past, even countless lifetimes ago, can produce vipāka, result, at this moment in the form of body-consciousness accompanied by painful feeling. The pain can be unbearable, or dying-consciousness may arise. Death can come at any time.

Seeing, hearing and the other sense-cognitions arise in a process of cittas that succeed one another. After seeing has fallen away it is succeeded by other cittas that do not see but still experience the visible object that has not fallen away yet. Like or dislike of the object may arise and then there are akusala cittas. Like and dislike are cetasikas that accompany akusala cittas. The Buddha taught about kusala (wholesome) and akusala (unwholesome). Kusala does not lead to the harm of oneself nor of another. Akusala leads to the harm of both.

There are certain mental factors, cetasikas, that are roots. A root is the foundation of the citta. Every akusala citta has ignorance as a root (in Pali hetu). Some have in addition to ignorance attachment and some have in addition to ignorance aversion or anger. When we dislike something the akusala citta is rooted in ignorance and aversion. Aversion has many degrees, it can be dislike, fear or even anger.

Kusala cittas have non-attachment and non-aversion as roots and they may be accompanied by paññā as well. There are also other types of cittas that are not kusala nor akusala, but vipākacittas and these are results of kamma. Kamma, a wholesome or unwholesome deed committed in the past can bring results today in the form of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting or experiencing tangible object through the bodysense. These can be pleasant experiences or unpleasant experiences. Kamma also produces rebirth that can be a happy rebirth such as in the human plane or in a heavenly plane, or an unhappy rebirth in a woeful plane such as a hell plane or the animal plane, depending on the nature of kamma.

There are also cittas that are neither kusala, nor akusala, nor vipāka and these are kiriyacittas (inoperative cittas). The understanding should be developed that there is no one there, only different realities. We dislike akusala citta and we may try not to have it, but it arises because of conditions. We had attachment and ignorance in the past and these are accumulated in the citta from moment to moment, from life to life. Acharn said that we should be courageous to understand akusala as a conditioned dhamma instead of trying not to have it. Otherwise akusala can never be eradicated. It is developed understanding, paññā, that can eventually eradicate akusala at the different stages of enlightenment.

Acharn explained time and again that pariyatti has to be understanding of the dhamma that appears now. It is not different from this moment. The texts help us to consider realities and to know that they appear now.

Robert Kirkpatrick who is a professor at the university in Kuwait visited us for a few days in Saigon with his wife and little baby Ryan and older daughter Roxanne. On this occasion Acharn Sujin gave us another opportunity for a Dhamma session in English in Khun Noppadom's room in the hotel. Although Acharn had spoken on Dhamma during the morning and afternoon for the Vietnamese listeners, she graciously gave her time also for Dhamma in the evening. Baby Ryan who was not yet two years old gave her a "wai" greeting, a respectful greeting with clasped hands.

Acharn had explained that pariyatti can condition paṭipatti, direct awareness of realities. When there is not yet direct awareness, it shows that pariyatti has not developed enough. We were wondering when it would be enough. I remarked that it never is enough. Acharn answered: "So long as you hope, it never is enough." We were reminded that hoping, which is attachment, is not self and that it is only a dhamma that should be known as it is. It is most beneficial to be reminded when attachment, even slight attachment, arises. It hinders the process of the development of paññā if it is not realized as a dhamma.

She also said that the Buddha did not only speak about pariyatti, paṭipatti or direct awareness of realities, and paṭivedha or the direct realization of the truth. He also spoke about the three rounds of understanding the noble Truths: sacca ñāṇa, the firm understanding of what has to be known and what the Path is; kicca ñāṇa, understanding of the task, that is, satipaṭṭhāna³; kata ñāṇa, understanding of what has been realized, the realization of the truth⁴. When pariyatti has be-

³ The development of right understanding of nāma and rūpa as they appear at the present moment.

⁴ See Kindred Sayings V, Kindred Sayings about the Truths, Ch 2, § 1, The Foundation of the Kingdom of the Dhamma.

come firm and more accomplished it is *sacca ñāṇa*. Then one does not move away from the dhamma appearing right now and turn to other practices in order to understand the truth. *Sacca ñāṇa* realizes that every dhamma that arises is conditioned.

If the Buddha had not taught the three rounds of understanding we would have misunderstandings about *pariyatti*. We would believe that when we had studied the texts sufficiently and understood what the right Path is, *pariyatti* was already sufficient. We would believe that it was the right time for the arising of direct awareness. But then one underestimates the importance of *pariyatti*. The explanations about *pariyatti* were most beneficial and they made it clear that *pariyatti* pertains to what appears right now. At the same time we should remember that it has to be *kusala citta* accompanied by understanding that attends to what appears now. It is not self and it can only arise because of conditions. We need patience to gradually develop understanding of the dhamma appearing now.

One of the Vietnamese listeners asked whether there is any method to control the mind. There is no method. After seeing, hearing and the other sense-cognitions, *akusala citta*s usually arise. We have accumulated attachment and ignorance and, therefore, they are bound to arise. The development of *paññā* is the only way leading to the end of defilements. Also what is *akusala* should be known as it is, as only a dhamma.

We read in the “Gradual Sayings”, Book of the Threes (I, Ch 3, § 71, Ānanda)⁵ about a conversation between Ānanda and Channa, a wanderer. Channa asked Ānanda whether he taught the abandoning of lust, hatred and delusion and when Ānanda said that he did Channa asked what the danger was he had seen in them. Ānanda explained:

“One excited by lust, friend, overcome by lust, with mind obsessed by it, intends for his own affliction, for the affliction of others, and for the affliction of both and he experiences mental suffering and dejection. But when lust is abandoned he does not intend for his own affliction, for the affliction of others and for the affliction of both, and he does not experiences mental suffering and dejection....”

He then explained that one, because of lust, hatred and delusion is engaged in misconduct by body, speech and mind and one does not understand one’s own good, the good of others and the good of both. But when defilements are abandoned the opposite is the case.

⁵ I used the translation by Ven. Bodhi, in the Numerical Discourses of the Buddha.

Ānanda said: “Lust leads to blindness, loss of vision, and lack of knowledge; it is obstructive to wisdom, aligned with distress, and does not lead to nibbāna.”

He said the same about hatred and delusion and about the abandoning of them. Channa then asked whether there is a Path abandoning defilements. Ānanda said that it is the eightfold Path.

The eightfold Path are the cetasikas of right understanding, right thought, right speech, right bodily action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration. Not a self practises, but right understanding develops and it is assisted by the other path factors. Right thinking as factor of the noble eightfold Path has to accompany right understanding. It “touches” the nāma or rūpa which appears so that paññā can understand it as it is. Right effort is energy and courage to persevere being aware of nāma and rūpa which appear one at a time through the six doorways. Because of right effort one is not discouraged but one continues developing understanding. At the moment of mindfulness of nāma and rūpa, right effort has arisen already because of conditions and it performs its function; we do not need to think of making an effort.

Right mindfulness is mindful of the nāma or rūpa which appears so that understanding of that reality as non-self can be developed. When right understanding realizes the true nature of the nāma or rūpa which appears, right concentration assists the citta and the accompanying cetasikas to cognize that object.

Right speech, right action and right livelihood are actually three cetasikas which are abstinence from wrong speech, wrong action and wrong livelihood. They may, one at a time, accompany kusala citta when the occasion arises. They do not accompany each kusala citta. While we abstain from wrong action or speech there can be awareness and right understanding of nāma and rūpa. Paññā can realize that the cetasika which abstains from akusala is non-self, that it arises because of its appropriate conditions. The path-factors of the noble eightfold Path lead to deliverance from the cycle of birth and death. At the moment of enlightenment lokuttara citta arises that experiences nibbāna and eradicates defilements. At that moment all three abstinences accompany the lokuttara citta. They fulfil their function of path-factors by eradicating the conditions for wrong speech, wrong action and wrong livelihood. The path-consciousness, magga-citta, eradicates the tendencies to evil conduct subsequently at the different stages of enlightenment. When the last stage of enlightenment, the stage of the arahat, has been realized, all defilements are eradicated and there will not be rebirth for him.

An excursion to My Tho was organised where one would go on a boat. At first I did not want to go since I thought that a boat trip would be too difficult for me. But when I heard that the boat trip would be on the Mekong River, the word

“Mekong” evoked many memories. I decided that I just had to go. When my late husband Lodewijk and I were posted in Bangkok (in 1966), Lodewijk was very actively engaged with the Mekong Committee and its many projects for the development of the four Mekong countries of Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam and Thailand. He pleaded successfully for a larger donation of money from our government in the Hague. Our Vietnamese friend Thai had organised the excursion and he made it into an unforgettable experience for me. In the bus he gave a touching speech explaining how meaningful this trip was for me. He had very thoughtfully arranged for a taxi when the distance was too long for me to walk. When we were on the boat different projects were explained to us: about the way the rice fields obtained water from the Mekong when the tide was high, about the importance of the coconut plantations for the export, about the fibre made from coconut for sleeping mats.

We had lunch on an island and after that there was a Dhamma discussion. The discussion was about seeing at this moment and how ignorance and attachment always lead us away from the present moment. This is very true. We may have thought that we were on the right Path, but each time there is wishing for more progress we are clinging to self. Pariyatti is not yet firm enough to be *sacca ñāṇa*. Its development depends entirely on conditions and I am most grateful that Acharn made it very clear that “no one can do anything”. She said: “It is impossible to go against the current of ignorance. Listen and listen, this prevents turning away from the Buddha’s words. There is always the idea of self trying. Seeing now sees, not I.”

Chapter 3

What is Sati

Every kusala citta is accompanied by sati, a beautiful (sobhana) cetasika. Sati, mindfulness or awareness, is non-forgetful of what is wholesome. There is sati of the level of dāna, generosity, of sīla, morality, of calm and of satipaṭṭhāna, the development of right understanding of realities. When sati arises it is a condition for seeing the value of kusala and the disadvantage of akusala. When there is an opportunity for kusala such as dāna, generosity, there is usually forgetfulness and one wastes this opportunity. Or, there may be forgetfulness when there is an opportunity for sīla, that includes not only abstention from unwholesome deeds, but also helping others or politeness. When sati arises it is non-forgetful of kusala and there are conditions for generous giving, abstention from unwholesome deeds or helping others.

Sati of the level of satipaṭṭhāna is non-forgetful, mindful, of the nāma or rūpa appearing at the present moment. Nāma and rūpa are ultimate realities, different from “conventional realities” or concepts, such as person, mind, body, animal or tree. We tend to think of a “whole” of mind and body, of the human person. When we study the Dhamma we learn that what we call mind are different types of citta accompanied by different cetasikas, and that these arise and fall away all the time. What we call body are different rūpas, some of which are produced by kamma, some by citta, some by temperature and some by nutrition.

When sati begins to be mindful of the present reality it is conditioned by right understanding of that reality, by understanding of the level of pariyatti. When there are the right conditions direct awareness of a reality can arise and at that moment understanding can see it as only a dhamma, a conditioned reality that is non-self. However, in the beginning understanding is very weak and we cannot expect to understand the truth immediately. We may wish for direct awareness, but that is clinging. Right understanding develops along with detachment. Sati accompanies kusala citta, but kusala citta is very rare. Mostly attachment arises after seeing, hearing and the other sense-cognitions. We think of the objects that are experienced and this is mostly with akusala cittas.

Some people believe that there is sati when one knows what one is doing. When walking, one knows that one is walking, when sitting, one knows that one is sitting. At such moments one thinks about different situations and this does not pertain to satipaṭṭhāna. It is merely thinking of concepts. One may think with clinging to a self who is walking or sitting. There is no awareness of realities as they appear one at a time through the six doorways.

Someone asked questions about detachment. Acharn answered:

“There should be right understanding from the beginning. What should be the object of detachment now? There is seeing now.”

We take seeing for “my seeing”, but when it is understood as only a conditioned dhamma there will be less inclination to take it for self. After seeing there are most of the time ignorance and clinging. Before this life there were other lives and during those lives there were ignorance and clinging. Akusala citta with ignorance and clinging arises and falls away, but every citta is succeeded by a following citta and in this way inclinations are accumulated from moment to moment, from life to life. That is why the development of right understanding of realities is an endlessly long process. It begins by listening to the teachings and carefully considering what one has heard so that very gradually understanding can grow. Understanding of realities is the goal, not having many moments of direct awareness. There is nobody who can do anything to have direct awareness. Acharn said: “It arises unexpectedly and who knows when? In this life?...Sati can dart in like a flash, just as lobha. No one chooses it. It is another conditioned dhamma. It arises unexpectedly, not according to plan.” Lobha just arises when there are the right conditions, and even so, sati arises when there are the right conditions. Nobody can cause the arising of sati.

Sati and paññā are anattā, non-self. Acharn said: “They are all dhammas. Are we sure that what is seen now is a reality, no one in it? It is only a reality that can be seen, no doubt.” She said that one may look into a mirror and believe that there is someone there. But the mirror does not have anyone in it. What is seen is only visible object and when one touches the mirror only hardness may appear. This is the way to understand rūpa that appears and not just by talking about it. Understanding begins with listening to the Dhamma.

Acharn said several times: “Where is the visible object? Where the four Great Elements arise there is visible object”. Rūpas arise in groups, kalapas, and each group consists of at least eight rūpas. Among these are the four Great Elements of Earth or solidity, appearing as hardness or softness, of Water or cohesion, of Fire or temperature, appearing as heat or cold, and of Wind, appearing as motion or pressure. Furthermore there are: visible object, odour, flavour and nutrition. Thus, when visible object appears, it is accompanied by seven other rūpas, but only visible object is seen. The accompanying rūpas condition visible object but they are not experienced. Since the accompanying rūpas are varied they condition visible object to be different every moment. For instance, solidity is of different degrees of hardness, and temperature is of different degrees of heat and that is why they condition visible object to be different. This leads to thinking of different shape and form and because of remembrance, saññā, a cetasika arising

with every citta, we recognize different people and things. While Acharn was explaining about the different kalapas she pointed at the draperies, at the table and a bottle. If visible object would not be different all the time we would not recognize those things. The teaching of different kalapas helps us to have more understanding of anattā.

We may have intellectual understanding of realities, but it may still be weak and it may be a long time before direct awareness of realities can arise. Pariyatti conditions paṭipatti, direct awareness and understanding, but it is useless to wish for it. We have to continue to listen and consider the reality of the present moment. We are so fortunate to have become acquainted with the Buddha's teachings and to be able to consider the reality appearing now. This moment is the right moment to consider and investigate the present reality. Who knows when he will die? It may be this afternoon or tomorrow. Rebirth in another plane of existence may not be favourable for the development of understanding.

In the "Gradual Sayings" (Book of the Ones, Ch VIII, § 4) we read about right understanding as being the most precious in life - that which doesn't bring sorrow:

“Of slight account, monks, is the loss of such things as relatives.
Miserable indeed among losses is the loss of wisdom.

Of slight account, monks, is the increase of such things as relatives.
Chief of all the increases is that of wisdom....

Of slight account, monks, is the loss of such things as wealth. Miserable indeed among losses is the loss of wisdom.

Of slight account, monks, is the increase of such things as wealth.
Chief of all the increases is that of wisdom....

Of slight account, monks, is the loss of such things as reputation.
Miserable indeed among losses is the loss of wisdom.

Of slight account, monks, is the increase of such things as reputation.
Chief of all the increases is that of wisdom. Wherefore I say, monks,
you should train yourselves thus: We will increase in wisdom. You
must train yourselves to win that.”

Acharn often said that what appears now should be known as just a dhamma. We may think: “It is just a dhamma”, but it is very difficult to realize the truth and it may take a long time. Whatever appears at the present moment should be known as only a conditioned reality which is not something or somebody. Acharn said: “Any moment there is understanding of visible object as that which

is seen, right now, understanding begins to know that it is only that which is seen.” She explained that when there is more understanding it can let go of the idea that there is something there, someone there. She said: “When there is no detachment, there can be conditions for attachment to follow instantly, all the time. Paññā has to be keener and keener to examine everything that appears as it is. Otherwise we are only talking about attachment, aversion and wrong understanding.”

Paññā has to be precise, it should not be just theoretical understanding but closer to the moment a reality appears. When we begin to listen to the Dhamma, there is sati with the kusala citta, but not yet sati that is directly aware of realities. It may take a long time before direct awareness and understanding arise, but we have to continue to listen and consider what we hear. A few times of considering the present reality is not enough.

Rūpas have been classified as twenty-eight, but only seven types are experienced all the time in daily life. They are: visible object, sound, odour, flavour and tangible object which is solidity, appearing as hardness or softness, temperature, appearing as heat or cold and motion, appearing as motion or pressure. Each of these rūpas is experienced in a sense-door process and then in a following mind-door process. The objects experienced through the six doorways are the six worlds and these do not last. They are ultimate realities, different from concepts. We think mostly of concepts such as people or different things, but thinking itself is a reality that is conditioned. Nobody can force himself not to think of concepts.

One of the monks had to leave the sessions earlier and he had a short conversation with Acharn. In departing she said to him: “Do not forget about ultimate realities.” They appear all the time but we do not realize that they are just dhammas. We are so absorbed in the stories we think of. When we are involved in an accident we think of the whole situation and we believe: “that is my kamma.” However, in reality many different cittas arise and they arise and fall away extremely rapidly. When we feel pain, there is only a very short moment of body-consciousness accompanied by painful feeling and this is vipākacitta, the result of akusala kamma. After that we have aversion about the pain and this is akusala citta accompanied by dosa, aversion. We keep on thinking about our suffering for a long time with aversion. We are likely to take for the result of kamma what is actually akusala citta. We think: “Why does this happen to me?” Acharn spoke about the ups and downs of life and she said that life is unbearable without paññā. When there is kusala citta accompanied by right understanding there is no aversion, no disturbance about the ups and downs of life. We shall be less inclined to think of a self who has unpleasant experiences. There are only dhammas occurring. Some are cause, some are result, some are neither cause nor

result. Whatever happens are only conditioned phenomena, beyond control. There is no one there who suffers. When we see the benefit of the teachings we can have more confidence to continue to develop understanding. This is the most precious in life.

Acharn spoke in the bus to our friend Thai about Dhamma. He was holding the microphone all that time so that, later on, we all could hear this conversation. She explained that the world is quite different from the way it was before hearing Dhamma. She said: “Before understanding can be firmly established about the way the world is, it takes time to develop it from hearing, considering. The first time one has listened it is not enough. One cannot let go of anything. Attachment is there, hiding. We can begin to let go.” Thai remarked that this is a long way. Acharn answered: “A long way, so long as ignorance and attachment are accumulated. There can be more confidence in hearing, considering.”

Acharn explained that we live as in a dream. We think of ourselves as being on the bus. When we will be at the hotel everything is gone. In a dream there is always “I” and different things. In our life different objects appear, just one characteristic at a time. The most difficult thing is that the development of understanding has to be natural. Not a person develops understanding, it is understanding that develops because of the right conditions. When there is no expectation realities appear as anattā.

Nāma and rūpa arise and fall away extremely rapidly. Every citta is followed by another citta without any interval, and thus, it seems that citta can stay. Rūpa does not fall away as rapidly as citta, it lasts as long as seventeen moments of citta. However, it still falls away rapidly and so long as there are conditions it is followed by another rūpa. All the sense objects we experience at this moment seem to last, it seems they were there already for a while when we experience them. Time and again Acharn reminded us that dhammas arise and fall away and that only a sign or nimitta is left of them when they have fallen away already. There is a sign or nimitta of each of the five khandhas that arise and fall away: of the khandhas of rūpa, of feeling, of remembrance (saññā), of the other cetasikas (sañkhārakkhandha) and of citta (viññāṇa-kkhandha). This is sañkhāra nimitta, the nimitta of conditioned realities⁶. It is impossible to have awareness and direct understanding of just one unit of rūpa or one citta. She said: “We do not have to think of nimitta, it appears. There is a little glimpse of that which is seen, different from when one closes one’s eyes. But we should not try to know

⁶ The “Path of Discrimination” (“Patisambhidhamagga”), I, 438 speaks about seeing as terror the signs (nimittas) of each of the five khandhas, whereas nibbāna is animitta, without sign. Sañkhāra nimitta also occurs in the Visuddhimagga XXI, 38.

it, it is useless. One begins to see the rapidity of the arising and falling away of realities. One clings to that which has gone. Only a sign is left.”

We cannot catch visible object that arises now, but there is seeing again and again and visible object appears again and again. This gives us an idea of continuity. We think of shape and form and because of the cetasika remembrance, *saññā*, which marks and remembers the object that is experienced, we recognize different people and things. Acharn said: “There are ignorance and attachment. There are always ideas of people in the world until right understanding can see that this is the world of *nimitta*, and that nothing is permanent.”

Jonathan remarked that we do not have to stop seeing people. Thinking of people is conditioned, it is real. The teaching of *nimitta* is beneficial, we can come to see that *dhammas* are beyond control, *anattā*. It is useless to cling to what has gone already. One may try to focus on visible object or another sense object in order to know it, but it has gone when we try to think about it. When people asked whether *nimitta* is a concept or reality Acharn answered: “It is now.” Instead of thinking of words there should be understanding of what appears now.

After our sojourn in Vietnam we returned to Thailand and some of our Vietnamese friends joined us in order to have more Dhamma discussions. There were sessions at the Foundation⁷ and we went twice to Kaeng Krachan where we had Dhamma conversations.

A Cambodian monk often came to the Thai sessions at the Foundation. At a certain time in the morning he was invited to have his meal and he went away. He tried to spend as little time as possible with his meal so that he could promptly return to the Dhamma session. At the end of my stay a short trip was organised to Chiangmai and after that to Chiangrai which is higher in the mountains. The Cambodian monk was also invited to join and in the plane to Chiangmai he spoke during the whole trip about the Dhamma with Khun Noppadom.

In Chiangmai I met with many old friends again. We all had lunch together and after that there was a Dhamma discussion. Acharn explained about contiguity-condition, *anantara-paccaya*: each *citta* that falls away conditions the arising of the next *citta* without any interval. Even so the last *citta* of this life, the dying-consciousness (*cuti-citta*) is immediately succeeded by the rebirth-consciousness of the next life. All our good and bad inclinations are accumulated from moment to moment, from life to life. Listening and considering the Dhamma is never

⁷ The Dhamma Study and Support Foundation. This is the center where all sessions with Acharn Sujin take place each weekend.

lost: understanding is accumulated and it can grow in the course of countless lives.

Acharn explained about citta that experiences an object. Every citta must experience an object. That object is a condition for citta by way of object-condition. If sound does not arise there cannot be hearing. Sound is object-condition for hearing. We have to consider this now, while there is hearing. This is the way to know what ultimate realities, paramattha dhammas, are which each have their inalterable characteristic. Nobody can change their characteristics. When we hear a harsh sound, the hearing is vipākacitta, the result of former kamma. We cannot select what is heard, we cannot say: let hearing not occur. Paramattha dhammas are different from concepts and ideas that are merely objects of thinking. We live mostly in the world of concepts but we should not try to change this.

The second day in Chiangmai we visited a sick person in hospital. We went there with a small group. The patient was unable to talk, but he could understand very well what we were saying. Before his sickness he used to attend the Dhamma sessions in Chiangmai. Acharn inquired with utmost gentleness and kindness about his wellbeing and then she spoke about Dhamma to him. This reminds me that the Buddha, when he visited sick monks, would, full of compassion, first inquire about their physical condition and then teach Dhamma to them. Acharn asked each one of us to speak to our sick friend about what we learnt during the discussions. I spoke to him about the usefulness of discussions and asking questions. The day before I had encouraged the listeners to ask questions, explaining that if one does not ask questions, paññā will not grow. Discussions are a means to test one's understanding and to consider more. This visit was a real family gathering.

Later on we went by car to a meditation center in Chiengrai. The person who had invited us had provided a luncheon for us in a building high up on a hill. During the luncheon Acharn talked to our hostess about Dhamma untiringly. Most people here were used to being in a quiet place in order to meditate. Wherever Acharn is, she will always speak about the reality appearing now. The Buddha taught about seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and the experience of tangible object through the bodysense. They arise when there are conditions for their arising and nobody can make them arise at will. Understanding of them can be developed anywhere, at any time. The Buddha taught in detail about realities so that people would come to understand their nature of anattā.

Chapter 4

The Right Path and the Wrong Path

Akusala citta, unwholesome consciousness, arises very often in a day and kusala citta arises seldom. After seeing and hearing clinging to the object arises but this is unknown. Acharn reminded us many times that the development of right understanding is a process that takes a long time, even aeons. We have accumulated life after life ignorance and wrong view, diṭṭhi. Diṭṭhi is an akusala cetasika which may arise with clinging. We cling to an idea of self, we want to have more awareness and understanding. Also understanding is merely a dhamma arising because of conditions and it cannot be manipulated by a self. We move away from developing understanding of the present object when we have an idea of wanting to do specific things in order to have more understanding. This is wrong practice, sīlabbata parāmāsa, clinging to rites and rituals. Even when we are slightly trying to have more understanding or we are thinking about having more understanding, we are already on the wrong Path.

I had a short discussion with Acharn.

Acharn: Would you like to have satipaṭṭhāna ⁸ right now?"

Nina: "I would like to."

Acharn: "That is already wrong practice, sīlabbata parāmāsa, clinging to rites and rituals."

Only paññā can know when there is wrong view and this is the beginning of right understanding. The sotāpanna who has attained the first stage of enlightenment has eradicated wrong view and wrong practice. Thus, when one has not reached that stage one can be caught up with wrong practice without even realizing this.

We can easily mislead ourselves. We may turn our attention to what appears at the present moment, but there may be a subtle idea of wanting to do this, or trying just a little. Sarah said: "A subtle path - the middle way of understanding very, very naturally any time at all, without thinking about it or trying to make it happen even a little."

⁸ Satipaṭṭhāna is the development of right understanding of mental phenomena and physical phenomena appearing at the present moment.

The word meditation is often used, but we should know that there are two kinds of meditation or mental development: the development of samatha or calm and the development of insight or vipassanā. Also before the Buddha's time samatha was developed. The aim of samatha is to become freed from sense objects and from the attachment that is bound to arise on account of them. Defilements can be temporarily suppressed in samatha but they cannot be eradicated. The development of vipassanā is the development of right understanding of nāma and rūpa as they appear in daily life. Nāma and rūpa, ultimate realities, not concepts, are the objects of insight. The aim is the eradication of the wrong view of self, ignorance and all other defilements.

In Kaeng Krachan we had very lively discussions with one of our friends who said that he finds a meditation center useful in order to clear up the daily rubbish. He found that after a few days the mind becomes less restless, more calm, more concentrated. He could have peace of mind. Actually, this is thinking about one's mind. But there is no mind that stays. Every moment there is citta, and only paññā can clearly know whether the citta is kusala citta or akusala citta. Concentration, samādhi, is a cetasika that accompanies every citta. Its function is to focus on the object that appears so that citta can experience it. Each citta can experience only one object because of samādhi. When samādhi accompanies akusala citta it is wrong concentration, micchāsamādhi, and when it accompanies kusala citta it is right concentration, sammāsamādhi. When someone tries very hard to concentrate on a meditation subject in order to become calm, he may take for right concentration what is actually wrong concentration with attachment and wrong view. Some people think when there is no like or dislike of an object and the feeling is indifferent that they have true calm. In reality there may be citta rooted in ignorance, moha-mūlacitta, which is accompanied by indifferent feeling.

Those who want to develop samatha, calm, with a suitable meditation subject should know when kusala citta arises and when akusala citta. They should also have right understanding of the meditation subject that can condition calm. Thus, for the development of samatha paññā is indispensable. Our friend who found a meditation center useful spoke about mettā as a suitable meditation subject. Acharn asked him whether he knows the difference between selfish affection and mettā when looking at his child. We all have attachment and unselfish love alternately and it is most difficult to distinguish between them. Only paññā can clearly distinguish between them. Our friend listened attentively and he gave us in the end a summary of what he learnt from the discussions with Acharn: "Forget to try. Do not move away from reality and from paññā. Paññā conditions detachment from self."

As soon as one wants to do specific things in order to have more calm and understanding, there is an idea of self and one is following a wrong practice. Understanding can be developed of whatever object appears and there should be no selection, no preference for particular objects or particular circumstances. Someone in Vietnam wanted to change her lifestyle in order to have more favorable conditions for the development of paññā. If one thinks in this way one forgets again about anattā. One clings to an idea of self who wants to do specific things. We encouraged her not to change her lifestyle. It is because of conditions that we are in such or such circumstances. We should come to know our natural inclinations in order to see them as conditioned dhamma. Understanding can be developed no matter where one lives, no matter what one's activities are. Seeing is seeing everywhere and it experiences visible object. Paññā develops along with detachment.

On the occasion of Acharn's birthday we went to a school near Kaeng Krachan. It is a school for poor children in the neighbourhood and the support of this school was one of Khun Duangduen's charity projects. A delicious and nourishing meal was provided for the hungry pupils. We noticed that many of them stood in queue twice with their plates to get another helping. Some of the children had prepared a speech and did their utmost to read it out in excellent English. We all helped in sharing out sweets and also a gift of money for the school was handed to the teachers. It was an excellent way of celebrating a birthday with loving kindness, mettā.

We should not blindly follow others, but carefully consider each word of the teachings. Acharn often referred to the Mahā-Mangalasutta, the Greatest Blessings (Sutta Nipāta, II, 4), stating:

“Not associating with fools, but associating with the wise.”

We read in the “Book of Analysis” (second book of the Abhidhamma, Ch 17, §901) about wrong friendship:

“Therein, what is ‘having evil friends’? There are those persons who are without confidence, of wrong morality, without learning, mean, of no wisdom. That which is dependence on, strong dependence on, complete dependence on, approaching, approaching intimately, devotion to, complete devotion to, entanglement with them. This is called having evil friends.”

We have accumulated so much ignorance and wrong view, and, thus, we can easily mislead ourselves as to the truth. Some people believe, in order to develop right understanding, that one must first clean oneself from impurities, but, when there is ignorance one takes for kusala what is akusala. How does one know for

sure? There must be clear understanding of kusala and of akusala, and this can only be right at the moment they appear. Paññā must be very keen to know this and only theoretical understanding is not sufficient.

Before hearing the Dhamma we used to believe that the whole wide world with all the people in it, and things such as a table or a tree were real. Now we heard that we can think of a person or a table but that these are not realities that can be directly experienced through the five senses and the mind-door. Hearing or listening to the Dhamma means listening to anyone who can explain correctly what the Buddha taught in the Tipiṭaka. We do not have to think of a particular person. Or it can be reading and studying the Buddha's words. We always have to verify ourselves what we heard, it has to be our own understanding, not someone else's. We touch what is called a table and hardness may appear. We can find out for ourselves whether hardness has an inalterable characteristic. Is hardness always hardness, no matter how we call it? We learnt that it is an ultimate reality, a paramattha dhamma, and we should verify whether this is true. It is different from a table we can only think of. We can only verify the truth of what appears now, what is real. This is not a matter of naming, remembering numbers, it is not theory.

Nāma and rūpa appear one at a time and each one of them has its own characteristic. These characteristics cannot be changed. Seeing, for example, has its own characteristic; we can give it another name, but its characteristic cannot be changed. Seeing is always seeing for everybody, no matter whether it is seeing of an animal or of any other living being. Concepts are only objects of thinking, they are not realities with their own characteristics, and, thus, they are not objects of which right understanding is to be developed. Nāma and rūpa which are real in the ultimate sense are the objects of which right understanding should be developed.

In the beginning paññā does not clearly understand realities but the right way of its development can be understood. One knows that the realities that appear at the present moment should be considered and investigated again and again so that understanding can grow.

During one of the Thai sessions in the Foundation the “Subrahmā Sutta” (Kindred Sayings I, Ch 2, § 7) and its commentary were discussed.

The commentary to this sutta states that the young deva Subrahmā who lived in the Tāvātimsa heaven went to the Nandana park with a thousand nymphs. Five hundred of them sat with him under the Parichattaka tree and five hundred climbed in the tree, throwing garlands on him and singing for him. They suddenly deceased and were reborn in the Avīci Hell. Subrahmā saw with his divine Eye their fate and he knew that he would only live seven more days. He went to

see the Buddha and spoke about his anxiety. We read in the Subrahmā Sutta (Kindred Sayings I, Ch 2, § 7) ⁹:

“Always frightened is this mind,
The mind is always agitated
About unarisen problems
And about arisen ones.
If there exists release from fear,
Being asked, please declare it to me.”
“Not apart from enlightenment and austerity,
Not apart from restraint of the sense faculties,
Not apart from relinquishing all,
Do I see any safety for living beings.”

The commentary states that, after he followed the Buddha’s advice, he became a sotāpanna. The commentary explains that he developed the factors leading to enlightenment. At the moment of right awareness and right understanding of the object appearing through one of the senses or the mind-door, there is restraint of the sense faculties (indriya samvara sīla). The sense-doors are guarded. As to the expression “relinquishing all” this denotes nibbāna. Only paññā developed to the stage of lokuttara paññā that attains nibbāna leads to complete safety.

Like Subrahmā, we are overcome by attachment time and again. Ignorance of realities conditions clinging to whatever object appears. We cling to beautiful colours, to pleasant sounds, to delicious food, to dear people and to comfort. It seems that pleasant objects can stay because each dhamma that falls away very rapidly is followed by another dhamma. Subrahmā, after he saw the unhappy rebirth of the five hundred Fairies and realized that he would not live much longer, had a sense of urgency. Because of the Buddha’s words he saw the benefit of right understanding that is the only way to safety from an unhappy rebirth. So long as there is ignorance and clinging there cannot be freedom from the cycle of birth and death.

⁹ I used the translation of Ven. Bodhi, in his “Collected Discourses of the Buddha”, p. 149.

There are several radio programs in Thai of Acharn Sujin broadcasted every day. In the morning and in the evening some of these programs are preceded by a poem recited by Khun Unnop about the danger of ignorance and about the benefit of understanding. The words are as follows:

“Because of ignorance we have to be in the world

Because of ignorance we suffer in misery

Because of ignorance we have to be deluded for a long time

Because of ignorance we associate with fools

Because of ignorance we burn ourselves and destroy ourselves.

Because of knowing the Dhamma we learn continuously

Because of knowing the Dhamma we are diligent in the development of kusala

Because of knowing the Dhamma we clearly understand that there are no beings, no persons,

Because of knowing the Dhamma we let go of self, we are free from danger.”

The arahat who has eradicated ignorance and all defilements has no more conditions for rebirth. We still have conditions to be reborn again and again in future lives. We may believe that rebirth is pleasant, but so long as one is not a sotāpanna one can still be subject to rebirth in an unhappy plane, or rebirth in a place where there is no opportunity for hearing the Dhamma. It is sorrowful to continue being in the cycle of birth and death and it is a blessing to be freed from the cycle.

Chapter 5

Basic Aspects of Dhamma

Acharn was asked to speak more about the beginning of development of understanding, about basics. She said: “The beginning is understanding what is real right now. What is the nature of seeing now? Understand dhamma now, dhamma is not self. This is the benefit of hearing... Basic is listening to the truth of the teachings, understanding what is now. Listening to him [the Buddha] is basic. There is seeing right now, but there is no understanding of anattā. There can be confidence that paññā can develop so that it really understands that nothing can be taken for self. This is the beginning. It has to be one’s own understanding. Never move away from what appears.”

We read in the “Gradual Sayings” (Book of the Eights, Ch 1, § 5, Worldly Failings) that the Buddha spoke about eight worldly conditions: gain and loss, fame and obscurity, praise and blame, contentment and pain. These worldly conditions are the ups and downs of life. Actually, this sutta exhorts us to develop right understanding of whatever appears at the present moment. The Buddha spoke the following verse:

“Gain, loss, obscurity and fame,
 And censure, praise, contentment, pain -
 These are man’s states - impermanent,
 Of time and subject unto change.
 And recognizing these the sage,
 Alert, discerns these things of change;
 Fair things his mind never agitate,
 Nor foul his spirit vex. Gone are
 Compliance and hostility,
 Gone up in smoke and are no more.
 The goal he knows. In measure full
 He knows the stainless, griefless state.
 Beyond becoming has he gone.”

When we read about gain and loss and the other worldly conditions we are inclined to think of a self who is subject to such experiences. Our happiness seems to depend on the pleasant worldly conditions, we attach great importance to them. We want to be treated well by others and we are disturbed when people blame us. We forget that there is no self who experiences gain and loss, praise and blame. We forget that the worldly conditions are just dhammas, not “me” or “mine”. We are inclined to think of a whole situation, pleasant or unpleasant, but we have to grasp the deeper meaning of this sutta. This sutta reminds us that the realities of our life arise and fall away all the time, that they do not last and are beyond control. They have their appropriate conditions for their arising and it is unpredictable what will arise next. We may think for a long time about the loss of a dear person, but in reality there is no one there, as Acharn reminded us all the time. There are only nāma and rūpa which arise because of their appropriate conditions and fall away rapidly, never to return. Merely thinking of gain and loss, praise and blame will not lead to detachment from the wrong view of self and to the eradication of ignorance and all defilements.

The Buddha taught for forty-five years about paramattha dhammas, ultimate realities: citta, cetasika, rūpa and nibbāna. Citta, cetasika and rūpa can be objects of understanding when they appear now, one at a time. When we hear words of praise there are actually many different dhammas: hearing hears only sound, not words of praise, but thinking of a whole story of words of praise follows shortly afterwards. We can learn that hearing is only a conditioned dhamma, that sound is only a conditioned dhamma and that thinking is only a conditioned dhamma. None of these is self or belongs to a self. Words of praise are concepts we think of, they are not paramattha dhammas.

One may wonder how it is known when a concept is the object of citta and when a paramattha dhamma. It can only be known just now. Now we seem to see people and different things such as a computer or a table. The object of citta is not just visible object, not just sound, not just one object through one of the six doorways. There are wholes, conglomerations, a collection of things like a person, like a landscape. We can be sure that we are mostly thinking of concepts. When paññā has been developed to the degree of direct understanding the difference will be clearly discerned.

On account of what is experienced through the senses, different feelings arise: pleasant feeling, unpleasant feeling or indifferent feeling. The Buddha taught that feeling is only a dhamma, a cetasika, accompanying every citta. He taught about feeling in detail so that we would be less inclined to take it for self or mine. Akusala cittas that are rooted in attachment, lobha, can be accompanied by pleasant feeling or indifferent feeling. Akusala cittas that are rooted in aversion, dosa, are accompanied by unpleasant feeling. Akusala cittas that are rooted

in ignorance, moha, are accompanied by indifferent feeling. Kusala cittas are either accompanied by pleasant feeling or by indifferent feeling. It seems that feelings stay for a while, but they arise and fall away extremely rapidly together with the citta they accompany. When we think of pleasant feeling or unpleasant feeling it is gone already.

When we understand that whatever feeling arises is only a conditioned dhamma we will be less inclined to be led by feeling on account of happy experiences or unhappy experiences. When we read a sutta about pleasant events and unpleasant events, we should remember that every sutta points to paramattha dhammas. We should carefully consider what we read so that there will be conditions for the arising of direct understanding of realities later on.

At this moment we are seeing, hearing and thinking. Seeing sees what is visible, what appears through the eyes. We may believe that it lasts, but in fact it falls away. We cannot make seeing arise whenever we want to and we cannot make it last. When hearing arises, there is no longer seeing. Hearing experiences sound. It seems that we can see and hear at the same time, but in reality this is not so. Seeing arises because of the right conditions, because there is eyesense and visible object. Hearing arises because of earsense and sound. Seeing and hearing are different moments of consciousness, which each arise depending on their own conditions. We cannot direct them, we are not the owner of seeing and hearing.

Thinking is again another moment of consciousness. It arises because of its own conditions. There are different moments of consciousness arising one at a time and falling away immediately. We believe that I see, I hear, I think, but actually, there are just different moments of consciousness. The Buddha taught that there is no self, no person who can direct the phenomena of life.

Acharn said: “Actually, what is appearing now? Is there any understanding of it? It cannot be taken for I. We can talk about satipatṭhāna for a long time but what about this moment? Is there the realization that there is no one at that moment at all? Most important is understanding that there is actually no self. Begin with that understanding to follow each word, understanding that there is no self, even if it is theoretical understanding... When there is no understanding at all, it is ‘I’ all the way. Even sammā-sati, right awareness, can be followed by the idea of I, but it is not known. That is why paññā has to be developed on and on, with the understanding of no self. Until all realities can appear in daily life as no self.”

The rūpa that is visible object can be experienced by several cittas arising in a process. Only seeing sees visible object, and the other cittas of that process do not see, but they perform other functions while they experience visible object. When visible object, sound or another sense object has been

experienced by cittas arising in a sense-door process, it is experienced by cittas arising in a mind-door process. Thus, rūpa can be experienced through a sense-door and after the sense-door process is over, it is experienced through the mind-door.

Seeing, hearing and the other sense-cognitions are vipākacittas, results of kamma, a wholesome or unwholesome deed performed in the past. They are not the only vipākacittas arising in our life. The first citta of our life, the rebirth-consciousness (paṭisandhi-citta), was the result of kamma. It is followed by life-continuum, bhavanga-citta, which is the same type of vipākacitta and conditioned by the same kamma that produced our rebirth. There are countless bhavanga-cittas arising in our life. They keep the continuity in life so that we are the same individual during that lifespan. Bhavanga-cittas do not experience objects impinging on the senses and the mind-door, they experience the same object as the rebirth-consciousness. They do not arise in a process of cittas that experience objects through the six doorways. When we are fast asleep and not dreaming there are bhavanga-cittas. At such moments we do not know where we are and who we are. We do not see or hear. Also in between processes bhavanga-cittas arise.

Within a process not only vipākacittas arise, there are kiriyacittas which are neither kusala citta nor akusala citta and there are kusala cittas or akusala cittas, arising mostly in a series of seven, that experience the object that impinged on a sense-door or the mind-door. For example, the object that was seen or heard can be experienced with attachment, aversion or understanding. We cling to all sense objects and clinging arises very shortly after seeing, hearing or the other sense-cognitions have fallen away. We are ignorant of the different cittas that arise and fall away extremely rapidly. We believe that we are still hearing a pleasant sound when in reality the vipākacitta that hears has fallen away and akusala citta that clings has already arisen.

It is most beneficial that the Buddha taught about the processes of cittas; it shows that the cittas that arise and fall away extremely rapidly and perform each their own function cannot be controlled. They are anattā.

Someone asked me whether I was not bored hearing the same thing over and over again throughout all these years. I undertake long journeys to listen to Acharn Sujin and to have Dhamma discussions with friends. It never is enough because an enormous amount of ignorance and wrong view has been accumulated. We need courage and patience. Patience to listen again, consider again. We need to be reminded of the truth very often. When we hear that seeing does not see people, only the rūpa that is visible object, that impinges on the eyesense, we should not expect to really grasp the truth immediately.

Acharn said: “One can understand that the development of right understanding is not just in one or two days, not in a week, a month, not in a life time, more than that. It is better to have a little understanding from time to time.”

This is an excellent reminder not to reach for levels of understanding one is not ready for. We should be grateful that we can listen to the teachings and begin to consider the reality that appears now. That is pariyatti.

What is the Abhidhamma is a question that is often raised. The Abhidhamma is an exposition of all realities in detail. The prefix “abhi” is used in the sense of “preponderance” or “distinction”. “Abhidhamma” means “higher Dhamma” or “Dhamma in detail”.

The Abhidhamma is not a theory one finds in a textbook; the teaching of the Abhidhamma is about all the realities that appear at this moment. The Abhidhamma teaches about seeing, about thinking of what was seen, about all the defilements arising on account of what is experienced through the senses and the mind-door. We should study the Abhidhamma in order to understand what is appearing now, otherwise the study is useless. The Abhidhamma brings us back to the present moment all the time. Coming to know what appears at this moment, be it seeing, hearing or thinking, will be more helpful than thinking of a situation in the past or a feeling which arose then. Because what arose is already gone and there is no way to clearly know its characteristic.

Those who have not studied the Abhidhamma may think of states of mind that can be there for a long time. Through the Abhidhamma we know that cittas arise and fall away all the time. After seeing has fallen away there are likely to be attachment and ignorance, but they may be subtle, we may not notice them. One may believe that kindness is a state of mind that can last for some time. But even when doing kind acts, there arise in between seeing, hearing, other sense-cognitions or defilements.

Understanding can be developed of whatever reality appears. We should not mind whether it is kusala or akusala, and if we mind it shows clinging to the self. Nobody can change what has appeared already. It is important to know all kinds of dhammas, not only mettā, but also seeing, hearing, attachment, anger, whatever appears now.

Every citta is accompanied by mental factors, cetasikas. Citta conditions cetasika and cetasika conditions citta, they have to arise together. Some cetasikas accompany every citta, such as feeling or remembrance (saññā), some accompany only akusala citta or only kusala citta. The Buddha taught in detail about the cetasikas which accompany kusala citta, the cetasikas which accompany akusala citta and the cetasikas which accompany cittas which are neither kusala nor aku-

sala but vipākacitta (citta that is result of kamma), and kiriyacitta, inoperative citta. If we do not know this distinction we can easily be misled when we read the definitions of the cetasikas. For example, loving kindness, mettā, arises with kusala citta whereas attachment arises with akusala citta. Generally, people think that affection and attachment to one's family members is good. Moreover, they have an idea of "my attachment". When one enjoys the company of dear people it is selfishness, not pure kindness. Kusala citta is always accompanied by the cetasikas alobha, non-attachment and non-aversion, adosa.

During the discussions, questions were raised about the meaning of different cetasikas such as effort, volition and concentration. We should not be misled by words in translations. Only direct understanding can know characteristics of realities. We read in the texts about viriya, energy or effort, and some people want to apply effort to have more understanding. Effort arises with many types of citta, it arises with kusala citta as well as with akusala citta. When we are clinging to having more understanding and apply effort thereto, there is wrong effort, akusala viriya. If we do not realize when akusala citta arises and when kusala citta we may delude ourselves and take wrong effort for right effort. As understanding of the level of pariyatti grows, there is kusala viriya already because of conditions. We do not have to think of applying effort.

The cetasikas volition and concentration arise with every citta. We may mistake volition and concentration that are akusala for kusala. We may try very hard to focus on visible object, concentrate on it, in order to know it as it is without realizing that this is done with clinging.

We should not try to experience different cetasikas. Most important, they have to be known as just a dhamma, a conditioned dhamma that is not mine or self. Paññā grows very gradually, and if it is not known what nāma is, the dhamma that experiences an object, different from rūpa, the difference between cetasikas cannot be realized. Without the Buddha's teaching in detail about realities we would delude ourselves our whole life.

Chapter 6

Confidence

We read in the Vakkali Sutta (Kindred Sayings (III, Kindred Sayings on Elements, Ch 4, § 87) that Vakkali was sick and that the Buddha came to visit him. Vakkali said that he had wanted to see the Buddha. The Buddha answered:

“Hush, Vakkali! What is there in seeing this vile body of mine? He who sees the Dhamma, he sees me: he who sees me, Vakkali, he sees the Dhamma. Verily, seeing the Dhamma, Vakkali, one sees me: seeing me, one sees the Dhamma.”

Seeing the Buddha refers to the nine lokuttara dhammas: the eight lokuttara cittas subsequently arising at the four stages of enlightenment when the lokuttara dhamma that is nibbāna is experienced by these lokuttara cittas. When one has attained enlightenment one comes to understand what Buddhahood means. The Buddha always taught about dhamma or reality appearing at the present moment, so that people would come to understand the true nature of anattā. Without the Buddha’s teaching, we would be completely ignorant of dhammas such as seeing and visible object, hearing and sound, of all objects that can be experienced one at a time through the six doorways.

During the Dhamma sessions in Vietnam Acharn would often refer to the Buddha who taught us about all that is real out of compassion. She said: “Who is the Buddha? The greatest understanding and compassion.” The highest respect we can pay him is studying carefully each word of his teachings.

After his enlightenment the Buddha pondered about the profundity and subtlety of the Dhamma. We read in the “Kindred Sayings” (I, Ch 6, Brahmāsamyutta, I) that the Buddha spoke the following verse¹⁰:

“Enough now with trying to teach
 what I found with so much hardship;
 This Dhamma is not easily understood
 By those oppressed by lust and hate.
 Those fired by lust, obscured by darkness,

¹⁰ I used the translation by Ven. Bodhi in his “Connected Discourses of the Buddha”.

Will never see this abstruse Dhamma,
 Deep, hard to see, subtle,
 Going against the stream.”

The Brahmā Sahampati asked him to teach Dhamma. The Buddha surveyed the world with the eye of a Buddha and saw that some beings had little dust in their eyes and some much dust. Out of compassion he decided to teach Dhamma.

The teaching of Dhamma goes against the stream of common thought, because many people do not accept that there is no self, that all realities are beyond control. It is difficult to really comprehend the nature of anattā, but there can be a beginning of understanding of the reality appearing at this moment. Very gradually understanding can grow. Acharn said that one cannot know who the Buddha is without understanding his teachings. She compared our understanding and his understanding with the earth and the sky. Before hearing his teachings we did not know that seeing at this moment is a dhamma, a conditioned reality that is non-self. We did not know that noticing people is not seeing but thinking. We did not see the danger of clinging to sense objects, to being enslaved to them. We did not see the danger of ignorance of realities. The development of intellectual understanding can lead to direct understanding of realities, which is different from thinking about them. If seeing is not the object of direct understanding, the idea of self cannot be eliminated. Seeing arises and falls away and it never returns.

When there is a degree of understanding of whatever appears now, we can have gratitude to the Buddha’s teachings and contemplate his wisdom, his purity and his compassion. Since ignorance and attachment were accumulated for aeons, from life to life, the development of understanding is bound to take an endlessly long time. However, it is the only way leading to the eradication of ignorance and all other defilements.

During the discussions in Vietnam Acharn was speaking about the observance of the precepts. We take avoidance of akusala for self. She said: “What reality avoids? The cetasika that is abstinence (virati). There is no one at all. That is the difference between the teaching of the Buddha and that of others. *Buddham saraṇaṃ gacchāmi, Dhammaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi, Saṅghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi*¹¹. I take my refuge in the Buddha. He is my refuge.”

¹¹ I take refuge in the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha.

One may wonder why it is necessary to develop right understanding of such common realities as seeing and hearing. They appear time and again and they are conditioned dhammas that arise and fall away never to return. We take them for self and mine. Understanding can come to see them as just conditioned dhammas. As understanding develops there will be more confidence that it is worthwhile to know the truth of all realities appearing in daily life. We shall learn that there are two types of realities: the reality that experiences an object, *nāma*, and the reality that does not know anything, *rūpa*. First we know this by intellectual understanding, but this is not sufficient to eliminate clinging to a self. When understanding grows *nāma* and *rūpa* can be directly understood as non-self, without the need to think about them.

Very often during our discussions Acharn mentioned the importance of confidence in the Buddha's teachings. Confidence, *saddhā*, is a *sobhana* (beautiful) *cetasika* arising with every *kusala citta*. It has purifying as characteristic and it sees the benefit of *kusala*. Without confidence there cannot be any way of *kusala*, be it *dāna*, *sīla*, the development of calm or the development of right understanding of realities.

The Expositor (*Atthasālinī*, commentary to the *Dhammasangani*, the first book of the *Abhidhamma I*, Part IV, Chapter I, 119) states that confidence is the forerunner of all kinds of *kusala*. When we see the benefit of *kusala* we apply ourselves with confidence to whatever type of *kusala* there is an opportunity for.

The conventional sense of confidence or faith may be misleading. One may mistake faith that goes together with attachment and happy feeling for the reality of confidence, *saddhā*. However, confidence, *saddhā*, is *kusala* and it always goes together with detachment. It is difficult to know its characteristic, but *paññā*, when it is developed, can realize its characteristic.

Confidence is an *indriya*, a controlling faculty. It governs the accompanying dhammas, *citta* and *cetasikas*, in its quality of purifying and of confiding in *kusala*. It overcomes lack of confidence in *kusala*. Some dhammas are classified as *indriyas*, they are "leaders" each in their own field. Five faculties are sometimes referred to as "spiritual faculties". These are *sobhana cetasikas* (beautiful mental factors) included in the "factors of enlightenment" (*bodhipakkiya dhammas*) that should be developed for the attaining of enlightenment. They are: faith or confidence (*saddhā*), energy (*virīya*), mindfulness (*sati*), concentration (*samādhi*) and understanding (*paññā*).

When confidence is still weak it is not an *indriya*. There should be confidence that whatever appears can be object of right understanding, and then one does not move away from the present object. Confidence prevents wrong understanding and wrong practice. One should not have an idea of "I have confidence", be-

cause confidence is a dhamma that is non-self. For the sotāpanna who has realized the four noble Truths saddhā has become an indriya. He has an unshakable confidence in the Triple Gem.

Acharn gave us invaluable advice throughout our journey. She said: “There can be confidence that paññā can be developed so that it is really understood that nothing can be taken for self. This is the beginning. It has to be your own understanding. Never move away from what appears. Is there understanding of anattā or is there still an idea that you can do anything? Otherwise we just talk about the words of the teachings without any understanding of anattā. It takes a long time. Understanding right now is accumulated for the future. Right understanding now is the condition for right understanding in the future, not by doing anything.

Who understands the teachings of the Buddha will listen more, consider more and leave it to anattā, because the development of understanding is conditioned. If one tries to have it, it is not anattā. What arises is the world: that which experiences and that which does not experience anything.”

We have to leave the development of understanding to conditions, to anattā. We are inclined to think that we have to do something, to apply energy, in order to know the truth. Acharn often reminds us that there is bound to be an idea of self who is striving. By listening and considering the reality that appears at this moment we can have confidence that understanding of the level of pariyatti will become firmer. When the conditions are right, awareness and direct understanding can arise. We are fortunate that we are in the situation to be able to listen and study the Buddha’s teachings.

I am most grateful to Acharn Sujin for reminding us all the time that there is no one there, only different realities. One may wonder when understanding of the level of paṭipatti, that is the level of direct awareness and understanding, can arise. When we wonder about this it is already clinging to a self. As Acharn said, we should leave it all to anattā, to conditions. We can appreciate more the value of understanding of the level of pariyatti, intellectual understanding of the reality appearing now. Without the Buddha’s teaching we would be completely ignorant of the present reality, we would not know when there is clinging, even a little, to more understanding. As Acharn reminded us, instead of wondering when there can be direct understanding it is better to have a little understanding from time to time.

The perfection of truthfulness or sincerity is one of the perfections¹² that should be developed along with right understanding leading eventually to enlightenment. We need truthfulness to investigate all realities of our daily life, our defilements included. Truthfulness is one of the perfections that should be developed. Do we believe that we see persons? Doesn't it really seem that we see them? Then we think of concepts. It is citta that thinks. At that very moment we have to consider what citta is. We have to consider the nature of citta, the element that experiences, again and again, when it appears, with great patience. We all have so much to learn. We have an idea that we touch a spoon, cup, fork, plate. We have to be sincere and really consider what appears at the present moment.

Truthfulness, patience, courage, all the perfections support the growth of right understanding so that it can eventually perform the function of detachment from all conditioned realities. We may take akusala citta for kusala citta, but we have to verify the truth and this takes courage and patience. The development of understanding of realities will take many lives, but even when right understanding just begins to develop we come to know things we did not know before. Instead of being distressed about our ignorance and clinging we can be grateful to the Buddha who taught us the wisdom which can eradicate all defilements. Being distressed or discouraged is actually clinging to the idea of a self who wants more progress. It is thanks to the Buddha that we can begin to develop right understanding of the realities of daily life. Understanding of the present reality can be developed while working in an office or doing house work, while talking or being silent, while laughing or crying. When we begin to understand the reality appearing at the present moment we may remember that this is due to the Buddha's teachings and then there can be recollection of the qualities of the Buddha.

We read in the "Discourse on the Simile of the Cloth" (Middle Length Sayings I, no. 7) that the Buddha speaks about the defilements of the mind which are: greed, covetousness, malevolence, anger, malice, hypocrisy, spite, envy, stinginess, deceit, treachery, obstinacy, impetuosity, arrogance, pride, conceit and indolence. When the monk knows them as they are he can get rid of them. The text states:

"When, monks, the monk thinks that greed and covetousness is a defilement of the mind... that indolence is a defilement of the mind, and having known it thus, the defilement of the mind that is indolence is got rid of, he becomes possessed of unwavering confidence in the

¹² The perfections or pāramīs are: generosity, morality, renunciation, wisdom, energy, patience, truthfulness, determination, loving kindness, equanimity. The Buddha developed these for aeons in order to become the Sammāsambuddha.

Awakened One and thinks: ‘Thus indeed is he the Lord, perfected, wholly self-awakened, endowed with knowledge and right conduct, well-farer, knower of the worlds, incomparable charioteer of men to be tamed, teacher of devas and mankind, the Awakened One, the Lord.’ ”
