

Once upon a Time

Nina Van Gorkom

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Preface.

In January 2014, a year after my last journey, Acharn ¹ Sujin and Sarah had organised another sojourn in Thailand for our Vietnamese friends, including a girl of five years old, and other Dhamma friends from different countries: from Canada, Australia, from the U.S., from Japan and from Italy. In the Hague I had had an accident in the tramway and broken my hip. I was happy to be able to make the journey after several months of hard training with my therapist. A day trip was planned to Bangsai, near Ayuthaya, and shortly after that we would go to Kaeng Krachan, the place where Acharn Sujin and Khun ² Duangduen regularly stay and then to Suanpheung in the mountains outside Ratchburi. At the end of my stay I went to Chiangmai with my Thai friends.

Our stay in Thailand coincided with political unrest. Those who opposed the government and prime minister Yingluck whose brother Thaksin was ousted, organised demonstrations and blocked roads. However, we could make all our planned trips in spite of the political situation.

I received great assistance from all my friends, whenever there was a difficult high step to be taken, or when I had to walk in a dark garden. Khun Noppadom, one of our Thai friends, was asked to look after me. At breakfast in Kaeng Krachan he fetched the food for me all the time and also later on in Chiangmai he saw to it that I would not go hungry. In Suanpheung several Thai friends provided us with an abundance of fruits and sweets whenever we had a break in between the discussions.

In Bangkok I stayed again in Hotel Peninsula where Sarah and Jonothan often stay. I was next door to them which gave me a safe feeling. I listened four times a day to Acharn's radio programs in Thai and heard that one should not be impatient in the development of understanding. One should not have expectations as to its development since we have accumulated such an amount of ignorance. If one is discouraged it shows that one clings to the idea of self. Understanding should be developed with courage and cheerfulness.

Acharn asked me to write a summary of our discussions and she even suggested a title: "Once upon a time". I am very grateful that Acharn explained with great patience that the characteristic of seeing and visible object appearing at this moment should be investigated. If we do not know what seeing is, only a dhamma, a conditioned reality, we shall continue to cling to a self. Everything is dhamma and "there is no one there" she repeated many times. We cannot hear this often enough.

¹ Acharn is the Thai word for teacher. In Pali: ācariya.

² Khun is the Thai word for Mr. or Mrs.

Chapter 1

Once upon a Time.

“Once upon a time...” Stories of the past begin with these words. We do not really know the past. We do not even know what we did and thought yesterday from moment to moment, it is all gone. We do not know who we were in a past life, it is forgotten. We were happy and unhappy but all those experiences are completely gone, never to return. Also in this life it is true that all we find so important is gone immediately. This life will be the past life in the next life.

In reality the past can be as recent as one moment of citta (consciousness). What we call mind is citta that falls away immediately. There are different types of citta and each citta experiences an object: seeing is a citta that knows visible object and hearing is another citta that knows sound. Citta arises, experiences an object and then falls away immediately, never to return. Each citta is accompanied by mental factors, cetasikas, that assist the citta in cognizing the object. The mental factor remembrance or saññā accompanies every citta and it marks and remembers the object that is experienced. That is why we recognize a chair and know that it is for sitting, or we recognize a person who is in the room. Seeing only sees what is visible, it does not see people and things. After seeing has fallen away, there can be thinking of people and things which are remembered by saññā. In reality there is no one there.

During our discussions, Acharn repeated many times: “There is no one there”. She said: “Dhamma means: no one there. It is just a characteristic of reality that appears”. I am grateful for this reminder, because we are deluded most of the time and we believe that people exist. What we take for a person is in reality only citta (consciousness), cetasika (mental factor accompanying consciousness) and rūpa (physical phenomena) which arise for an extremely short moment and then fall away. When we see, we are immediately attached to seeing and visible object but before we realize it they are completely gone. They are past already, they were present “once upon a time”. We may think of a dear person who passed away, but there is only the idea or memory of what is gone completely. Only attachment and ignorance are left, Acharn said. This helps us to begin to understand, at least intellectually, the disadvantage and uselessness of clinging to persons.

We believe that we live with many people, but when we consider the different cittas that arise one at a time and experience different objects through the senses or the mind-door, we can understand what “living alone” means. Life is only the experience of one object at a time such as visible object or sound. When visible object is experienced, there is the world of visible object and when sound is experienced there is the world of sound. Different worlds appear through the senses and the mind-door. They could not appear if there were no citta which experiences them.

Sarah said that this is an encouragement to wake up from our dreams. Understanding of the reality appearing now is the only way to lessen attachment to whatever appears. She also said that we usually live in "once upon a time" stories, but, that just for a moment now, there can be truly living alone with the world that appears. When we appreciate this, we begin to have a sense of urgency, with understanding.

It takes an extremely long time before the truth can be realized. It is realized by paññā, a mental factor that is understanding. This is developed stage by stage, during countless lives. Intellectual understanding of the Buddha's teachings is a foundation for the development of direct understanding. But if we wish for direct understanding we are on the wrong Path. There is clinging instead of understanding. Ignorance and clinging have been accumulated for aeons.

We are heedless and we need many reminders of the truth. Our life is very short and therefore, we should not waste opportunities to listen and consider the Dhamma. Actually, life is as short as one moment of citta. Each moment of seeing or hearing is one moment in the cycle of birth and death. Seeing is only once in a life time and then it falls away. Hearing is only once in a life time and then it falls away. Life is only one moment of citta experiencing an object.

One of the first days of our stay we went to Bangsai. Bangsai is near Ayudhaya. Here Khun Duangduen has a peaceful place, surrounded by fields and near a temple. In the background we could hear the monks preaching, because it was Uposatha day ³.

Acharn asked: "Do you know me? What you see is only visible object, and you do not know visible object yet. It is very difficult to eliminate the idea of self and it can only be achieved by paññā. Is there visible object or are there people around here? It takes a long time to develop the understanding of not me, not anyone, no self, no thing in it. Seeing sees only visible object. It has to be right now, it should be very natural. Understanding begins to develop, there is no 'I' who tries. It is a very long way but one can begin to see that the Buddha knew through his enlightenment whatever reality appears. The development of right understanding has to be the understanding of whatever appears now."

She wanted to remind us that we see only visible object, not a person. She said: "Me or visible object, exactly the same. But you don't know visible object. Understanding has to be developed until there is no one at all, no thing at all in that which can just impinge on the eyesense. Citta arises to see it and then falls away. Visible object cannot be anyone. What is left is only the sign (nimitta) of reality, no matter there is seeing, hearing, thinking. Even intellectual understanding is not easy. Whatever arises is

³ Special day of vigilance.

like a flash. Attachment cannot be known by a self, only right understanding can know it.”

It is true that persons cannot impinge on the eyesense, only visible object or colour can impinge on it so that it can be seen.

Someone asked whether the “Element of Wind” or motion can be experienced through the bodysense. This is a kind of rūpa (physical phenomenon) that can be experienced as motion or pressure.

Acharn Sujin answered: “You like to experience it, and there is not the understanding of it when it appears. That is the point. Attachment or craving is the second noble Truth⁴. If this is not gradually eliminated, it hinders. Someone may try very hard to make the Element of Wind or motion appear. Right now, many realities have passed without there being understanding of them, including motion, heat or anything. It is not under anyone’s control to let it appear. Mindfulness, sati, can be aware of it⁵. Sati is very rapid. Before we can think about it, it is already aware. There is no need to think that one would like to know a particular reality. It is time to accumulate understanding so that there are conditions for having less attachment to experiencing particular realities. Would you like to have satipaṭṭhāna⁶ right now?”

Nina: “I would like to.”

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

Nina: “Already? That is very heavy.”

Sarah: “It is very common.”

Acharn: “Anything which does not lead to the understanding of reality is sīlabbata parāmāsa.”

Nina: “That is so strong. It had not thought of that. Such a strong word.”

Acharn: “Only paññā can see reality as it is. Otherwise there is no understanding of anything.”

Understanding of realities is developed by listening to the Dhamma and carefully considering it. When intellectual understanding has been developed sufficiently, there are conditions for direct understanding of realities. When the mental factor sati is aware of a characteristic of reality, understanding, paññā, can know its true nature.

⁴ The Buddha taught four noble Truths: the Truth of suffering, dukkha. The Truth of the cause of suffering which is craving or attachment. The Truth of the cessation of suffering which is nibbāna. The Truth of the Path leading to the cessation of suffering which is the eightfold Path, the development of right understanding of realities.

⁵ Sati, mindfulness or awareness, is non-forgetful of the realities that appear. Usually there is forgetfulness, we are absorbed in thinking of “stories”. When kusala citta with sati arises there can be mindfulness of one reality at a time as it appears through one of the senses or the mind-door.

⁶ Satipaṭṭhāna is the development of right understanding of mental phenomena and physical phenomena.

Paññā is another cetasika that may accompany kusala citta (wholesome citta). Cittas may be akusala (unwholesome), kusala, vipākacitta (result of kamma) or kiriya-citta, inoperative citta⁷. Nobody can make a particular citta arise, they arise because of their own conditions.

Realities have each their own characteristic that can be directly experienced. Concepts are not realities, they can only be objects of thought, they do not have characteristics that can be directly experienced. The truth of non-self pertains to realities. Person or chair do not have the characteristic of anattā.

It is important to know the difference between realities and concepts. Seeing and visible object are realities. Seeing sees what is visible, what has impinged on the eye-sense. There is no person who sees, only seeing sees. Dhammas that appear one at a time through one of the senses or the mind-door are ultimate realities or paramattha dhammas⁸. Ultimate realities have each their own unalterable characteristic. We may call them by another name but their characteristics cannot be altered. Seeing is always seeing, no matter how we call it. Persons, trees, chairs are not ultimate realities, they are concepts formed up by thinking.

We dream of persons, mountains or trees. These are all stories we think of. When we see someone in our dreams it is not really seeing, but thinking of what is remembered, of what we saw before. It seems so real, it seems that we really see. When we believe that we see a person now, while we are awake, it is exactly the same; this is not seeing of what is visible, it is only thinking.

We read in the “Middle Length Sayings”, “Potaliyasutta” (I, 365) that the Buddha used different similes for sense pleasures. The text states:

“And, householder, it is as if a man might see in a dream delightful parks, delightful woods, delightful stretches of level ground and delightful lakes; but on waking up could see nothing. Even so, householder, an ariyan disciple reflects thus: ‘Pleasures of the senses have been likened by the Lord to a dream, of much pain, of much tribulation, wherein is more peril.’ And having seen this thus as it really is by means of perfect wisdom... the material things of the world are stopped entirely.”

It is necessary to consider why we want to study the Dhamma. We study to have more understanding of what is real, to have more understanding of the fact that there is nobody in what is seen or heard, nobody who sees or hears. We have accumulated

⁷ Kiriya-citta performs different functions within a process. The arahat has no more kusala cittas but he has kiriya-cittas instead.

⁸ Paramattha means the highest sense. In Pali “parama” is highest and “attha” is meaning or sense. Paramattha dhammas are: citta, cetasika, rūpa and nibbāna.

so much ignorance and wrong view for aeons and aeons and, thus, we cannot expect to get rid of these soon. Only paññā, wisdom or understanding, can eradicate ignorance, but it develops only very little at a time. If we think that we can control or manipulate understanding or make it grow, there will only be more attachment and wrong view. Thus, there should not be any expectations as to the growth of paññā, it develops according to its own conditions. It does not belong to us.

Acharn said: “We talk very often about visible object and seeing. Otherwise we are always forgetful of realities. We think of a collection of several realities as ‘something’. When sati is aware of a reality it is time to know that all the stories we think of are useless. They are only the object of thinking. Without thinking there is no situation. Ignorance conditions attachment.”

During our discussions Acharn emphasized very much the uselessness of experiencing objects. They are gone immediately, but we are clinging to objects, life after life. What is the use of clinging to what falls away immediately? Acharn wanted to remind us that life is dukkha (suffering), not worth clinging to. But just now we do not see the danger and disadvantage of all our experiences in life. Only paññā that sees realities as they are can realize this. Paññā can condition detachment. There can be a letting go, even of paññā, not wanting it again and again. There should be no selection of the objects of awareness and understanding.

Acharn said: “The characteristic of hardness appears as ‘no one’. Paññā can see that this is part of the cycle of birth and death (saṃsāra). The cycle is the succession of the arising and falling away of realities. There is no one there.”

The English discussions in Bangkok took place in the “Dhamma Study and Support Foundation”⁹. On Sunday I attended Thai sessions the whole day. For luncheon we walked to a restaurant nearby. The widow of Khun Denpong sponsored one of these luncheons. Khun Denpong passed away three years ago and before he died he said to Acharn Sujin: “I would like to live just somewhat longer in order to develop more understanding.” I have known him as someone who always had many good questions. His widow said that he was a wise man.

After luncheon Elle helped me to take the difficult, steep steps down from this restaurant on the way back to the Foundation. We talked about the deaths of our husbands and spoke about it how sudden death comes. There is no time to take leave of our dear ones. We were dwelling on stories of the past, “once upon a time”. This is thinking and Acharn’s words always bring us back to reality now.

⁹ This is the center where all sessions with Acharn Sujin take place each weekend.

I remember what Acharn once said to Khun Weera when his wife, Khun Bong, was about to die:

“Dukkha is heavy, nobody likes it. It is a danger, it causes citta to be sorrowful, troubled. Nobody is freed from it, but we must understand it. When we have more understanding of the Dhamma we shall see that what arises must fall away, this cannot be altered.

Birth is really troublesome. We have to eat to stay alive, we have to see, there is no end to seeing. Seeing is a burden, because of seeing there is attachment. Is seeing beneficial or is it a danger and disadvantage? When there is seeing, there will be clinging to what is seen. We are searching for the things we like, but if we do not search for what we like we live more at ease. From where comes the burden? From seeing and from wanting the things we see. We can come to understand that each citta that arises and falls away is a burden. Everything that arises and falls away is great dukkha. Defilements cannot be eradicated by ignorance, only by understanding. When we listen more and develop understanding more there will be less dukkha. Everyone has to die, this cannot be changed. What arises now has to fall away, and then there is nothing left. When a dhamma arises and there is ignorance, one clings and takes it for ‘self’ or ‘mine’.”

Chapter 2

Ignorance.

Not knowing conditioned realities which arise and fall away is ignorance. Ignorance, in Pali avijjā or moha, is an akusala cetasika (unwholesome mental factor) that accompanies each akusala citta. It is the root of all that is akusala. We read in the following text ("Sammadiṭṭhi Sutta: The Discourse on Right View", MN 9)¹⁰ that ignorance is not understanding the four noble Truths. We read :

"Not knowing about suffering, not knowing about the origin of suffering, not knowing about the cessation of suffering, not knowing about the way leading to the cessation of suffering — this is called ignorance."

We have to apply this text to the present moment. The first noble Truth, suffering, dukkha, is the arising and falling away of reality now. Seeing now falls away and it never comes back. All our experiences fall away never to return. What is impermanent is not worth clinging to, clinging only brings sorrow.

The second noble Truth, the origin of suffering, that is craving or attachment. So long as we have attachment there are conditions for realities to arise again and again in new births. Also now we have attachment, attachment to all sense objects, and we often have subtle attachment we do not notice. Whatever we do, whatever we say, whatever we are thinking, the idea of self is there. During our discussions Acharn reminded us time and again of this fact. Even when we engage in kusala, we do this often for the sake of ourselves.

The third noble Truth, the cessation of suffering, is nibbāna¹¹. We cannot imagine what it is like but Acharn said that no arising and falling away is to be preferred to arising and falling away, which is the dukkha of life.

The fourth noble Truth, the way leading to cessation, this is the eightfold Path, the development of right understanding of realities¹². Only paññā, right understanding, can eliminate ignorance. Right understanding can be developed by listening to the Dhamma and carefully considering it. Even one moment of understanding can condi-

¹⁰ Translated from the Pali by Ñanamoli Thera & Bhikkhu Bodhi. *Access to Insight (Legacy Edition)*, 30 November 2013.

¹¹ Nibbāna is the unconditioned dhamma, it does not arise and fall away. It is experienced by lokuttara citta, supramundane citta, when enlightenment is attained and defilements are eradicated. There are four stages of enlightenment and at each stage defilements are eradicated until they are all eradicated at the attainment of arahatship.

¹² The eightfold Path consists of sobhana cetasikas, beautiful cetasikas, of which the foremost is right view or paññā. The factors of the eightfold Path have to develop on and on so that enlightenment can be attained.

tion the arising of understanding again later on. Understanding, a cetasika that accompanies kusala citta (wholesome citta), falls away together with the citta, but it is not lost. Cittas arise and fall away in succession, and, thus, understanding is accumulated in the citta from moment to moment so that there are conditions for its arising again. We have accumulated ignorance and wrong understanding for aeons and therefore, they cannot be eliminated immediately. Courage and patience are needed to continue to listen and develop more understanding. That is the reason why Acharn explained time and again about seeing and visible object and all realities of daily life.

We listen to the Dhamma in order to have more understanding of realities. A beginning can be made now: seeing appears now and what is the nature of seeing? Seeing only sees what is visible, seeing is not a person, no "I" who sees. Visible object is a type of rūpa, a physical phenomenon, and it can impinge on the eyesense which is another rūpa. Visible object and eyesense are rūpas, they do not know anything. They are conditions for seeing. Seeing is a type of nāma, a mental phenomenon, a citta that experiences visible object. Cittas arise and fall away in succession very rapidly. It seems that we see immediately the shape and form of persons and things, but in reality there are many different cittas arising and falling away.

It seems that there is one moment of seeing and perceiving people and things all at the same time, but in reality there are many different moments. Seeing arises in a process of several cittas that experience visible object. When that process is over, there is another process of cittas experiencing visible object through the mind-door. Later on other processes of cittas arise that think of shape and form and take this for a person or thing. It seems that there is a long period of seeing people and things, but in reality there are many different cittas succeeding one another.

Seeing does not think, it only sees, but when it has fallen away we think of long stories, forgetting that thinking of stories is conditioned by seeing, hearing and the other sense-cognitions. Acharn said: "After once upon a time, then what? Right now there is past all the time. Even now, it is once upon a time."

Sarah remarked: "Not only when we are asleep, but even now we are always dreaming, building up stories with worry about how to take steps in the dark. Always stories like 'once upon a time', continuing the story again and again."

Citta knows an object, each citta knows or experiences a particular object and the cetasikas that accompany it also experience that object, but while they are doing so, they each have their own function or task while they assist the citta. Citta is the leader in knowing the object and the cetasikas are the assistants of citta. When we read about cetasikas, we should not get lost in names or terms. It is not the name that is important, but the characteristic of cetasika that can be gradually understood. Studying them helps us to see that citta is conditioned by the cetasikas that accompany it.

Citta cannot arise without cetasikas and cetasikas cannot arise without citta. The Buddha taught conditions for the dhammas that arise in order to make it clear that they do not belong to us, that they are not “self” or “mine”.

Feeling is a cetasika that accompanies each citta, and we find feeling so important. We cling to it all day long. Feeling may be happy, unhappy or indifferent. It is only a conditioned dhamma. Attachment (lobha) and aversion or anger (dosa) are unwholesome cetasikas (akusala cetasikas). We do not have to name them in order to come to understand their characteristics when they appear. When they appear now, at the present moment, their different characteristics can be known very gradually. When there are conditions they arise and nobody can prevent their arising. They can be understood as anattā.

We have to know the difference between intellectual understanding of a reality such as seeing, and the actual, direct understanding of seeing when it sees, just now. That is understanding without words. We usually pay attention only to that which is known, seen or heard, and we forget that without citta there would not be anything that appears, no world. Visible object could not appear if there were no seeing, sound could not appear if there were no hearing. There can be less attachment to citta that experiences and to that which is known by citta. But we should not have any expectations. Understanding cannot arise by wishing or wanting. We can come to know that all the time the idea of self comes in that wishes to know, wishes to observe, and this works counteractive. When there is more understanding of realities it leads to detachment from the idea of self who wants to do something, who is trying to know.

We had planned to go to Kaeng Krachan outside Bangkok and this was on the first day that Bangkok would be “shut down” by those who opposed prime minister Yingluck and the government. Streets would be barricaded. The day before our departure was a Sunday and the Foundation was closed so that people could prepare for the “shut down”. This happened to be Acharn’s birthday, of which she said that she would rather be without it. However, now people still came with presents on Saturday. We had an opportunity, with Betty’s help, to give her presents and appreciate other people’s generosity. They smiled and kept on telling her how much they appreciated her teaching. Some people presented her with huge vegetables. In no time the whole room was packed with presents.

We could go on our journey as planned and we stayed four nights in Kaeng Krachan. We stayed in bungalows situated in a large park with flowering trees. Early morning we walked from the bungalow where we stayed through the park to the restaurant for breakfast, outside along a lake. For the discussions we were sitting in the garden at the place where Acharn and Khun Duangduen stayed. The subject of our discussions was mental phenomena and physical phenomena, the many defilements that arise and kamma that brings result. A good deed, kusala kamma or a bad deed, akusala kam-

ma, can produce result later on, even after many lives. The kusala citta or akusala citta that motivates a deed falls away but kusala and akusala are accumulated from one citta to the next citta, from life to life. When it is the right time kamma produces result, vipākacitta, in the form of rebirth-consciousness or the sense-cognitions arising throughout life, such as seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting or body-consciousness experiencing bodily ease or pain. I mentioned that one never knows when kamma will produce result. My accident, when I broke my hip, was completely unexpected; I never thought that it would happen. Acharn reminded me that we always think of people and situations, but that in reality there are eyesense, seeing, earsense, hearing, conditioned dhammas that are only there for an extremely short time. She said: “There is the flux of the elements that arise and fall away, uncontrollable. We should understand them as not ‘me’. There is no one there. We do not have precise understanding of a reality that is seen but we keep on thinking in terms of people and situations. The conditions are not sufficient to make us understand what appears now.”

She always referred to the present moment since that is the moment a dhamma appearing through the senses or the mind-door can be investigated and understood. They appear one at a time and they each have their own characteristic. When we think about situations, the reality is thinking; it is usually akusala citta that thinks, and the situation is not a reality. Acharn reminded us to develop understanding of this moment, just one moment in the cycle of birth and death.

We were discussing realities, and we can also use the word dhammas or paramattha dhammas. For example, sound is a reality, it can be directly experienced when it appears. We do not have to name it sound, but its characteristic can be directly experienced. Thinking about sound is not the same as the direct experience of it. We can learn that its characteristic cannot be changed into something else. Sound is always sound, it is the object of hearing. Attachment is always attachment, no matter how we call it.

We think of concepts most of the time. It seems that we hear dogs barking, words spoken, that we see persons in the room, mountains or trees. But the difference between concepts and ultimate realities, paramattha dhammas, should be known, at least on the level of intellectual understanding. This can lead to direct understanding. Then we shall know that there is no one there, no person. We shall know that realities are anattā. At this moment anattā is just a word we repeat. But the truth of anattā has to be directly realized.

When we are thinking about realities they have fallen away already. We all try very hard to find out the truth about realities, reasoning about them. That is not the way. What about now, while we ask questions about something or have doubts? Acharn said:

“At the moment of not understanding, what is there? Usually we think without understanding, so it is like a dream. At this moment, what is real? Now, when there is not direct awareness and understanding, it is a dream. Even when talking about paramattha dhammas the object is a concept of paramattha dhammas, they do not appear. When there is direct understanding, you are not thinking of that subject.”

Also when we ask questions she reminded us to consider the citta that does so. Instead of wondering or having doubts shouldn't we attend to the present moment, such as seeing right now? We should know what type of citta motivates our questions. Often it is akusala citta.

We had Dhamma discussions in the morning and later in the afternoon, even after dark. In between we went out for luncheons in different places where we had panoramic views of a lake and mountains or we sat along the waterside. When the steps to reach the place were too deep for me I always had support from my friends. Acharn, her sister Khun Jeed and Khun Duangduen offered us a luncheon on the first day and for the other days we took turns in sponsoring them. Even during luncheon Acharn untiringly explained about mental phenomena, *nāma*, and physical phenomena, *rūpa*. We were asking about the characteristic of *sati*, mindfulness. This is a *sobhana cetasika*, beautiful *cetasika*, that can only arise when there are conditions. Nobody can cause its arising. We touch many times during the day different things and body-consciousness experiences hardness, but there is no mindfulness of a characteristic of a reality. Body-consciousness is not accompanied by *sati*, it is *vipākacitta* that merely experiences tangible object. When *sati* arises it is mindful of the characteristic of tangible object without thinking of the hardness of “my body” and at the same time *paññā*, understanding, which is another *sobhana cetasika*, can investigate that characteristic so that it is known as just a dhamma, not belonging to a self.

Listening and discussing are conditions for awareness but we should not be wishing or wanting to have it.

Acharn explained: “When one is touching and hardness appears it is different from thinking about what is touched. When a characteristic of a reality appears it is not as usual because there is direct awareness¹³ of it. You do not have to name it and you do not expect to have it. Understanding knows the difference between the moments of *sati* and the moments there is no *sati*. This is the only starting point for the development of awareness. *Paññā* knows when there is attention with awareness to the characteristic that appears. Attachment or aversion may arise when one does not have awareness as much as one would like to. *Sati* is only a reality, a dhamma, not different from other realities.”

¹³ *Sati* can be translated as mindfulness or awareness.

When there is awareness of hardness which is a kind of rūpa, there is not some “thing” in the hardness such as a hand or the table. Only hardness appears and nothing else. It seems that seeing and hearing can arise at the same time, but when awareness arises one knows that realities appear one at a time. Seeing experiences visible object and hearing experiences sound, these cittas cannot experience more than one object. At the moment of awareness just one reality appears at a time and there is nothing else, no world. When this is not realized one knows that understanding has not been accumulated sufficiently. We need to listen again and consider again and again. Since ignorance is deeply rooted we cannot expect that paññā develops rapidly. In each life very little understanding is being accumulated, Acharn said. Now and then just a glimpse of understanding arises. When we have an interest in the Dhamma now and listen to the Dhamma there are conditions for listening again in a future life. In this way paññā develops gradually from life to life.

I had a conversation with Acharn about awareness:

Acharn: “Is there anyone in visible object which is seen? This is the beginning of seeing the world as it is. Otherwise one is born and dies without any understanding of reality.”

Nina: “I have regret when there is no awareness”.

Acharn: “One can see clinging, it is always there. Only paññā can lead to detachment.”

Nina: “When I ask ‘how can I develop paññā... how can I have more detachment...’, I know that this indicates clinging.”

Acharn: “It is a reminder how much ignorance and clinging are there.”

Nina: “We have regret about what is all gone.”

Acharn: “If there is no understanding of the present reality there will not be any understanding of the past and the future. There is only thinking. Life is just the arising of different realities. We begin to understand the reality of dhamma, not just the word dhamma. Seeing, for example, is real and there is no need to say that seeing is dhamma. It is the same for hearing. We begin to understand the nature of dhamma: it is arising and falling away and never comes back.”

Sati is aware of the reality appearing now, at the present moment. Acharn repeated many times that there is seeing now and that its characteristic can be investigated with awareness. When we think about seeing or talk about it, it is not the same as attending to the characteristic of seeing when it appears at the present moment. We do not know the past since it is gone, nor do we know the future which has not come yet. The reality appearing at the present moment can be investigated.

We read in the “Kindred Sayings” (I, the Devas, Ch I, a Reed, 10, Forest ¹⁴) that the Buddha spoke about the benefit of attending to the present moment:

¹⁴ Translated by Ven. Bodhi.

At Sāvatti. Standing to one side, that devatā recited this verse in the presence of the Blessed One:

“Those who dwell deep in the forest,
Peaceful, leading the holy life,
Eating but a single meal a day:
Why is their complexion so serene?”

[The Blessed One:]

“They do not sorrow over the past,
Nor do they hanker for the future,
They maintain themselves with what is present:
Hence their complexion is so serene.

Through hankering for the future,
Through sorrowing over the past,
Fools dry up and wither away
Like a green reed cut down.”

Chapter 3

Gradual Development of Understanding.

Understanding of the realities that appear through the eyes, the ears, through the other sense-doors and through the mind-door should be known as they are, as non-self. First there should be intellectual understanding of realities and this can condition later on direct understanding. Intellectual understanding is called in Pali: *pariyatti*. *Pariyatti* pertains to the reality at this moment, be it seeing, visible object, body-consciousness or hardness. *Pariyatti* is not mere theoretical knowledge, it is not different from considering reality appearing at this moment. There cannot be direct awareness and understanding of these realities yet, but one can begin to consider them when they appear. The texts help us to consider the realities that appear now. When we read the teachings we should remember that they pertain to this very moment.

We read, for example, in the “Kindred Sayings” (IV, Third Fifty, 5, §152) that the Buddha said to the monks:

“Is there, brethren, any method, by following which a brother, apart from belief, apart from inclination, apart from hearsay, apart from argument as to method, apart from reflection on reasons, apart from delight in speculation, could affirm insight, thus: ‘Ended is birth, lived is the righteous life, done is the task, for life in these conditions there is no hereafter’?”

The Buddha then explained that there is such method:

“Herein, brethren, a brother, beholding an object with the eye, either recognizes within him the existence of lust, malice and illusion, thus: ‘I have lust, malice and illusion’, or recognizes the non-existence of these qualities within him, thus: ‘I have not lust, malice and illusion’. Now as to that recognition of their existence or non-existence within him, are these conditions, I ask, to be understood by belief, inclination, or hearsay, or argument as to method, or reflection on reasons, or delight in speculation?”

“Surely not, lord.”

“Are not these states to be understood by seeing them with the eye of wisdom?”

“Surely, lord.”

The Buddha said that this was the method. He then said the same about the other sense-cognitions. The Buddha spoke time and again about seeing, hearing and the other sense-cognitions. One should know one’s defilements when they arise. There

should not be mere intellectual understanding; dhammas should be “seen with the eye of wisdom”.

We learn that *nāma* (*citta* and *cetasika*) is a reality that experiences an object and that *rūpa* is a reality that does not experience anything. Hardness which is a *rūpa* could not appear if there were not a *citta* that experiences it. We may begin to understand that not a self experiences hardness or any other object. That is understanding of the level of *pariyatti*. *Pariyatti*, when it has been sufficiently developed, leads to *paṭipatti*, awareness and direct understanding of the reality that appears now. *Paṭipatti* leads to *paṭivedha*, the direct realization of the truth beginning with the stages of insight-knowledge¹⁵ and leading on to enlightenment. But if one wishes to have direct understanding and clings to it, it will not arise.

Acharn spoke many times about *pariyatti*, explaining that it is different from just reading the teachings: “It is this moment. It is the same as coming to the Buddha and listening to his teaching. It all pertains to whatever appears now.”

We read in the “*Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*”¹⁶ that the Buddha, before he passed away, exhorted the monks: “Behold now, Bhikkhus, I exhort you: Transient are all the elements of being! Strive with earnestness!”

The commentary explains: “You should accomplish all your duties without allowing mindfulness to lapse!”

We should listen heedfully and learn to understand the present reality, then we follow the Buddha’s teachings. Acharn explained that all of the teachings deal with the present reality as non-self. She said several times that we should carefully study each word of the teachings. I remarked that life is so short and that we should not waste opportunities to hear true Dhamma.

Acharn answered: “Understanding of the words ‘once upon a time’ can condition detachment. There can be more understanding of each moment as just once in a life time.”

We think of a whole life that lasts but actually life is only one short moment of *citta*, such as seeing, hearing or thinking. They are part of the cycle of birth and death which goes on and on so long as there is ignorance and attachment. Each reality that arises falls away and never returns. It occurs only once in a life-time.

¹⁵ Insight, direct understanding of *nāma* and *rūpa*, is developed in the course of several stages of insight leading on to enlightenment, when *nibbāna* is experienced and defilements are eradicated.

¹⁶ Wheel Publication 67-69, Kandy. Ven. Nyanaponika added in a note the explanation of the commentary to this sutta.

We read in the “Mahāniddeśa” (I, 42) quoted by the Visuddhimagga (VII, 39):

“Life, person, pleasure, pain- just these alone
 Join in one conscious moment that flicks by.
 Ceased aggregates of those dead or alive
 Are all alike, gone never to return
 No [world is] born if [consciousness is] not
 Produced; when that is present, then it lives;
 When consciousness dissolves, the world is dead:
 The highest sense this concept will allow.”¹⁷

As we read: “ceased aggregates of those dead or alive, are all alike, gone never to return.” The *nāma* and *rūpa* that fall away at this moment will never return and so it is at the moment of dying. When understanding is developed of the present reality there will be less clinging to a self who could make realities arise or be master of them.

Acharn explained that when the *citta* is full of *akusala* there will not be much interest in listening to the Dhamma and developing understanding. *Akusala* has been accumulated in many lives and, thus, very few moments of *kusala citta* arise. The good qualities which are the perfections¹⁸ are supportive to the development of *paññā* up to the stage of enlightenment. We should develop them, not because we expect a result of *kusala*, but because we see the danger of each kind of *akusala*. Our aim is the eradication of defilements and eventually to reach the end of the cycle of birth and death.

Kusala citta can arise with *paññā* or without it. *Kusala* is not a perfection when it is not accompanied by *paññā*, but *paññā* does not arise very often. Acharn spoke about “pre-*pāramīs*”, indicating that *kusala*, even without understanding, can precede the arising of the perfections. At the moment of *kusala citta* there is no opportunity for the arising of *akusala citta*, and, thus, there is no accumulation of *akusala*. It depends on conditions what type of *kusala citta* arises. If we try very hard to make *kusala citta* with *paññā* arise, we are clinging to the idea of self who can exert control over realities. We need the perfection of truthfulness so that we do not mislead ourselves, believing that there is *kusala citta* whereas in reality there is the wrong view of self. We need patience and courage so that we are not discouraged and *paññā* continues to investigate the characteristic of the present reality.

¹⁷ As to the word “the highest sense this concept will allow”, the commentary to the “Visuddhimagga” explains: “the ultimate sense will allow this concept of continuity, which is what the expression of common usage “*Tissa* lives, *Phussa* lives” refers to, and which is based on consciousness (momentarily) existing along with a physical support; this belongs to the ultimate sense here, since, as they say, “It is not the name and surname that lives” (*Paramattha-mañjūsā* 242, 801).

¹⁸ 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*.

The present reality is *nāma* or *rūpa*. *Nāma*, *citta* and *cetasika*, experiences an object, whereas *rūpa* does not experience anything. There are twentyeight classes of *rūpa*, but seven *rūpas* appear all the time in daily life. These are: visible object appearing through the eye-door, sound appearing through the ear-door, odour appearing through the nose-door, flavour appearing through the tongue-door, and the three tangibles of solidity (the Earth Element), temperature (the Fire Element) and motion (the Wind Element) to be experienced through the bodysense. Solidity appears as hardness or softness, temperature appears as heat or cold, and motion appears as motion (oscillation) or pressure.

Rūpas do not arise solely, they arise in groups. The four Great Elements which are the Element of Earth or solidity, of Water or cohesion, of Fire or temperature, and of Wind or motion, always arise with each group of *rūpas*, they are the foundation for each group. The Element of Water or cohesion cannot be experienced through the bodysense, only through the mind-door. Visible object is always accompanied by the four Great Elements. The four Great Elements arise in different combinations with visible object and that is why they condition visible object to be seen as different colours. For example, the Element of Earth or solidity that accompanies visible object may have different degrees of hardness or softness, the Element of Fire or temperature that accompanies it may have different degrees of heat or cold. There are many varieties in these Elements.

A *rūpa* such as visible object is not only experienced by seeing, it is experienced by several *cittas* arising in a process. *Rūpa* does not fall away as rapidly as *nāma*¹⁹. One *rūpa* such as 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. *Nāma* is only experienced through the mind-door. We should not try to find out when there is a sense-door process and when a mind-door process. *Cittas* arise and fall away in different processes extremely rapidly and only when the first stage of insight arises will we know what a mind-door process is.

Acharya said that we discuss seeing and visible object, hearing and sound so that there are conditions for the arising of awareness. Without intellectual understanding the arising of awareness is not possible. She said about the experience of hardness: “When hearing again and again that there is no one in hardness, no arms, no legs, that

¹⁹ *Rūpa* lasts as long as seventeen moments of *citta*.

it is only hardness, there can be conditions for understanding the characteristic of hardness. It just appears and there is no need to name it. Usually it does not appear. There is touching and then other things are experienced immediately. But when sati arises hardness appears, even if it is very short. It is different from the moment when it does not appear to sati, there is just a slight difference. When there is more attention to that characteristic with the understanding that there is no one in it, paññā develops. Because of conditions one does not pay attention to other things at that moment. Paññā begins to understand that characteristic as not ‘me’ or ‘I’. Hardness appears to the reality that is aware. There is no idea of ‘I am aware.’ One can understand the anattanness of reality. It arises unexpectedly.”

Our discussions about nāma and rūpa were held in different places. The location was changed, but the subject of discussion was always about realities appearing now. Nāma and rūpa appear, wherever we are. We went to Hotel Toscana, outside Bangkok and this was a resort in the mountainous region of Suanpheung past Ratchburi. Our hostesses were Khun Luk and Khun Ten. They were very concerned about my handicap and arranged things in such a way that I would stay in their bungalow, in a room near Sarah and Jonothan so that I would be more comfortable. All discussions were in a new building where Acharn and her sister Khun Jeed stayed. The place was hilly with a large orchard. Our hostesses supported me whenever I had to take big steps to enter the bungalow or to go out. We took turns to sponsor the luncheons which were nearby in woods or near waterfalls. All around we had a panoramic view of the mountains.

At that time there was a cold period for a few days, and in the morning even frost was on the grass. Maeve became ill and had to go to hospital where two of our friends, Elle and Azita, were allowed to stay overnight with her. They discussed different cittas that arise in such situations. Kusala cittas arise when helping, but there were many akusala vipākacittas when unpleasant odours were experienced. Elle and Azita, while walking, saw a picture and each of them was taken in by what she saw according to her different accumulations. Elle who is always engaged with flowers and who arranges the flowers at the Foundation in Bangkok, saw immediately flowers on that picture. Whereas Azita, who is a nurse, saw on the same picture a mother nursing her child. We all follow our different accumulations in life. It is due to the different accumulations as to what is interpreted and imagined on account of the visible object which is seen.

Awareness of nāma and rūpa should be very natural so that paññā comes to know accumulations. When lobha, attachment, arises, paññā can come to know it. If it is ignored, paññā will never know it. I said that when I find the akusala that arises very ugly, I do not want to know it, I rather suppress it. Acharn explained that if one tries not to have akusala with an idea of self who is trying there is wrong practice. Awareness should be very natural. Natural is the way of anattā, she said. I thought before

that the natural way of development is easy, but now I see that it is not easy. The natural way is difficult when defilements are in the way. When paññā becomes stronger it is a condition for the natural way of development. There can be awareness and understanding of whatever dhamma appears, pleasant or unpleasant, wholesome or unwholesome. This is the way to know our accumulations. The perfection of truthfulness is necessary, so that we do not delude ourselves into thinking that we have a great deal of kusala.

Chapter 4

The hidden Self.

So long as we are not a sotāpanna²⁰ who has eradicated the wrong view of self we are not free from clinging to the idea of self. Acharn helped us to realize that clinging to the idea of self happens more often than we ever thought. I had a conversation with Acharn about wrong view. I thought that there was just ignorance, not clinging to the idea of self.

Nina: “I am not thinking all the time that this is my eye or that I am seeing. So, there is just ignorance.”

Acharn: “What is there?”

Nina: “Ignorance.”

Acharn: “But the idea of ‘I see’ is there. Not the other person sees, it is ‘I see’ ”.

Nina: “Where is it when I do not think ‘It is I?’ ”

Acharn: “If there would be no I at the moment of seeing it would be completely eradicated.”

Nina: “We usually think of concepts like a table or a person who is sitting here.”

Acharn: “At the moment of seeing, who is seeing? The other person? Not the other person is seeing.”

Nina: “I, I who is seeing”.

So long as it is not directly understood that seeing sees, we are bound to take seeing for self, even if it is not apparent. That is why Acharn spoke about seeing and visible object every day. It seems that there is no wrong view but it is there. She also reminded us that when we read or study, this may be with the idea of self. One may think: “O, I have read this, I understand better” and that is reading with the idea of “I want to have more understanding”. Paññā has to become keener and keener to see when the idea of self is there, no matter how large or slight it is. It seems that we have understanding of words like nāma and rūpa, or of dhamma, but these are just words and there is no understanding of a characteristic of reality that appears. If one would never consider what appears now it means that there is no understanding. Acharn repeated again: “Dhamma means ‘no one there’ in reality.”

We were talking about accumulated inclinations and I mentioned that I like to appreciate what is wholesome in others, that I am inclined to “anumodana dāna”²¹. Acharn

²⁰ The sotāpanna or “streamwinner” is the person who has attained the first stage of enlightenment. He has eradicated wrong view, but he still has defilements. There are four stages and at each stage different defilements are eradicated. The stage of the arahat, when all defilements are eradicated, is the fourth stage.

²¹ Anumodana means gratefulness, and dāna is generosity. It is the appreciation of someone else’s kusala.

mentioned that there may be attachment at such moments: one likes to have such thoughts and one may be clinging to the idea of self at those moments. It is true, most often one clings to a self, a self which is thought to be kusala. This is not known most of the time.

We may want to have more understanding than we actually have at this moment, and that is clinging to a self, that is wrong. Whatever we say or think, mostly it is done with the idea of self. There may be clinging to the idea of self even when we do not think, that it is “I” or “mine”. Clinging is a yoke, it is like the thread of a spider’s web, very fine but strong and hard to cut through.

Seeing sees visible object. When sati arises one can begin to know that it is not “I” who sees. Seeing is different from visible object. Only very little at a time can be understood. Visible object may appear, but we should not try to make ourselves experience visible object with nobody in it. When we learn more about nāma and rūpa there will be conditions for awareness of them.

Very shortly after seeing, hearing or the other sense-cognitions akusala citta with clinging arises already. Acharn said that it is not easy to understand that there is clinging to seeing right now. It sees. When asked “who sees?” we would answer that it is “me”. She explained that the more understanding develops, the more it realizes how difficult and subtle the Path is. As understanding develops, it has to understand more and more subtle defilements and other dhammas as not self. Paññā can see how complex it is to have more understanding of each reality. If there is no understanding latent tendencies cannot be eradicated. When I remarked that we would have less problems when there is more understanding, she answered: “Right, but paññā goes deeper, deeper than we can imagine. Paññā has to become very keen and develop, otherwise it cannot understand realities as not self. Paññā has to see lobha in order to let go of taking lobha for ‘me’. Energy or effort (virīya cetasika) encourages one to continue all the way.”

Clinging can be so subtle that it is not noticed. That is why the Buddha taught us the akusala cetasikas which are āsavas, intoxicants or cankers.

There are four āsavas (Dhammasangani §1096-1100):

1. the canker of sensuous desire (kā mā sava),
2. the canker of becoming (bhavā sava),
3. the canker of wrong view (diṭṭhā sava),
4. the canker of ignorance (avijjā sava).

The āsavas keep on flowing from birth to death, they are also flowing at this moment. Are we not attached to what we see? Then there is the canker of sensuous desire, kā mā sava. We are attached to visible object, sound, odour, flavour and tangible ob-

ject. We are infatuated with the objects we experience through the senses and we wish to go on experiencing them. One of the cankers is clinging to becoming. Every one clings to becoming, to being alive. We want to experience all objects through the sense-doors.

Another group of defilements is the group of the Floods or Oghas (Dhammasangani §1151). There are four floods which are the same defilements as the cankers, but the classification as floods shows a different aspect. The “floods” submerge a person again and again in the cycle of birth and death.

Another group of defilements are the Yoghas or Yokes. They are the same defilements as the cankers and the floods. The yoghas or yokes are stronger than the āsavas, they tie us to the cycle of birth and death.

We often ask questions with an idea of self, and it is unknown when we cling to the idea of self at such a moment. Acharn would remind us all the time: “There is a yoke.” When I answered that I would not say anything any more, she said “Yoke again”. We cannot escape the yokes but they are there to be known. We have to develop understanding, only paññā can know realities precisely.

Acharn said: “Does one mind about having kusala or akusala? When one minds it is ‘me’, the yoke is there. If one tries to stop akusala, how can one know one’s accumulations? The idea of ‘self’ is so strong. There is no understanding that it is there, while one is wishing. Many people just want to be good and they do not know their defilements at this moment. Right mindfulness can arise before you can think about wanting to have it, or waiting for its arising. In the same way as seeing arises. This is the understanding of its nature of anattā. Paññā understands when there is a moment with sati and when without sati. Otherwise sati cannot develop. It does not develop with desire and this is very difficult. Usually there is attachment but paññā can begin to understand attachment. One is trapped all day.”

Seeing only sees what is visible object and after it has gone we think of many stories on account of what was seen. Seeing arises only for one moment and at that moment people and things do not appear. After that many moments of thinking arise. Every reality arises only once, “once upon a time”, and then it is gone completely. Acharn asked several times: “Is it worth clinging to what is completely gone, each moment?” We think of what is past, once upon a time, and then we live in a dream. Without awareness and direct understanding life is like a dream. Even when we talk about ultimate realities we are dreaming, we are not mindful of them. When direct understanding arises we are awake just for a moment. At the moment of direct understanding no words are needed and as soon as we use a word we are thinking. At that moment the reality has gone completely.

We learn from the texts that kamma produces result, vipāka, in the form of rebirth-consciousness and of sense-cognitions throughout life, such as seeing or hearing. Without understanding of the characteristic of seeing, we cannot know what vipākacitta is. “It is still me, not vipāka”, Acharn said. In the beginning it is not possible to understand seeing as vipāka. Seeing has to be known as a reality, as a dhamma. Seeing is nāma, it has no shape and form; it arises because of conditions and it sees now. It is different from thinking. We do not have to name it vipāka or think of vipāka. No one can prevent seeing from arising. It is uppatti (origin, coming forth). It just appears for a moment, but we believe we see people and think of many stories, and that is nibbatti (generation, resulted)²². There are five pairs of the sense-cognitions of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and the experience of tangible object through the bodysense, and of each pair, one is kusala vipākacitta, the result of kusala kamma, and one is akusala vipākacitta, the result of akusala kamma. These cittas directly experience a sense object as it arises at the appropriate sense-base.

We can come to know the difference between seeing that directly sees visible object and the other cittas that follow. Even the citta that succeeds seeing and that, though it does not see, still experiences visible object, needs the cetasika vitakka, thinking, in order to be able to experience visible object. Vitakka is translated as thinking, but it is not thinking in conventional sense. It “strikes” or touches the object so that citta can experience it. Afterwards in that sense-door process kusala cittas or akusala cittas arise in a series of seven and they experience visible object in a wholesome way or unwholesome way. In the following mind-door process kusala cittas or akusala cittas arise, and after that mind-door processes of cittas arise that think about the object. Thus, the vipākacittas that are the sense-cognitions of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and the experience of tangible object directly experience the relevant sense object and they do not need vitakka. They are completely different from all following cittas. In order to distinguish them from the following cittas they are called “uppatti”. Whereas the following cittas are called “nibbatti”.

Throughout our discussions Acharn emphasized time and again the difference between uppatti and nibbatti. Uppatti, such as seeing or hearing, is what appears now. One moment of seeing or hearing is quite different from the following moments of citta when we think of what was seen or heard, when we think of stories that are not real, when we live in a dream. It reminds us of the fact that seeing arises and falls away very rapidly and that after they have fallen away we are thinking on account of what is seen for a long time. We believe that the stories we think of are true. We like what has already fallen away. We continue to live in the past, in what is “once upon a

²² These terms occur in the “Visuddhimagga” XXI, 37, 38, under “appearance as terror”.

“Herein, arising (uppādo) is appearance here [in this becoming] with previous kamma as condition (purimakammappaccayā idha uppatti)... Generation (nibbatti) is the generating of aggregates (the khandhas)”.

time”. Thinking is conditioned and we should not try not to think but it can be understood as a reality different from seeing. It is beyond control. The notions of uppatti and nibbatti remind us of the nature of anattā of realities. The Buddha explained time again about the sense-cognitions and the objects experienced by them. After the sense-cognitions kusala cittas or akusala cittas may arise. When there are mindfulness and understanding, ignorance will be eliminated and even arahatship may be attained.

In the “Bāhiyasutta” (“Minor Anthologies”, Khuddaka Patha, the “Verses of Uplift” Udāna, I, 10) we read that Bāhiya Dārucīriya thought of himself as an arahat. A deva advised him to visit the Buddha at Sāvathī. He asked the Buddha to give him a teaching but the Buddha refused this two times. The commentary²³ explained that the reason for this was that Bāhiya was too excited to listen. When Bāhiya asked for a teaching the third time, the Buddha said:

“Then, Bāhiya, thus must you train yourself: In the seen there will be just the seen, in the heard just the heard, in the imagined just the imagined, in the cognized just the cognized. Thus you will have no ‘thereby’. That is how you must train yourself. Now, Bāhiya, when in the seen there will be to you just the seen, in the heard just the heard, in the imagined just the imagined, in the cognized just the cognized, then, Bāhiya, as you will have no ‘thereby’, you will have no ‘therein’. As you, Bāhiya, will have no ‘therein’, it follows that you will have no ‘here’ or ‘beyond’ or ‘midway between’. That is just the end of Ill.”

We read that Bāhiya attained arahatship. Not long after the departure of the Exalted One, Bāhiya was attacked by a cow and gored to death.

We read in the commentary as to “with respect to the seen... merely the seen...”: “It is of the extent seen (diṭṭhamattaṃ) since it has the extent seen (diṭṭhā mattā), meaning, the thought process will be of the same extent as eye-consciousness. This is what is said: ‘Just as eye-consciousness is not excited, is not blemished, is not deluded with respect to the form that has gone into its range, so will there be for me an impulsion of the same extent as eye-consciousness in which lust and so on are absent, I will set up an impulsion of the same measure as eye-consciousness.’ ”

Seeing-consciousness is vipākacitta which is not accompanied by the unwholesome roots of attachment, aversion and ignorance. It merely sees visible object. Usually akusala cittas with attachment and ignorance follow upon seeing, but when there is awareness and right understanding instead they do not arise. Bāhiya could not have reached arahatship without realizing nāma and rūpa as mere dhammas. We read further on in the commentary about visible object and seeing:”... occurring (as they do) in accordance with conditions, being solely and merely dhammas; there is, in this

²³ Translated by Peter Masefield, Volume I. PTS.

connection, neither a doer nor one who causes things to be done, as a result of which, since (the seen) is impermanent in the sense of being oppressed by way of rise and fall, not-self in the sense of proceeding uncontrolled, whence the opportunity for excitement and so on with respect thereto on the part of one who is wise?"

The same is said with respect to the other objects experienced by the sense-cognitions through the relevant doorways.

It will take a long time to know seeing as it is, as a mere dhamma. Sometimes a moment of understanding may arise and after that ignorance arises again and covers up the truth. As Acharn said, we should not mind, because that is the way it is. If we long for more understanding we are yoked again.

Chapter 5

Thinking of the Past.

We think of death as the end of a lifespan but in reality there is at each moment death of citta that falls away. There are three kinds of deaths ²⁴: momentary death, *khaṇika maraṇa*, which is the arising and falling away of all conditioned dhammas; conventional death, *sammuti maraṇa*, which is dying at the end of a lifespan; final death, *samuccheda maraṇa*, which is *parinibbāna*, the final passing away of the arahat who does not have to be reborn.

Life goes on without understanding the truth. Seeing sees visible object and because of our delusion we think that we see people who seem to be already there. It also seems that seeing can stay, that we are seeing all the time. Ignorance covers up the truth. Seeing falls away immediately, but since dhammas arise and fall away so rapidly it seems that the different moments of seeing that arise again and again are one period of time that lasts for a while. Understanding can be developed of the characteristic of seeing and there is no need to pinpoint in what process it has arisen.

Seeing falls away but the sign (in Pali: *nimitta*) of seeing remains. Even so visible object falls away but the sign or *nimitta* of visible object remains. The *nimitta* covers up the truth of realities which arise and fall away very rapidly in succession. No one can really directly experience one particular reality, because there are so many realities arising and falling away. The rapid succession of dhammas, such as visible object, leads to the experience or impression of shape and form and to the idea of people and things. A simile can be used to explain this: when we take a torch that we swing around we notice a circle of light. In fact what we take for a circle of light consists of many moments, but it seems to be a continuous whole. There is a reality that can be seen and *paññā* begins to understand that what is seen cannot be any one at all. Only memory and thinking condition the idea of someone or something.

The term *saṅkhāra nimitta*, the sign of conditioned dhammas ²⁵ pertains to the fact that each of the five *khandhas* ²⁶ which arise and fall away has a *nimitta*: *rūpa-nimitta*, *vedanā-nimitta* (feeling), *saññā-nimitta* (remembrance), *saṅkhāra-nimitta* (the

²⁴ “Dispeller of Delusion,” Commentary to the Book of Analysis, Classification of the Truths, 101.

²⁵ The “Path of Discrimination” (“*Patisambhidhammagga*”), I, 438 speaks about seeing as terror the signs of each of the five *khandhas*, whereas *nibbāna* is *animitta*, without sign. *Saṅkhāra nimitta* also occurs in the *Visuddhimagga XXI*, 38.

²⁶ All conditioned dhammas, *saṅkhāra dhammas*, can be classified as five different *khandhas* or aggregates. One *khandha* is *rūpa*, and four are *nāma*.

other fifty cetasikas apart from feeling and saññā)²⁷ and viññāṇa-nimitta (citta). Since nibbāna does not arise and fall away it is without nimitta, it is animitta.

Conditioned dhamma falls away but the nimitta remains. It is a sign or nimitta of the reality that arises and falls away, but we do not realize the arising and falling away. We mislead ourselves, taking for permanent what is impermanent. We take for self what is beyond control. There is no need to think all the time: “it is a nimitta” or, “the reality has fallen away”. Characteristics are appearing and they can be investigated. Saṅkhāra nimitta denotes a nimitta of a reality appearing right now. The reality and its nimitta can be compared to a sound and its echo. We should remember what Acharn said: “The reality and the nimitta of it appear like sound and its echo, who knows which is which? Instead of finding out whether nimitta is a paramattha dhamma, know that it is now. No one can pinpoint a moment of experiencing an object or the object itself.”

We learn to be aware of characteristics of dhammas that appear but knowing about nimitta makes it clearer that dhammas fall away so fast. It helps to understand their nature of anattā, they are beyond control. What has arisen is gone already before we realize it. “Once upon a time” can be seen as an extremely short moment ago. We can remember what Acharn said long ago: “We have dear people, people who are close to us, but dhamma arises and then falls away. Seeing has fallen away and there is nothing left. Thinking and all dhammas fall away completely. This is not different from the moment a dear person dies. We are thinking about a dear person but thinking falls away completely.”

The colour that appears through the eyes is the nimitta, the sign referring to the visible object that is accompanied by the four Great Elements of Earth (solidity), Water (cohesion), Fire (temperature) and Wind (motion). There is a great variety of the four Great Elements, and since they have different degrees of hardness, softness, heat or cold, it is a condition for the nimittas to be varied. Whenever visible object appears or seeing appears, there is the sign of the rapidly arising and falling away of realities. A single moment of seeing cannot be experienced.

The succession of the arising and falling away of visible object leads to an idea of continuity, the perceiving of shape and form. Acharn explained: “Memory just marks and forms up the idea of a particular shape and form of this or that person. It is all that can be seen. Close your eyes and there is no more that which can be seen. ...Without reality there is no nimitta but the arising and falling away is so rapid that it cannot be directly experienced.”

²⁷ In this context saṅkhāra refers to saṅkhārakkhandha. The term saṅkhāra dhammas refers to all conditioned dhammas, to all khandhas. Saṅkhārakkhandha refers to one khandha, the khandha of “formations”.

Because of wrong remembrance of self, attā-saññā, the nimitta is taken for something. Concepts are thought of because of different nimittas. Sarah also gave some more explanations: “Thinking has an idea of shape and form and that leads to the idea of eyebrows, people and things. Without experiencing visible object many times there could not be the sign of visible object and without that sign there could not be thinking about the outward appearance and details of things. One thinks of concepts of people and things on account of what is seen.”

When we have no understanding there are just concepts about realities as permanent phenomena which don't arise and fall away instantly. When we have more understanding of nimitta, we see that whatever we experience arises for a moment and is then completely gone. We cannot hold on to it. Acharn said:

“That is life. No matter how happy or unhappy we are, all these moments are gone. What we take for so very important in life is gone. Such moments are just objects of ignorance and attachment. What is the use of experiencing all these realities at this moment? Understanding this is the beginning of seeing dukkha, which is the arising and falling away of realities. Each conditioned reality is dukkha. It just arises and falls away and it cannot be controlled. It is time to eat, to sleep, to move, to think, but we have an idea that ‘I will do this’. We can come to understand the paññā of the Buddha and his compassion to teach, to let others understand whatever appears.”

At the end of my stay in Thailand a short visit to Chiangmai was planned and I wanted to join this. We took the plane and stayed one night, but there were two full days of Dhamma discussions. I had been to Chiangmai before and, thus, it was a happy meeting again with old friends. We had lunch in the cultural center where we were offered traditional Northern dishes, like bamboo filled with pork and a great variety of vegetables. The sessions were in an auditorium in the hotel where we stayed overnight. I had to climb a podium with very steep steps, but people assisted me from all sides.

Acharn explained about nimitta that when seeing, there is clinging to the nimitta as something or somebody. The impingement of visible object on the eyesense is a condition for seeing that arises and falls away very rapidly. Because of the arising and falling away again and again a nimitta or sign of continuity appears. She said: “There is a nimitta of different shapes and forms. Saññā remembers them wrongly as something that stays. There is wrong remembrance of self, attā-saññā. Concepts are known because of different nimittas. Because of a concept we know what something is. Because of thinking of nimitta we know when and where there is food. If there is no reality, there is no nimitta and no shape and form.”

We have to know the extent of our understanding and if we try to find out more than we can understand, we are clinging again. When understanding develops we can let go of clinging very gradually. We have possessions in our house but do we have them

now? We are only thinking of them. When we return home, they may not be there anymore. We should develop understanding with courage and cheerfulness. People mostly follow their own ideas and do not study the teachings with respect. Therefore, the teachings will dwindle and disappear.

The last afternoon, before our departure, one of our friends sang a song in honour of Acharn. She praised her wisdom in explaining the Dhamma to all of us. The song was very charming with a melody in the Northern style of music. When we were at the airport on our way back we waited in the VIP room where we had a Dhamma discussion for another hour. People showed a great interest and had many questions. Acharn reminded us again of the Buddha's last words, saying that we should not be neglectful, also with regard to listening to the Dhamma. There are dhammas all the time but we do not know that they are dhammas. Their different characteristics should be investigated.

The Buddha taught the four noble Truths: the Truth of dukkha, the Truth of the origin of dukkha, the Truth of the cessation of dukkha and the Truth of the Path leading to the cessation of dukkha.

Dukkha is the arising and falling away of dhammas. What arises and falls away is not worth clinging to, it is unsatisfactory. The origin or cause of dukkha is craving, because of craving we have to reborn and that means the arising and falling away of nāma and rūpa again and again. The cessation of dukkha is nibbāna and the Path leading thereto is the eightfold Path.

Paññā has to be developed on and on for aeons before the four noble Truths can be penetrated. The Buddha showed in his first sermon ²⁸ that there are three phases in the development of understanding and these pertain to each of the four noble Truths. There are three "rounds" or inter-twining phases of the understanding of the four noble Truths. They are: understanding of the truth, sacca ñāṇa, knowledge of the task to be performed, kicca ñāṇa, which is the development of understanding of realities, and knowledge of the task that has been done, kata ñāṇa, which is the direct realization of the truth.

Acharn referred very often to these three "rounds" or phases and explained that without the first phase, sacca ñāṇa, the firm understanding of what the four noble Truths are, there cannot be the second phase, kicca ñāṇa, the performing of the task, that is, satipaṭṭhāna, nor the third phase, kata ñāṇa, the fruit of the practice, that is, the penetration of the true nature of realities.

²⁸ Kindred Sayings, V, 420. The Foundation of the Kingdom of the Norm.

With regard to the first phase, she said that there should be the firm intellectual understanding of the first noble Truth, and that means understanding that there is dhamma at this moment, that everything that appears is dhamma. Acharn said that it must be the firm understanding that seeing arises and falls away, and that we should not be ignorant of seeing. All dhammas should be known, otherwise the idea of self cannot be eradicated. She said:

“Who sees? When anattā is understood it is the beginning of the right Path.” When we listen to the Dhamma and consider what we hear the intellectual understanding of realities, that is, the first phase, *sacca ñāṇa*, gradually develops and then it can condition the arising of *satipaṭṭhāna*. This means that the second phase, knowledge of the task, *kicca ñāṇa*, begins to develop. The practice, *paṭipatti*, is actually knowledge of the task that has to be performed.

The second noble Truth is craving or attachment. Craving or clinging in daily life should be understood. The clinging to self has been deeply accumulated and we should consider this more. We cling to *satipaṭṭhāna* and this can induce wrong practice. We should learn at what moment this occurs, the test is always at this moment. Understanding of what appears at the present moment through one of the six doorways leads eventually to the abandonment of craving. Seeing, for example appears now and it can be known as only a conditioned dhamma, no self who sees. However, attachment takes us away from the present object, time and again, so that we are forgetful of seeing that appears now. Also attachment can be known as a dhamma.

The ceasing of *dukkha*, namely *nibbāna*, is the third noble Truth. Also with regard to the third noble Truth there are three phases: understanding what the ceasing of *dukkha* is, *sacca ñāṇa*. *Paññā* can come to see the danger and disadvantage of the arising and falling away of conditioned dhammas and it will see the unconditioned dhamma that does not arise and fall away as freedom from *dukkha*. We should have the firm understanding that detachment and the eradication of defilements is the goal. We should be convinced that it is possible to attain this goal only if we follow the right Path. Understanding of the task in order to reach this goal is *kicca ñāṇa*. At the moment of enlightenment *nibbāna* is experienced and defilements are eradicated. Understanding of the task which has been performed, the realization of *nibbāna*, is *kata ñāṇa*.

The way leading to the ceasing of *dukkha*, namely the eightfold Path, is the fourth noble Truth. Also with regard to the fourth noble Truth there are three phases or rounds. The first round is understanding what the development of this Path is, *sacca ñāṇa*. This is not theoretical understanding, but it pertains to the development of understanding of the dhamma appearing at this moment. *Nāma* and *rūpa*, *paramattha* dhammas, are the objects of which understanding should be developed. These are different from concepts, from the image of a ‘whole’ of a person, of the body, of a thing. When there is firm understanding of what the Path is, we shall not deviate from it.

The teaching of the three phases shows us that the development of paññā is bound to be an age-long process. We need to develop it with courage and patience.

Acharn was invited to speak at the “World Fellowship of Buddhists”. I went to their center with Jonothan. It was a long taxi drive because at that time several streets were blocked during anti-government demonstrations. We had to walk through a park to reach the place.

Acharn said:

“Reality is very daily. It should be studied, otherwise we never know the truth. Does anything belong to you? Even seeing does not belong to you. Right understanding, when it arises, begins to see realities as no being. Seeing is seeing. At the moment of hearing there is no seeing. Is sound real? It has its own characteristic. Nobody can change the characteristics of realities. When one has not heard the Dhamma one thinks: ‘I see a person’. Visible object is a reality that is seen and after that one thinks of shape and form because of saññā. Each moment is conditioned. Understanding is conditioned.”

Several people showed a real interest and asked questions. We discussed the fact that it is not by chance that someone comes to a particular place at a particular time to listen to the Dhamma. It must be because there was an interest in the past and this has been accumulated so that there are conditions to listen again, to consider again. In this way understanding can grow.

The Buddha taught anattā all the time. Anattā of what? Of realities or dhammas. We should not think so much about names and terms, but understand the reality represented by a name. We may stare at the texts but it may happen that the meaning escapes us. Then we may go all the wrong way, and this is very dangerous.

When reading suttas it may seem that the Buddha spoke about impermanence of concepts, such as persons or possessions, but this was the method of teaching to certain people who needed first conventional truth until they were ready to accept ultimate truth (paramattha sacca). So, he often spoke about people in different situations. When reading about conventional truth we can consider the deeper meaning, the truth of realities.

When people had deep sorrow about the loss of dear ones, they needed at first a gentle approach by way of situations and persons. Not everybody is ready to accept the truth that each reality falls away very rapidly, never to come back, and that there is nothing left. When we read in the suttas about death we can be reminded of momentary death. At each moment dhammas arise and then fall away never to return. If we believe that people stay or that possessions are there all the time, we live in a dream.

We read in the “Sutta Nipāta”, the Group of Discourses, the Chapter of Eights, IV, Old Age, vs. 804-813 ²⁹:

“ Truly this life is short; one dies less than one hundred years old. Even if anyone lives beyond (one hundred years), then he dies because of old age.

People grieve for their cherished things, for no possessions are permanent. Seeing that this separation truly exists, one should not live the household life.

Whatever a man thinks of as ‘mine’, that too disappears with his death. Knowing thus indeed, a wise man, one of my followers, would not incline to possessiveness.

Just as a man, awakened, does not see whatever he met with in a dream, even so one does not see beloved people when they are dead and gone.

Those people are seen and heard of, whose name is ‘so and so’. When he has departed, only a person’s name will remain to be pronounced. Those who are greedy for cherished things do not abandon grief, lamentation and avarice. Therefore the sages, seeing security, have wandered forth, abandoning possessions. Of a bhikkhu who lives in a withdrawn manner, resorting to a secluded residence, of him they say it is agreeable that he should not show himself in any dwelling.

Not being dependent upon anything, a sage holds nothing as being pleasant or unpleasant. Lamentation and avarice do not cling to him, as water does not cling to a (lotus)-leaf.

Just as a drop of water does not cling to a lotus(-leaf), as water does not cling to a lotus, so a sage does not cling to what is seen or heard or thought.

Therefore a purified one does not think that purity is by means of what is seen, heard or thought, nor does he wish for purity by anything else. He is neither impassioned nor dispassioned.”

The commentary explains as to the words “a bhikkhu who lives in a withdrawn manner”, that he practises so that the citta becomes detached. The word bhikkhu refers to the “excellent worldling” (kalyāṇa putthujana) or the “trainer” (sekha puggala, the ariyan who is not arahat). As to not showing himself in any dwelling, this means that the wise person is free from dying, he does not have to be reborn.

²⁹ Translated by K.R. Norman, PTS 1992.

The development of understanding of whatever reality appears now leads to detachment. As we read: "A sage does not cling to what is seen or heard or thought". He understands realities as they are.

Chapter 6

Courage.

The world with all the people is quite different from what we used to think, before we heard the Dhamma. Even though we listened for a long time we have not penetrated the truth of realities. We may repeat the word “There is no one there. Everything is dhamma”, but as we listen more to Acharn we come to realize how little we know. This is beneficial, we have to continue to listen and consider the Dhamma with courage and cheerfulness.

The world seems so large, but there is only one citta that experiences an object and then falls away. Acharn reminded us many times that we are not together with another person but with citta that experiences visible object and with citta that thinks, with citta that experiences sound and with citta that thinks, with citta that smells odour and with citta that thinks. We are alone in our own world. We think of another person but there is only citta that thinks and then falls away.

Acharn said: “Paññā can arise and it can accumulate. It is not a matter of ‘doing something’ but of understanding. Everyone would like to have paññā, but the moment of understanding is paññā. When a reality appears paññā can know the truth. Do not try to have it. At this moment it can be known to what extent paññā has developed.”

We have to understand seeing and visible object. Time and again seeing arises and, thus, we should not be forgetful of the present reality. Some people may find seeing too ordinary to consider, not interesting enough. But it arises because of the coming together of different factors. Visible object and eye-base are rūpas that have not fallen away yet. Rūpa does not fall away as rapidly as nāma. There are conditions for them to associate exactly at the time they have not fallen away yet, so that kamma, a deed committed in the past, can produce seeing. We always took seeing for granted, but actually, it is amazing that seeing arises.

Seeing experiences visible object and only for that extremely short moment the world is bright. When seeing has fallen away other cittas succeed seeing in the eye-door process which, although they do not see, still experience visible object, but the world is no longer bright. It seems that when we notice persons on account of what has been seen, that the world is still bright, but this is not so. We are thinking and, although our eyes are open, the world is dark. Thinking and other experiences are interspersed with moments of seeing visible object very rapidly, and it seems that we are seeing all the time. However, the moment of seeing is extremely short, it arises and falls away. Thus, in reality only one short moment is bright and all other moments are dark.

Because of our ignorance we take phenomena for permanent and self. It seems that we see people and things and that whatever we see was there already for a long time and that the world keeps on being bright.

In the beginning the momentary arising and falling away of realities, one at a time, cannot be realized. Understanding has to be developed further so that impermanence can be directly penetrated.

We read in the “Kindred Sayings” (IV, First Fifty, Ch 3, § 23, Helpful), that the Buddha said:

“ ‘I will show you a way, brethren, that is helpful for the uprooting of all conceits. Do you listen to it. And what, brethren is that way?
 Now what think you, brethren? Is the eye permanent or impermanent?’
 ‘Impermanent, lord.’
 ‘What is impermanent, is that weal or woe?’
 ‘Woe, lord.’
 ‘Now what is impermanent, woeful, by nature changeable, -- is it fitting to regard that as: This is mine. This am I. This is myself?’
 ‘Surely not, lord.’ ”

The Buddha then explained the same about the other sense-doors, the objects experienced through them, and the cittas that experience these objects. He said that the person who realizes the truth attains arahatship and eradicates conceit.

The Buddha draws our attention to realities such as the senses, all the objects that can be experienced and all the cittas that experience these objects. The Dhamma is very precise. We do not even know what hearing is. It seems that we hear words that are spoken, or that we hear dogs barking, but only sound is heard. We have to get used to realities one at a time. It will take very long before the arising and falling away of precisely this or that reality is directly known. In this sutta we see that the Buddha mentions realities (dhammas) and not concepts, no collection of things. In this sutta he truly teaches Abhidhamma, higher dhamma or dhamma in detail. Or in other words, paramattha dhamma, dhamma in the highest sense. The Buddha asked after each reality he mentioned whether it was permanent or impermanent. He wanted the listeners to consider the truth with respect to each reality, one at a time, right at that very moment. It is only dhamma at this moment that can be investigated.

A collection of things does not exist. Where is a person? Is it seeing, hearing or thinking? Only one citta arises at a time. Once we understand this, we know the difference between reality and concept.

The Great Disciples at the Buddha's time could after only a few words realize the truth of impermanence: the arising and falling away of seeing that appeared at that moment, of visible object and of the other realities that appeared at that moment. But we are beginners. Impermanence is not realized by thinking, it is by direct understanding and no words are needed. It is not thinking: “everything comes to an end”. Anybody could come to this conclusion.

We read and repeat: “all conditioned dhammas are impermanent”, but these are only words to us. What arises and falls away at this moment: a nāma or a rūpa? Citta with understanding and mindfulness can take only one object at a time. Does seeing fall away now, or visible object? This has to be known very precisely.

There are specific characteristics (*visesa lakkhaṇa*) and general characteristics (*samañña lakkhaṇa*). The general characteristics are: impermanence, *dukkha*, *anattā*. These general characteristics cannot be realized immediately. First it has to be known precisely what seeing is as different from visible object. The specific characteristics have to be known first. So long as we join realities together we take them for some “thing”, for a self, for permanent. Seeing is different from thinking, different from attachment, these are different realities, each with their own specific characteristics. That is the reason why Acharn always stressed: you have to know realities first as only a dhamma, and that at the present moment, now.

The Buddha taught for fortyfive years so that people would have conditions for direct awareness and understanding. The Buddha had immeasurable compassion to teach so that others could understand whatever reality appears at this moment. Without him we would be in complete darkness, the darkness of ignorance. We would not know what is real and what is not real. We would not know our attachment and all other vices, we would not know how to develop kusala. We should study what the Buddha taught with genuine respect. Every word he said is important.

We should begin to learn what dhamma is from this very moment. In the beginning one does not know anything at all about dhamma, the reality that is appearing now. When we listen we can begin to see that what arises and appears at this moment is dhamma; we can understand it as dhamma. We can understand the characteristic of dhamma instead of thinking about the “story” of dhamma.

We read in the “Path of Discrimination” (*Patisambhidamagga*, Treatise on Knowledge I, Ch 71, the Great Compassion) that Enlightened Ones when seeing all the dangers and disadvantages of worldly life, have great compassion for beings. We read at the end:

“Upon the Enlightened Ones, the Blessed Ones, who see thus, ‘I have crossed over and the world has not crossed over; I am liberated and the world is not

liberated; I am controlled and the world is uncontrolled; I am at peace and the world is not at peace; I am comforted and the world is comfortless; I am extinguished and the world is unextinguished; I, having crossed over, can bring across; I, being liberated, can liberate; I, being controlled, can teach control; I, being at peace, can pacify; I, being comforted, can comfort; I, being extinguished, can teach extinguishment,' there descends the Great Compassion. This is the Perfect Ones knowledge of the attainment of the Great Compassion."

It was the Buddha's great compassion to teach in such a way that people who listened could develop their own understanding.

Many conditions are necessary for right understanding to develop. Acharn often reminded us that there is not a self who is trying to develop paññā, but that saṅkhāra-kkhandha is operating. Saṅkhāra-kkhandha (the khandha of formations) includes all cetasikas apart from feeling and remembrance. All sobhana cetasikas (beautiful cetasikas) are included such as sati, paññā and other wholesome qualities. She explained that the development of right understanding is understanding of whatever appears. This is conditioned by listening and considering the Dhamma. She said: "Leave it to saṅkhāra-kkhandha. They are working on and on, all by themselves." When we really consider this we shall be less inclined to think that we have to "do" something special in order to have more understanding.

All wholesome qualities, such as the "perfections" have to be developed together with right understanding. Paññā is very weak, it needs the support of all kinds of kusala so that the 'other shore' can be reached. This shore is the shore of defilements and the 'other shore' is enlightenment, when defilements are eradicated. We need courage, viriya, so as not to become downhearted but continue on the right way of development. We need dāna, generosity, so that we are not self-centered all the time, thinking of our own pleasure. We need determination (aditṭhāna) to continue on and on considering the reality appearing now, whatever difficult situations we have to face, since we see the benefit of right understanding. We need truthfulness, sincerity: to what extent is there paññā and to what extent still ignorance. We do not want to be deluded about the truth of realities and be blinded. We should not mistakenly believe that we have understood what we are still ignorant of. With sincerity we have to develop all kinds of kusala. We need patience, to listen and carefully consider each word of the teachings. We see that many conditions are necessary for the development of paññā.

Sarah spoke about difficulties many people face with anxiety and depression. She said: "We learn that these are kinds of aversion, not liking, not accepting life now as it is. No one likes such states because of the unpleasant feelings, but no one minds about the attachment and pleasant feelings which lead to the anxieties and depres-

sions. So often, we find ourselves lost in the stories about past and future and just forget that now, the realities are simply the seeing of what is visual, the hearing of sounds and thinking about such experiences. The ideas thought about in our imagination are not real. This is why we look at the actual realities more and more.”

This is true, the more we listen, the more we come to see the importance of understanding the present dhamma. In our daily life we are absorbed in many different events that take place, or in what we read in the newspaper. At the hotel in the small pool that I use for my early morning swim, a huge snake was found, just ten minutes before I would enter the pool. On account of this it is natural that we think of many stories of what could have happened. At this time it was Chinese New Year, the Year of the Horse. Children were dressed and performed a dance mimicking a lion’s movement. One could throw money inside his wide-open mouth and then the lion would bow and thank the giver. Only visible object is seen, but on account of visible object we go on thinking for a long time. Gradually we can come to see the difference between thinking of stories, of concepts and the experience of seeing and other ultimate realities.

At our last session in the “Foundation” Acharn stressed all the time: not the words are important, but what is understood right now at the present moment. What about seeing now? We do not need any words, we have to attend to its characteristic when it appears now. The present moment cannot be emphasized enough. It is very helpful that Acharn stressed the difference between textbook knowledge and understanding without naming realities, by attending to their characteristics. We are likely to call seeing vipāka (result of kamma) and clinging to visible object akusala but we can learn that their characteristics are different when they appear. Gradually we can learn that seeing is quite different from attachment, without calling them by name.

Acharn spoke about “seeing now” every day. Once we have some understanding of it as only a conditioned dhamma we will come to know what a reality is as different from a concept. Acharn often explained that what has fallen away never comes back and that this is the meaning of dukkha: the reality that just appears and disappears and never comes back. What was experienced in the morning is not now and what will be experienced in the evening is not now. Each moment is past and there is just the idea of self, of “I”, all the time. What from head to toe could be “I”?

During our sessions clinging to the “self” became more apparent, even when we do not think expressively: “it is mine”. We may believe that hardness is known as only hardness, but when it appears at some location in the body it shows that we cannot let go of the idea of body, it is always “somewhere in my body”. Seeing appears but when it appears at some location, namely at the eye-base, there is still an idea of my eye. It takes a long time before there is detachment from the idea of “self” or “mine”. Direct understanding of a dhamma is without words. Even when we talk about ulti-

mate realities we are thinking of concepts, concepts of realities. During our discussions this became clearer.

Usually there is no understanding, and, thus, we live in a dream. Now, when there is not direct understanding and awareness, we are dreaming. Even when we are talking about ultimate realities, we are dreaming. But when direct understanding arises we are not merely thinking, we are awake just for one moment. It takes a long time to realize the true nature of realities. Acharn explained with endless patience that “there is no one there”. To remind me of the truth she said: “Where is Lodewijk? He is no more, but also when he was still alive there was no Lodewijk. No Lodewijk, no Nina”. Her remark helped me to see that the Dhamma has to be applied in daily life, at this moment. She often asked whether seeing, hearing or thinking is a person. It is not a person, because each moment is gone completely. It is hard to accept, but it all depends on paññā: is it sufficiently developed? We need more listening and considering so that paññā can grow. In theory we know that person is a concept, not a reality. But right now we cling to concepts, to persons, as if they are real. It is beneficial to know what one does not know yet. I am very grateful to Acharn that she untiringly, with great compassion, explained that this moment is dhamma, not “us”. She said “this moment”, because only what is present can be investigated, it arises only once and immediately it is past: “once upon a time”.
