

# Understanding Reality

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## Understanding Reality

Can we find true happiness in life? There are moments of happiness in our life but these do not last. Pleasant things we enjoy are susceptible to change, they do not last. We do not really see the impermanence of what is in ourselves and around ourselves, we always cling to what is actually impermanent. The pleasant and unpleasant events of our lives condition very much our feelings. We are slaves of the vicissitudes of life. One day we are praised and then we are glad. The next day we are treated unjustly and we are humiliated, and then we are sad. There are in our life. We read in the "Gradual Sayings" (Book of Eights, Ch I, par. 6) that the Buddha spoke to the monks about the eight worldly conditions which obsess the world. He spoke with regard to those who have not attained enlightenment as follows:

...monks, gain comes to the unlearned common average folk, who reflect not thus: "This gain which has come is impermanent, painful and subject to change." They know it not as it really is. Loss come... fame... obscurity... blame... praise... contentment... pain... They reflect not that such are impermanent, painful and subject to change, nor do they know these conditions as they really are. Gain, loss and so forth take possession of their minds and hold sway there. they welcome the gain which has arisen; they rebel against obscurity. They welcome the praise which has arisen; they rebel against blame. They welcome the contentment which has arisen; they rebel against pain. Thus given over to compliance and hostility, they are not freed from birth, old age, death, sorrows, lamentations, pains, miseries and tribulations. I say such folk are not free from ill.

We then read that for the "ariyan disciple," who has attained enlightenment, the opposite is the case. We may wonder what the secret is of the ariyan disciple. He sees things as they really are and is not enslaved to the worldly conditions. Could we also become an ariyan disciple? At this moment we are still "unlearned, common, average folk." From the Buddha's teachings we learn that seeing realities as they are can make us less enslaved to the worldly conditions. Seeing things as they are, that is true wisdom. Do we see realities as they are or do we live in dreams and fantasies? In our life there are realities and there are imaginations or ideas which we form up in our mind. We do not even know the difference between reality and imagination. However, in order to see things as they really are we must know the difference between what is real and what is not real. We may wonder whether the Buddha's teaching is not a philosophical system which deals with abstractions. On the contrary, the Buddha's teaching helps us to know ourselves, to know our different moments of wholesomeness and unwholesomeness. He taught the way to eradicate attachment, aversion and ignorance.

Our thinking about reality is conditioned by many ideas we acquired through our education and through the culture in which we are rooted. If we want to understand what the Buddha taught we should not hold on to our own ideas about reality and we should be open-minded to his teaching. Then we will notice that his teaching is completely different from our ideas about reality. The Buddha taught about everything which appears no and which can be directly experienced. He did not teach abstract ideas. What appears no? Is it

attachment, aversion or ignorance? Or is it generosity or compassion? In our life there are wholesome moments and unwholesome moments and these change very rapidly. We do not have one consciousness or mind, but many different moments of consciousness. Moments of consciousness are realities, not imagination, and we can know them now, at this moment, when they appear. Then we will notice that there are many different moments of consciousness (cittas). When we, for example, perform a good deed there are wholesome moments of consciousness, but also unwholesome moments of consciousness may arise. Some slight stinginess may arise, which we only know ourselves and which nobody else may notice. There may be attachment to the person to whom we give a gift, or there may be conceit. If we do not know when there is an unwholesome moment of consciousness (akusala citta) how could we develop wholesomeness? Through the development of right understanding of the different moments of consciousness we will better know our defilements and then we will see that the cause of all sadness and misery is within ourselves and not outside ourselves.

What are realities and what are imaginations? We use in our language words in order to make ourselves understood. sometimes a word represents something which is real, which can be directly experienced, and sometimes a word denotes an abstract idea. We must find out what the Buddha taught about reality, otherwise we will continue to be ignorant of what occurs in ourselves and around ourselves. then it will be impossible to eradicate our faults and vices and we will not be freed from our enslavement to the worldly conditions. Moments of consciousness are not imagination, they are realities which can be directly experienced, now, at this moment. We can come to know our good and bad qualities when they appear. We have attachment and aversion with regard to what we experience through the eyes, the ears and through the other senses. Before attachment or aversion with regard to what we see can arise, there must be a moment of just seeing. Is there seeing at this moment? It can be experienced, it is a reality. Seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, experiences through the bodysense and through the mind are realities, they are not imaginations. They are different moments of consciousness which can be directly experienced with they appear. The Buddha spoke about realities which can be directly experienced and there are different from abstract ideas and imaginations. Seeing is the experience of what presents itself through the eyes, of what is visible. Seeing is different from thinking about what we see, different from attachment. Seeing just sees. Hearing is the experience of what presents itself through the ears, of sound. Hearing is different from thinking about what we hear such as someone's voice or the barking of a dog. Sound is a reality, it can be directly experienced; but sound itself does not experience anything, it is different from hearing. Tasting experiences flavour. Flavour can be directly experienced when it presents itself. Flavour itself does not experience anything, it is different from tasting. In our life there are two kinds of realities:

- The reality which knows or experiences something, nāma
- the reality which doesnot know anything, rūpa.

Generosity, kindness, aversion, seeing or hearing are mental phenomena or nāmas, they experience different objects. Sound, flavour, hardness, softness, heat or cold are physical phenomena or rūpa, they do not know anything. If we want to know what is real we should ask ourselves: "Can it be directly experienced?" What is real has a characteristic which there being the need to think about it or to name it. Everything which is real can be directly experienced through the eyes, the ears, the nose, the tongue, the bodysense and the "mind-door," through these six doorways. Thus, if we want to know whether something is real we should ask ourselves: "Can it be directly experienced and through which of the

six doorways?" nāmas and rūpas are realities which can be directly experienced without there being the need to think about them or to call them by a name. Hearing is hearing for everybody, everywhere. We can give hearing another name, but its characteristic is the same. Sound is sound for everybody, everywhere. We can give sound another name but its characteristic is the same. Attachment is attachment for everybody, aversion is aversion for everybody. We can change their name, but the realities are the same. Generosity is a reality, it is nāma. We may be inclined to think that there is a person who is generous, that a self is generous, but generosity does not stay. It is not self, only a kind of nāma which arises and falls away. Seeing is real, it is a kind of nāma. We think, "I see," but seeing does not stay, it is impermanent. Where is then the self? There is no person.

What we take for a person are in reality only different nāmas and rūpas which arise and then fall away again. The nāma and rūpa in our life are realities which can be directly experienced. They are real, but they do not stay. They arise and then fall away immediately. We are full of wrong ideas about reality, we believe that a self sees and hears, that a self performs good deeds and bad deeds, the whole day there is clinging to a self. Wrong view about reality cannot lead to any good. So long as we believe in a self there cannot be any eradication of attachment, aversion and ignorance and then we will always be enslaved to the eight "worldly conditions" of gain and loss, fame and obscurity, praise and blame, contentment and pain.

There is no self who experiences something. The seeing sees, the hearing hears, the thinking thinks. What is the use of knowing this? It is essential to know that not a self but different moments of consciousness experience different objects. There can be only one moment of consciousness at a time and it experiences one object. We may be inclined to think that nāmas can last for a while. We may believe that thinking, for example, can last for some time. In reality there are many different moments of thinking and they think of only one object at a time. Can we think of more than one thing at a time? This is impossible. Seeing is a moment of consciousness and it experiences only one object: the visible object. After seeing there can be thinking of what we have seen or there can be hearing, but these moments cannot arise at the same time. All these moments are different. We should know nāma and rūpa as they appear one at a time through the six doors. Ideas such as person, car or tree are not realities, they cannot be directly experienced and thus they are not objects of which we should develop insight.

The Buddha taught that only one nāma or rūpa can be known at a time, when it presents itself through one of the six doors. We may understand this in theory, but now we have to prove it through the direct experience of realities. This is not easy, because we still cling to our wrong view of reality. Still, we have to know the different objects which present themselves one at a time through the different doorways.

Once I was having lunch with "Khun Sujin," my good friend in the Dhamma, in a Chinese restaurant in Bangkok. I was served a duck's foot and when I looked at it I had aversion. Khun Sujin said, "Just taste it, try it, without paying attention to the shape and form." I tasted it without paying attention to the shape and form. The taste was good. At that time I did not understand yet the full meaning of Khun Sujin's lesson, but she wanted to show me that the experience through the eyes is one thing, and the experience through the tongue the eyes is one thing, and the experience through the tongue quite another thing and thus another reality. We join all the different experiences together into a "whole" and we think "I am eating a duck's foot." Duck's foot is not a reality. What are the realities?

- There is the experience of visible object,
- there is visible object,
- there is attention to shape and form, and this is different from seeing,
- there is aversion,
- there is tasting, the experience of flavour,
- there is flavour,
- there is thinking of the flavour.

Thus we see that there are different mental phenomena, *nāmas*, and physical phenomena, *rūpas*, and these can be known one at a time. We can begin to develop right understanding of the realities of our life. If we do not come to know *nāmas* and *rūpas* which appear one at a time, we believe that a duck's foot, a person, a house or a car realities which exist. However, these things are ideas, not ultimate realities (*paramattha dhammas*). *Namas* and *rūpas* which can be experienced one at a time are realities. Our life is *nāmas* and *rūpas* which arise and fall away. When there is a clearer understanding of the realities which can be directly experienced, one *nāma* or *rūpa* at a time, there will be less confusion in our life and we will gradually learn that there is no self.

In order to develop right understanding of *nāma* and *rūpa*, there should be mindfulness of them when they appear. There is no self who is mindful but it is "sati" which is mindful. Sati is a term in Pāli (the language of the Buddhist scriptures) which can be translated as mindfulness, non-forgetfulness or awareness. Sati is a mental factor which accompanies each wholesome moment of consciousness. There are different kinds and degrees of sati. When we are generous there is sati which is non-forgetful of generosity. When we abstain from killing or other unwholesome actions there is sati which prevents us from unwholesomeness. There is sati with the development of calm (tranquil meditation) and it is mindful of the meditation subject. Sati in the development of insight or right understanding of realities has a different object: it is mindful or non-forgetful of a *nāma* or *rūpa* which appears now. At that moment there is no notion of a "self" or something which exists and can stay.

We cannot induce sati whenever we want it. Listening to the Dhamma and considering realities which appear can condition the arising of sati. We should have right understanding of the object of awareness: the reality which appears now, which is either *nāma* or *rūpa*, and we should remember that only one reality appears at a time. We are inclined to join many realities together into a "whole." I thought that I could see a duck's foot, and I failed to understand that seeing is different from thinking and different from tasting. One cannot see a duck's foot, seeing sees only visible object or colour. Thinking can think of the idea of a duck's foot. Thinking itself is a *nāma*, it is reality, and sati can be mindful of thinking. That idea of which we think is not a reality and thus it cannot be object of mindfulness. We cannot expect there to be many moments of sati in the beginning. Sati is non-forgetful of the reality which appears now, through one of the six doors, and at that moment understanding of that reality can develop. That kind of understanding is direct understanding of the reality which appears and it is different from theoretical understanding.

The development of direct understanding of realities is the development of insight of the Buddha taught. It can only develop very gradually, during many lives. Insight leads to detachment from the self. We learn that what we used to take for self are in reality many different elements, *nāmas* and *rūpas*, which can be known when they appear. My husband

and I had been invited to a restaurant where it was very cold. I have aversion towards cold and I was inclined to say something about it. But that would have been impatience and lack of consideration for our host and hostess. I considered that the nāmas and rūpas which arise are beyond our control. They arise when there are conditions for their arising. We always think that a self or a person can be master of nāma or rūpa. Sometimes it seems that we can, but it is not so in reality. The experience of bodily ease and pain belongs to the eight worldly conditions which we are not master of. The Buddha taught us to develop right understanding of realities which are already appearing in daily life, no matter whether they are pleasant or unpleasant. Sati can arise wherever we may be, in our daily life. Also when we do not feel well or when we are cold there can be mindfulness of realities. For example, if there can be a moment of mindfulness of only cold when it appears, there is at that moment no notion of "my feet which are cold" or "the cold draught," which are not realities but only ideas. After a moment of sati is never lost. Sati falls away, but it can condition a moment of sati again, later on. We may think of the eight worldly conditions, but the development of right understanding of realities will help us most of all to be more patient amidst the vicissitudes of life. Eventually the right understanding of realities will lead to complete detachment and to freedom from all sorrow.