

# **The Present Moment**

**by**

**Nina van Gorkom**

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## Preface

A ten days journey to Sri Lanka with English discussions was organized in October 2015 by Sarah and Khun Toey. Preceding this journey we stayed two days in Nakorn Nayok, in Thailand, where we had Dhamma discussions with Tadao from Japan, Ann from Canada, Sukinder and Khun Metta who live in Bangkok, and other friends. I found that it is most valuable to be in the company of good Dhamma friends. I am so grateful for all the good reminders of the truth about realities appearing in daily life. Early morning in the hotel in Sri Lanka Sarah reminded me that all the problems with difficult steps I had to take (very high and very deep), problems with the laundry, the bathroom, stiffness, are nothing compared to the Dhamma we received. I was so glad to hear again and again: “understanding is not yet firm enough, not enough yet.” I found it most helpful that Sarah and Jon elaborated on the subjects Acharn spoke about and gave us reminders of reality time and again.

I admired Jon's translation from Thai into English of all the details of the Vinaya Khun Sangob gave us, even including technical subjects like the Sīmā (measurement pertaining to boundaries).

The sessions in Sri Lanka were mostly two hours in the morning and two hours or more in the afternoon. Acharn never thinks of her own comfort or rest. That is why she decided, when we were in our hotel in Negombo (near Colombo), to travel during our stay there, to Colombo, which meant four hours in the traffic each day. In Colombo we went to the Buddhist Cultural Center to have Dhamma discussions with monks, sisters and other people. Even after returning to the hotel she would still be with us for Dhamma discussions. I am very grateful for all the reminders she gave about "dhamma now".

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## Chapter 1

### Concepts and Realities

The aim of the Buddha's teachings is to develop right understanding of the dhamma appearing at this moment and this will lead to detachment from the idea of self and to the eradication of all that is unwholesome.

We read in the "Khuddhaka Nikāya" in the Commentary to the "Basket of Conduct", the "Conduct of Yudañjaya", about the beginning of the development of paññā during the life the Bodhisatta was young Yudañjaya:

"In his life when the Bodhisatta was Yudañjaya, he was the eldest son of the King and had the rank of the viceroy. He fulfilled every day mahā-dāna, the giving of an abundance of gifts. One day when he visited the royal park he saw the dewdrops hanging like a string of pearls on the tree-tops, the grass-tips, the end of the branches and on the spiders' webs.

The prince enjoyed himself in the royal park and when the sun rose higher all the dewdrops that were hanging there disintegrated and disappeared. He reflected thus: 'These dewdrops came into being and then disappeared. Even so are conditioned realities, the lives of all beings; they are like the dewdrops hanging on the grass-tips.' He felt a sense of urgency and became disenchanted with worldly life, so that he took leave of his parents and became a recluse."

The Bodhisatta realized the impermanence of realities and made this predominant in accumulating a sense of urgency and disenchantment; it arose once and then became a condition leading to its arising very often.

What falls away immediately is dukkha, not worth clinging to. Seeing appearing at this moment is dukkha, it arises and falls away, never to return. We cling to whatever can be experienced through the senses and the mind, but actually we cling to what is gone already. What is gone never arises again.

In Sri Lanka we stayed first in a hotel outside Colombo, in Negombo. The first afternoon Venerable U Pandita and Kevin, a Vietnamese student who is living now in Colombo, visited us. We discussed dukkha, the first noble Truth and the difference between what is real and what is an idea or concept. Dukkha pertains to the arising and falling away of realities and if we confuse reality with concept and do not know the difference we cannot understand the truth of dukkha. The truth of dukkha refers to realities appearing at this moment.

We may have read texts of the Buddhist teachings about ultimate realities, dhammas, appearing one at a time through the six doors of the senses and the mind-door and we have learnt that these are different from what is real only in conventional sense such as a garden or a person which are a collection of things or a “whole” of impressions. We have theoretical understanding of the difference, but Acharn Sujin helped us time and again to have more understanding of the reality appearing now, at the present moment. In this way we learn to verify the truth for ourselves. For instance, when we are seeing now, it seems that we see persons and different things like a glass or a table. Persons and different things do not impinge on the eyesense, they are objects of thinking after seeing. Seeing experiences what is visible object impinging on the eyesense. We can come to know the difference between seeing and thinking very gradually, but it will take a long time since ignorance and attachment have been accumulated for a long time.

Seeing is not a person, it is a citta (moment of consciousness) that sees. It falls away and is then succeeded by a next citta. Only one citta arises at a time, but every citta is accompanied by different mental factors, cetasikas, which may be wholesome, unwholesome or neither. Our life is a succession of cittas that arise and fall away, succeeding one another. There is no moment without citta. That is why good and bad tendencies are accumulated from one citta to the next one, from life to life.

When we listen to the Dhamma and consider what we hear, there may be a little more understanding of what is real in the ultimate sense. Acharn said that we discuss a great deal about seeing and visible object, because otherwise we would be forgetful. The fact whether there is an interest in the Dhamma today is due to what has been accumulated in the past.

An illustration of this fact was given to us by a family in Thailand we met after our short sojourn in Nakorn Nayok, before we travelled to Sri Lanka. We stopped on our way back to Bangkok to visit this family at a place where they sold trees and plants. The grandmother is a garbage collector who happened to listen to one of Acharn’s radio programs and found that she had never heard before such an explanation of the Dhamma. She gained confidence and collected and sold old bottles to make money for the “Dhamma Study and Support Foundation”<sup>1</sup>. Her children were not interested in the Dhamma, but recently they independently from each other happened to see Acharn’s program on the T.V. and hear on the radio one of her lectures broadcasted. They were impressed by her words and from then on they listened regularly. Now a family of three generations, the grandmother, her children and grandchildren have great confidence in the Dhamma they heard. They had found out when Acharn was in

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<sup>1</sup> This is the center where all sessions with Acharn Sujin take place each weekend.

Nakorn Nayok and they were overjoyed by our surprise visit. Understanding and interest in the Dhamma does not arise without there being conditions. What has been accumulated in the past can be a condition for understanding today.

Different objects are experienced by citta and if there were no citta, these objects could not appear. We are so absorbed in the objects that present themselves that we are forgetful of citta. Acharn explained that what appears now to seeing is a reality, a dhamma. No matter what we call it, it is that which is seen. Visible object impinges on the eyesense and, after it has fallen away, the impression or sign, nimitta, of visible object is what is left. It seems that visible object lasts for a while, but in reality it arises and falls away. We know that seeing arises at this moment, but we cannot pinpoint the citta which sees, it arises and falls away very rapidly and another moment of seeing arises. We only experience the “sign” of seeing.

The notion of sign or nimitta can remind us that not just one moment of seeing appears, but many moments that are arising and falling away in succession. Also visible object is not as solid as we would think, there are many moments arising and falling away in succession which leave the sign or impression of visible object. Acharn Sujin used the simile of a torch that is swung around. In this way, we have the impression of a whole, of a circle of light that seems to stay. In reality there is no whole.

Visible object that was experienced by cittas of a sense-door process has fallen away; sense-door processes and mind-door processes of cittas alternate very rapidly. Visible object impinges again and again and seeing arises again and again. When their characteristics appear we cannot count the different units of rūpa or the cittas that see, they arise and fall away; the impression or nimitta of what is seen and of the seeing appears.

Acharn Sujin said: “No matter whether we call it nimitta or not, it is appearing now. Whatever appears is the sign or nimitta of the dhamma that arises and falls away.”

We cling to what appears for a very short moment, but it does not remain. It is the same with saññā, remembrance, a cetasika accompanying every citta. It marks or remembers the object experienced by citta so that it can be recognized later on. There is not one moment of saññā that marks and remembers, but countless moments, arising and falling away. We can speak of the nimitta of each of the five khandhas: of rūpa, of feeling, of saññā, of sankhārakkhandha (the other cetasikas apart from feeling and saññā that can accompany citta), of consciousness. There are nimittas of all conditioned dhammas that appear at this moment, arising and falling away extremely rapidly.

What is seen is not one reality arising and falling away, it is only the succession, the rapidity of the succession of visible object, and it appears as “something”. The nimitta of visible object that arises and falls away in succession gives rise to thinking of shape and form, of a concept of a person or thing.

We do not have to think of nimitta, but it is helpful to know about it: we come to understand that it is not possible to experience just one reality such as one moment of seeing or one visible object. It is of no use to try to catch it, wondering about it whether it is this visible object or that one. It is gone already. The next visible object has appeared already, but its characteristic can be known as just a dhamma. The teaching of nimitta gives us an idea of the shortness a reality appears; it is insignificant, not worth clinging to.

Seeing and visible object are realities, dhammas, but a concept we think of on account of what was seen is not real in the ultimate sense. Realities such as seeing, visible object, hearing, sound, all the sense-cognitions and the sense objects appear all the time and when they appear they can be objects of study. The study of the Dhamma is not theoretical. We may read texts of the Buddha’s Teachings and believe that we, while we read them and ponder over them, we already understand them, but that is not so.

Kevin said while he experiences hardness or softness by touch, that he has to think: “This is hardness, this is softness”. Otherwise he would forget the Buddha’s words.

Acharn answered: “When characteristics of realities are experienced, you need not think about words. We can know the difference between thinking about the ‘story’ of dhammas and the direct understanding of them. Whatever appears, there is no one there.”

She reminded us very often that there is no one there. The Buddha taught the nature of non-self, anattā, of realities. There is seeing, but it is not a person who sees, the seeing sees, the hearing hears. Seeing and all conditioned realities are non-self, there is no one who can cause their arising. They are beyond control. We may believe that we see a person, but only what is visible, visible object, is seen, there is no one there.

Seeing is real, it is a dhamma. We have to understand seeing that arises now, who can make it arise? Nobody can have anything at will. It can be said that seeing is a paramattha dhamma<sup>2</sup> and this means that its characteristic cannot be altered. We can give seeing another name, but its characteristic does not change: seeing experiences what is visible. Or it can be said that seeing is abhidhamma: subtle dhamma or dhamma in

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<sup>2</sup> Paramattha: The highest sense.

detail<sup>3</sup>. When we hear the word abhidhamma we need not merely think of the text; that part of the Tipiṭaka that is the Abhidhamma explains all realities in detail and it pertains to whatever reality appears now. In this sense it can be said that seeing, visible object, hearing, sound, that all realities are abhidhamma.

We are usually living in the world of concepts and we may have no understanding of paramattha dhamma, of what arises because of conditions. It is true that we have to think of people and things all day long, otherwise we could not lead our daily life naturally. We have to know that this is a book, that a table. But the difference between concepts and ultimate realities can be understood.

When there is wise attention to the object that appears now, understanding of realities can grow very gradually. But it takes a long time not to move away from the present object. That is why Acharn reminded us many times of the different phases of understanding: pariyatti, which is not theoretical understanding but intellectual understanding of the present object; paṭipatti which is direct understanding of whatever appears; and paṭivedha, the direct realization of the truth. Pariyatti can condition direct understanding and this again conditions paṭivedha.

Moreover, there are three rounds of the understanding of the four noble Truths that can be discerned: sacca ñāṇa, the firm understanding of what has to be known and what the four noble Truths are; kicca ñāṇa, understanding of the task, that is, direct awareness and understanding, satipaṭṭhāna<sup>4</sup>; kata ñāṇa, understanding of what has been realized, the direct realization of the truth<sup>5</sup>.

When pariyatti has become firm and more accomplished it is sacca ñāṇa. Then one does not move away from the dhamma appearing right now and turns to other practices in order to understand the truth. Sacca ñāṇa is the firm understanding of the fact that every dhamma that arises is conditioned.

After our discussion with the venerable U Pandita and Kevin, in Negombo, they had to return to Colombo, which meant for them about two hours or more in the traffic. Acharn decided that it would be better to visit them instead in Colombo for the next three days. There were sessions in the “Buddhist Cultural Center” in Colombo where monks, sisters and other people listened and showed their interest by their questions. In spite of the many hours we spent in the bus Acharn was never tired to have

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<sup>3</sup> The prefix “abhi” is used in the sense of “preponderance” or “distinction”. “Abhidhamma” means “higher Dhamma” or “Dhamma in detail”.

<sup>4</sup> Satipaṭṭhāna is the development of right understanding of mental phenomena and physical phenomena appearing at the present moment.

<sup>5</sup> See Kindred Sayings V, Kindred Sayings about the Truths, Ch 2, § 1, The Foundation of the Kingdom of the Dhamma.

Dhamma discussions. She always encourages us not to think of ourselves and our own wellbeing, and then we do not mind when we are in difficult circumstances. Whatever experiences arise, they are all gone immediately.

Sarah often reminded me, even early morning before breakfast in the hotel, that what really matters is the development of understanding of the dhamma appearing at this moment. She said that we have so much confidence and interest in the Dhamma that we travel a long way to hear the Dhamma. While we see its benefit we do not think of hardship, “my pain” or “my problems”.

In the Buddhist Cultural Center questions were raised that pertained to science and psychology, and people tried to find a common ground for Buddhism and science. However, science belongs to the world of conventional realities and its aim is different from the Buddha’s teachings. We all know conventional realities and we need not to be taught about them. When we are thinking about the world and all people in it, we only know the world by way of conventional truth. It seems that there is the world full of beings and things, but in reality there is citta experiencing different dhammas arising and falling away very rapidly. Only one object at a time can be cognized as it appears through one doorway. Without the doorways of the senses and the mind the world could not appear. So long as we take what appears as a “whole”, a being or person, we do not know realities. The Buddha teaches realities, dhammas that are real in the ultimate sense and that can be directly experienced. A medical doctor specialized in brain diseases had questions about memory, believing that this was stored in the brain. Acharn explained that memory, *saññā*, is a *cetasika*, mental factor, that accompanies every citta and that it arises and falls away all the time. It marks each object experienced by the citta it accompanies so that it can be recognized later on. When we recognize something or someone *saññā* performs its function.

With all her answers Acharn tried to help the listeners to understand the present reality, such as seeing, visible object, feeling or thinking. We had heard this very often, but every time it seems as if it is new. We are forgetful of realities and that is why we found it beneficial to listen again and again to her explanations about seeing now.

She said: “The seeing that now sees is not ‘I’. Life is the experience of one object at a time. There is always the idea of ‘I see, I hear, I think’. There are only different realities, no one at all.

Self is trying so hard to understand realities, but without the right conditions it is impossible.”

Even when we do not think of a self who is seeing, there is still a notion of “I see”. It is so deeply engrained. Acharn often said that understanding is not yet sufficient to be



detached from the idea of self. Patience is needed because it takes a long time for understanding to develop. The term pariyatti was often discussed. It is understanding of what appears at this moment. We may feel hot and then we usually have a notion of “I” who feels hot. We live in the world of concepts, instead of understanding what is reality. But sometimes one characteristic of reality such as heat or bodily feeling may appear. Then we begin to understand the reality of the present moment and even at this level there can be some detachment from taking heat or feeling for self or mine. Without pariyatti there will not be conditions for right awareness and right understanding of the Eightfold Path<sup>6</sup>. Pariyatti, when it is firmly established, conditions paṭipatti. Paṭipatti is often translated as practice but there is no one who practices. When people hear the word practice they are inclined to think of doing specific things in order to attain enlightenment. However, it is a level of paññā that directly understands the dhamma that appears at the present moment. It is of the level of satipaṭṭhāna. It can only arise when there are the right conditions, it is not under anyone’s control.

Acharn often reminded us that there cannot be paṭipatti when understanding of the level of pariyatti has not been sufficiently developed.

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<sup>6</sup> The eightfold Path are the cetasikas of right understanding, right thought, right speech, right bodily action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration. They develop together so that realities can be seen as impermanent, dukkha and anattā.

## Chapter 2

### One Path

One of the listeners in the Buddhist Cultural Center had doubts about the truth of the Abhidhamma. He was thinking about the history of the text and thought that it was of a later date. Acharn answered: “Whatever appears is Abhidhamma. Is it ‘I’ who sees?”

In other words, Abhidhamma is not theory, we can come to understand what Abhidhamma is if there is wise attention to the present reality. The text of the Abhidhamma teaches that there is no person, no self, only citta, consciousness, cetasika, mental factors accompanying citta and rūpa, physical phenomena. There is an unconditioned dhamma, nibbāna, but this can only be experienced through the attainment of enlightenment. In our daily life citta, cetasika and rūpa appear all the time. Seeing is not self, it is only a conditioned dhamma. Nobody can cause its arising.

For most people Acharn’s explanations were new and they found it hard to grasp immediately what she said. Sometimes her answers are short, but deep in meaning. Therefore, it was most helpful that Sarah elaborated on Acharn’s words in answering questions. Sarah and Jonathan assisted all the time during the sessions in adding more explanations to Acharn’s words.

Realities are different from concepts that can be objects of thinking but are not real in the ultimate sense. Acharn would time and again speak of seeing and explain that seeing is real. We are seeing all the time but we know so little about it. Instead of giving theoretical explanations about realities and concepts Acharn would speak about what appears at the present moment in order to help the listeners to understand what is real. At the moment of seeing there is no idea of a human, a bird or “I”. There is just a conditioned dhamma and no one makes it arise. The citta that sees falls away but it conditions the following citta to succeed it.

Some monks from Bangladesh showed great interest and one of them asked why the Buddha had spoken about groups of rūpa, kalapas.

Rūpas do not arise singly, they arise in units or groups. What we take for our body is composed of many groups or units, consisting each of different kinds of rūpa, and the rūpas in such a group arise together and fall away together.

There are four kinds of rūpa, the four “Great Elements” (Mahā-bhūta rūpas), which have to arise together with each and every group of rūpas, no matter whether these are rūpas of the body or rūpas outside the body. The types of rūpa other than the four

Great Elements depend on these four rūpas and cannot arise without them. They are the following rūpas:

- the Element of Earth (paṭhavīdhātu) or solidity, appearing as hardness or softness,
- the Element of Water (āpodhātu) or cohesion,
- the Element of Fire (tejodhātu) or heat, appearing as heat or cold,
- the Element of Wind (vāyodhātu) or motion, appearing as oscillation or pressure.

Every day we experience a great variety of sense objects, but they are, in fact, only different compositions of rūpa elements. When we touch a cushion or chair, tangible object may appear, such as hardness or softness. We used to think that it was a cushion or chair which could be experienced through touch. When we are more precise, it is hardness or softness that can be experienced through touch. Because of remembrance of former experiences we can think of a cushion or chair and we know that they are named “cushion” or “chair”. This example can remind us that there is a difference between ultimate realities and concepts we can think of but which are not real in the ultimate sense.

The Buddha taught about the groups of rūpa and each rūpa that arises is conditioned by the other rūpas in that group. It is entirely dependent on conditions and there is nobody who could cause its arising. The Buddha taught the nature of anattā of each dhamma. Visible object is always accompanied by the four great Elements and by other rūpas arising in a group. There have to be at least eight rūpas in each group. Apart from the four Great Elements these rūpas are visible object, odour, flavour and nutritive essence. Visible object arises in every group of rūpas, but only visible object impinges on the eyesense, the other rūpas of that group do not. We believe that we see a person but a person cannot impinge on the eyesense. However, there could not be an idea of “person” if visible object did not impinge on the eyesense and there would not be seeing.

Rūpas are classified as twenty-eight, but seven types appear all the time in daily life. They are: visible object, sound, odor, flavor, and three kinds of tangible object which are solidity (appearing as hardness or softness), temperature (appearing as heat or cold) and motion (appearing as motion or pressure). The Element of Water or cohesion cannot be experienced through touch, it can be experienced only through the mind-door.

All the texts of the Tipiṭaka, including the Abhidhamma, are not meant merely for intellectual study or memorizing, they are directed to the development of direct understanding of realities. The classifications in the texts of the Abhidhamma of cittas, cetasikas and rūpas are an exhortation to develop understanding of whatever reality appears at this moment. This is the development of the eightfold Path leading to the eradication of all defilements.

The Abhidhamma teaches about different cittas: cittas that are kusala, wholesome, akusala, unwholesome, vipāka, result of kamma, or kiriya, inoperative, not kusala, akusala or vipāka. A citta never arises alone, it is accompanied by several cetasikas, mental factors. Some cetasikas accompany every citta, such as remembrance (saññā) or feeling. Some accompany only akusala citta or only kusala citta. Each citta cognizes an object, that is its function. Akusala cetasikas or beautiful cetasikas that accompany it cause the citta to be akusala or kusala. When we are attached to people we are inclined to believe that it is self who is attached. However, it can be understood that attachment (lobha) is only a cetasika that is conditioned to accompany akusala citta at a particular moment. We were attached in the past and, thus, this inclination is accumulated from one citta to the next citta so that attachment arises again. Our life is an uninterrupted series of cittas arising in succession. That is why good and bad qualities are accumulated and carried on from moment to moment.

We read in the text of the “Path of Discrimination” (Paṭisambhidāmagga, Ch 69, 585) more about the meaning of accumulation:

“Here the Perfect One knows beings’ biases, he knows their underlying tendencies (āsayānusaya ñāṇa), he knows their behaviour (carita), he knows their dispositions (adhimutti), he knows beings as capable and incapable...”

The Commentary to the “Path of Discrimination” (the “Saddhammappakāsinī”) gives explanations about the knowledge of beings’ biases and underlying tendencies:

“As to the term āsaya, bias, they explain this as dependence, abode or support on which beings depend. This term denotes the disposition to wrong view or to right view that has been accumulated. It denotes the disposition to all that is unwholesome, such as clinging to sense objects, or the disposition to all that is good, such as renunciation that has been accumulated.

The defilements that lie persisting in beings’ continuous stream of cittas are called anusaya, latent tendencies. This term denotes the defilements such as clinging to sense objects that is strong.”

Thus, anusaya, latent tendency, refers to unwholesome inclinations that lie dormant in every citta<sup>7</sup>. They do not arise but they can condition the arising of akusala citta. Āsaya refers to both wholesome and unwholesome inclinations that have been accumulated and can condition the arising of kusala citta or akusala citta.

There were ignorance and clinging in past lives and these have been accumulated from life to life and that is why there are conditions for their arising time and again. However, in listening to the Dhamma and truly considering it, there may be a little more understanding of realities. A moment of understanding is never lost, it is accumulated in the citta so that it can arise again and grow very gradually.

We should understand first what is dhamma, before we can understand kusala and akusala dhammas. As Acharn often said, kusala is not a person, akusala is not a person. It is dhamma, only a reality. Generosity (alobha) may arise and this is a cetasika that accompanies kusala citta. It arises and then falls away with the citta. It cannot stay and it does not belong to a self. Evenso, aversion that arises is a cetasika that may accompany akusala citta. It cannot stay and does not belong to a self.

Seeing and hearing arise time and again. These are vipākacittas, results produced by past kusala kamma or akusala kamma. Kamma is accumulated from one citta to the next citta and it can produce its appropriate result later on.

Our world seems to be full of people, but there are only two kinds of reality: mental phenomena or nāma and physical phenomena or rūpa. Citta and cetasika are nāma, they experience an object, whereas rūpa does not know anything. Visible object and eyesense are rūpas that are conditions for seeing, they do not know anything. At each moment of life there is citta, accompanied by cetasikas. What we call body are groups of rūpa, arising and falling away. If there were no citta, the body could not move.

One of the monks said that there are different Paths for different people. He emphasized good behaviour in family life as essential for lay people. Acharn said that all the teachings point to right understanding. Kusala sīla is the wholesome behaviour of citta. Sīla before the Buddha's time was different from the sīla he taught.

Acharn said: "Not killing is what everyone can say, not only a Buddha. He taught that there is no one, no self, at any time. All dhammas are anattā. With regard to not killing, there is no "I" at all, only wholesome mental factors. There is no one. There

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<sup>7</sup> There are seven anusayas: sensuous desire, aversion, wrong view, doubt, conceit, craving for existence and ignorance.

may be wrong understanding, taking realities for self, from life to life. All the teachings are about understanding realities as not self. Ignorance, moha, and aversion, dosa, kill, not a self. His teachings are different from others' teachings. Morality with understanding is his teaching. One should not just follow his words, but develop one's own understanding.”

An illustration of the fact that *sīla* with understanding is the Buddha's teaching we find in the “Vyagghapajja Sutta” (Gradual Sayings, Book of the Eights, Ch VI, §4<sup>8</sup>). We read that Vyagghapajja visited the Buddha and asked for an instruction leading to happiness in this life and in a future life. First the Buddha explained the conditions for worldly progress using conventional terms expressing situations in everyday life. He spoke about abstaining from debauching, drunkenness, gambling and from friendship with evil doers. After that he spoke about the conditions for spiritual progress: the accomplishment of faith (*saddhā-sampadā*), the accomplishment of virtue (*sīla-sampadā*), the accomplishment of charity (*cāga-sampadā*) and the accomplishment of wisdom (*paññā-sampadā*). The accomplishment of faith is confidence in the Triple Gem and this points to right understanding. When right understanding is being developed confidence in the Buddha who taught the truth about realities is ever growing. The accomplishment of *sīla* is abstaining from killing, stealing and the other *akusala kamma* the abstention of which is contained in the five precepts. The *sotāpanna* who does not believe in a self who is abstaining, will never transgress these five precepts. He really has the accomplishment of *sīla*. Even so the *sotāpanna* who has eradicated all stinginess has the accomplishment of *cāga*. *Cāga* in its widest sense is actually relinquishment, giving up, renunciation from all *akusala*.

As to the accomplishment of wisdom, we read:

“Herein a householder is wise: he is endowed with wisdom that understands the arising and cessation (of the five aggregates of existence); he is possessed of the noble penetrating insight that leads to the destruction of suffering. This is called the accomplishment of wisdom.”

The Buddha taught that all *dhammas*, including *sīla*, are *anattā*. Whenever *kusala sīla* arises we should understand that it does so because of the right conditions and that there is no self who can make an effort for *kusala sīla*. If one thinks that one should accumulate more *sīla* so that later on there will be more understanding of realities, this is not according to the Buddha's teachings. When *kusala citta* does not arise, *akusala citta* arises very often. Right understanding sees the danger of *akusala*. One can begin not to neglect any kind of *kusala*, be it even of a slight degree. There can be

<sup>8</sup> I am using the translation by Ven. Narada, Wheel 14.

more conditions for kindness, compassion and helpfulness. Sīla accompanied by right understanding can lead to enlightenment. There is actually only one Path, the development of right understanding of realities.

Questions about samatha, the development of calm, were raised. Someone thought that samatha had to be developed before vipassanā. Acharn explained that one should know what calm is. If one expects or wishes to be calm it is attachment and there is no understanding. For both samatha and vipassanā right understanding is indispensable. Understanding has to know when the citta is kusala and when akusala, lest one mistakes akusala for kusala. One may believe that one is calm whereas in reality there is attachment. One may be attached to being in a quiet place without any noise. True calm (passaddhi) arises with every sobhana citta. When one assists someone else with kindness or one abstains from harsh speech, there is calm with the kusala citta. When someone develops samatha there are specific subjects of meditation, such as recollection of the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha, or death. Paññā in samatha has to be very keen so that it is known how true calm is to be developed with a meditation subject.

Mindfulness of breathing, anapanasati, is a subject that is often misunderstood. One may believe that by concentrating on breath calm can arise. We should first know what breath is. It is rūpa, conditioned by citta. Rūpas of the body can be conditioned by four factors: by kamma, by citta, by nutrition and by temperature. Breath is conditioned by citta. It is very subtle and very easily one may take for breath what is not breath. The rūpa that is breath is different from breath as we use this word in conventional language. Even when we are holding our breath as we say in conventional language, citta still produces the rūpa that is breath. Citta produces breath from birth to death.

One may believe that samatha is developed by concentrating on a meditation subject. Concentration can also arise with akusala citta; it focusses on an object in an unwholesome way. Paññā has to know when it is akusala and when kusala. When someone tries very hard to concentrate on a meditation subject, there may be attachment instead of calm.

The word meditation often leads to misunderstandings. In Pali the word bhāvana is used and this means developing. There is samatha bhāvana and vipassanā bhāvana which are different ways of development and have a different aim. Before the Buddha's time samatha was developed by those who saw the disadvantage of clinging to sense objects. They developed calm to a high degree in order to become free from sense-cognitions and from being involved in sense objects. Vipassanā is taught only by the Buddha. It is clear understanding of whatever reality appears at the present moment. This understanding eradicates ignorance and wrong view.

Throughout the discussions Acharn would frequently remind us never to move away from the present object. She would explain whatever can be understood right now. We think of a self who is seeing or hearing, but seeing and hearing should be understood as not self. Ignorance and wrong view are deeply engrained and that is why each reality is taken as “I”. Understanding has not been developed sufficiently so as to abandon the idea of self.

There is much to learn and consider so that understanding can very gradually develop. One may like to understand anattā now, to experience directly the arising and falling away of dhammas, but that is impossible. Only paññā can realize the truth, there is no one who can do anything. Acharn said: “The opportunity to listen to the Dhamma is not easy to find, it depends on conditions. Who knows what will happen the next moment or tomorrow? This moment of hearing the teachings can be accumulated little by little. Confidence in the teachings is more valuable than anything else in the world. The most precious thing in life is a moment of understanding. The teachings are very subtle and, therefore, more words of explanation and more consideration are necessary, otherwise there are conditions for forgetfulness of realities. Paññā can begin to see the danger of not understanding reality as it is, since ignorance will condition more and more akusala.”

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## Chapter 3

### Living Alone

Sometimes we may feel lonely, but Acharn reminded us time and again that there is no one who lives alone, that there are only different realities arising and falling away. We have heard this many times, but when we are in a difficult situation, such as the experience of the loss of a dear person, we tend to forget that in truth life is only one moment of citta experiencing one object that presents itself through one of the senses or the mind-door. When seeing, life is seeing that experiences only visible object, not a person. When hearing, life is hearing experiencing sound. When thinking of a person life is thinking, and the object of thinking is a concept, the concept of a person, and each of these moments falls away immediately.

Huong, one of our friends, wanted to join us in Negombo, but while she traveled she lost her friends in Vietnam twice since they had missed the plane. She did not know the right address and sent an Email to the Dhamma Study Group after she had moved into a hotel in Negombo. Sarah happened to check Emails very early in the morning and saw Huong's post. She did not hesitate and immediately took a taxi to fetch Huong at her hotel. It was all by conditions that Huong could meet us. Huong's mother had recently passed away and Huong was going through a difficult time because of her loss. Acharn said:

“The thinking is gone, everything is gone, each moment. Understanding is not sufficiently developed to see that whatever appears is dhamma. There is an idea of ‘my mother’, but even what is taken for mother is dhamma, and thinking about her is dhamma. Whatever appears, whatever arises is a dhamma. What we take for something or someone are in reality different dhammas...

We should not forget that whatever appears, whatever arises must be a dhamma only, one dhamma at a time... It's only a reality. That's why we learn about reality to understand reality as not self, otherwise there must be 'I'. When there's 'I', there's 'my Mom', Right? But when we talk about realities, we begin just to learn that whatever we take for someone or something are in reality different dhammas."

Developing understanding of realities does not mean that we do not think of persons anymore, but we learn to discern the difference between what is real in the ultimate sense and what is a “story” we may be thinking of.

When we feel lonely because of the loss of a dear person, unhappy feeling arises. But feeling does not last, it falls away immediately. We continue holding onto our feelings and sad thoughts, and we think of ourselves as being alone. It is natural that we

think of dear persons with attachment though we understand intellectually that there is no one there.

Acharn said: “There is no one there, only seeing arises and it sees. There is no one at the moment of hearing, no one who hears.”

Sarah remarked: “The development of understanding is learning to live alone, each moment. That is the nature of dhamma: always arising alone, falling away alone. From the moment of birth until the moment of death we are alone, there is never anyone there. Citta arises on its own by conditions. No matter the circumstances, no matter how difficult they are, we have to remember that citta is always alone, at each moment.”

After five days in Negombo we travelled by bus for about five hours to our next destination: Nuwara Eliya. This is located in the mountains, past Kandy. The hotel was at 1800 meter altitude. We passed tea plantations on the green hills and waterfalls. Our guide explained that in Sri Lanka nature is well protected and no more trees are to be cut. If someone would cut a Jackfruit tree he can await five years in prison. Our bungalow type hotel was situated high above terraces full of flowers. We had Dhamma sessions in the morning and in the afternoon. It was the rainy season but in the morning we could sit outside for our discussions. Acharn went out together with some of our group for a morning walk and Sarah told me that the talk was about flowers and plants all the way. This is natural, daily life. There should be no selection of objects that are experienced. At another moment Acharn asked people about the food they would eat and explained that we should not avoid talking about these things. We enjoyed the Sinhalese breakfast with the traditional “egghoppers”, pancakes with an egg. If we believe that there cannot be awareness when talking about such subjects we go the wrong way. Thinking is real, but it is gone immediately.

Our friends Vince and Nancy also came over for the sessions. We have known them for a long time. Vince spoke about Lodewijk, my late husband, with great appreciation and kindness. He asked me full of concern whether it was not a great change for me to live alone. I reacted later on to his question when the owner of the bungalow, Rajid, attended our sessions. We discussed about realities and the importance of knowing whatever appears at the present moment. This is the way leading to the understanding that there is no self, no person, only mental phenomena and physical phenomena arising and falling away. It is not easy to see that this truth concerns our daily life and, therefore, I returned to Vince’s question about my reaction to Lodewijk’s death in order to help Rajid to see the relevance of Dhamma to daily life. I explained that we learn from the Buddha’s teachings that even when a person is still alive there are just fleeting phenomena, only citta, cetasika and rūpa that arise and pass away instantly. Through the Dhamma our outlook on life can very gradually

change and we can learn to live alone, even when we have a loss. Citta is always alone, each moment.

Sarah said that the Dhamma is the best medicine but that it is not always easy to take this medicine. We hear about realities appearing now and that there is no person. We have to consider this, we cannot understand the truth immediately. It takes more than one life, but this does not matter. It is good that we begin to listen and consider. Understanding can only grow very gradually. It is useful to have discussions and remind one another of the truth.

I said that although I understand intellectually that a person does not exist, I still find it difficult to accept that Lodewijk, after passing from this life and going on to another life, does not care for me anymore. Acharn said that after dying-consciousness has arisen and fallen away and rebirth-consciousness has arisen, there is for the reborn being no more attachment to a particular person. Lodewijk cared for me in the past and I have some idea that he can still care for me. Acharn asked me whether I remember my past life? It is helpful to consider that this life is only one short period in the innumerable lives of the past and the lives yet to come. Thinking with attachment is very natural, but there are only dhammas. Dying-consciousness is succeeded by rebirth-consciousness and then there is a new life, a new story.

She reminded us: “We have to understand whatever appears. It is conditioned, nobody can control it, no matter pleasant or unpleasant experiences occur. When it is gone, it is gone. But we think that an experience is there all the time. From nothing to something to nothing, never to arise again. One characteristic of reality appears and then it does not ever appear again. It seems that the world continues to be the same, but actually it never is the same. Whatever occurs is only once in the cycle of birth and death, and then never again. This is the truth. It seems that seeing continues all the time, but there are countless moments of seeing. There is the succession of the arising and falling away of realities, appearing through six doorways all the time.”

In the “Kindred Sayings” (Ch III, Kosala, Persons, § 2 Grandmother) we read that King Pasenadi visited the Buddha. The Buddha asked him why he had come at this hour of the day. The King said:

“ ‘My grandmother, lord, is dead. She was aged and full of years; long her span of life, long her life’s faring. She has passed away in her 102th year.

Now, my grandmother, lord, was dear to me and beloved. If I had been offered the gift of a priceless elephant [or that her life might be preserved], I should have chosen that my grandmother had not died;

‘nay, I would have given the elephant away to save her life. I would have done no less had I been offered, or did I possess a priceless horse, or the choice of a village, or a province.’

‘All beings are mortal; they finish with death; they have death in prospect.’

‘That is notably and impressively said, lord...’

‘Even so, sire, even so... Even as all vessels wrought by the potter, whether they are unbaked or baked - all are breakable. They finish broken, they have breakage in prospect.’

All creatures have to die. Life is but death.

And they shall fare according to their deeds,

Finding the fruit of merit and misdeeds:

Infernal realms because of evil works;

Blissful rebirth for meritorious acts...’ ”

Wholesome deeds, kusala kamma, is accumulated and can produce a happy rebirth or pleasant sense impressions during life. Whereas evil deeds, akusala kamma, is accumulated and can produce an unhappy rebirth or unpleasant sense impressions during life. A wholesome deed or unwholesome deed committed in a past life can produce its appropriate result even after aeons. It is never lost but it is accumulated in the citta and passed on from moment to moment.

We usually think of death as the end of a lifespan, but in reality there is birth and death at each moment of citta that arises and passes away. A moment of seeing that arises now falls away instantly, never to return. What we take for life are only fleeting realities.

Huong asked me whether I have attachment now to my late husband.

I answered: “It depends on the citta at a particular moment whether attachment to my late husband arises. There is no attachment to thinking of him all the time, when seeing, or when having fun and laughing. There is only one citta at a time, experiencing one object. We may think of a whole situation of being sad, missing a dear person, but that is only a moment of thinking. It seems to last, but that is not according to reality. There are only seeing, hearing, other sense-cognitions or thinking and they are all gone immediately.”

The teachings are very subtle and the truth of there being no person cannot be penetrated immediately. We may understand intellectually that there is no person, no self, but, as Acharn emphasized many times, there are not yet sufficient conditions for direct understanding and direct awareness of the truth. If we wonder about it how to have more conditions there is no understanding of dhamma at all, Acharn said. We hear the word anattā and think about it, but there is no direct understanding of a reality that appears as only a dhamma. We have to be truthful to what is real now.

Acharn said many times: “What is seen cannot be anything at all, this is the way to have less attachment.”

What is seen, visible object, is only a type of rūpa that arises, impinges on the eye-base and then falls away. It is present for an extremely short moment, but we think about it for a long time, clinging to what has gone already. It seems that we see people, but they are not there, they are only objects of thinking, not of seeing. There is no one there, no person, that is the truth of anattā.

Visible object is an element, this means: devoid of self. It is a conditioned element, it is conditioned by the four great Elements that always arise together with it. The composition of these Elements is different at different moments: sometimes heat is more intense or it may be less, or hardness is more intense or it may be softer, and this causes the visible objects that are seen to be different. It seems to us that visible object can stay, but since it is conditioned, it falls away, it cannot stay.

Acharn said: “We talk about what appears, about seeing, hearing, smelling, but there is no understanding of these realities as not ‘I’ at all. Then there is no paññā. Everyone knows ‘I see, I hear, I think’, but at this moment there is seeing and seeing is conditioned. Little by little paññā begins to understand that it is not ‘I’. But it is not developed enough to give up the idea of self at all, no matter how many times we hear about this, for years, or our whole life. It depends on paññā and sati. Even at the moment of kusala there is sati, but sati is not apparent. So how can paññā see sati as sati which arises with kusala citta, when it is not apparent. But when paññā develops on and on there are moments of understanding reality, not only stemming from hearing, but sufficient to directly understand the nature of it as just a reality. Very naturally.”

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## Chapter 4

### Treasures

The subject of pariyatti was often discussed. We are bound to have misunderstandings about pariyatti and take for pariyatti what is only thinking about the teachings. Acharn said: “At the moment of understanding reality as not self, that is pariyatti.”

Sarah remarked: “That is what is meant by not moving away from the present object.” We should not mind when there is only thinking about the teachings, because whatever has conditions for its arising arises.

One may wonder whether there is just thinking about realities at a particular moment or whether there is pariyatti. Sarah said to me: “Behind such thinking there is strong clinging to self, to ‘my understanding’ and wanting to know how I can have result. Such thinking occurs when it is not understanding dhamma as anattā at this moment.”

We read in the “Dhammapada” (vs 76): “Should one see a wise man, who, like a revealer of treasures, points out faults and reproves, let one associate with such a wise person; it will be better, not worse, for him who associates with such a one.”

Being an ordinary person (puthujjana), I am full of ignorance, wrong view and clinging. I often do not see when these defilements arise. Even when I do not think: this belongs to me, this is myself, I am still full of the idea of me, me, me. As soon as I open my eyes and seeing arises, there is still the idea: I see, even when I do not say so or think so, it is there. When a good friend reminds me of my ignorance and wrong view I am just grateful, otherwise I would not know about them. I receive a treasure.

There may be a subtle trying to have awareness or to catch realities. Effort or viriya is a cetasika that arises with many cittas. We may believe that we do not try to have awareness. But there is a very, very subtle trying that is unknown to us. We wish to avoid akusala, we wish to have more understanding and not to be full of ignorance. At such moments there is a subtle trying. Paññā may come to know such moments.

Sarah said: “It is self trying. The most precious moment is understanding the anattaness of realities, not just want to have understanding. This is the way to have less attachment.”

We had a discussion about sati and I mentioned that there is sati with each kusala citta. Sati of the level of thinking. Our discussion was as follows:

Acharn: “Thinking about I, all about I.”

Sarah: “It is all about the ‘story’ of sati.”

Nina: “At the moment of kusala citta?”

Sujin: “It is true, but you do not need to talk about it.”

We often think about the “story” or concept of realities instead of understanding their characteristics. Acharn explained that when there are the right conditions for sati it is aware and at that moment there is no thinking about realities, no need to talk about sati. It arises unexpectedly, nobody can plan it. We talk so much about sati and about what level it is, and then we cling to an idea of “my sati”. Or we may think that we are not yet ready for sati of the level of satipaṭṭhāna. Also at such moments we are clinging to the idea of self who is not yet ready. If we do not mind whatever reality arises, even if it is a very unwholesome thought, and it is understood as just a conditioned dhamma, it is pariyatti. If friends would not remind me of the truth, I would go around life after life, not knowing about clinging to the self, to my thinking. Thus, these are rare gems to receive in the cycle of birth and death.

If paññā of the level of pariyatti has not been developed, there are no conditions for the arising of direct understanding of realities. Pariyatti is not reflecting about words and their meaning. Acharn often asked us: “Is there seeing now?” It is a reminder that there is seeing at this very moment, not an object we merely think about. What appears must be a reality, it is conditioned. If there were no conditions it could not appear. By understanding this, it is of the level of pariyatti. As understanding develops there will be detachment from taking things as a whole, as a being.

Pariyatti is understanding of what appears, but it is not yet direct understanding. Acharn said: “The understanding of realities is pariyatti, it is not understanding merely what this word pariyatti means. It is understanding of reality appearing now. It is the understanding of any moment, it is not thinking. It is not remembering the words of the texts. We can think about them, but pariyatti is the firm understanding of realities. Without pariyatti one goes the wrong way. Pariyatti is the understanding of realities which will condition direct understanding. If it is not firmly established it can never condition paṭipatti, satipaṭṭhāna. Pariyatti is not listening and thinking. The moment of understanding the truth of reality is pariyatti. We do not have to pinpoint whether there is intellectual understanding or direct understanding. Right now we talk about seeing, visible object, hearing, thinking, but it is not as clear as when paññā is developed to the degree that it can directly experience these realities.”

It seems that we understand what dhamma is, but when it arises, there is no understanding. More intellectual understanding of what appears now, pariyatti, will condition paṭipatti. Intellectual understanding knows just the “story” but it is not direct understanding.

The development of understanding should be very natural, there is no need to go to a special place or assume a special posture. One should not select a specific object for sati and paññā. Acharn often said: “no one can do anything”. This is not an excuse to be indolent. It is a warning not to cling to an idea of having sati and paññā by engaging in specific actions. Then we fall into the trap of lobha and wrong view. It is difficult to go against the current of the accumulated lobha, ignorance and wrong view.

The Buddha’s teachings can condition less attachment to the object that appears. Very gradually it can be learned that not a self sees but that seeing sees, that there is no thing, no person in visible object. There is no person, only citta, cetasika and rūpa. As Acharn reminded us, who understands the teachings of the Buddha will listen more, consider more and leave it to anattā, because the development of understanding is conditioned. If one tries to have it, it is not anattā. What arises is the world, two kinds of realities: the reality that experiences and the reality that does not experience anything. We should discern the true nature of nāma and of rūpa but we do not have to call them nāma and rūpa. Confidence can become firmer, confidence that there is a way to know directly realities, not merely by thinking about them.

Right understanding has to be developed together with the “perfections”, pāramīs<sup>9</sup>, which support right understanding. In the Commentary to the “Cariya Piṭaka”, in the introduction (Nidāna Katha) we read about four ways of development which indicate that paññā has to be developed during innumerable lives. They are:

- The complete development of the entire range of the Perfections, sabbasambhāra-bhāvanā<sup>10</sup>.
- Development without interruption, nirantara-bhāvanā. The development of the Perfections throughout the minimum period of four asaṅkheyya (incalculable period) and a hundred thousand aeons, or the medial period of eight asaṅkheyya and a hundred thousand aeons or the maximum period of sixteen asaṅkheyya and a hundred thousand aeons, without a break of even a single existence.

<sup>9</sup> 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.

<sup>10</sup> Sambhāra can mean requisite or ingredient.



- Development for a long time, cirakāla-bhāvanā, the development of the Perfections for a long duration which is not less than the minimum period of four asaṅkheyya and a hundred thousand aeons.
- Development with respect, sakkacca-bhāvanā<sup>11</sup>, the development of Perfections with seriousness and thoroughness.

Earlier Acharn had given some additional explanations and Sarah rendered these as follows:

Sabbasambhāra-bhāvanā refers to how kusala 'ingredients' are conditions for the development of understanding. Without kusala, there is just akusala all day. Any kusala, however small, should be developed. Without right understanding, it won't be known or developed.

Nirantara-bhāvanā refers to the fact that understanding does not develop at once, but over lifetimes to come with continuous development. It doesn't matter how long. What is important is that the understanding about anattā is firmly established. Nirantara means without interval, in the sense of continuously, forever. The development of understanding takes great patience for a long time, with no thought of being engaged with a particular practice in order to have a result more quickly. This is the only way to be freed from being enslaved by attachment.

If there is desire for results or impatience with the path, it shows that understanding is not firmly established.

When people read about development without interruption, continuously, nirantara-bhāvanā, misunderstandings may arise. This does not mean that there has to be mindfulness and understanding all day long, without interruption. Nobody could force the arising of mindfulness, it is anattā. One should be firmly established in anattā as Acharn said.

Acharn explained: “Understanding should not be only once but since all realities are anattā, not under one's control, no one can try to force having it all day - impossible. So this means not just in this life, but in whatever life to come, one is firmly established in anattā. If there is the idea of ‘attā’, it is against the teachings, the Truth, that's why it's very subtle. Take courage to really understand what is now, not ‘I try to have awareness’. It doesn't mean to have awareness continually, it means no matter in what life - anytime.”

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<sup>11</sup> Sakacca means having honoured, respected.

Cirakāla-bhāvanā is the understanding of how long it takes before there is understanding of what the Buddha said. There is no doubt about what had to be known and realized by the previous followers of the Buddha.

Sakkacca-bhāvanā refers to the respect for each word of the Teachings. When respectfully understood, there are conditions for more understanding and less ignorance.

When we read about the incalculable periods it can remind us that paññā has to continue to develop lifetime after lifetime in order to understand the reality appearing at this moment. When we begin to see that clinging to self is deeply rooted we can understand that the development of paññā together with all the perfections must take innumerable lives.

We read in the commentary to the Cariyāpiṭaka about the means by which the perfections are accomplished, and it is said that they should be performed perseveringly without interruption, and that there should be enduring effort over a long period without coming to a halt half-way. We may become discouraged when we do not see a tangible result of the development of understanding. Then we are thinking about self, about “my lack or progress”, instead of developing understanding of whatever reality appears at the present moment. We are falling into the trap of lobha, as we were reminded several times during our journey.

There is lobha time and again, even while studying the teachings or listening to Dhamma. One should understand the nature of anattā, also at such moments. Acharn said: “When we are talking about what appears, attachment may arise and then reality does not appear as it is. Attachment covers up the nature of anattā, so that one does not know that seeing and that which is seen are not anyone at all.”

The perfections should be developed now, at this moment. There should be patience and determination to begin to understand realities that appear, they should be investigated very carefully. We need truthfulness to investigate all realities of daily life. It takes time to really understand and follow the teachings. We need the perfection of patience, khanti, energy or courage, viriya, truthfulness, sacca and determination, aditṭhāna. Without patience paññā cannot grow. We need the perfection of equanimity to face the worldly conditions such as gain and loss, praise and blame, without being disturbed by them. When understanding becomes firm we have more confidence in the Buddha’s words. Whatever experiences through the senses occur, pleasant or unpleasant, they all have conditions for their arising. We shall be less inclined to think of our own wellbeing. Many conditions are necessary for the development of paññā, there is no self who can do anything.

We need energy and courage, viriya, to listen again and again to the Dhamma. When we are convinced that hearing true Dhamma and right understanding are the most valuable in our life we appreciate the opportunity for listening we still have in this human plane. We do not need to think of the perfections or enumerate them, they are any kind of kusala though body, speech and mind.

We may not like having akusala citta, but when there are conditions it arises. Nobody can change it. If we are not courageous enough to develop understanding of akusala we shall forever be ignorant of akusala cittas that are bound to arise, even in between moments of doing generous deeds. We cling to a notion of self who performs kusala and forget that each citta is impermanent and non-self.

When akusala citta arises we can verify how much understanding there is. Do we try not to have akusala? We may be looking for different ways in order not to have it.

Acharn explained: "I do not think, 'defilements are so ugly', they are just realities. There should be understanding of them. People want to get rid of all defilements but they do not have any understanding of them. Why should our first objective not be right understanding? I do not understand why people are so much irritated by their defilements. One is drawn to the idea of self all the time, while one thinks about it whether one has less defilements or more. There is no understanding but merely thinking of kusala and akusala as 'ours'. So long as there is ignorance there must be different degrees of akusala. We should just develop understanding of whatever reality appears. At the moment of developing understanding one is not carried away by thoughts about the amount of one's defilements, wondering about it how many defilements one has or whether they are decreasing. Just be aware instantly!"

Time and again Acharn reminded us of the development of understanding at any moment: "Like now, there's seeing, hearing, thinking. That's all. Whatever arises by conditions - just understand it. Usually it's the object of ignorance and attachment, but it can be the object of right understanding and detachment when there's more and more understanding. Just live by conditions. You cannot change it, you cannot make anything arise at all, whatever is there. Best of all is understanding it - not wanting more or less or this or that."

Paññā has to be developed together with all the perfections so that it can eradicate the wrong view of self and all other defilements. Because of the accumulated ignorance we do not realize that we cling to the idea of self, that we have the idea that we see, we hear, we think. Paññā will see more and more how deeply engrained the clinging to self is.

The following sutta illustrates how common clinging to self is. We read in the “Kindred Sayings” (I, Kosala, § 8, Mallika)<sup>12</sup> that King Pasenadi of Kosala said to Queen Mallika:

“Is there, Mallika, anyone more dear to you than yourself?”

Mallika answered: “There is no one, great king, more dear to me than myself. But is there anyone, great king, more dear to you than yourself?”

The King answered: “For me too, Mallika, there is no one more dear than myself.”

We read that the Buddha recited the following verse:

“Having traversed all quarters with the mind,

One finds none anywhere dearer than oneself.

Likewise each person holds himself most dear;

Hence one who loves himself should not harm others.”

The commentary to the “Verses of Uplift”(Udāna), which has the same sutta (Ch V, Soṇa, I) explains that if one wants happiness for oneself, one should not harm, including even a mere ant or other insect. When one harms others one will experience the result of akusala kamma. This is the law of kamma.

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<sup>12</sup> Translated by Ven. Bodhi.

## Chapter 5

### Clear Comprehension

We may come to see that the Dhamma we hear and study is of the highest value in life. During this journey and also on many occasions we could listen to the Dhamma; we acquired a better understanding that the object of right understanding is any reality that appears at this moment. This is the only way to have less ignorance.

We discussed “clear comprehension”, *sampajañña*, which is classified by way of four aspects. This classification as we find it in the Commentary to the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*<sup>13</sup> and in the “Fruits of the Life of a Recluse” (Dialogues of the Buddha, Chapter 2), reminds us of the purpose of developing right understanding and of the suitable means in order to reach the goal, so that we have less delusion about the objects of right understanding.

The four aspects of clear comprehension are:

- clear comprehension of purpose, *sāthaka sampajañña*,
- clear comprehension of suitability, *sappāya sampajañña*,
- clear comprehension of resort, *gocara sampajañña*,
- clear comprehension of non-delusion, *asammoha sampajañña*.

When we begin to read the text in the commentary about these four kinds of *sampajañña* we may believe that it all pertains to the life of a *bhikkhu*, to the ways he should behave and do what is suitable. He should not go to crowded places, that is not suitable for him. We read how he should walk, wear his robes, eat. All the time he should not be forgetful of the four ways of clear comprehension.

Here we read about situations described by conventional terms. But the commentary also points to ultimate realities. Sometimes the truth is explained by way of conventional terms, sometimes by way of ultimate realities. We should remember that *sīla* is the behaviour of *citta*. Further on we read about the processes of *citta*, about details of *nāma* and *rūpa*. The translator speaks about the subject of meditation (*kammaṭṭhāna*) and this is, according to the subcommentary: “The subject of meditation of the elements (modes or processes) that is according to the method about to be stated with the words ‘Within there is no soul’ and so forth.”

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<sup>13</sup> Translated by Soma Thera in the “Way of Mindfulness”.

Bending and stretching that the monk should do is explained by way of nāma and rūpa and this is included in clear comprehension of non-delusion. One may read the whole passage about the behaviour of the monk with wrong understanding, as Acharn reminded us.

We should keep in mind that life is nāma and rūpa in the ultimate sense.

The explanations about the way of behaviour of the bhikkhu point to realities, to citta, cetasika and rūpa. It is emphasized time and again that mere processes are going on, and that there is no self.

Sampajañña is paññā that is able to understand what appears. There is clear comprehension of purpose if one sees that listening to the Dhamma and understanding the truth of the reality that is appearing is of the highest value in life. Sampajañña is understanding of what is of the highest value for those who are born a human being and have the opportunity to listen to the Dhamma.

Clear comprehension of suitability is listening to true Dhamma. One should not think that a particular place or time is not suitable for awareness. There are seeing, thinking, attachment on account of what is seen at any place, at any time. Awareness and right understanding should be developed in a natural way. If we think that a certain place or situation is not suitable for awareness, one is thinking about oneself. When we are in a difficult situation, we may think of “poor me, why me?” We are bound to forget that this is thinking at that moment, no self who thinks. It is thinking that is preoccupied with the self. If one can be mindful and not forgetful, there can be right understanding of whatever appears and then falls away.

One may truly understand that conditioned realities are impermanent, that nothing can stay. Each reality arises because of the appropriate conditions and then falls away. Clear comprehension of suitability, sappāya sampajañña, is the condition for knowing the truth of what is not permanent. When understanding of what is impermanent, conditioned, has been fully developed it leads to the attainment of what is unconditioned, nibbāna.

We read in the “Sappaya Sutta” (Kindred Sayings IV, Third Fifty, §146, Helpful) that the Buddha said:

“I will teach you, brethren, a way that is helpful for Nibbāna. Do you listen to it. And what, brethren, is that way?”

Herein, brethren, a brother regards the eye as impermanent. He regards objects, eye-consciousness, eye-contact, as impermanent. That

weal or woe or neutral state experienced, which arises by eye-contact, that also he regards as impermanent.”

The same is said with reference to the other sense-doors, the mind-door, the objects experienced through those doorways, the other sense-cognitions, contacts and feelings.

The Buddha spoke about what appears now, at this moment; he spoke about what arises and falls away, what is impermanent, but this is not yet known.

As to clear comprehension of resort, *gocara sampajañña*, *gocara* is any object that can be object of right understanding, also *akusala*. There should be no selection of the object of right understanding; understanding can be developed at this very moment.

Gradually understanding of whatever object appears can develop, so that there will be *asammoha sampajañña*, clear comprehension of non-delusion. One will know that the truth is at this moment; it is the reality that arises and falls away, but the arising and falling away has not been realized yet. Understanding can become firmer, one begins to have right understanding of the true characteristics of realities. That is *asammoha sampajañña*. One is not deluded, one has not wrong understanding and clinging to a reality one believes to be permanent.

The four aspects of *sampajañña* show us the conditions for the arising of clear comprehension. One will have more confidence that it is not “I” who can do anything.

Acharn said: “Be patient enough to let dhamma condition dhamma, not ‘I’ who tries so hard to cause the arising of understanding. The arising of *paññā* is very natural, as natural as ignorance. There cannot be many moments of understanding, only very, very few. It takes a long, long time to become detached from wanting to experience the truth.”

The Buddha explained about realities appearing through the senses and the mind-door, one at a time. We have heard his teaching about realities often, in many suttas, but we can hear his words again and again, they are deep in meaning. He taught about what is really appearing at this very moment: *citta*, *cetasika* and *rūpa* that arise and fall away. When seeing arises and appears, it experiences visible object through the eye-door, not a person or thing. The world experienced through the eye-door is completely different from the world experienced through the ear-door. When hearing arises, it experiences sound through the ear-door. Life exists only in one moment, the present moment.

As Sarah reminded us many times: “All problems in life come down to clinging now. Less clinging means more mettā to those around us, regardless of how we are treated.” The following sutta gives us a good illustration of this fact.

We read in the “Kindred Sayings” (IV, Second Fifty, Ch 4, § 88, Puṇṇa), that Puṇṇa asked the Buddha for a teaching in brief. The Buddha taught him about all the objects appearing through the six doorways. If he would cling to these objects, this would lead to suffering. If he would not cling there would be the end to suffering.

The Buddha explained about realities appearing through the senses and the mind-door, one at a time. We have heard his teaching about realities often, in many suttas, but we should hear his words again and again, they are deep in meaning. He taught about what is really appearing at this very moment: citta, cetasika and rūpa that arise and fall away. When seeing arises and appears, it experiences visible object through the eyedoor, not a person or thing. When hearing arises, it experiences sound through the eardoor. Puṇṇa had right understanding of realities, he did not take any reality for self. The Buddha asked him where he would be dwelling. When Puṇṇa said that he would dwell in Sunāparanta, the Buddha said:

“Hot headed, Puṇṇa, are the men of Sunāparanta. Fierce, Puṇṇa are the men of Sunāparanta. If the men of Sunāparanta abuse and revile you, Puṇṇa, how will it be with you?”

Puṇṇa answered that they were kind not to smite him a blow with their hands.

The Buddha then asked him how he would feel if they would throw clods of earth...beat him with a stick...strike him with a sword or slay him. Puṇṇa gave in each case a similar answer, he had no aversion. As to being stabbed to death, Puṇṇa said that some disciples who are disgusted with body and life stabbed themselves, but he would have come by a stabbing that he never sought. He was not afraid of fierce people, because in reality there are no fierce persons who could cause one to suffer injuries. He did not have any ideas of revenge. Puṇṇa had understood that there are no people in reality, only conditioned dhammas. Puṇṇa clearly understood what is meant by “living alone” - alone with what is experienced through the senses, one at a time. Life is only the experience of one reality at a time.

Experiencing pain or even being killed has nothing to do with people who act. If one is convinced that there is no one there, one has no ill feelings about people. When bodily painful feeling arises, this is vipākacitta, citta that is the result of akusala kamma committed in the past. When one has not heard the Dhamma, one may think about one’s afflictions with akusala citta and blame those who caused injuries to us. Puṇṇa had right understanding about cause and result and answered the Buddha with



wise attention when the Buddha asked him what he would do if the people of Sunāparanta would afflict him. Even if they would stab him to death he had no fear. No one can control in which circumstances one will die and at which moment. Puṇṇa had no attachment, aversion or ignorance and hence he had endless loving kindness and compassion.

We may believe that we notice different realities such as sound, odour or hearing. We may believe that we know the present reality. That is not understanding that knows realities one at a time as only a dhamma. When paññā arises there is no need to think: it is just a dhamma. Very, very gradually understanding can become firmer and it realizes sound that appears as just a dhamma that cannot be changed, without having to think about it. What arises does so because of its own conditions. We do not mind if the present reality is envy, conceit or stinginess, they are all conditioned and they are gone immediately.

Acharn reminded us many times of the subtlety of the Dhamma: “It is so very difficult to understand that there is not anyone at all. There is only that which impinges on the eyebase and can condition seeing to see it. We have to learn to understand realities one at a time so that it can be understood that there is no self. That which appears has arisen, just to be seen and then it exists no more, it will never arise again.”

I am most grateful for all good advice and reminders of the truth about realities of daily life, given by Acharn and other friends during our journey. These are real treasures.

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