

# The Meaning of Dhamma

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## 1 The Meaning of Dhamma

The Dhamma Study group in Vietnam had organised Dhamma sessions in June, 2019, in Nha Trang and Hoi An. Acharn Sujin could not come this time since she was recovering in hospital after a journey in India but Sarah and Jonothan were going to lead the discussions. Much of what I am reporting from these has been taken from their inspiring remarks.

Ann from Canada and Roti from Mexico also joined the sessions. The Vietnamese Dhamma Study Group is very active and Dhamma books are printed all the time. They had just finished printing Acharn's book on Metta, Loving Kindness, which I had translated from Thai into English. They had designed a beautiful cover with a hand of the Buddha.

Before leaving Bangkok for Vietnam Sarah had asked Acharn whether she had any message for the listeners at the sessions. She said: "One word: dhamma." Sarah elaborated: "What is the meaning of dhamma? Dhamma is the meaning of life at this moment. Usually there is no understanding of life. We follow our daily routine without any understanding of life."

Sarah explained that in whatever situation we are, there are just passing dhammas, each arising because of their own conditions and impermanent. We can learn to see life in a different way, for example, when we lose dear persons through death. Wherever we traveled, there was time and again a case of someone who had lost a dear person. This time I met someone who was depressed because of the loss of her husband ten years ago. She often went to the movies to forget about her loss.

We all cling to persons, but we can learn from the Buddha that what we take for a person are only citta, consciousness, cetasikas, mental factors accompanying consciousness, and rūpa, physical phenomena. They arise for an instant and then fall away immediately. What we used to find so important, the different feelings, our experiences through the senses and our thinking, are just passing dhammas.

The Buddha taught what life is. Before hearing the Buddha's teachings we had ideas about life different from his teaching. In reality, life is only one moment of consciousness, citta, and it changes all the time; it falls away immediately. At the moment of seeing, life is seeing, at the moment of hearing, life is hearing. The Buddha taught what can be directly experienced one at a time, through the sense-doors and the mind-door. He taught that each reality arises because of its own conditions and that there is not any person who can make it arise. Each reality arises just for a moment and then it is gone immediately, never to return.

At each moment in life there is the loss of an object we hold dear, there is a kind of death. We may experience a pleasant sound or a delicious flavour, but it is gone immediately. We are attached to all objects appearing through the senses and the mind, but actually we cling to nothing and are misleading ourselves with regard to what is real. When we lose a dear person through death we feel sorrow because of our clinging to pleasant sights, sounds and other objects experienced through the senses. We no longer see or hear the beloved person, but we are really thinking of ourselves, we mourn ourselves.

We always thought that life could last for some time, and that there is a self coordinating all our experiences in life. We thought of a self who sees and thinks about what is seen, who hears and thinks about what is heard, all at the same time. The Buddha explained that there is no self, only momentary realities that change all the time. None of these moments can stay and they cannot be controlled, they cannot be caused to arise. We usually live in the fantasy world of “I”, thinking of “I see, I hear, I touch”. They are only different dhammas.

One of the listeners realized that he often confused thinking of stories and concepts with realities. He realized this while he was thinking of the problems that arose within his family. That shows how useful discussion about this subject is. In this way understanding of the level of pariyatti can grow.

Because of the experiences through the senses and the mind-door different feelings arise: pleasant feeling, unpleasant feeling and indifferent feeling. We find feeling so important and take it for “my feeling”. We wish to experience only pleasant things and when there is an unpleasant object such as a loud sound, unpleasant feeling arises. Whatever is experienced, also feeling, are passing dhammas that cannot be controlled. We wish to control what will happen in our life, but we never know what the next moment will bring and during my journey I was reminded of this fact several times.

When we have problems in life we find them very important, and we worry. In fact, these are only moments of thinking with different cetasikas such as aversion which falls away immediately. We believe that we can control the events of life but in the end problems are solved in a way that is totally different from what we expected. I was worried about my traveling I find so difficult.

Sarah gave me very good reminders about worry. She had just had an accident, an electrical shock because of touching an electric device in the hotel room. She was flung from one side of the room to the other side. Shortly afterwards she spoke very helpful words to me to remind me of the truth while I was worrying, but she could not remember what she had said since she still had to recover from the shock. Kusala cittas conditioned her speaking. This was beyond control but it happened because of conditions. She explained that when one is worried one is occupied with oneself and one forgets that whatever reality appears is beyond control. We can make useful plans, believing that we can determine the outcome and then we are thinking of situations instead of understanding the reality which appears now, such as seeing, hearing, attachment or aversion. When we are just thinking of situations we usually do this with an idea of self and this will not lead to the understanding of realities.

I was worried how I could manage to go around without a walker when arriving in Thailand and Vietnam. But there were walkers when I arrived, people had given them to me with great generosity. I could not have known this ahead of time. Problems are solved beyond expectation.

Hang and I wanted to eat some noodles and we went to the restaurant of the hotel. The owner of the hotel had offered food to monks who were visiting from Myanmar and since there was much food left she invited us for luncheon. At the table we were sitting together with her family members and friends. We had not expected to enjoy a meal together with such a delightful company when we went out for some noodles. It happened all because of conditions. During the meal I met Jotamoi from Myanmar who had studied the Abhidhamma for many years and given lectures on this subject. Hang and I spoke to him about the Dhamma Study Group and invited him to join our sessions. He had no more time since he had to accompany the group of monks from Myanmar, but the next day he sent us a few useful questions.

One of his questions was about the difference in teaching as we find it in the Suttanta, the Abhidhamma and the Vinaya. It seems that we read in the suttas about things that should be done whereas in the Abhidhamma there is reference to realities. It seems that the Vinaya mainly deals with the establishment of rules, with *sīla*.

The Buddha taught about the reality appearing at the present moment and the way to develop understanding in order to eliminate ignorance. He taught that whatever reality appears is non-self. The teachings contained in the three parts of the Tipiṭaka are actually the same. In the Suttanta he would speak about persons and situations, but also at those moments he was referring to realities arising because of conditions. He spoke time and again about all realities of daily life as they are experienced through the six doors and he asked the listeners whether these realities are permanent or impermanent and whether they can be taken for self. He would speak about making an effort for the arising of kusala, and the elimination of akusala, but then he was referring to the *sobhana cetasika* (wholesome mental factor) right effort which is a factor of the eightfold Path and which is always arising together with right understanding of realities. Right effort does not belong to a person. It arises because of wholesome accumulations. Each wholesome or unwholesome quality that arises with the *citta* falls away immediately with the *citta*, but it is not lost, it is accumulated in the *citta*. Since each *citta* is succeeded by a following *citta* wholesome and unwholesome qualities are carried on from one *citta* to the following *citta*, from moment to moment, from life to life.

Not only in the Abhidhamma but also in the suttas we read about the ultimate realities of the five aggregates (*khandhas*), the elements (*dhātus*), the sense-fields (*āyatanas*), about all realities which are classified in different ways as *nāma* and *rūpa*.

As to the Vinaya, this deals among others with *akusala sīla*. *Sīla* comprises kusala dhamma, akusala dhamma, and for the arahat *avyākata* (indeterminate) dhamma which is neither kusala nor akusala<sup>1</sup> People are inclined to think that *sīla* are just rules to be followed, but *sīla* is the behaviour of the *citta* at this moment. Kusala *sīla* develops through right understanding of the *citta* at this moment. Any reality which appears now can be investigated and considered in order to understand its true nature. The development of understanding is the highest kind of *sīla*.

We read in the teachings about *sīla* (morality), *samādhi*, (calm) and *paññā*

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<sup>1</sup>He does not commit kamma that can bring a result in the future. For him there are no conditions for rebirth.

(understanding) and people are inclined to think that there is a certain order of developing these qualities. There is no rule that they should be developed in a certain order. The factors of the eightfold Path can be classified in this threefold way, but all factors develop together with right understanding of the eightfold Path<sup>2</sup>

Kusala *sīla* comprises all levels of *sīla* and the highest *sīla* is the development of right understanding of realities. As to *samādhi*, calm, this arises with every *sobhana* (beautiful) *citta*. When a moment of right understanding of a reality arises, there are *sīla* and *samādhi* as well.

There are several ways by which *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā* have been classified. They can be considered under various aspects. One way is the classification of the ariyans who have reached the perfection of *sīla*, of the ariyans who have reached the perfection of *samādhi* and of the ariyans who have reached the perfection of *paññā*. The *sotāpanna* who has eradicated the wrong view of self has no more conditions to violate the five precepts, he has perfected *sīla*. He has no more conditions to commit the kinds of *akusala kamma* that lead to an unhappy rebirth. The non-returner (*anāgāmī*) who has realized the third stage of enlightenment, has perfected calm, *samādhi*. He has eradicated all attachment to sense objects, he is no longer absorbed by them. The *arahat* who has eradicated all ignorance and other kinds of defilements has perfected *paññā*.

It is because of the development of right understanding of the reality appearing at the present moment that the different stages of enlightenment can be attained and defilements are eradicated stage by stage. Not because one should develop *sīla* first, then calm and then *paññā*.

Right understanding of what is reality should be developed and this is different from knowing conventional notions such as a table, a tree or a person. Acharn Sujin reminded us of what *dhamma* is by her message to Sarah about *dhamma*. *Dhamma* is what can be directly experienced through one of the senses or the mind-door. Sound is a *dhamma* that can be directly experienced through the earsense, without having to think about it. We believe that we hear the sound of a barking dog, but then there is thinking of a concept, a story. There is no barking dog in the sound.

Before coming into contact with the Buddha's teachings we only knew conventional truth. But the Buddha taught what can be directly experienced one at a time, through the sense-doors and the mind-door. He taught that it only lasts for one moment and then it is gone, never to return. He taught that each reality arises because of its own conditions and that there is not any person who can make it arise.

We can lead our daily life as usual, thinking of our friends, of persons, of food, of our house, but we can learn the difference between thinking of concepts of persons and things and understanding of what can be directly experienced at the present moment.

It is beneficial to understand the difference because in that way we can learn how much ignorance there is of the truth of life. We do not try to change anything that arises because of conditions, but understanding can grow. Understanding the truth of life is more precious than anything else.

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<sup>2</sup>The three abstinences, right speech, right action and right livelihood, are the *sīla* of the eightfold Path, right mindfulness and right concentration the calm, *samādhi*, of the eightfold Path, right thinking and right understanding the wisdom of the eightfold Path.

## 2 The Understanding of Ultimate Realities

Understanding of our life now can be developed. We usually follow our daily activities with attachment and ignorance, but any reality that appears can be the object of understanding. One of our friends liked playing the guitar and spent much time on this. Time and again he was wondering whether he should spend more time on studying Dhamma instead of playing guitar. Whatever arises in life happens by conditions. One person likes music, another person painting or sports. It is not useful to think of how little awareness and understanding there is and what one will do to have more. Then one is concerned about one-self and this will not be helpful to have more understanding of the truth of non-self. Satipaṭṭhāna is not “doing something” but the arising of mindfulness and understanding by conditions whereby direct understanding of nāma and rūpa is developed. We were often reminded by Acharn with the words : “Let understanding work its way”.

No one can stop attachment from arising right now. One of our friends remarked that conditions can be created for the non-arising of attachment. However, if one tries to make things happen in a specific way one fails to see the truth of anattā.

When people spoke about their different defilements Jonothan kept on saying: “It does not matter, it does not matter.” When asked to explain what he meant by this, he said:

“What has arisen, has arisen. It can be understood. It is of no use to analyse it, finding out whether it is kusala or akusala. Then we are choosing a specific object and it is not understanding the present moment. There is no understanding of any reality that is appearing now.”

We can lead our life naturally, swimming, playing guitar, doing our job. It is of no use to try to change our life style. Understanding can be developed in any situation. If one just thinks of being in favorable situations there will never be understanding of what dhamma is that just arises because of its own conditions.

When one thinks that the development of the Path is too difficult, there is again the idea of self, an idea of “I who cannot do it”. When one thinks about what one shall do, thus, about the future, there is forgetfulness of the present moment. One does not understand that there are only conditioned dhammas which are beyond control, non-self. Thinking arises now, and then it is gone immediately. If there is no understanding of the present moment yet, it does not matter. When understanding has been accumulated more the present moment can be known naturally, without any expectation.

What can be directly experienced now, without having to think about it, is just dhamma. Usually realities such as hardness, heat or cold are directly experienced through the bodysense but they are not known as dhammas. Right understanding has to grow so that they can be understood as realities appearing through the bodysense that arise for a moment and then fall away immediately.

Each reality arises and falls away very rapidly. Seeing is immediately followed by other cittas. Then seeing arises again and again in other processes. We could not know a single moment of seeing, only a sign, in Pali: nimitta, remains. Of each reality that arises a nimitta is experienced. This can remind us that realities arise and fall away extremely fast.

At the end of the Dhamma sessions, in Nha Trang, the monk who followed

the sessions asked Jonothan to resume in a few points the contents of the sessions.

Jonothan mentioned four points: Listen carefully, consider carefully, remember this while going about one's daily life, and have confidence. He elaborated on these points in the following way: As to listening carefully, this means hearing an explanation of the Buddha's teaching and every opportunity to hear that can be taken when understanding is being developed. One needs to hear everything more than once, from different aspects and different parts of the teachings.

As to the second point: just hearing is not enough, there need to be some reflection as one goes about one's daily life. The meaning is deep and subtle. It cannot be comprehended just on a single hearing without reading, turning it over in one's mind, considering how it relates to the present moment.

This has to be done while going about one's daily life and that means that there is no need for a special kind of place, special circumstances or environment for this to happen. One can hear Dhamma from an unexpected source, consider it during unlikely activities. Anything other is not the Path of the Buddha.

There should be confidence that the first and second points are sufficient if properly understood, and that they can condition awareness to arise. It may seem that there must be more that can be done, but there should be confidence that those factors mentioned by the Buddha are sufficient for awareness to arise, in time, when the conditions are there. Be patient also.

These are precious points. As to confidence, one should not be disheartened that the development of understanding of the present reality takes a long, long time. Jonothan also said about confidence: "Confidence in the Dhamma, confidence in the development of kusala, regardless of the situation." We may be disappointed when things do not work out the way we expected, but we should not forget that whatever reality presents itself is conditioned already.

At the end of the sessions in Nha Trang one of the children who listened to the Dhamma conversations made a touching speech, showing her gratefulness for all she had learnt those days. She spoke with great confidence. It was inspiring to notice people's enthusiasm. The mother of someone who regularly attended the sessions was listening to recordings during the time she worked in the rice field. This is heavy work in a hot climate but it did not prevent her from listening and considering the truth of Dhamma with confidence. Different families sponsored our lunches each day and they walked with their children past our tables so that we had an opportunity to meet them and to express our appreciation.

After Nha Trang we had a short flight to Hoi An where some of us stayed in Anicca Villa. Those were happy days when we enjoyed the hospitality of Sun and Mai. Every day a delicious Vietnamese meal was prepared and before, during and after the meal we had Dhamma conversations. Nam and his younger brother Nguying joined our discussions and Nam, who has a great musical talent, played the piano for us. The two French architects who had designed this villa and several other resorts came along and they had basic questions which were useful for everybody. We discussed how one is inclined to wish to control whatever occurs and if things do not work out according to one's wish one may vex oneself and believe that this is one's own fault. Sarah explained that right understanding that whatever occurs is because of the appropriate conditions is like the removal of a heavy burden. There will be less clinging to an idea of self one used to find very important, and no feelings of guilt.

Again we have to remember the true meaning of dhamma; whatever arises is dhamma and this means that nobody can make good qualities arise, that there is no person. It is natural to think of persons, of our friends, but in order to understand the truth we have to consider the present reality. There is no reality to be known that is a person, a friend. Visible object is experienced through the eyesense and in visible object there is no person, in sound that is heard there is no person. We tend to forget that what we take for a person is only citta, cetasika and rūpa that do not last, even for a splitsecond. When someone speaks unkindly to us we have aversion or anger and we keep on thinking of “that terrible person”. We forget that the real problem is always the attachment, aversion and ignorance that arise within ourselves. In reality no person is heard, only sound is heard and there is no one who acts or speaks. It is important to know what is real in the ultimate sense and what is only imagination. I have heard this often but we can hear it again and again in order to be reminded of the truth. It is not wrong view to think by way of conventional notions such as this or that person or situation. It is necessary for leading our daily life naturally and to communicate with others. At the same time we can develop understanding of what is real in the ultimate sense. There is wrong view when we believe that a person or self really exists.

If we have a problem we tend to think about it with attachment or aversion and we take our thinking for self. Sarah explained that the aim of the study of Dhamma is not to stop such thinking, but that this is the time for understanding Dhamma. Whatever occurs can be understood as just passing dhammas. Sarah said: “When confidence develops there will be less thinking of ‘how can I have more understanding.’ There can be understanding just now of what appears.”

If we wonder about the way to have more understanding, it takes us away from the present moment. We should not try to focus on particular realities, because realities appear naturally, just when there are conditions for them to arise and appear. We should not forget that life is in a moment, just in this moment. Very gradually we can come to understand the difference between life in conventional sense, life as different situations, and life just in a moment, such as seeing appearing now or thinking appearing now. We think of many stories in a day, but they are just fantasy, not reality.

When we wonder whether we should or should not do this or that, we are inclined to control the situation we are in or we think that another situation, not the present one, is more favorable for the development of understanding.

Some people believe that the development of samatha is necessary for the understanding of realities. One may wonder whether the Buddha taught samatha. During the sessions people asked questions about samatha. Also before the Buddha’s time samatha was developed. The Buddha taught about all kinds of kusala, and these can be developed with right understanding. Samatha should not be developed without understanding of what true calm is. Some people believe that when they close their eyes and think of a wholesome subject such as metta, that they develop calm. One should have right understanding of calm. Calm is a sobhana cetasika that arises with each wholesome citta<sup>3</sup> At the moment of calm there are no attachment, aversion or ignorance. If one has accumulated the inclination to develop higher degrees of calm, even to the degree of jhāna, one should see the danger of clinging to sense objects. If one does not

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<sup>3</sup>There are actually calm of citta and calm of cetasikas.

see this, calm cannot be developed. Right understanding of the characteristic of calm and of the way to develop it with an appropriate subject is indispensable.

There can be wise reflection at any time and at any place. There is no need to wait for a favorable time or to go to a quiet place. Some people believe that they have to be calm first before they can develop understanding of realities. Or they think that when there are less defilements there is more opportunity for the arising of awareness and understanding. Akusala has been accumulated and it will continue to arise. Only direct understanding that has reached the level of lokuttara can eradicate stage by stage the latent tendencies of attachment and other accumulated defilements.

We often hear that the development of understanding begins at the present moment. We can listen more and consider the reality appearing now, be it seeing, sound or attachment, even for a few moments. Life will never be as we think or plan. It cannot be known what hearing hears the next moment or what thinking thinks the next moment.

There is no self who is listening and considering the Dhamma. These are only moments of citta arising because of conditions. Someone may hear for the first time that there is no “I” who sees or hears. It is only the seeing that sees, the hearing that hears. There can be a beginning of understanding the truth. Considering the realities that appear are wholesome moments that do not last, that fall away immediately. Each moment of citta falls away immediately but it conditions the following moment. In this way understanding can be accumulated from moment to moment. At a following moment there may be a little more understanding of realities. Then we listen and consider again and gradually understanding can grow. This helps us to see that it is not “I” who understands.

Intellectual understanding, pariyatti, can condition direct understanding, paṭipatti. Pariyatti does not mean theoretical knowledge of the teachings, it is always related to the present moment, to what appears now.

Seeing appears time and again and we can consider its nature. We can begin to understand that it is a conditioned reality, conditioned by kamma, by eyesense and visible object, and that it only experiences visible object, no persons or things. Thinking about persons and things is another citta, and it follows so closely after seeing, that it seems to arise at the same time as seeing. But there can be only one citta at a time experiencing one object.

Before realities can be understood as non-self, it should be known what appears now. Understanding of the level of pariyatti does not experience realities directly, it experiences concepts of realities. It should be emphasized that the objects are concepts of reality, not concepts in the sense of stories, situations or imagination, such as a person, a building or a table. Seeing, hearing, sound or feeling may appear, and understanding can investigate these realities so that they will be known as only dhammas. When understanding of the level of pariyatti has become very firm, it can condition direct understanding of them. There should be no expectation when there will be direct understanding of realities, but there can be confidence that the truth of Dhamma can be penetrated little by little. Otherwise the Buddha would not have taught it.



### 3 Sati of Vipassanā

Sati is a wholesome cetasika that is non-forgetful of what is wholesome. Sati can be of different levels, of dāna, of sila, of samatha and of vipassanā. When there is an opportunity to be generous in giving or assisting someone else, we may be lazy and forgetful so that it is impossible for us to be generous or to help. When sati arises it uses the opportunity for kusala and it is non-forgetful of generosity and mettā. At such moments it guards the six doorways: whatever object is experienced through one of the six doorways is experienced without attachment, aversion or ignorance.

Sati is not awareness or mindfulness as we use these words in conventional sense. It is not: knowing what one is doing, like walking, or focussing on an object. One should know what the object of sati is: any object that appears at the present moment by conditions. It is not a situation or a concept but a reality like sound, hardness, attachment or thinking. There should not be any selection of specific objects; also unpleasant objects and unwholesome objects can be known one at a time when they appear. That is the only way to understand that whatever appears is anattā; it is not in one's power to have any control. If one believes that the situation is not favorable for sati or that one should create conditions for sati one is on the wrong Path leading one further away from the truth.

Anger or attachment can be object of mindfulness. They may arise because these realities also arose in the past. They arose and fell away with the citta but they are accumulated from one moment of citta to the succeeding moment of citta, from life to life. Kusala and akusala lie dormant in each citta and when there are conditions they can arise.

When we remember that kusala cittas and akusala cittas arise in processes in a certain order that cannot be altered it will be clearer that they are beyond control. Seeing arises within a process and after it has fallen away three more moments of cittas arise before kusala cittas or akusala cittas performing the function of javana arise. They are all gone before one can think about them. Nobody can prevent them from arising. Who knows what seeing will see the next moment or what thinking will think of. Whatever arises because of conditions can be object of mindfulness.

It is important to know what is real and what is only imagination. We believe that we can hear a dog barking. Sound is real, but a barking dog does not exist in the ultimate sense. What we take for a dog is only citta, cetasika and rūpa which do not last for a moment. Sati can only be mindful of the present reality, not of a conventional notion. When sati is mindful of a reality like sound there can be understanding of that reality as anattā. It was explained time and again that when there is more understanding of the level of pariyatti, thus, intellectual understanding of this moment, it will lead to realizing that there are only passing dhammas which are beyond control. Even when one has heard this many times, it is beneficial to be reminded of the truth. There is usually absorption in stories, in a fantasy world, instead of understanding the present reality.

When one does not know the difference, misunderstandings of what the Buddha taught may arise. An illustration of this fact is the way some people understand the Buddha's teaching about kamma and the result, vipāka, produced by kamma. Some people think of this truth by way of a situation. When they

have an unpleasant experience they say: “It is my kamma.” In reality kusala kamma or akusala kamma produces a pleasant object or unpleasant object at the moment of rebirth or during life through one of the senses, such as seeing or hearing. A moment of vipāka is gone immediately but one may think of it as a long lasting event. The difference should be remembered between thinking of a whole situation, of concepts or ideas, and understanding the truth of the reality appearing at the present moment.

During the discussions Sarah and Jon pointed out very often that when we cling to the idea of a person, of a self and believe that a person or self really exists, we live in a fantasy world and do not understand realities. It is natural to think of persons and situations, but they are not real in the ultimate sense. They are not realities that can be directly experienced one at a time as they appear at the present moment.

Jonothan said: “The ignorance, misunderstanding, that needs to be overcome is not the thinking of the concept of a being, a person, but the ignorance or misunderstanding of the reality appearing at the present moment.” Thus, we need not avoid thinking of this or that person, but at the same time understanding can be developed that in reality what we take for a person are only citta, cetasika and rūpa that arise and fall away, that do not stay on. In that way we shall know the difference between the fantasy world of stories and concepts and the real world.

People had questions about attaining nibbāna. Sarah and Jon pointed out again and again: the development of awareness and understanding begins now in daily life, that is the only Path to nibbāna. The reality appearing now can be understood and thinking of attaining nibbāna is speculation that is not helpful.

All we find so important in life such as a pleasant place to stay, good friends, is just a moment of thinking. Life exists only in one moment. At the moment of seeing, life is seeing, at the moment of thinking, life is thinking. Gradually we can learn to attach less importance to the stories we think of and which are only fantasy. Thinking is real. It arises because of the appropriate conditions, but the object we are thinking of is mostly a story, a concept, and thus not real. While listening and considering more we learn that the way we used to consider the events of life is quite different from what the Buddha taught and what we can verify at this moment. Before we had no idea of what the present moment is. Gradually it becomes clearer what the meaning is of “just passing dhammas”.

Acharn asked time and again: “Why do you listen?” Is it because we want to be a better person with less ignorance and less akusala, we want to have more calm? Then we are thinking of a self who wants to improve his life. When we are in a difficult situation we usually think about a self who wants to solve problems and we cling to the idea of a change of situation. In reality there are only seeing, hearing, visible object or hardness. On account of such experiences we think of stories, pleasant or unpleasant. Seeing or hearing which arise now are vipākacittas, results of kamma committed long ago. After the vipākacittas have fallen away, kusala cittas or akusala cittas arise which react with wholesomeness or unwholesomeness towards what is experienced.

The Buddha said: “Avoid evil, do good and purify the mind.” These words are not a prescription to be followed without any understanding of realities. When there is more understanding of anattā, of reality arising because of conditions, we can take his words in the right way. When people are told to have

mettā all day there is an idea of “I” who can do something. Mettā is adosa cetasika, (non-aversion) and it can only arise when there are the right conditions. When one has kindness towards people one likes there may be moments of metta, but there are also likely to be moments with attachment. Kusala cittas and akusala cittas alternate and one may take for mettā what is attachment. Without paññā that knows the characteristic of the reality which arises we are likely to confuse mettā and attachment.

Before we went to Vietnam we visited Acharn a few times in Teptharin Hospital. One topic we discussed was the development of the perfections (paramis)<sup>4</sup> We should not try to know whether or not there is at this moment development of the perfections. She said: “Daily life is the proof how much the perfections are developed.” There must be the firm understanding of non-self. Several times Acharn emphasized that the development of understanding is much more difficult and deeper than anyone can think about. Acharn remarked: “Understanding does not mind how much it develops. It is self who thinks about this.”

I said that it is very important to remember that it is more difficult than you would think. Acharn remarked that otherwise akusala cannot be eradicated. Ignorance and attachment continue on, from life to life, for aeons. We are just reading and talking about realities, but there must be the understanding of non-self at any time. “It is harder and harder” she said. She emphasized the difficulty of eradication of ignorance to show how deeply ignorance and wrong view are accumulated. Acharn said: “Lobha is making its way all the time and this is so very difficult.” We do not realize it that we cling to an idea of “self that should have understanding”. We take akusala citta with clinging for kusala citta and that takes us further away from the truth. We may underestimate the power of the latent tendencies that can condition the arising of wrong view at any time.

The different levels of akusala were brought up by Sarah and Jon during the discussions. There are three levels: the anusaya kilesa (latent tendencies), the pariyuṭṭhāna kilesa (arising with the akusala citta) and the vītikka kilesa (transgression, misconduct). The latent tendencies do not arise with the citta but they lie dormant in each citta, they are subtle defilements that can condition the arising of akusala citta. The medium defilements (pariyuṭṭhāna kilesa) arise with akusala citta but they are not of the degree of unwholesome courses of action. The vītikka kilesa are transgressions or misconduct.

The latent tendencies are called subtle defilements, but they are very powerful and tenacious. They can only be eradicated by the magga-citta of the different stages of enlightenment. Since they are latent and do not arise, they cannot be known.

We talked about the intoxicants, the āsavas, subtle defilements that arise. After seeing which is vipākacitta there are just a few more cittas and then during the moment of cittas performing the function of javana, the āsavas often arise with the akusala citta: the intoxicant of clinging to sense objects (kāmasava), of clinging to existence (bhavāsava), of wrong view (diṭṭhāsava) and of ignorance (avijjāsava). The āsavas arise time and again, even right now, immediately after seeing, hearing and the other sense-cognitions, but they are unknown. Cittas succeed one another extremely rapidly and they have already gone in a flash.

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<sup>4</sup>These are the excellent qualities the Bodhisatta developed in order to attain Buddhahood: liberality, morality, renunciation, wisdom, energy, forbearance, truthfulness, resolution, loving kindness and equanimity.

Seeing arises now and then the āsavas of ignorance and wrong view are likely to follow. They pass very quickly but they can condition the arising of ignorance and wrong view again and again. Acharn said: “Even when you do not say ‘I see’, the ‘I’ is there. Only paññā can understand it. The way to eradicate is so far away. Only paññā can understand better and deeper, it can see what appears now as it is. There is no need to say that it appears as not self, that is thinking again.”

Acharn reminded us that it is very difficult not to cling to the idea of self: “No matter when, it comes in instantly as long as one forgets it’s not self. Even right now, whatever arises passes away never to return. This moment is the test, any time!”

Jonathan remarked that it is wrong to wish for more understanding. Acharn answered: “One is trapped by ignorance and clinging, having expectations about sati.”

Acharn explained about letting go of the object that is experienced. When paññā begins to understand a characteristic of a reality, there may be the inclination to hold on to that object and then there is no opportunity to investigate other realities that follow. One does not let go of the object. At the moment of understanding there is no thought of “I know”. If there is no letting go there is clinging to an idea of self who thinks about realities. I remarked that it is difficult to know the difference between the moments with wrong view and without wrong view. Sarah asked me: “Does it matter to know? Otherwise there is clinging again. When it is time it is known naturally, and we are not trying to work it out.”

Seeing now is not the same as seeing a moment ago. Seeing arises and then it falls away never to return and this is life. We have heard this often but we did not consider this enough. We still have an idea that seeing can stay, that it is always there. There are actually six worlds, the world appearing through the eyes, through the ears and through the other senses and the mind-door. Acharn was speaking about the world during a session at the Foundation. She spoke about the first stage of insight when there is clear understanding of nāma as nāma and of rūpa as rūpa, of only one reality at a time: “Where is the world? The world is lost. It is amazing, no one, no world; only one characteristic as it is. Hardness is hardness, where are the arms and the legs, the whole world? They are all gone.”

She said several times that it is so amazing that only one reality appears, no self. We think of our whole body but this is only an idea. When the body is touched hardness may appear and hardness is a reality that can be directly experienced. At such a moment there is not clinging to our whole body. We talk about nāma and rūpa but they do not appear clearly as is the case when moments of insight-knowledge arise. There has to be firm understanding of the level of pariyatti and it can condition later on direct understanding.

What is the first noble truth of dukkha, was a question that was raised. The noble truth of dukkha is dukkha of all conditioned realities, saṅkhāra dukkha. It is the unsatisfactoriness of conditioned realities that arise and fall away and can, therefore, not be a refuge. When paññā is of the level of pariyatti, it is understood intellectually that nāma and rūpa are dukkha, but the arising and falling away of realities can only be penetrated when paññā is of the level of paṭipatti, direct understanding. After the third stage of insight knowledge it is really understood what dukkha is. In one of the sessions at the foundation

Acharn said about dukkha: “What is the use of what arises and falls away? To understand this is to understand dukkha. There is nothing, and that is dukkha. . . Whatever has arisen must have conditions for its arising and whatever arises falls away rapidly. It is no more, never to return in the cycle of birth and death.” It cannot return and be something that one likes. We cling actually to what is nothing.

The second noble truth is the cause of dukkha and that is lobha, clinging. It hinders the understanding of the truth of dukkha, that is why it is the second noble Truth. It is opposed to wisdom. When we cling to a reality we think that it is there all the time, that it does not arise and fall away.

Because of lobha there is clinging to what cannot last and we go on to think of people and things as being lasting and real. This leads to more clinging and craving throughout many successive lives. So long as there is clinging there are conditions for rebirth and we shall continue to be subject to the unsatisfactoriness inherent in the impermanence of conditioned realities. The third noble truth is the ceasing of dukkha. When there is no more clinging there will not be rebirth. The fourth noble truth is the Path leading to the ceasing of dukkha. This is the development of understanding of all realities appearing at the present moment.

Acharn often repeated that one has to study each word of the teachings, one word at a time. She said: “Study with respect, great respect to each word. Otherwise one takes it that’s very easy, very simple; it cannot be like that at all.” This reminds us not to underestimate the subtlety of dhamma.

We should remember Acharn’s message to the listeners of the Dhamma session, her message of one word: dhamma. We have to consider the meaning of dhamma as it appears now, in our daily life. It has no owner and it cannot be controlled.

When someone asked Acharn to speak some encouraging words, she answered: “All are dhammas”. One may be upset by troubles in life, by problems, but there are only dhammas, conditioned realities.