

The Shortness of Life

by

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May 2017

Preface

Acharn Sujin and other friends were invited to Vietnam by Tam Bach and other Vietnamese friends for a two week sojourn at the end of October 2016. Sarah and Jonothan were assisting Acharn untiringly and with great enthusiasm during her Dhamma explanations. Friends from Thailand, Canada, Australia, Taiwan and myself joined this journey. In Vietnam, Tran Thai made the travel and accommodation arrangements for all of us.

The Dhamma discussions took place in Hanoi. There had been Dhamma sessions before with Acharn Sujin in Hanoi and at that time there were fewer attendees than at this time when the number of listeners had grown; now there were about eighty of them. The listeners became more and more interested to understand the present reality. Among the audience were three monks, many 'nuns', that is to say, women who wear robes and observe eight precepts, and many lay followers. Some had come with their parents. Tam Bach translated into Vietnamese the English Dhamma discussions and a team of Vietnamese friends translated the questions from the audience into English. We were also invited to the mountainous region of Sapa where the discussions were more informal and personal.

Before going to Vietnam, I spent a few days in Bangkok, at the Peninsula Hotel. The King of Thailand, King Bhumibol Adulyadej, had just passed away and a period of national mourning was announced, which had been extended to a year. Every day the daily newspaper, the Bangkok Post, was dedicated to all the achievements of his Majesty. He truly was a man of the people, visiting all parts of the country to meet people personally in order to see in which ways he could solve their problems. With dedication and self-sacrifice, he set up many projects to raise their quality of life. He assisted the hill-tribe villagers who lived in very difficult circumstances. He made people replace opium crops with alternative crops such as peaches and apples. His Majesty spent several years in hospital because of ailing health and also during that time he only thought of the interests of his people.

In Hanoi we usually had sessions of about six hours a day and in addition one of the monks wanted to discuss the conditions¹ for the dhammas that arise. Also during previous sessions in Saigon we had discussed some of the conditions and

¹ In the seventh book of the Abhidhamma, the Paṭṭhāna, twenty-four classes of conditions have been taught.

now he was very interested to understand the way they condition dhammas that appear in daily life.

During the sessions Acharn reminded us time and again that we should carefully study each word of the Buddha's teachings. People are inclined to speak about concentration and calm, but first one should consider the meaning of these terms. Otherwise one talks about these subjects without understanding what they exactly are.

Chapter 1

What is Life?

At the moment of seeing what is visible, life is seeing. At the moment of hearing sound, life is hearing. At the moment of smelling odour, life is smelling. At the moment of tasting flavour, life is tasting. At the moment of experiencing tangible object through the bodysense, life is tactile consciousness. At the moment of thinking, life is thinking. We find our experiences most important, but we forget that each moment of experience is extremely brief. It arises because of its proper conditions and then it falls away immediately. We cling to all objects that are experienced through eyes, ears, nose, tongue, bodysense and mind, through these six doorways. We cling to them and take them for things that exist, that belong to us.

Throughout our discussions we were reminded that realities that appear are impermanent and non-self, *anattā*. There is no self or person that coordinates all the different experiences through the senses. When seeing arises it sees visible object, and it is not a self or person who sees. Hearing is again another experience and it is not a self or person who hears. Each moment of experience is actually a moment of consciousness, in Pali: *citta*.

Before hearing the Buddha's teachings, we only paid attention to the outward world around us, to all the objects that presented themselves. We did not realize that nothing could appear if there were no *citta* that experiences objects.

There are many different types of *cittas* and only one *citta* arises at a time, experiencing one object. Each *citta* is succeeded by a next one, from moment to moment, from life to life. It seems that we see people and things, but seeing only sees visible object that impinges on the eyesense; persons or things cannot impinge on the eyesense. Very soon after seeing has fallen away, we think of persons and things and this shows how fast *cittas* arise and fall away and succeed one another. The thinking of people and things could not occur if there were no seeing, but seeing and thinking do not occur at the same time. The fact that there is not one type of consciousness that stays but many different types of *cittas* succeeding one another helps us to see that there is no self who could direct or manipulate realities. They all arise because of their own conditions and they fall away immediately. Acharn repeated very often: "There is no one".

We can acquire intellectual understanding of the reality that appears at this moment, but this is not the same as the direct experience of the truth. To show us that it takes a long time to develop intellectual understanding up to the level of

direct understanding and the full realization of the truth, Acharn said that we are under the water, at the bottom of the ocean. It will take aeons before we rise up out of the water. From life to life we take realities for something permanent.

One afternoon I had a conversation with three friends from Taiwan, with Vincent, his older brother Yung and Maggie. I said to them:

“Now there is seeing, it is not I who is seeing but it is citta that sees. It falls away immediately. It is there for a very short time. Nobody can make seeing arise. That shows that it is anattā, non-self. If there were no eyesense and visible object, all that is visible, there could not be seeing. Hearing is again another experience, a different citta. This is not book knowledge, but it occurs right now. Hearing could not arise if there would not be sound and earsense. It falls away immediately, it is there for a very short time. After hearing has fallen away, there is another citta: a citta that thinks about the meaning of what is heard. Each citta falls away and is succeeded by a following citta, there is no gap in between. It is like this from moment to moment, from birth to death.

There are many different types of citta: some are good or wholesome, kusala, some are unwholesome, akusala, some are neither. Citta does not arise alone, it is accompanied by several mental factors, cetasikas. Some cetasikas are good or wholesome, some are unwholesome and some are neither. They all arise because of conditions and they condition the citta they accompany. The citta that thinks is sometimes accompanied by cetasikas that are akusala, sometimes by cetasikas that are kusala.

When the cetasika anger, dosa, accompanies the akusala citta, anger falls away together with the citta, but the inclination to anger is accumulated in the citta and it can be a condition that anger arises again. Anger, or aversion, is one of the three unwholesome cetasikas that are roots. The other two are attachment and ignorance. They are called roots because a root is the foundation of the citta. Besides the akusala cetasikas that are roots, there are many other akusala cetasikas, but each akusala citta is rooted in ignorance and attachment, or in ignorance and aversion, or in ignorance alone. We have not only accumulated aversion, but also attachment. They arise time and again after seeing, hearing and the other sense-cognitions. We are taken in by pleasant objects and at such moments also ignorance of realities arises.

Attachment to pleasant objects experienced through the eyes, the ears, the nose, the tongue and the bodysense and attachment to people is actually attachment to the self. We think of ourselves most of the time. When understanding has been

developed more, we shall realize that whatever arises is a conditioned dhamma. Dhammas arise, nobody can make them arise and they fall away.

There are three wholesome or *sobhana cetasikas*: non-attachment, non-aversion and understanding or wisdom. Each *kusala citta* is rooted in non-attachment and non-aversion and it may or may not be accompanied by understanding or wisdom. When there is a moment of understanding, it arises with the *citta* and falls away with the *citta*. But understanding can be accumulated and then there are conditions for it to arise again and again. I am inclined to think: ‘I understand’, but it is understanding that understands.”

Maggie asked: “Does *citta* know or does *paññā* know?”

Nina: “*Citta* knows or experiences an object but it is different from *paññā* that understands the true nature of the reality that is the object of *citta*. *Paññā* can be accumulated and it develops little by little.

What are realities? *Citta*, *cetasika* and *rūpa* are realities of our daily life. *Citta* and *cetasika* are *nāma*, mental realities that experience an object, and *rūpa* are all those realities that cannot experience anything. Intellectual understanding of the reality that appears now is a foundation for direct understanding.”

Question: “How can intellectual understanding condition direct understanding?”

Nina: “When we listen and consider what we hear, intellectual understanding develops and then it can condition direct understanding.”

Maggie’s question: “It is all for the purpose of liberation from the cycle of birth and death. I will then renounce (worldly life) and become a nun.”

Nina: “It all has to be step by step. Do not forget this moment, we cannot think of the end of the cycle yet. The idea of ‘doing something’ is already wrong.”

Question: “What is the difference between conceit, *māna*, and wrong view of self, *diṭṭhi*?”

Nina: “They cannot arise together. *Diṭṭhi* is wrong view, whereas when there is *māna*, you find yourself important, thinking, ‘Here I am’. It is compared to the waving of a banner.”

Question: “They are attached to self?”

Nina: “But each in a different way. They cannot arise together. Only the *arahat* (who has attained the fourth and last stage of enlightenment) has eradicated

conceit, māna. The sotāpanna (who has attained the first stage of enlightenment) has eradicated wrong view but not conceit. When you compare yourself with someone else, you may think: ‘I am better, equal or less.’ The sotāpanna does not have any idea of ‘I exist’ but he can still think that his khandhas² are better than the other’s khandhas.”

Question: “What is the present reality?”

Nina: “We can ask ourselves: can it be directly experienced and through which doorway – through the eyes, the ears, the nose, the tongue, the bodysense or the mind-door? Can its characteristic be directly experienced, without naming it? Then we know that it is a reality. Seeing appears time and again. We can call it seeing or give it another name, but its characteristic is always the same. It experiences visible object.”

Citta is different from cetasika, it is just the faculty of knowing an object, it knows or cognizes an object. It does not like or dislike or understand the nature of the object. Cetasikas condition citta and citta conditions cetasikas. When we come to know that there are many conditions for each reality that arises, it leads to detachment from the view that they are permanent and self.

Feeling accompanies every citta and we take it for self. There are happy feeling, unhappy feeling and indifferent feeling. When the feeling is unhappy and we wish it to be happy, we can see that we cannot control feeling. It has its own conditions for its arising. This shows us that it is beyond control, or anattā.”

In Hanoi there were several young people among the audience who asked questions about the way Dhamma could help them in daily life. They asked how the understanding of seeing, for example, could be of use in their social life.

Seeing is an ultimate reality, different from conventional ideas. Before hearing the Buddha’s teachings, we only knew the conventional world of people and of different circumstances. We did not know that life really is a moment of experience like seeing, hearing or thinking. Acharn explained many times that seeing is a reality and that there is no one who sees, that only seeing sees. Seeing arises because there are eyesense and visible object, it arises because of several conditions and then it falls away. How can that which falls away be controlled by a

² Conditioned realities can be classified as five khandhas or aggregates: physical realities are rūpa-khandha, and four groups of mental realities are: feeling, vedanā-khandha, remembrance, saññā-khandha, the other mental factors besides feeling and remembrance which are saṅkhāra-khandha, and all cittas, viññāṇa-khandha.

self? Seeing is a mental reality, in Pali *nāma*. Eyesense and visible object are *rūpas*, physical realities, in Pali *rūpa*. They do not experience anything.

What we take for people are *nāma* and *rūpa*. We may wonder why a person is always bad-tempered? His accumulated inclinations are the condition for him to behave in this or that way. Understanding of conditioned realities leads to more patience when we are in the company of others. When we understand that we all have different accumulations, we shall become more tolerant of someone else. Acharn said: “We can become an understanding person.” When there is more understanding of our own accumulations, we will also understand the other persons in our surroundings, in our relationship such as married life. Through the Buddha’s teachings, we will have more understanding of accumulated tendencies, wholesome and unwholesome. They condition the *citta* arising at the present moment.

We all have different likes and dislikes and this is conditioned by accumulations of different tendencies. When we were in a restaurant in a village in Sapa, we had a Dhamma discussion after our lunch. After the discussion, loud music was being played. Vincent and I did not like this music and I was inclined to ask to have it less loud. Vincent’s wife was a concert pianist and, therefore, he likes classical music and I like soft Baroque music and classical music. This is clinging, and all clinging is actually clinging to oneself. We noticed that most people liked the music, they were applauding time and again. Through the Dhamma, we can learn more about the clinging to ourselves in the different circumstances of life. The preference for certain objects and the clinging to these is caused by attachment to oneself. More understanding will lead to patience and tolerance when things do not turn out the way we wish.

At this moment there are seeing, hearing or thinking. There can be only one moment of *citta* that experiences an object. Acharn reminded us that seeing cannot hear or think, and that hearing cannot see or think. These words sound simple, but they remind us to consider the truth again and again.

Acharn said: “There is always the idea of ‘I see someone’. That which is seen is nobody, nothing at all. Consider in order to begin to understand the truth of whatever the Buddha taught. This does not mean only listening without considering the truth of that which is heard. Without seeing, can there be the idea of something? Without any reality at all, can there be the idea of ‘I’? But what is taken for ‘I’ is not permanent at all. Is that not wrong understanding about life, about moments of seeing and hearing? As long as seeing is not directly experienced, it is not possible to eradicate the idea of ‘something’ in it.”

We may have expectations to have less defilements through the understanding of the Dhamma, but then we are clinging to an idea of self who wants to become a better person. The Buddha's Path is the development of more understanding of whatever reality appears at the present moment. Understanding should be developed with detachment. If we have expectations, we forget that whatever arises, be it wholesomeness, kusala, or unwholesomeness, akusala, has specific conditions. The wholesome and unwholesome tendencies that have been accumulated in each citta can, at a given moment, condition the arising of kusala citta or akusala citta. Most of the time akusala citta arises.

If we believe that a self can avoid akusala, we forget that akusala is conditioned and that it is impossible to push away what has arisen already. We can learn that akusala citta is just a conditioned reality, not self. This is the way to follow the right Path. The Buddha taught that all realities that arise are just conditioned dhammas, non-self.

Our friends from Taiwan believed at first that having long retreats in a meditation centre would help them to have less akusala. But after listening to the discussions we had in Vietnam, they realized that there is no self who can control cittas and that right understanding of realities can eventually lead to the elimination of akusala after countless lives. Maggie came to understand that attachment and anger are normal, that they are conditioned. If they would not arise, how could one understand them? What arises at the present moment can be understood by paññā. When there are conditions for attachment, it arises and then its characteristic can be understood.

One of the listeners in Hanoi was wondering how the understanding of realities like seeing could help him in his social life. He said that when he was planning his diverse activities in his social life, he could not avoid taking account of a self. Our activities in social life have to be planned, and we have to think of other people. But it is beyond control whether or not our plans come true. We never know the next moment and whatever we experience is dependent on several conditions. We may plan to meet someone else at a certain time and place, but due to an accident this may not be according to our plans. We talked about success for someone who is in business. Acharn remarked that he also has to die. The duration of one's lifespan is dependent on kamma, it is beyond control. It is important to know the true nature of realities like seeing, hearing or thinking which occur now. Otherwise we shall never understand their conditioned nature and their impermanence.

We should not change our lifestyle or behaviour in order to develop right understanding of realities. Understanding is to be developed naturally in daily life.

But understanding can be a condition to become more patient and mettā, unselfish love, can arise more often instead of attachment to people.

The Buddha spoke time and again about all realities occurring in daily life. We read, for example, in the Kindred Sayings (IV) § 32, Helpful (2):

“I will show you a way, brethren, that is helpful for the uprooting of all conceits. Do you listen to it. And what, brethren, is that way? Now what think you, brethren, is the eye permanent or impermanent?”

“Impermanent, lord.”

“What is impermanent, is that weal or woe?”

“Woe, lord.”

“Now what is impermanent, woeful, by nature changeable, is it fitting to regard that as ‘This is mine. This am I. This is my self?’”

“Surely not, lord.”

The same is said about all objects experienced through the six doors, about contact through these doorways and all the sense-cognitions.

We should not just believe these words but carefully consider what appears now. Like seeing, there is seeing now. This is the only way to find out about the Truth of the Buddha’s teaching.

Chapter 2**Kamma and its Result**

Our present life is part of an endless series of lives in the cycle of birth and death. When this life has come to an end, it is followed by a next life and after that there are countless other lives. Even so, before this life there were countless past lives. Acharn reminded us many times that this life was once the future life for the past life. This life will be the past life for the coming life, just as today will be yesterday for tomorrow. Yesterday, today and tomorrow follow upon each other and what is past is forgotten very soon. This shows how short each life is. We do not remember our past life, where we lived and whether or not we were married. Remembering that the present life, to which we attach so much importance, is only a minuscule part of the cycle of birth and death is helpful when we lose a dear person through death.

Paṭācārā had lost all her family including her recently born son. She went to the Buddha and his gathering quite mad and without dress. The Buddha taught her the impermanence of life and she was able to develop understanding and finally reach arahatship. She spoke to other women who had suffered loss.

We read in the Therīgatha (Canto VI, Fifty, Paṭācārā's Five Hundred) that Paṭācārā said:

“The way by which men come we cannot know;
Nor can we see the path by which they go.
Why mourn then for him who came to thee,
Lamenting through thy tears: ‘My son! my son!’
Seeing thou knowest not the way he came,
Nor yet the manner of his leaving thee?
Weep not, for such is here the life of man.
Unasked he came, unbidden went he hence.
Lo! ask thyself, again whence came thy son
To bide on earth this little breathing space?
By one way come and by another gone,

As man to die, and pass to other births -

So hither and so hence - why would ye weep?"

A question was raised during the discussions about the last moment of this life and the first moment of the next life. There is no person who travels from this life to the next life. When the last citta of this life, the dying-consciousness (cuti-citta), has fallen away, it is immediately succeeded by the next citta which is the rebirth-consciousness (paṭisandhi-citta) of the following life. There is no gap between these cittas. It is just like now when each citta is succeeded by the next citta. Actually, also now there is momentary birth and death of each citta that arises and falls away. Life lasts as long as one citta and this is extremely short.

The Buddha taught about life at this moment, what life is now. Acharn said: "Life does not belong to anyone, it is only one moment of experiencing an object. It is extremely short. There should be more understanding that there is no one, only conditioned realities."

We read in the Kindred Sayings (I, Māra Suttas, § 9, Life Span³) that the Buddha said:

"Bhikkhus, this life span of human beings is short. One has to go on to the future life. One should do what is wholesome and lead the holy life; for one who has taken birth there is no avoiding death. One who lives long, bhikkhus, lives a hundred years or a little longer."

Then Māra, the Evil One, approached the Blessed One and addressed him in verse:

"Long is the life span of human beings,

The good man should not disdain it.

One should live like a milk-sucking baby:

Death has not made its arrival."

[The Blessed One:]

"Short is the life span of human beings,

³ I am using the translation of Ven. Bodhi.

The good man should disdain it.

One should live like one with head aflame:

There is no avoiding Death's arrival.”

Then Mara the Evil One...disappeared right there.

Acharn reminded us: “What is there from moment to moment? What has arisen just a moment ago? It has all gone immediately. Life is nothing. From nothing there is something and then again nothing, completely gone. After seeing, there is the idea of ‘I’ from birth to death. Each life is conditioned to be born and die. Today will be yesterday of tomorrow.”

Before seeing arose, there was nothing, no seeing, and then, when there were the right conditions, it could arise just for a moment and then it was gone, it became nothing.

We attach so much importance to joyful events and we dislike sorrow, but they all arise because of conditions and they do not last. We would like to experience only pleasant objects but this depends entirely on conditions. It is unavoidable that unpleasant objects are experienced: we all are subject to disease and to loss of what is dear to us.

It is kamma that produces birth in different planes of existence. Nobody can choose his birth. The term kamma is generally used for good and bad deeds, but kamma is actually *cetanā cetasika*, volition or intention. *Cetanā* arises with each *citta* and hence it can be *kusala*, *akusala*, *vipāka* or *kiriya*. *Cetanā* directs the associated *dhammas* and coordinates their tasks (*Atthasālinī*, Book I, Part IV, Ch I, 111). There are two kinds of kamma-condition: *conascent kamma-condition* and *asynchronous kamma-condition*. *Cetanā* which arises with each *citta* directs the associated *dhammas* to accomplish their functions; it conditions these *dhammas* by way of *conascent kamma-condition*, *sahajāta kamma-paccaya*. *Cetanā* which accompanies *kusala citta* and *akusala citta* directs the tasks of the associated *dhammas* and it has the function of activity in good and bad deeds. In this last function it produces the results of good and bad deeds.

Kusala kamma and *akusala kamma* are mental, and, therefore, they are accumulated in the *citta* from moment to moment. When *cetanā* motivates a good deed or a bad deed, the *citta* falls away, but *cetanā* or *kamma* is accumulated. It is unknown which of the accumulated *kammas* will produce rebirth-consciousness. Rebirth as a human is a happy rebirth, the result of *kusala kamma*, because understanding can be developed during that life if there are oppor-

tunities for listening to the Dhamma. Rebirth in higher planes, heavenly planes, is a happy rebirth. Rebirth as an animal or in a Hell plane is an unhappy rebirth or the result of akusala kamma. Some kammas produce their results in the same life in which they were committed, some in the next life, some in later lives.

Kusala kamma and akusala kamma through body, speech and mind can be of different degrees. Kamma is not always a 'completed action' (kamma patha). There are certain constituent factors which make kamma a completed action. For example, in the case of killing there have to be: a living being, consciousness of there being a living being, intention of killing, effort and consequent death (Atthasālinī, I, Book I, Part III, Ch V, 97). If one of these factors is lacking, kamma is not a completed action. Akusala kamma or kusala kamma which is a completed action is capable of producing rebirth that may be unhappy or happy.

There were several questions during the discussions on mano-kamma, kamma or cetanā, performing its function through the mind (mano), and people wondered when mano-kamma would be a completed action. Sarah explained what mano-kamma is and whether it can be kamma patha.

Cittas that experience objects through the sense-doors and the mind-door arise in different processes of cittas. Seeing, for example, sees visible object through the eye-door. But seeing is not the only citta that experiences visible object, it arises in a process of cittas. There are several other cittas that experience the same visible object: they do not see, but while they experience visible object, they perform their own functions. Soon after seeing has fallen away it is succeeded by several cittas, usually seven, that are either kusala cittas or akusala cittas, which have the function of 'javana', 'running through' the object in a wholesome or unwholesome way. The intention or cetanā that accompanies those cittas is mano-kamma, but it is not a completed action. As to the kusala cittas or akusala cittas arising in a mind-door process, it depends on the intensity of the cetanā accompanying them whether they are kamma through the doors of body, speech or mind that is accomplished kamma, kamma patha. When attachment to a pleasant sound or flavour arises now, it is first experienced through the relevant sense-door and then through the mind-door. It is mano-kamma, it does not harm anyone else.

Kamma can also be of the degree that it harms another person. As Sarah explained, wrong views are only akusala kamma patha when they lead to deeds and speech, not just the views by themselves. There is mano-kamma whenever there are kusala or akusala cittas which are not said to be bodily or vocal kamma. However, unless all the conditions are completed, it is not kamma patha ca-

pable of producing rebirth. Akusala cetanā in the mind door processes may be of a strength to condition bad deeds when they are planned or thought about, not just impulsively done. So if the wrong view conditions such deeds or speech, it is mano-kamma patha.

It helps to have less misunderstanding about what kamma is and to appreciate that mano-kamma is very common, to know that even now after seeing or hearing, there are kusala cittas or akusala cittas immediately. None of them is self and most of the time it is not of a strength to be kamma patha which can condition rebirth.

Acharn reminded us several times that the Buddha's teaching is not theory, not book knowledge. Understanding has to be developed of the reality appearing at this moment, so that it will be understood as not self. She said:

“Is there kamma now? Do we have to find out through which doorway or what kind of kamma is there? At this moment it is ‘I’ who is thinking about kamma so how can there be the understanding now of kamma itself as not self?”

It is not like ‘what kind of kammās are there in the book’, but how to understand it now as not self and by then one can see, without saying it out, what kind of kamma it is. At this moment of speaking, it has to be known that without citta there can never be speaking. What conditions the words which are spoken? It depends on citta. When it is akusala citta it conditions harsh words, bad words, hurting the other. At that moment it is not necessary to classify whether it is the kamma through speech which is vaci-kamma or mano-kamma... The most precious moment is to understand the moment which is conditioned as not self.”

Sarah explained: “Akusala kamma patha, no matter through which doorway it is committed, is the one that hurts or harms someone else, but if we try to work out exactly whether this or that is kamma patha, there will not be right understanding of it. Someone gave the example in the discussion about covetousness when you don't take what belongs to someone else but you really wish to have it – and then people want to know whether it is kamma patha. But why is one so concerned about it whether it is kamma patha? Usually it's because one is concerned about oneself, thinking, ‘Will I get bad results in another life’ or something like this. We cannot know all the details of the Buddha's wisdom, but whether kamma is kamma patha depends on the intensity and whether it harms the others at that moment.”

Kamma is the condition for the experience of pleasant objects and unpleasant objects through the senses. We may believe that other people or the outward

circumstances of our life are the cause of sorrow, but the real cause is kamma that produces results in the form of sense impressions. Seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and body-consciousness may experience a pleasant object or an unpleasant object. Cittas arise and fall away so rapidly that we cannot know whether the object that was experienced was pleasant or unpleasant. It is not necessary to find out. There can be wise attention or unwise attention to whatever is experienced and this is dependent on conditions, it is beyond anyone's power. At this moment, seeing arises and falls away, and it is followed by thinking that arises and falls away. Even so, in the past there was seeing, followed by thinking. In the future, there will again be seeing and all other sense-cognitions, followed by thinking.

When we hear an unpleasant sound, we may have aversion and then the citta is akusala citta accompanied by dosa, aversion. When we hear a pleasant sound, we may have attachment and then the citta is akusala citta accompanied by lobha, attachment. All akusala cittas are accompanied by ignorance. When right understanding is being developed of the realities that appear, there are conditions for wise attention. We may realize that no matter what object is experienced through the senses, pleasant or unpleasant, it is only a conditioned dhamma.

Whatever arises because of conditions has to fall away immediately. It is not worth clinging to what is impermanent by nature, what is dukkha (unsatisfactory). As paññā develops, it is understood more clearly that life is only one moment of experiencing an object. This is a condition for courage to develop understanding of whatever appears now, be it pleasant or unpleasant, wholesome or unwholesome. It is the only way to understand that realities are beyond control, anattā.

Chapter 3

Attachment

Before we heard the Buddha's teachings, we did not have a precise understanding of what attachment is. We knew in general that one is attached to children, members of one's family or friends. Through the Dhamma we learn that there is attachment time and again on account of what is experienced through the eyes, the ears, the nose, the tongue, the bodysense and the mind-door. Very often attachment and ignorance arise after seeing has fallen away, but we do not know it. Ignorance covers up the truth of realities. Attachment has been accumulated from life to life. It is accumulated in each citta that arises and falls away and that is why it can arise so easily. It always finds an object.

We discussed attachment to persons, which can cause a great deal of disturbance in life. Acharn explained: "But actually it is not the force of that person to condition attachment, but the attachment here has been conditioned for a long, long time and it is so great, so that when there is the right moment and the right object, it is there and paññā (understanding) can understand. In the beginning, paññā cannot see the danger of attachment but it begins to see that it is not self. That is the main point. No matter how great attachment is, it falls away. The self just regrets having it but paññā does not let go of it."

When paññā has not been developed to a higher degree, it cannot let go of it. Only those who have reached the third stage of enlightenment, the stage of the non-returner, anāgami, have eradicated attachment to sense objects. Only the arahat has eradicated all kinds of attachment.

Sarah said: "One always clings to something or someone because of not understanding reality. We think this is 'my problem – I'm so attached to people', but actually it is not 'my problem'. They are just moments of thinking with attachment that fall away instantly and they don't last at all. Just moments of attachment and thinking long stories because of saññā (memory) and clinging to the stories and ideas – taking them for someone or something. But even such moments of clinging do not last."

Nina: "Thinking again and again all the time – it is so disturbing."

Acharn: "Paññā begins to see that it is wasting of time, because there is nothing, only the object of attachment. It can arise any time."

Nina: "Paññā is too weak to see that, too weak."

Acharn: “We do not mind and just develop understanding. Paññā will work its way.”

Sarah: “If we mind that there is clinging or are disturbed by the clinging, then it is just more disturbance about the disturbance. More self – ‘I don’t like this, I don’t want this kind of thinking’. Thinking and attachment are conditioned and fall away anyway, so there is no point in minding and thinking that it shouldn’t be like that.”

Acharn: “The object of attachment does not last at all. Only thinking and at that moment there can be attachment to other things instead of that because it is accumulated in the citta. Nothing can take it away – only paññā can purify it little by little. Only that, so be happy. Whatever happens is just a moment and it does not last... only a reality which has fallen away completely and is no more.”

Nina: “I don’t know yet that it is just a moment.”

Acharn: “By understanding, little by little.”

Sarah: “Never mind! Even if there is no understanding now, moments of ignorance – they are just passing realities. So, it doesn’t matter if there is a lot or a little understanding, attachment or disturbance or moments of kusala – they are all gone instantly. When we think we are so attached to people, actually it is visible object and sound and so on that there is so much attachment to and that is why there is thinking about them again and again. It is not ‘my disturbance’ but just common, ordinary realities. It is like that for everyone.”

Acharn: “Paññā accumulates so little at a time but it is so great when it has accumulated more and more. It will come.”

Sarah: “No need to think about it – how much or little. Let it just perform its function and do its job, otherwise if one is thinking about a lot or a little understanding, one is disturbed again, attached again.

One thinks of attachment to others but one is most attached to oneself. One thinks ‘Oh, no understanding, very little understanding’, and this is all attachment to oneself. As soon as it matters, there is the idea of self. There is nothing to be concerned about or upset about, attachment is very common. The problem is that one thinks ‘my attachment is so special’.”

People go to Acharn with different problems concerning their relationship with others, in the family, with their partner, in their work. Acharn always asks: “Is there seeing now?” She brings us back to the present moment, because without

understanding of the present reality, problems cannot be solved. There is no ‘I’ who sees, seeing sees. Seeing arises because of conditions and it cannot be manipulated. This shows us the nature of anattā. There is no one there. Thinking thinks of a problem and the problem becomes very great and important. But it is only in our thinking. Thinking is also a conditioned reality, and it is not ‘I think’. The thinking thinks. When things in life are not the way we would like them to be, we are inclined to wish to control our life. That is attachment and with attachment problems will not be solved. We think of long stories instead of realizing that whatever happens is beyond control. The realities of our life are only citta, cetasika and rūpa, no person who can be master of situations and events. They just arise for a moment and then fall away.

We may not realize how extremely brief one moment of citta is. When we see, it seems that we immediately see people, but then seeing has fallen away and thinking has arisen already.

It is helpful to consider again and again the following verse of the “Mahā-Niddeśa” quoted in the “Visuddhimagga” (VIII, 39):

Life, person, pleasure, pain – just these alone
 Join in one conscious moment that flicks by.
 Ceased aggregates of those dead or alive
 Are all alike, gone never to return.
 No [world is] born if [consciousness is] not
 Produced; when that is present, then it lives;
 When consciousness dissolves, the world is dead:
 The highest sense this concept will allow’ (Nd.1,42).

Life, person, pleasure, pain: What is life? It is all that appears through the five senses and the mind-door. When seeing arises, life is seeing; when hearing arises, life is hearing; when thinking arises, life is thinking. When we think of a person, he seems to exist, but what we take for a person are only impermanent nāma and rūpa, fleeting phenomena. Pleasure and pain are impermanent: in our life happy moments and sad moments alternate, they appear one at a time. We attach great importance to our experiences in life, to our life in this world, but actually life is extremely short, lasting only as long as one moment of citta.

As we read:

No [world is] born if [consciousness is] not
Produced; when that is present, then it lives;
When consciousness dissolves, the world is dead.

When we are thinking about the world and all people in it, we only know the world by way of conventional ideas. 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 the world.

If there were no citta, nothing could appear, but since citta arises at each moment, realities appear. We are reminded of the brevity of all experiences, including thinking with worry about our problems. The real cause of problems is not in the outside world nor in other people, it is in the citta. People wonder what they should do in difficult situations, in their dealings with other people. They ask: “What next?” But who knows the next moment? This depends entirely on conditions which are beyond control. Because of our clinging to the idea of self, we create our own problems and we believe that we can act in this or that way to solve our problems. Development of right understanding of one reality at a time as it appears at this moment is the condition for one to be less taken in by concepts and ideas of the conventional world with all the problems and worries. One begins to see the world in the ultimate sense: citta, cetasika and rūpa. That is the world that is real, that is the world that should be understood more and more.

When we were at the airport, about to leave Vietnam and go back to Thailand, Acharn spoke about attachment. She said that we should not be afraid of it. We should not mind having it, or try to force ourselves not having it. It arises because there are conditions for it and it falls away immediately. It is only a dhamma and when paññā is more developed, it can realize its characteristic. Now we are mostly thinking about ideas which are not real and there is likely to be the idea of ‘my attachment’. We are afraid of having attachment, but the reason for being afraid of it is that we take attachment for self. Even not wanting to have attachment is attachment already.

We had a discussion with the listeners about the way how to solve problems. Someone suggested that this could be with therapy. Acharn asked: “Is there a problem now? What is the cause of problems?” The Dhamma is not like a ther-

apy. The cause of problems is that we are thinking of self, that we relate problems to ourselves. All that is arising now is only a conditioned dhamma, not self, and nobody can make it arise or do anything about it. When we listen to the Dhamma, there can be a little more understanding. The development of understanding is with ups and downs but we can see that even a little more understanding is beneficial. We cannot expect an immediate result of listening and considering the Dhamma. When there is any expectation, we cling to an idea of self. We can accept that the development of paññā is just step by step.

Sarah said that one learns to live easily and naturally while developing understanding instead of trying to change our life with the wrong idea of self. She said: “It is like letting go of a big burden. The happiness of understanding is different from the happiness with clinging.”

Acharn quotes from the teachings time and again that the development of understanding should be with courage and gladness. She told us to be happy about the reality that appears. She said: “Be happy. Whatever occurs is just a moment and it does not last. It is only a reality that has fallen away completely and is no more.” We should be grateful that the Buddha taught that whatever appears is only a conditioned dhamma, impermanent and not self.

Is there seeing now? It does not see a person, it sees only visible object for an extremely brief moment. While realities are considered in the right way, there is no worry, no disturbance at that moment.

The Buddha spoke time and again about seeing, hearing, all the sense-cognitions and all objects experienced by them.

We read in the “Kindred Sayings” (IV,32, Second Fifty, § 60, Comprehension):

“I will show you, brethren, a teaching for the comprehension of all attachment. Listen to it. What is that teaching?

Dependent on the eye and the object arises eye-consciousness. The union of these three is contact. Dependent on contact is feeling. So seeing, the well-taught Arian disciple is repelled by the eye, by objects, by eye-consciousness by eye-contact and by feeling. Being repelled by them he lusts not for them. Not lusting he is set free. By freedom he realizes ‘Attachment has been comprehended by me’ ”.

The same is said about the ear and sounds, the nose and scents, tongue and savours, body and tangibles, mind and mind-states.

The Buddha explained that the objects that are experienced, the types of consciousness, cittas, the feelings arising on account of them, are all conditioned. He spoke separately about all the six doors. The aim is to understand anattā, to become detached from the ideas of person, self, situations, things. Understanding leads to detachment.

We see here that there is Abhidhamma in the suttas. We read about what is real in the ultimate sense, different from stories about persons and things we think of all day long.

The conditions for the experience of visible object, for seeing are entirely different from the conditions for the experience of sound. Eyesense and visible object are conditions for seeing. Earsense and sound are conditions for hearing. The more we understand about conditions, the less we cling to a self who could cause the arising of seeing or hearing.

In the Abhidhamma texts details are given about the different processes of cittas experiencing one object. All with the aim to cling less to the self, to understand anattā.

The cittas of the eye-door process, of the ear-door process, of all processes succeed one another very rapidly so that it seems that we can experience more than one object at a time.

We should distinguish between the world of thinking of concepts, of persons, things, situations, from the world of realities that can be experienced one at a time. We mostly live in the world of concepts, imaginations, but we can begin to know the difference. This cannot be accomplished immediately, since we accumulated ignorance and attachment from life to life.

Chapter 4

Conditioned Dhammas

One day, when we were having lunch, Acharn explained to Vincent, our friend from Taiwan, about realities. Vincent was working hard all the time, translating into Mandarin all the Dhamma conversations held during the sessions for his brother and for Maggie.

We usually think that we see people and do not realize that seeing just sees visible object, not a person or thing. While we were eating a salad with tomatoes, Acharn said:

“How could there be an idea of something without visible object? Visible object is a reality, it is not a thing like a tomato, it is just that which can impinge on the eyebase. It arises and falls away. Attachment and ignorance arise and attachment wishes to understand, but it covers up the truth. Why did he teach visible object? If he had not, there would be something in it all the time.

It would not appear as it is and it would be impossible to let go of the idea of someone. The eyebase is a condition for the arising of seeing. Without it, it would be impossible to see. Each citta experiences an object, whenever it arises it experiences an object.”

Then the term saṅkhāra dhamma, conditioned dhamma, was discussed. We should study each word of the teachings, otherwise we talk about what we do not know. Whatever arises because of conditions and appears is saṅkhāra dhamma. Understanding this is the beginning of paññā. Paññā eradicates ignorance.

Vincent asked whether saṅkhāra is a concept.

Acharn said: “We do not talk about concepts. What appears through the eyes?”

Vincent answered: “White colour, but this is already thinking.”

Acharn: “We talk about citta, the faculty that experiences. It does not have the function of like or dislike. The table has no quality to experience. You think of saṅkhāra but there is no understanding of its meaning. What appears now?”

Vincent: “Sound.”

Acharn: “If sound had not arisen it could not appear. Whatever appears has arisen because of conditions, not by anyone’s will. The eyebase cannot condition hearing. It is a condition for seeing. Does it arise?”

Vincent: “Yes.”

Acharn: “It is saṅkhāra dhamma, a conditioned reality. At this moment of seeing, we do not have to think of a flower or another thing. There is just that which is seen. This is the way to let go of the idea of someone or something in it. There is nothing mixed in it at all. Smell is smell, sound is sound. Is sound saṅkhāra dhamma?”

Vincent: “Yes.”

Acharn: “Is hearing saṅkhāra dhamma? Is thinking saṅkhāra dhamma?”

Vincent: “Is concept not saṅkhāra dhamma?”

Acharn: “We do not talk about concepts, just about absolute realities. That is why we have the words paramattha dhamma (absolute or ultimate reality) and abhidhamma (subtle dhamma or dhamma in detail). We begin with the word dhamma: whatever is real. We know that there are so many different kinds of realities. There are realities that can experience something and realities that cannot experience anything.”

Acharn then explained that there are nāma, realities that experience something, and rūpa, realities that cannot experience anything. There is nobody, no one, no permanent self. The word saṅkhāra is used to indicate that there is no one, only dhammas. She explained that by talking and discussing one will have more understanding. She said that discussing is a blessing, since it brings more understanding. Otherwise one reads the texts but one does not know how much understanding there is. She then spoke about meditation centres.

Acharn: “It is useless to go somewhere and meditate. Then one does not have understanding of the reality at this moment. What is saṅkhāra dhamma? Whatever arises by conditions. Without conditions nothing can arise. That is why it cannot belong to anyone. It is not anyone. All dhammas are anattā. When you go somewhere, is that attā or anattā?”

Attā means self, one’s actions may be motivated by the idea of self, or by anattā, the understanding of non-self.

Vincent answered: “Attā.”

Acharn: “No understanding of anattāness when one thinks: ‘I would like to do this or that’. If there is no attā, why do you go there? If there is right understanding, it is now, right understanding of that which appears. What is dhamma?”

Vincent: “What is real.”

Acharn: “Can attā make it arise? Attā cannot bring about right understanding. That is the reason one goes to a quiet place, but it cannot be the right Path; it is motivated by ignorance and attachment. Here we are talking about Dhamma. What brings you here is listening to the Dhamma.”

Vincent: “So, that kind of desire is not-attachment. There is the opportunity to listen.”

Acharn: “One knows what can bring less attachment: right understanding.”

While we were having our Dhamma conversation at the lunch table, preparations were going on for Khun Deng’s birthday. Acharn said to her: “May you be happy” and then went on immediately with the Dhamma explanation. Khun Deng found this the best way to celebrate her birthday. There were songs for her and a birthday cake was being shared out. She went to Acharn and said that she had appreciated so much the simile of the closed fist Acharn had given her. When a fist is closed, we do not know what is in it, but when one opens it, one sees that there is nothing. Even so, what we take for our life are realities that arise and fall away. There is nothing or nobody there.

We read in the commentary to the “Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta”:

The character of contemplating the collection of primary and derived materiality is comparable to the separation of the leaf covering of a plantain-trunk, or is like the opening of an empty fist.

As to primary and derived rūpas, these are the four Great Elements of solidity, cohesion, temperature and motion, and the derived rūpas of taste, odour, smell, nutrition and other rūpas. They arise and fall away all the time. The body does not exist, what we take for our body are only fleeting rūpas.

Acharn: “It is not easy to understand that there is no one at all. What is there when there is no one? What is the reality at this very moment?”

Vincent: “Nāma and rūpa.”

Acharn: “We may name it, but it takes a long time, from life to life, to understand what is real now. Each word of the Buddha should be considered, because it represents a reality, just one characteristic at a time. Only when there is a great deal of listening to the Dhamma, considering it and wise reflection, understanding can begin to develop. Now it is intellectual understanding but it can become firmer and firmer.”

Intellectual understanding of the reality that appears at this moment, in Pali *pariyatti*, is the foundation for the development of direct understanding of realities, in Pali *paṭipatti*. This again can eventually lead to the direct realization of whatever reality appears, *paṭivedha*.

People had questions about *sati*, mindfulness of realities, that is developed in *satipaṭṭhāna*. *Paññā* that is accompanied by *sati* of this level is actually *paṭipatti*, which is often translated as practice. This translation is misleading since it suggests a self who is acting in a specific way.

There are many misunderstandings about mindfulness or awareness. Some people think that this means knowing what one is doing, such as walking or applying oneself to tasks in the house or at work. *Sati* is a *sobhana cetasika*, a beautiful mental factor, that accompanies every *kusala citta*. It is non-forgetful of *kusala*. It can be of many levels and degrees. *Sati* of the level of *dāna* arises when one is generously giving gifts. *Sati* of the level of *sīla* arises when one abstains from harsh speech or when one is helping others. *Sati* of the level of *samatha*, calm, is non-forgetful of the object of calm. *Sati* of the level of *satipaṭṭhāna* is mindful of the reality appearing at the present moment. It accompanies *paññā* so that it can know this reality as only a conditioned dhamma that is not self or mine. When there is an opportunity for *kusala*, one may be lethargic and lazy, thinking of one’s own comfort and pleasure. One is forgetful and lets the opportunity go wasted. However, when *sati* arises, it is non-forgetful of *kusala* and does not let the opportunity go wasted.

Some people wish for the arising of *sati* and they do not see that *sati* also is a conditioned reality that arises because of its own conditions. Acharn spoke many times about the conditioned nature of seeing, because there is seeing time and again, also right now. What has arisen is real and what has not arisen is not real. She would speak about seeing time and again to bring people back to the present moment instead of paying attention to abstractions, ideas which are not realities. If there is correct understanding of seeing at this moment, one can learn the meaning of conditioned reality that is beyond control. Then it will be clearer that also *sati* is beyond control.

It is difficult to be aware of one reality at a time that appears without thinking of the word. One has to get used to their characteristics, each one is different. When there is no understanding of what appears, there is attachment, because it seems to be permanent. What is the object of attachment that appears and disappears? Actually, there is clinging to that which is no more. When there is understanding of what appears, like seeing right now, it is the beginning of understanding that it is just a conditioned reality.

The Buddha taught details so that people would have more understanding of conditioned realities. Acharn reminded us: “There is no method at all. It is dependent on right understanding when it has been sufficiently developed to condition direct awareness of seeing right now. Before hearing the teachings, hardness was experienced at the moment of touching with the idea of ‘something’ all the time, with the idea of ‘I’ or ‘mine’. Softness appears all the time but there is no understanding. Nobody can change it.”

Acharn explained about conditioned realities: “How can there be less attachment to seeing right now? The Buddha taught the conditions for the arising of seeing. Otherwise one would think that just opening one’s eyes is a condition for the arising of seeing. That is wrong understanding. Seeing experiences that which is now appearing. Without the accompanying cetasikas, seeing could not arise.”

The accompanying cetasikas are conditions for seeing. Contact, phassa, is a cetasika that contacts visible object so that seeing can see it. One-pointedness or concentration, ekaggata cetasika, is the condition that seeing only experiences visible object and that there is no thinking of other things at that moment. Memory or saññā marks or remembers the object that is seen. Even so, sati could not arise without the accompanying cetasikas. It needs non-attachment, alobha, as a condition. It also needs concentration, so that it is mindful of one nāma or rūpa. It needs calm that accompanies every kusala citta.

Some people believe that there should be calm first before right understanding of a reality can arise. They take a feeling of relaxation, or not being disturbed by noise, for calm. Calm as it is understood in conventional sense is quite different from the reality of calm, passaddhi. This is a cetasika that accompanies every kusala citta. It can only arise when there are the right conditions for kusala and nobody can cause its arising. When one is generous, there is already calm with the kusala citta. When one studies the Dhamma with kusala citta, there is already calm accompanying the kusala citta. If one thinks that one should go to a quiet place in order to have calm, it is wrong understanding. One clings to an idea of self who can induce calm.

Nāma and rūpa appear one at a time and each one of them has its own characteristic. These characteristics cannot be changed. Seeing, for example, has its own characteristic; we can give it another name, but its characteristic cannot be changed. Seeing is always seeing for everybody, no matter an animal sees or any other living being sees. It has to be known as only a dhamma. Concepts are only objects of thinking, they are not realities with their own characteristics, and, thus, they are not objects of which right understanding is to be developed. Thinking is a reality, there is no self who thinks. Sometimes when there is thinking of beings there can be understanding at that moment, one may realize that it is just thinking.

Only one reality at a time can be experienced by citta and, thus, mindfulness which accompanies the kusala citta can also experience only one object at a time. Since we are so used to paying attention to ‘wholes’, to concepts such as people, cars or trees, we find it difficult to consider only one reality at a time. When we know the difference between the moments of thinking of concepts and the moments that only one reality at a time, such as sound or hardness, appears, we will gradually have more understanding of what mindfulness is. It can only arise when there is no expectation.

The following sutta emphasises the importance of listening and discussing the Dhamma in order to have more direct understanding of realities.

We read in the “Gradual Sayings” (Book of the Fours, Ch XV, § 7 Seasons):

“Monks, there are these four seasons which, if rightly developed, rightly revolved, gradually bring about the destruction of the āsavas⁴. What four?

Hearing Dhamma in due season, discussion of Dhamma in due season, calming in due season, insight in due season. These are the four.

Just as monks, on a hilltop when the sky-deva rains thick drops, that water, pouring down according to the slope of the ground, fills up the clefts, chasms and gullies of the hill-side; when these are filled, they fill the pools; when these are filled, they fill the

⁴ There are four kinds of āsavas:
 the canker of sensuality (kā mā sāva)
 the canker of becoming (bhā v ā sāva)
 the canker of wrong view (di t t h ā sāva)
 the canker of ignorance (avi j j ā sāva)

lakes; when these are filled, they fill the rivulets; when these are being filled, they fill up the great rivers; the great rivers being filled fill the sea, the ocean; - just so, monks, these four seasons, if rightly developed, rightly revolved, gradually bring about the destruction of the āsavas.”

Chapter 5

Understanding this Moment

Acharn reminded us: “When there is no understanding, attachment arises to what appears; it seems permanent. The truth is that the object of attachment appears and disappears very rapidly. There is clinging to what is no more. Seeing arises and falls away but ignorance cannot understand that. So it takes what is seen or seeing as ‘something’. Seeing a moment ago is gone completely. Thinking about it is gone immediately.”

Acharn explained that anattā, the truth of non-self, can only be understood by paññā, not by trying so hard to make paññā arise.

Vincent remarked: “But citta is so fast.”

Acharn said: “No one can stop the rapidity of the succession of cittas. There cannot be selection to have this or that as object of awareness. Realities roll on very fast. Life is the stream, the flux of realities arising and falling away by conditions.”

People were asking how there can be direct understanding of realities. The answer is: only when paññā has grown to a higher level with direct awareness of whatever reality appears. This will take many lives, but intellectual understanding of what appears now, thus, pariyatti, can condition understanding of the level of paṭipatti, direct understanding of realities.

Some people believe that they have to concentrate on nāma and rūpa in order to develop direct understanding of realities. But, what is concentration? As Acharn often said, we have to study each word of the teachings in order to understand the true meaning. People like to have concentration but they do not understand what it is. Coming back to this moment, is there concentration now? Someone thought that concentration helps a great deal to understand the present moment. Acharn asked again:

“Is there concentration right now? At the moment of seeing, is there concentration? All realities are unknown. We are only talking about the story of them. Citta experiences only one object at a time, and it is the function of ekaggatā cetasika, concentration, to cause citta to focus on that one object.”

There are many misunderstandings about concentration. It arises with every citta. When it accompanies akusala citta, it is wrong concentration, and when it accompanies kusala citta, it is right concentration. It is a conditioned dhamma and nobody can cause its arising.

One of the listeners said that there was quite a revolution in his way of thinking when he gave up wrong ideas about the eightfold Path. He sees now that understanding should be developed in a natural way and that he should not try to focus on particular realities.

If we try to concentrate or if we think, “I am concentrated”, we cling to an idea of self who has concentration and then we follow the wrong Path. When we think that we can do something to develop understanding, it is wrong practice. One should consider realities more that appear now in daily life so that understanding can develop naturally.

Someone asked how one can reach the stage of paṭipatti, the development of direct understanding, and whether meditation is necessary to reach it. She wished for enlightenment.

Sarah answered: “Bhāvanā is the development of understanding. Let us speak about understanding now. It does not mean practice. No ‘I’ who can do anything. Hearing about the realities that arise in a day leads to a little more understanding of what pariyatti means. There can be bhāvanā right now, there is no need to wait for another time or place. When one thinks of going to follow a method, it is thinking. There can be understanding of thinking.”

The person who asked questions about meditation had an idea of wanting to experience emptiness. Sarah explained:

“It seems that there is just emptiness, nothing there, no citta, no object. That is moha, ignorance. It is not possible for the citta that arises not to experience an object. The object is a reality or a concept. It is not nothing.”

Sarah then explained, if someone has an idea of having no object but being able to have concentration lasting a few hours, experiencing emptiness, that it does not bring him closer to the Buddha’s teachings. It will induce people to take the wrong Path, it is not a condition for understanding conditioned dhammas. Following the wrong Path is so dangerous. If one listens, like now, one will realize that dhammas are anattā, each one impermanent and unsatisfactory (dukkha).

Acharn repeated very often that realities such as sound, hearing or tangible object are experienced in darkness. Only at the moment visible object is experi-

enced by seeing, the world is light. But when visible object has fallen away, the world is dark. It seems that the world of light lasts but this is an illusion. Visible object impinges again and again on the eyesense and seeing and the other eye-door process cittas follow. But there are numerous other processes of cittas in between. This shows us how rapidly cittas are arising and falling away in succession. When Acharn said that hearing experiences sound in darkness, she reminded us that only one object at a time can be experienced. She reminded us of the rapidity of the stream of realities.

The Buddha taught about cittas that experience objects through the doors of the senses and the mind, arising in different processes of cittas. Cittas arise and fall away in succession extremely rapidly. When we consider his teaching more deeply, it will help us to see that nobody can interfere with these processes, that they are beyond control. All realities are anattā.

Each of the sense-cognitions experiences an object through the appropriate doorway. There is not only one citta that experiences visible object, or one citta that experiences sound, but each of the sense-cognitions arises in a series or process of cittas succeeding one another and sharing the same object. They all cognize the same object, but they each perform their own function.

Seeing is preceded by the eye-door adverting-consciousness, which adverts to visible object. It does not see but it merely turns towards the visible object that has just impinged on the eyesense⁵. This citta is an ahetuka kiriyacitta (inoperative citta without hetus, roots), it is not akusala citta, not kusala citta and not vipākacitta. Seeing, which is an ahetuka vipākacitta, is succeeded by two more ahetuka vipākacittas which do not see but still cognize visible object that has not fallen away yet. They perform a function different from seeing while they cognize visible object. Visible object is rūpa and it lasts longer than citta. These cittas are receiving-consciousness (sampaṭicchana-citta), that receives visible object and investigating-consciousness (santīraṇa-citta), that investigates the object. The investigating-consciousness is succeeded by the determining-consciousness (votthapana-citta), which is an ahetuka kiriyacitta. This citta is followed by seven cittas performing the function of javana, which are in the case of non-arahats kusala cittas or akusala cittas. There is a fixed order in the cittas arising within a process and nobody can change this order.

⁵ The five-sense-door adverting-consciousness (pañca-dvārāvajjana-citta) turns towards the object through one of the five sense-doors. It is named after the relevant sense-door, such as eye-door adverting-consciousness or ear-door adverting-consciousness.

There is no self who can determine whether the determining-consciousness will be succeeded by kusala cittas or akusala cittas. Cittas arise and fall away succeeding one another extremely rapidly and nobody can make kusala citta arise at will. Kusala or akusala performed in the past is a condition for the arising of kusala or akusala at present.

When the sense-door process of cittas is finished, the sense object experienced by those cittas has also fallen away. Very shortly after the sense-door process is finished, a mind-door process of cittas begins, which experience the sense object which has just fallen away. Although it has fallen away, it can be object of cittas arising in a mind-door process. The first citta of the mind-door process is the mind-door adverting-consciousness (*mano-dvārāvajjana-citta*) which adverts through the mind-door to the object which has just fallen away. The mind-door adverting-consciousness is neither kusala citta nor akusala citta; it is an *ahetuka kiriyacitta*. After the mind-door adverting-consciousness has adverted to the object, it is succeeded by either kusala cittas or akusala cittas (in the case of non-*arahats*), which experience that same object.

When visible object is experienced through the mind-door, the cittas only know visible object, they do not pay attention to shape and form or think of a person or a thing. But time and again other mind-door processes of cittas follow which think of people or things and then the object is a concept, not visible object. The experience of visible object conditions the thinking of concepts of people and things which arises later on. It seems that while we are seeing we can think already about what is seen, but in reality seeing and thinking arise in different processes. Since cittas succeed one another so rapidly, it seems that they last.

How much understanding is there now of visible object as visible object? Right understanding has not been sufficiently developed so as to become detached from the idea of self. There should be listening to the Dhamma, considering what one hears and understanding of what is now appearing. Thinking always follows seeing, hearing and all the other sense-cognitions. What is thinking? It is different from seeing but only when understanding is more developed their different characteristics can be directly known.

We may only ‘think’ that seeing is not self but the actual moment of that which sees is not known yet. When there is more understanding, there will be less attachment to realities as self. We should have confidence in right understanding, it can understand what was not known before. As long as seeing is not directly known, it is impossible to give up the idea of something in it. There can be more confidence that whatever happens, whatever we do only lasts for an extremely short moment.

People are often wondering what the conditions are for right understanding and right mindfulness of the eightfold Path. The condition for right awareness is right understanding from hearing, considering. Paññā is not developed sufficiently to know that there is no one in visible object. We mostly live in the world of ignorance; there is no understanding of what is true and real. Considering realities is a precious moment.

On my last day in Thailand I attended the morning session in Thai at the Foundation⁶. The subject discussed was the real purpose of monkhood. The following sutta was discussed:

Gradual Sayings, Book of the Tens, Ch IV, § 1, Upāli and the Obligation. Upāli asked the Buddha what the purpose of the Vinaya was. The Buddha explained that this was:

“For the excellence of the Order,
for the well-being of the Order,
for the control of ill-conditioned monks
and the comfort of well-behaved monks,
for the restraint of the cankers in this same visible state,
for protection against the cankers in a future life,
to give confidence to those of little faith,
for the betterment of the faithful,
to establish true dhamma,
and to support the discipline.”

Khun Unnop stressed that the second point was most important: the well-being of the Sangha. Often there is wrong understanding about the meaning of monkhood. Young men take ordination for a short while, to please their parents and without any understanding. People give money to monks and they accept it, but this is wrong. Monks have left the home life and should not accept money or enjoy the idea of it. They should see the danger of being in the cycle of birth and death and their life should be directed towards freedom from the cycle, to

⁶ Dhamma Study and Support Foundation. This is the centre where all sessions with Acharn Sujin take place each weekend.

be reached at the attainment of arahatship. The monk has only two tasks: the study of the scriptures and the development of insight. Nothing else. The study of the scriptures is not in order to gain theoretical knowledge, but to understand the reality of the present moment. Acharn adapted most of her radio programs to explain the purpose of monkhood.

I met Khun Samnuang Sucharitakul, who came very cheerfully in a wheelchair. She had recently turned a hundred years. She used to get up at night for a few hours to transcribe Acharn's talks in Thai, so that these could be printed as books which were beneficial for many. It enabled me to translate several of these books into English.

At the Foundation, during the English session, we discussed the accumulation of akusala. By listening to the Buddha's teachings, there can be more understanding of attachment (lobha), aversion (dosa) and ignorance (moha) which are of many degrees. They arise because of conditions, they have been accumulated from life to life. Whenever there is attachment, we think of ourselves. Some degrees are very harmful such as wanting to steal something, and some are not harmful for others. We can learn to see the danger and disadvantage of all degrees of akusala.

We are attached to friends and family members but it is good to know that we are actually attached to ourselves when we like the company of dear people. It was emphasized several times that it is so common and that we should not consider it as our special problem or find it important.

The discussions held during these weeks were most beneficial to all of us. Sarah and Jonothan added many useful points to Acharn's explanations of dhammas that arise in daily life. I am very grateful for all those reminders. It was emphasized in many ways that understanding should be developed naturally. One should not change one's lifestyle or give up one's job to study Dhamma with the purpose to have kusala citta with understanding more often. Then clinging to the idea of self will not be eradicated.

Acharn had said before many times that paññā was not developed sufficiently so as to condition direct understanding of realities. We may repeat these words but at first they may not be very meaningful. Now, after all our discussions, it became somewhat clearer that only a higher level of paññā can condition direct awareness and understanding of the present reality. We cannot act in any way to cause the arising of a higher level of paññā, except persevering in listening and considering what we hear. Seeing and thinking that appear now can be understood as just conditioned dhammas, but it will take a long time, even many

lives, before this is clearly understood. Gradually there will be more confidence in the growth of paññā. How could one interfere with realities that arise and fall away extremely rapidly?

Acharn asked: “Life is so very short. What is the best moment in life?”

The answer is: listening to Dhamma so that we come to know what the truth is in life – whatever reality appears is only a conditioned dhamma, not self.
