

A Journey with Dhamma in Egypt and Turkey.

Introduction.

This journey I made in Egypt and Turkey some twenty years ago with Acharn Sujin, was organised by friends from Thailand. Gabi from Germany and Alan from England had also joined this tour.

We experienced pleasant feeling when we were seeing objects of art and unpleasant feeling when we were tired or when the luggage was lost. Acharn Sujin explained to us that everything is just “dhamma”, a reality that is conditioned, in whatever situation one may be.

The word “dhamma” has several meanings. When we speak about the “Dhamma” we mean the Buddha’s teaching of all that is real. The phenomena that occur at this moment and that can be experienced through the senses and the mind can be called “dhammas”, conditioned realities. We cling to ideas of mind and body that exist, but in reality, what we take for the body or the mind are ever changing dhammas that fall away immediately and that are not owned by a self.

Thanks to the Buddha’s teaching we learn to understand the different conditions for the physical phenomena and mental phenomena that arise. We learn that they cannot be controlled by a “self”. Nobody can cause the arising of seeing, seeing has its own conditions for its arising. Without eyesense and visible object it could not arise. When attachment or aversion arises on account of what is seen, these realities are also conditioned, they arise because of attachment and aversion that arose in the past.

Our guide in Turkey was moslem and she believed in God and a soul. Very gently Acharn explained to her that what she called soul was in fact a mental state or citta that changes all the time and that arises because of conditions. This is the teaching of the Abhidhamma. The Buddha’s teachings contained in the Tipiṭaka (Three Baskets) are the Vinaya or Book of Discipline for the monks, the Suttanta or Discourses and the Abhidhamma which is an exposition of all realities in detail. The Abhidhamma deals with whatever is experienced in daily life; it deals with what is pleasant or unpleasant, wholesome or unwholesome. “The Abhidhamma is not in the book”, as Acharn said.

Citta is a reality and it arises throughout our life. Only one citta arises at a time and it is accompanied by several mental factors, cetasikas. Cetasikas such as feeling or remembrance accompany each type of citta. Citta and its accompanying cetasikas can be good or wholesome, kusala, they can be evil or unwholesome, akusala, or they can be neither kusala nor akusala. Akusala cetasikas such as ignorance, attachment and aversion accompany akusala

citta. Wholesome cetasikas such as kindness or understanding accompany kusala citta.

Citta and cetasika are mental phenomena, nāma. Mental phenomena experience an object. Physical phenomena or rūpa do not experience any object. We should know the difference between ultimate truth and conventional truth. Conventional truth is the world of concepts such as person, tree or animal we can think of but which are not real in the ultimate sense. Ultimate realities, nāma and rūpa, are impermanent, they arise and fall away. The purpose of the development of the eightfold Path is seeing ultimate realities as impermanent, suffering and non-self. If the difference between concepts and ultimate realities is not known, the eightfold Path cannot be developed. Right understanding, the leading factor of the eightfold Path, is developed through direct awareness of nāma and rūpa. Nāma and rūpa, not concepts, should be the objects of understanding. When direct awareness arises of one object at a time as it appears through one of the senses or through the mind-door, we do not think of a concept of a “whole”, of a person or thing, at that moment.

In the conversations described as interviews between the three of us, Gabi, Alan and myself, we tried to apply all the good lessons we learnt from Acharn. Acharn would often remind us of the need to apply the Dhamma in our daily life, reminding us that each moment is conditioned. Whatever we experience through the senses, be it pleasant or unpleasant, is conditioned by kamma, wholesome or unwholesome action committed in the past. Cittas conditioned by kamma are vipākacittas, cittas which are results. Vipākacittas are different from kusala cittas and akusala cittas. When others behave towards us in a disagreeable way or speak harshly, we may react to this with akusala cittas rooted in aversion. However, when we remember that unpleasant experiences through the senses are vipākacittas conditioned by our own kamma, not by another person, we shall be less inclined to blame others.

Acharn would emphasize that we should not think of ourselves, and that we become less selfish by paying more attention to the needs of others. This is a simple advice, but it is very basic. We cling to ourselves all the time, but the aim of the teachings is detachment from the idea of self. If we are always selfish, how can we become detached?

I began to understand that there are countless moments of thinking of ourselves. Even when we want to have more understanding of realities, we are bound to think of a “self” who desires this. When kusala citta arises, there is no clinging, but very shortly after kusala citta has fallen away we are likely to cling to an idea of “my kusala”.

I am most grateful to Acharn for pointing out to us time and again that we should understand our life at this very moment. What she explained is completely in conformity with the Buddha’s teachings.

Because of listening to the Dhamma, we acquire intellectual understanding of what the Buddha taught and then we gradually learn to verify in our life the truth of the phenomena that occur so that there can be direct understanding. The eightfold Path taught by the Buddha is the development of direct understanding of whatever reality appears in daily life. Acharn reminded us that we should consider what 'dhamma' is: reality appearing at this very moment in our daily life.

When we study the teachings we should not forget that also studying and considering what we read are conditioned dhammas. We listened to the Dhamma in the past and this conditions our interest today. The Buddha taught the conditions for all realities of our life so that we would understand that realities are beyond control, non-self. His teaching is subtle and intricate and we should study all details. Understanding of nāma and rūpa is difficult and it can only be learnt very gradually. The Path the Buddha taught should be developed with detachment from the idea of self at the very beginning. Eventually the development of understanding will lead to the eradication of clinging to the idea of self.

Chapter 1

Patience.

Right understanding can be developed no matter where one is, on land, on water or in the air. Gabi, Alan and I had opportunities for Dhamma discussions with Acharn Sujin while we were walking along the pyramids of Gizeh, in papyrus shops, in handicraft shops, in restaurants, in the bus, in a horse coach, on a boat or on the plane. The scenery changed all the time, but we were reminded that everything that appears is a dhamma, a conditioned reality. Seeing sees visible object now, and also aeons ago there was seeing of visible object, and there will be seeing in the future, for aeons to come. We have read about physical phenomena (rūpa) and mental phenomena (nāma) and we have considered them; we have listened to tapes about the Dhamma, but we also need to be reminded of realities in the different situations of our daily life. Then we can see more clearly that everything we learn is not mere theory, that it is all about daily realities.

We have read inspiring texts about patience, but do we realize when there is an opportunity to develop it in our daily life?

We read in the “Dhammapada” verses 183, 184:

“To abstain from evil, to cultivate wholesomeness, to purify the mind, - this is the teaching of the Buddhas.

Forbearing patience is the highest ascetism, nibbāna is the supreme, say the Buddhas; he, verily is not a recluse who harms another; nor is he an ascetic who oppresses others.”

It is said that one should abstain from evil, develop wholesomeness and purify the mind. However, we forget that patience is most essential. “Without patience one cannot attain enlightenment”, Acharn said.

We need great patience to develop understanding of all realities of our daily life. In the “Exhortation to the Pāṭimokkha” the “Ovāda Pāṭimokkha”, the same is said as in the text just quoted from the “Dhammapada”, but the order is different: patience is mentioned first, and this is very appropriate.

We believe that it is beneficial to develop loving-kindness, mettā, but it cannot be developed if one does not see the danger of dosa and the benefit of patience (Visuddhimagga IX, 1-3). We may be inclined to think about patience

in a general, conventional sense, thus, about a concept of patience, instead of developing patience in daily life, whenever there is an opportunity for it. Acharn showed us very clearly during this journey that at the moment of akusala citta there is impatience and at the moment of kusala citta there is patience. When there is awareness of akusala we can see that it is ugly and we can understand more clearly its disadvantage. Seeing the benefit of kusala is a condition for the arising of kusala citta and at that moment there is patience.

Patience should be developed not only when the object is unpleasant but also when it is pleasant. When a pleasant object presents itself, usually lobha arises and in that case there is no patience. When, instead of lobha, kusala citta arises there is patience.

During this journey we discussed different levels of awareness. Awareness is non-forgetfulness of what is wholesome, kusala. Awareness accompanies generosity, it accompanies kusala citta that is abstaining from ill deeds, it accompanies each kusala citta. Awareness of the level of satipaṭṭhāna is directly aware of mental phenomena, nāma, and physical phenomena, rūpa, as they appear one at a time through one of the six doors ¹. The aim of the development of satipaṭṭhāna is to see realities as they are: as impermanent, dukkha (suffering) and non-self.

Gabi said to Acharn that she was not directly aware yet of nāma and rūpa. She said that she could be aware of akusala citta in the situation of her daily life. She reads Jātakas (the Buddha's Birth stories) and she finds that she often is in the same situation as described in the Jātakas. She read in a Jātaka story that one should not speak when one is angry and she could apply this in her daily life. When someone's baby was crying she understood the ugliness of aversion and that was a condition for kusala citta: she would not say anything about the baby's crying. In the middle of her work she thinks about the teachings and she is reminded to develop kusala. Acharn said to her: "This shows progress in the development of right understanding". Reading, considering the teachings and moments of awareness condition the development of right understanding. Before we studied the teachings we did not have many moments of awareness of akusala. Now there can be some moments, even if it is not yet at the level of satipaṭṭhāna. There can be awareness of realities at different levels. We cannot expect many moments of satipaṭṭhāna, right understanding and awareness of nāma and rūpa, but awareness of other levels can arise. The Bodhisatta developed the perfections

¹ The development of satipaṭṭhāna is the development of right understanding of nāma and rūpa as they appear in daily life.

(pāramīs) with awareness and right understanding of different levels ². We found it very encouraging to hear this.

Acharn had said many times before that all kinds of kusala should be cultivated so that sati and the other sobhana cetasikas (beautiful mental factors) can develop and conditions are accumulated for the growth of direct understanding of realities. During this journey it became clearer that awareness and right understanding can arise at this very moment so that it can be known whether there is akusala citta or kusala citta. At this moment patience can be developed. Acharn reminded us time and again to develop understanding of daily realities. One may be merely thinking of the Dhamma and not pay attention to all the akusala cetasikas (unwholesome mental factors that can accompany akusala citta) which arise in one's daily life. Acharn said that people want to have great patience, but forget to develop patience at this moment. Paññā, understanding, should become refined so that also the more subtle akusala can be known. At the moment of understanding, the citta is kusala. We read in "As it was said" (Itivuttaka, The Twos, Ch II, § 2) that the Buddha said to the monks:

"Monks, two dhamma-teachings of the Wayfarer Arahat, a rightly awakened one, take place one after the other. What two? 'Look at akusala as akusala' is the first dhamma-teaching. 'Seeing akusala as akusala, be disgusted with it, be cleansed of it, be freed of it' is the second dhamma-teaching.

These two dhamma-teachings of the Wayfarer take place one after the other.

This is the meaning...

Of the Wayfarer, the awakened one,

Who has compassion on all beings,

Behold the way of speech and the two teachings:

See akusala for what it is, and then

Conceive disgust for it: with heart made pure

Of akusala, you shall make an end of dukkha."

After Acharn's explanation about awareness and understanding we see more clearly that what is stated in this text occurs in daily life.

² The Buddha, in his former lives, when he was still a Bodhisatta, developed the perfections, and these are the wholesome qualities of generosity, morality, renunciation, wisdom, energy, patience, truthfulness, determination, loving-kindness and equanimity.

While we walked around the tombs of the Egyptian kings, or while we had to sit for a long time in the bus or at the airport we became tired. Alan was wondering whether tiredness is bodily or mental. Acharn asked him, “Do you like it to be tired?” Alan answered that he did not like it and then it became clear that he had aversion. Usually akusala citta with aversion arises when we feel tired. We use tiredness as an excuse not to develop kusala at such a moment but, Acharn said, it is no excuse. When we have no understanding of realities, tiredness can condition akusala. When we have to wait a long time for dinner and we become faint with hunger, or the shower in the hotel room does not work, we can ask ourselves, “Do we like this?” Then we can know how much aversion we have; we begin to see akusala as akusala and to understand its disadvantage. When we give in to aversion we only think of ourselves. Whereas when we think of others kusala citta with patience arises. Acharn said that we should forget ourselves, our own body; we should ‘belittle’ ourselves with understanding. There was not always an opportunity for Dhamma discussions during this journey and then I was disappointed. Acharn clearly explained to me at such occasions the importance of patience. She said:

“When aversion arises it is evident that it is caused by something you want to have but which you do not obtain. We should trace the cause of aversion, otherwise we cannot get rid of the cause. You cling to the time for dinner or breakfast. You cling to Dhamma talk. Everything is dhamma, and it depends on your considering and understanding whether you can see this. Dhamma is not different from seeing, hearing, thinking and considering now. Whenever unpleasant feeling arises, there is akusala citta. Do you like to accumulate akusala on and on? We should remember that kusala is always pleasant. If you see the advantage of all kinds of kusala you know that it is time to develop patience, kindness or generosity. We should develop all kinds of kusala, not only the kusala that is listening to the Dhamma. When you have aversion it is caused by clinging, by expectations. Be patient, receive all kinds of vipākacittas that are conditioned by previous kamma. Just let go of the things you are used to or you would like to have. Patience has to be gradually developed. We have to endure all kinds of hardship. Why can patience not be developed at this moment? When you know how to develop patience you can see progress from time to time. One can be calm and happy, even when facing difficult situations.”

When we, after our trip to Turkey, arrived at Cairo airport again, we had to be patient, waiting for one hour for a piece of luggage which was lost and then found again. We proceeded to the hotel where we had to wait in our room for our suitcases until after one a clock at night. On account of this event I had another conversation with Acharn which I found most helpful:

Nina: “My luggage did not come. Patience has a certain limit, after that there is no more patience.”

Acharn: “What is the use of being impatient? Only right understanding can see that it is useless. When there is impatience there is no right understanding which sees the benefit of patience. We need right understanding in any situation. If paññā sees the disadvantage of impatience it is a condition for the development of patience. Understanding can develop together with all kusala dhammas.”

Nina: “There can be patience to a certain degree and then one forgets about it.”

Acharn: “That is why sati is necessary in any situation.”

Nina: “Even if you lose your suitcase?”

Acharn: “If you see the benefit of higher understanding it is time to develop all kusala dhammas.”

Nina: “I think that the moments of impatience are the usual moments of akusala that are bound to arise anyway.”

Acharn: “They have to arise when there are conditions for them, but it depends on the development of paññā whether one continues to accumulate more akusala”.

Nina: “I did not realize that the moments of impatience really hinder paññā.”

Acharn: ”Nothing can hinder paññā. However, if you do not understand the disadvantage of akusala you will have more akusala. People desire great paññā, but is there paññā that sees the uselessness of akusala at this moment? Paññā can develop with all kinds of wholesome cetasikas.”

”You help us to see more the disadvantage of akusala in the situations of our life.”

Acharn: “The details of Dhamma can help a great deal when you carefully think about the way to develop right understanding. We should understand the moment of aversion. Without understanding of the reality which is akusala, ignorance cannot be eliminated.”

Nina: “Before, we knew more in theory about akusala and kusala, we did not realize so much the disadvantage of each moment of akusala. This has become much clearer during this journey.”

Acharn: “You can come to understand the importance of developing patience, also patience through body and speech.”

Nina: “When the luggage did not come I was so impatient, I lifted my hands. That was conditioned by impatience. There was no awareness.”

Acharn: “Patience can condition one to refrain from speaking certain words or from doing what is akusala. When we attend to this very moment we do not mind what will happen, we can be patient, no matter what will occur. Yesterday we had to wait at the airport for the luggage a long time. It was quite a test. In this way we can develop more wholesome cetasikas. Only reading and writing about the Dhamma is not enough, one should consider precisely the reality of this moment.”

We consider the development of right understanding as the goal of our life, but we tend to forget that when akusala arises there is ignorance at that very moment. At the moment of ignorance we do not develop paññā and we are going downhill. Acharn made this very clear to us during the journey.

Patience can be developed when we have pain or when we are sick. I had a backache when waiting at the airport for a long time. Acharn said:

“If you do not think much of the pain, it does not appear. Other things appear as objects, such as sound and hearing. One should forget about oneself, otherwise one is self-centered all the time.”

When we were about to board the plane for Turkey Alan was very sick and he did not want to continue traveling. He was afraid of being sick on the plane. Acharn said:

“Do not think of it, let it go. Everything just arises because of conditions. It is of no use to try to control your body. Awareness is aware naturally, this is the way. Develop understanding at any time, also when you cannot control your stomach.”

Alan came along on the plane and he was not sick anymore.

I spoke to Acharn about my daily life and I explained that I found my social life so tiring, always receiving guests or going out to parties. Acharn said that in such situations there are opportunities to think of the benefit of others. I mentioned that the social program I receive every week conditions aversion and that I express this in speech. Although I tell myself not to say anything I still speak with aversion about the program. We had the following conversation:

Acharn: “Sometimes it looks as if you think of yourself first.”

Nina: “It is the self that is in the way.”

Acharn: “That is not good, even in conventional sense. If you think of making other people happy by entertaining them and going out to their parties, you will have the energy to do this, instead of thinking that it is too much. You can think: ‘It is my time to help’, and then kusala citta can arise. Everything can be changed by right understanding. We have to continue to develop right understanding and all wholesome cetasikas. Otherwise defilements cannot be eradicated.”

Chapter 2.

Understanding the Present Moment.

In Egypt and Turkey we saw golden treasures, jewelry and objects decorated with glittering precious stones, which have been collected in olden times and are unique in the world. While we were visiting musea and palaces we were absorbed in the details of all those things. Most of the time clinging arises after seeing, and when we are absorbed in the details of what we see our clinging becomes more obvious. The cetasika saññā, remembrance or perception, remembers what is seen and citta think of it for a long time³. Whenever we do not apply ourselves to dāna, sīla or mental development, we act, speak and think with akusala citta. Even when we believe that our thinking is harmless the citta is likely to be akusala citta. We often think with akusala citta about people. Acharn said:

“Where is that being? It is only a story in your mind. Previous experiences condition the thought of a being. Gradually we can come to understand what is meant by “being alone” with visible object at the moment of seeing, because there is nobody in the visible object. One can be alone at the moment of hearing sound, because there is no idea of anyone at that moment.”

When awareness arises of the visible object which appears, one is alone, there is no person there. At that moment one does not cling to an image or to details. Visible object falls away and nothing is left; only the memory remains. Everything lasts just for a moment and in the next life everything is forgotten. We should often consider that we see visible object, no husband or wife, friend or relative.

³ One citta arises at a time and each citta is accompanied by several cetasikas, mental factors. Saññā, remembrance, is a cetasika accompanying each citta. It remembers or recognizes the object citta experiences.

Acharn said to me: “You assume that there is Lodewijk, but you just enjoy paññatti, a concept. What is more beneficial: understanding that there is a reality, not Lodewijk, or thinking that he is Lodewijk?”

We spoke about the death of someone who is dear to us. I asked what I could do in case my husband would die. Acharn said: “When he dies and you would feel lonely, you cling to just air, to nothing. Where is he after death? You cling to your own memory. We should often consider this.” When I said that we have to be prepared, she said: “Now you are preparing.”

We can only prepare ourselves for a great loss by understanding the present moment more clearly. Throughout our journey Acharn emphasized the importance of understanding the present moment: “We should not worry about enlightenment, but what about the understanding of this moment? Understanding can develop from one moment to a following moment. There is no other way but the understanding of the reality of this moment.”

We read, consider and discuss Dhamma just in order to understand the reality of this moment. Sometimes she was yawning and when I asked her whether she was tired she answered: “It is just this moment.”

When we can realize that each reality which appears disappears immediately we can learn to let it go instead of thinking long stories about it. We spoke about seeing and thinking of the details of what was seen. I remarked that if one does not pay so much attention to details, one can know what seeing is. Acharn said: “You do not have to try to prevent thinking. When thinking thinks a great deal, it is time to understand thinking. Develop understanding now, that is better than waiting to see the precise distinction between nāma and rūpa, or the rapidity of their arising and falling away. That is beyond our understanding at this moment. One studies in order to have more understanding of realities, we have to go stage by stage. There should be no expectation of result.” When we pay attention just to what appears now, understanding can develop from moment to moment and we do not cling to an idea of stages of insight we want to attain.

In order to remind us of “this moment”, Acharn spoke about the processes of cittas which experience objects through the five senses and through the mind-door. In between the processes there are bhavanga-cittas, life-continuum. Bhavanga-cittas do not experience sense objects which impinge time and again on the sense-doors and on the mind-door. The bhavanga-cittas experience their own object which is the same as the object experienced shortly before the dying-consciousness of the previous life. When we are fast asleep and not dreaming, bhavanga-cittas arise and fall away, succeeding one another.

Acharya used a simile of actors who play on the stage. When the eye-door process is running, a play is going on and when the ear-door process is running, another play is going on. The cittas experiencing the sense objects are the actors and the bhavanga-cittas in between processes are like the darkness in between the acts, when the curtain is drawn. Each time when the curtain opens there is a new act going to be played. One never knows beforehand what kind of act will be played, it is a surprise. The acts change with great rapidity: seeing arises, then hearing, then thinking. They seem to occur all at the same time, but in reality there are different “acts” separated by bhavanga-cittas. They have no connection with each other. Each act is so short, it is already over before we realize it. This reminds us that there is no self who could direct the drama of life.

We attach great importance to what we experience, but it only lasts for a moment. We are attached to praise and honour. Acharya said:

“One may cling to praise and fame, but that is very dangerous. People become infatuated with these insignificant things. Praise is called an axe that falls from heaven. It wounds if one does not know how to receive it. We should learn to receive both blame and praise. We should get rid of the idea of rank, it destroys kusala. It is more beneficial to be “nobody”; to get rid of the idea of my body, of the idea of self, of rank or praise. One should understand that praise are only words people will forget immediately after they have been spoken. The person who clings to praise wants more. When we realize our clinging we will be able to get rid of it. Otherwise we will keep on clinging to rank, honour, praise and fortune.

We have to continue to develop right understanding and all the wholesome qualities which are the “perfections”, pāramīs. The Buddha, in his former lives, when he was still a Bodhisatta, developed the perfections: generosity, morality, renunciation, wisdom, energy, patience, truthfulness, determination, loving-kindness and equanimity. He developed them to the highest degree since they were the necessary conditions for his attainment of Buddhahood. We also should develop the perfections together with satipaṭṭhāna so that eventually enlightenment can be attained.

Acharya said:

“One reads the teachings and considers them, and one knows that this conditions right understanding, but one should not expect it to be fully developed tonight or tomorrow. Is the development of understanding at this moment not enough? We should let go of all expectations.”

One may wonder which kinds of perfections in particular one should develop. Acharya said: “It seems that ‘we’ can develop them, but it depends on conditions which type of kusala arises at a particular moment. When we learn

about the ten perfections we are encouraged to develop all of them. When we realize that such or such perfection is deficient, right understanding can condition the development of those that are deficient.”

It is true that time and again an idea arises of “I will develop understanding”, or, “I will develop mettā”, but we should let go of the idea of a self who intends to or who is able to do something. Realities can arise only when there are the appropriate conditions for their arising. Right understanding of what is kusala and what is akusala can condition mettā. We read about infinite mettā and we think about it, but we may not know how to develop mettā in daily life. Acharn said:

“My goal is not infinite mettā, but to extend mettā to different people at any time, and not to particular people.”

This reminded us again that the perfections should be developed naturally, when the opportunity arises, and that this is different from mere thinking about them.

Patience is indispensable with the development of all the perfections. When we see the extent of our defilements more clearly we can understand that it takes a long time, even innumerable lives, to eradicate them. It should not disturb us that we cannot attain enlightenment soon, that it takes aeons. Gabi said: “Thinking of aeons will make patience grow.”

Sīla, morality, is one of the perfections; we have to develop the cetasikas which are abstention from unwholesome speech and unwholesome action (virati cetasikas), and we need patience to develop them. We may have an idea of “I have sīla”, but in order to develop sīla a precise knowledge of the different moments of kusala citta and of akusala citta is indispensable. We may be about to speak unpleasant words but paññā can realize the disadvantage of akusala. Then the cetasika that is abstention can stop angry words, even if one has opened one’s mouth already, Acharn said. When we give in to unpleasant speech and disagreeable behaviour we only think of ourselves, we are not considerate towards others. When we are with close friends, we are used to letting ourselves go more easily when we speak. Do we know when the citta is kusala and when it is akusala? I said to Acharn that I complain to my husband when I am tired or hungry, when I do not like something, that I let myself go more easily when I am with him. Acharn answered:

“We should develop wholesomeness. Nobody likes to hear unpleasant words. We can change our habits little by little. When someone is complaining he is thinking of himself first, whereas when he thinks of the other person’s feelings he forgets about himself.”

Right effort or energy for the development of understanding and of all kinds of kusala is another perfection. We should not lose courage even if it takes aeons to reach the goal. Alan spoke about the benefit of being on this journey. One needs effort to decide to make the journey and to take part in it. At times we have to undergo hardship and things do not turn out the way we expect. Making an effort for the Dhamma is beneficial; right effort is being accumulated. It can condition us to make an effort in the future to listen to the Dhamma again. Alan said:

“In many ways the Dhamma is not easy for me. I have to take long trips on my own to see Acharn. My family and friends are not interested at all, so one has to go against the stream. It takes quite an effort to turn away from what most people follow and to go your own way. It is important to accumulate right effort; without it one could not develop right understanding at all. It is encouraging that the benefit of kusala can gradually be understood more deeply. Just understanding it little by little.”

We also discussed the perfection of renunciation, nekkhamma. Not only monks but also laypeople can develop this perfection. Right understanding of nāma and rūpa can condition renunciation. There can be understanding of visible object as just visible object, not the dear person we love. “It is very difficult to realize that visible object is just visible object, not Lodewijk”, Acharn said to me.

The monk leaves his home but what is the purpose of it if he still thinks of his family and friends. The purpose of becoming a monk is arahatship, the state of perfection. When someone wants to become a monk he should know whether his purpose is only to have calm and to be removed from a busy life. That is clinging. He should know of himself whether his kusala is strong enough to renounce the homelife. He should know his accumulated inclinations.

Visākhā, a laydisciple at the Buddha’s time, gave an example of how one can lead a worldly life and still practise detachment. At the age of seven she became a sotāpanna, after she heard the Buddha preach. Later on she married and she had ten sons and ten daughters. She had perfect generosity and she was always attending to the needs of the Sangha. She was called the laydisciple who was foremost in ministering to the Sangha. She was attached to her husband, children and grandchildren, but she was aware of all that naturally arose in her daily life. She understood her clinging as a conditioned reality, not self. This teaches us not to ignore attachment when it arises, but to be aware of it. It is natural to have attachment, but paññā (wisdom) can understand it, no matter how strong it is. We are inclined to think of “our lobha”. We are so used to the idea that we do such or such things with lobha, but it is lobha cetasika that arises and performs its function of clinging. Acharn remarked:

“It is just a reality, don’t worry about it. Follow it with understanding. You can see how it changes. It is most important to understand it as not self. Whatever arises is conditioned. The “self” tries so much to control lobha, to change it, but that is wrong. We should understand it as it is and then the idea of self will gradually be eliminated.”

Visākhā had accumulated the perfection of truthfulness, sacca. Truthfulness means not deluding oneself about the realities which naturally arise, including defilements. Without right understanding of them one may delude oneself into thinking that one can control clinging, that one can prevent oneself from clinging. “That is only make belief, not truthfulness”, Acharn said.

We read in the “Harita Jātaka”(no. 431) that the Bodhisatta lived as an ascetic in the royal park, near the palace. He received food in the palace every day. Once, when the King had to go away because of disturbance at the frontier, the Bodhisatta succumbed to the charms of the Queen. We read:

“...His defilements which had been dormant for thousands of aeons, rose up like a poisonous snake lying in a box, and hence his skill in jhāna disappeared. The recluse who was unable to apply mindfulness, went inside, seized the Queen by her hand and then they gave themselves over to misconduct.”

When the King returned he asked the ascetic whether the bad rumours about him were true. We then read that the recluse thought:

”If I say that I did not indulge in sin, the King would believe me, but in this world there is no surer foundation than truthful speech. Someone who forsakes the truth cannot attain Buddhahood, even if he sits in the sacred enclosure of the Bodhi Tree. Hence I should only speak the truth. In certain cases a Bodhisatta may destroy life, take what is not given to him, commit adultery, drink strong liquor, but he may not tell a lie, speech that violates the truth.”

Thus, he spoke the truth to the King. He saw the misery of sinful desire; he developed samatha and could again attain jhāna. He saw the danger of dwelling in an unsuitable place that was the royal park. Therefore, he returned to the forest to be free from all taint of womankind. When he had come to the end of his life, he entered the Brahma plane.

We should be truthful, we should see our clinging which has been accumulated for aeons and not ignore it. We should neither delude ourselves nor other people. We should be truthful with regard to the realities that arise and present themselves; we should develop right understanding of them, otherwise enlightenment cannot be attained. We can be encouraged by this Jātaka. Al- though we have accumulated many kinds of defilements for aeons, right understanding of whatever appears can be developed so that eventually enlightenment can be attained.

Chapter 3.

Clinging to Mindfulness.

What hinders the development of satipaṭṭhāna? This was one of our topics of discussion while we were traveling. Seeing and hearing arise time and again and gradually we can have more understanding of these realities which arise because of their appropriate conditions. However, instead of attending to what appears at the present moment we continue to think of a concept of sati “we” wish to have. The idea of self is in the way.

Alan asked Acharn: “Why does understanding not arise often?” Acharn answered: “Why do you want it? Develop it.” This was a short but pointed reminder; it helped us to know our clinging to understanding. We want to be “somebody with sati”, but it is more beneficial to remember that we are “nobody”. That is in accordance with the truth. There is no self who could plan to have sati. Understanding develops stage by stage but nobody can hasten its development. When the right conditions are present different stages of insight, vipassanā ñāṇa, can be reached, but desire for their arising will not bring them about. We had a conversation with Acharn about this subject:

Acharn: “The right Path is not planning when and where sati will arise. We should not have any idea of “I will develop right understanding”. There are conditions for its arising, and this is not because of anyone’s will. It can arise now when there are sufficient conditions for its arising. One can know for oneself whether there are sufficient conditions for the arising of awareness of realities at this moment.”

Nina: “When insight knowledge (vipassanā ñāṇa) has not yet arisen, clear understanding of realities is not possible.”

Acharn: “We do not have to think of insight knowledge, what about understanding of this moment? If we can understand this moment as it is with awareness, then understanding will continue to develop. We will have no doubt what seeing and visible object are, no doubt about hearing and sound and the realities appearing through the other doorways. Then there are conditions for the arising of insight knowledge, vipassanā ñāṇa. It is of no use to wonder when it will arise and how understanding can become clearer. Understanding is merely developing, it is on the way. At this moment it cannot yet be as clear as insight knowledge.”

Nina: “We consider and study on and on. So many moments of considering are necessary before understanding can be a little clearer.”

Acharn: “Are you wishing for that stage?”

Nina: “Yes.”

Acharn: “If you don’t wish but you develop it, it is more beneficial.”

Nina: “But I cannot help wishing for it.”

Acharn: “If you understand that wishing is of no use, there is a condition for awareness. You can find out this yourself. When insight knowledge arises it is not Nina who has attained it; there is at that very moment nobody. We usually think in conventional sense that a person knows or understands something. The Buddha taught ultimate realities, paramatṭha dhammas, so that one can understand the meaning of no being, no person, no self. It is citta which knows an object, not a person.”

Alan: “At the moment of a stage of insight there is only the experience of the characteristics of realities as they are. So, how can anyone try to have it? We can remember that it is not natural to try.”

Acharn: “When you know the right Path, you will understand that it will lead to the stages of insight knowledge and to enlightenment. When you do not know the right Path it is impossible to reach the goal. If one is not developing right understanding of this moment it is impossible to attain insight knowledge.”

Nina: “When thinking arises instead of awareness of realities, we should not be put off, but we can remember that more understanding of thinking can be developed.”

Acharn: “Right understanding can understand any type of reality, at any time, with awareness. We should not expect to have right understanding of thinking, of wishing or of any particular reality. Awareness may arise or it may not arise, it depends on conditions at that very moment.”

Alan: “Seeing is conditioned now, we do not have to try to see. Hearing is conditioned now, we do not have to try to hear. Vipassanā ñāṇa, insight knowledge, is anattā, it is beyond control. We cannot speculate when it will arise. When we remember this it can help us to develop the Path; it can prevent us from trying to do things which are not natural.”

Acharn: “No matter how much you would like the arising of awareness, it cannot arise at will, by one’s wish. But whenever a moment of awareness arises, it is developing. That is why it takes aeons. When we do not expect any result, there will be result, because of the right cause.”

Nina: “When there is a short moment of considering realities, I cling to it, I spoil it again.”

Acharn: “There are conditions for such moments. There is no you in reality. Understanding must be very refined to know the moments of clinging.”

Nina: “If one does not realize such moments one will get stuck.”

Acharn: “Only paññā can know when lobha arises. There is no other way to eradicate lobha but right understanding.”

Nina: “The perfection of truthfulness is indispensable so that it can be known when clinging arises.”

Many basic points about the practice were brought up in our conversations which are worth considering again and again. Acharn emphasized that we should find out to what extent our understanding of this moment has developed. We have to find this out with truthfulness, by considering the realities that appear now. We are inclined to think about our understanding, we worry about it that realities do not appear clearly, one at a time, but instead of worrying we can investigate more the reality appearing at this moment. That will eliminate wishing for result. The arising of awareness and understanding is dependent on conditions; they may or may not arise. When we remember this it will prevent us from worrying about our lack of awareness and understanding.

“When there are conditions for awareness, you can’t prevent it from arising”, was another remark made by Acharn. She said this in order to explain the nature of anattā of sati. When the conditions are right it must arise and we do not have to do anything to cause its arising. Some people believe that they have to sit first and concentrate on breathing in order to be calm. One should

have correct understanding of breath. Breath is rūpa produced by citta so long as we are alive. One should find out whether kusala citta or akusala citta arises while one is mindful of breath, otherwise there cannot be true calm which is freedom from akusala. When one tries to concentrate on breath and it appears on the nosepip or upperlip, one may be happy that one can notice it, but it may not be known when attachment, lobha, conditions breath. What then is the use of concentrating on it? One should find out whether or not one develops calm that is wholesome. The reality appearing at this moment has to be understood. Seeing, visible object, hearing, sound and all the other realities have to be understood as they are, as non-self.

Some people believe that the text of “The Path of Purification”, the “Visuddhimagga”, states that sīla has to be developed first, then samatha and then vipassanā. They have read that concentration, samādhi, is the proximate cause of paññā. Buddhaghosa, the author of the “Visuddhimagga” collected the ancient texts and arranged them in a systematic way. When he wrote about sīla, he spoke about all types of sīla; he classified it as one kind, as twofold, threefold, etc. He also spoke about lokuttara sīla, supramundane sīla. He classified different types of samādhi and different types of paññā. There is no rule with regard to a specific order of the development of the different types of kusala. If one does not understand that the objective of Buddhaghosa, in the classification under the three headings of sīla, samādhi and paññā, was to indicate the different levels of each one of them, one may have misunderstandings. One may believe that jhāna must be developed first, before right understanding of the eightfold Path, and that jhāna is an indispensable condition for right understanding of the eightfold Path. Paññā which sees realities as they are is right understanding of the eightfold Path. Right understanding of the eightfold Path is accompanied by right concentration which is another factor of the eightfold Path. Right understanding, right concentration and the other factors of the eightfold Path have as object an ultimate reality, a nāma or a rūpa.

When in the development of samatha jhānacitta arises it is accompanied by right concentration, but this is not right concentration of the eightfold Path. Its object is one of the meditation subjects. The aim of the development of jhāna is calm, not the understanding of nāma and rūpa as dukkha, impermanent and anattā.

The development of all kinds of kusala, be it dāna, sīla, calm or right understanding is beneficial. All the moments of studying and considering the Dhamma and all the other kinds of kusala are never lost, they are accumulated from one moment to the next moment so that they can arise again, later on. In that way they develop and they can be the condition for the arising of stages of insight and for enlightenment in the future.

We cannot plan or direct the arising of direct understanding of realities, but we know that it is beneficial to develop right understanding together with all kinds of kusala. Acharn Sujin had said this before, but during this journey it became clearer to us. Acharn helped us to see that moments of akusala are wasted moments of our life, that they delay the development of paññā. When there are conditions for akusala, it arises, but shortly afterwards sati and paññā can arise and then the disadvantage of akusala is seen. If we desire to have sati and do not develop other kinds of kusala we think of ourselves. Acharn said: “Instead of wanting to develop satipaṭṭhāna, one should develop kusala, being considerate for others.” Kindness, considerateness, patience, all wholesome cetasikas are conditions for the arising of different levels of sati and paññā. One level of paññā is seeing the disadvantage of akusala, another level of paññā is studying and considering the Dhamma, and another level again is paññā developed in satipaṭṭhāna. When the right conditions are present, stages of insight can arise.

Some people become discouraged when they think that they cannot attain enlightenment in this life, and then they give up the development of satipaṭṭhāna. Then again the clinging to the concept of self is in the way; they have an idea of “I want to try”. The understanding of this moment leads to the goal. “Develop it now, be aware now”, Acharn often said.

One may wonder how one can be aware at this moment. The least we can do is to find out more about the reality appearing now. Seeing arises naturally at this moment. Seeing sees visible object, all that appears through the eyesense. We should not have any intention to concentrate on seeing, it sees now. We discussed the nāmas and rūpas appearing through the six doors, so that we would have more understanding of them. Intellectual understanding is the right condition for direct awareness and understanding of them which can arise later on. “Just begin again and again, so that there is more understanding of realities”, Acharn said. The direct understanding of a reality such as seeing is not thinking about it, but it is paññā that knows the characteristic of seeing as a reality. Acharn remarked:

“All realities are described in the texts, but how many times does sati arise? Develop it. The book is there, but the moment understanding develops is the most important. People learn Abhidhamma without knowing its real purpose, namely, the development of understanding of realities. They want to learn like scholars.

Paññā can know when there is sati, but it has to develop to the degree of understanding the reality that sati is aware of. Whenever awareness arises, there must be an object awareness is aware of. At that moment paññā can begin to develop and understand that object. Realities have to be understood as nāma and as rūpa.

Paññā is like a bud which will appear on a tree. One does not know where and when it will appear. We should not care when it will appear; what about the understanding of this moment? If there is no understanding of this moment, develop it now.”

A most important lesson we learnt was: not to care about it when insight knowledge will arise; not to cling to any result of the development of understanding. We study the Dhamma and we consider realities in order to have more understanding of them. “Awareness may arise now or later on”, Acharn reminded us. Again, we should not mind when it will arise, it has its own conditions. It is like the bud on a tree, when it is the right time nobody can stop it from appearing and then it will bloom. When insight knowledge arises realities appear very clearly as not self. There is no self and no world at that moment. Thus, how could anyone attain it while there is an idea of self who is trying to attain it? Acharn explained that insight knowledge is the experience of the nature of anattā of realities. We have learnt that nāma is an element which experiences, that there is nobody who experiences. When the truth is actually experienced, there is no doubt about realities. There is right understanding, no darkness. However, the moments of insight knowledge pass away very quickly, they are like a flash. Just a flash is not enough, all daily realities have to be fully understood. After the moments of insight knowledge have fallen away, the world full of people appears again. One has to apply again and again the knowledge one has gained at the moments of insight knowledge; one should be aware of all realities which appear. This shows again that paññā develops from one moment to the next moment.

When we are not aware of ultimate realities, we live in the conventional world. When visible object appears we think immediately of “something” or “someone”, we are thinking of concepts. Thinking of concepts conceals the characteristic of visible object. We usually think of people and things, but seeing sees only different colours. When we look at somebody it is exactly the same as looking at a painting, Acharn said.

We had the following conversation with Acharn about realities:

Alan: “When we see, we can think of many colours, like red, green or yellow. That is thinking. Visible object is not many colours, it is only one colour.”

Acharn: “What is the meaning of visible object?”

Alan: “It is seen through the eyesense.”

Acharn: “Do we have to name it red, green or yellow? The reality which appears is not yet understood as a mere dhamma.”

Alan: “Even without thinking in words we have an idea of green or red, and that is not seeing.”

Acharn: “Not only one colour appears, there are conditions for different colours to appear. Nobody can change the conditions for each different colour. You cannot change the colour of Gabi’s eyes. Colour is just a kind of rūpa which can be seen through the eyes. We do not have to name colour blue, black or green. It is the same in the case of sound, there are many different sounds. Nobody can change the conditions for each different sound. Sound is just a reality and it is not self who experiences it. There is nobody. If awareness does not arise it is always ‘I’ who hears.”

Nina: “We look at cars and houses all the time, it seems that we see them.”

Acharn: “It can be realized that visible object is different from the thought of a car.”

Nina: “Seeing sees details, but it does not know the meaning of them.”

Acharn: “It sees everything that is visible. When we are reading, we are thinking, but there is also the seeing of visible object.”

Nina: “If these would not appear through the eyes, we could not read.”

Acharn: “We will understand our task in life: the development of understanding of realities. Even when there is a little more understanding of realities it means that we are on the right way.”

Nina: “I was sleeping in a noisy room and I heard people walking by and talking. However, it helps to remember that hearing is only vipāka, that it is impossible to control it.”

Acharn: “We can realize that it is only a moment that is conditioned. All dhammas in a day appear as just dhammas when there is awareness and right understanding.”

Acharn reminded me to develop understanding in any situation. In Istanbul I was worried that a show which had been planned would end very late. Acharn said that she would not worry once she happened to be there. She said: “I always follow the stream”. I still remember what she said when I am at a party and I cannot leave when I want to. When we try to change events we are bound to have aversion and we have no patience. When we “follow the stream” we can understand that all events are only conditioned dhammas.

We read in the “Dhammapada”, verse 315:

“Even as a frontier city is well guarded both within and without,

Evenso one should guard oneself; let not a moment slip.

For they who let the moments slip, mourn, delivered over to Hell.”

When we do not act, speak or think with kusala cittas, there are akusala cittas and we let the moments of our life slip. We should “guard ourselves”, but without any idea of “self”. There are opportunities for the development of right understanding in any situation and this conditions more patience. Our journey with Dhamma was most beneficial.

Chapter 4.

Conversations on Buddhism.

Acharn Sujin explained about Buddhism to our guide in Turkey, Ms. Tuna, while we were having a tour on the Bosphorus river.

Acharn: We would like to have pleasant feeling all the time, but this is not possible. If we can understand the causes of our different feelings it will help us to have less unpleasant feeling. Life is so uncontrollable because each moment is conditioned. There are many kinds of conditions for our different experiences. We may think that it is just by chance that we are born in such and such country and that each of us has different experiences. In reality, there are conditions for each moment of our lives. We should learn to understand our lives, ourselves.

We should learn to understand this moment. People have different thoughts, different feelings because of different conditions. We think that there is a self, that there is “I”, but what we consider as “I” must be at this moment seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, experiencing tangible object or thinking. Seeing sees pleasant objects or unpleasant objects, but such experiences occur at different moments. Different experiences cannot occur all at the same time.

In order to understand our life from moment to moment we do not have to think in terms of a particular religion. Realities such as seeing, hearing or feeling are true for everybody, no matter which language we use in order to name them. Don't we all have pleasant and unpleasant feelings? Can you control your feelings?

Tuna: Well, I try to control my feelings. I am a Moslem, I believe in God. When I am in a very bad mood I pray to Him and then I feel better.

Acharn: But you have not seen God.

Tuna: I feel His presence. We believe that Mohammed is His prophet.

Acharn: You have not seen Mohammed, but you know him by his teachings, don't you?

Tuna: I pray to God. I read the texts of the Quran. When I want something very much and I pray, my wishes come true.

Acharn: You don't have to do anything at all?

Tuna: All of a sudden my wishes are fulfilled.

Acharn: When people pray do their wishes always come true?

Tuna: Some people work hard but they cannot become rich, whereas others who do not work so hard have everything. This depends on what we call in Arabic "kismet", or destiny.

Acharn: This is difficult to understand. The poor would like to have many things, but they cannot, even though they pray.

Tuna: It is their kismet.

Acharn: Should one believe in God, whether one is poor or rich, happy or unhappy?

Tuna: According to an old wise man, life is a kind of examination. This life is a voyage or passage to another life.

Acharn: Can the poor be happy and the rich be unhappy? What is the cause of being rich or poor?

Tuna: There are very rich people who are not happy and there are poor people who are very happy; they are rich in heart. They do not attach importance to material things.

Acharn: Is happiness caused by God or by yourself? Do you have the ability to condition your own feelings?

Tuna: Yes, I can.

Acharn: Since everyone is free as to the feeling he has, feeling is not conditioned by God. The poor can be happy if they know how to be happy. What about those who do not believe in God, can they have happy feeling?

Tuna: I am sure that it is terrible not to believe in God. I met many tourists who do not believe in God. I do not understand how that can happen.

Acharn: Do they still have happy feeling and unhappy feeling? People who do not believe in God live like everyone else. Everyone is born and dies, whether he believes in God or not.

Tuna: Where will he be buried if he does not believe in God?

Acharn: It does not matter. He will not notice anything after death. His body can be buried or cremated, it is all right.

Tuna: What about his soul, the soul never dies.

Acharn: Can you explain more about the soul at this moment, when death has not come yet?

Tuna: We think that the soul is in the body. When one dies, the soul goes away.

Acharn: When one is sleeping where is the soul?

Tuna: I don't know.

Acharn: Is the soul there even when one is asleep? One is not dead yet.

Tuna: I think it must be there.

Acharn: At this moment there is seeing. Is it the soul which sees? Is there a soul in everybody?

Tuna: Sure.

Acharn: When one is asleep the soul does not go away, because one is not dead yet. When we wake up in the morning there is seeing. Is it the soul which sees?

Tuna: I think so.

Acharn: At the moment of hearing, is it the soul which hears?

Tuna: Sure.

Acharn: So, the soul has many functions in a day. Seeing is one function, hearing is another function. Besides these, there are the functions of smelling, tasting, touching and thinking. I believe that the soul sleeps too.

Tuna: What about dreaming? Do you believe in dreams?

Acharn: Everyone dreams. So, the soul is dreaming. The body cannot dream.

Tuna: I believe in dreams. I saw in my dreams events which took place later on.

Acharn: What you consider as “I” or a “self” which knows is the soul which knows. There are body and mind, or, one could say, body and soul. The soul dreams, the soul sleeps, the soul likes, dislikes, feels pleasant or unpleasant. So, I understand what you mean by soul. It is different from the body. The body cannot see, but the soul is seeing. The body cannot think, but the soul is thinking. How many souls do you have?

Tuna: Only one, of course.

Acharn: I think that seeing is different from hearing. Seeing and hearing occur at different moments and experience different objects.

Tuna: All this is deep in meaning, difficult to understand. It is beyond my thinking.

Acharn: It is beneficial to talk about what we can experience right now because we can understand that. When we talk about what we cannot experience directly we are in darkness. When we understand the characteristics and functions of the realities which can be directly experienced there is light. I would like to understand more and more the realities of my life.

Most people take seeing for “my seeing”; they take it for self. Or, they take hearing for “self”; they take the body for “my body”. All realities fall away very rapidly, they cannot stay. Each part of the body falls away immediately; otherwise one could not notice any changes in the body.

Tuna: In order to be happy in one's life I find it essential to be a good Moslem. One should say one's prayers, read the Quran and observe the Ramadan, the fasting. The rich should give money to the poor every year.

Acharn: So long as there is ignorance about one's life one cannot be completely happy. Ignorance is the opposite of wisdom or understanding. Wisdom is to be considered more valuable than any kind of property; it is the most beneficial thing in life. I think that wisdom can develop.

Tuna: I agree with you.

Acharn: Wisdom can have a deep understanding of this very moment. It can understand how phenomena are conditioned; it can understand whether phenomena are permanent or impermanent, whether or not they belong to a self. Each reality which occurs goes away very quickly, it cannot come back anymore. There is just a moment of hearing and then it is completely gone, we cannot find the hearing anywhere after it is gone. Each reality, such as seeing, feeling or touching, is only very momentary. If we cling to any moment there is ignorance, we do not know the impermanence of realities that have arisen and fallen away already. During the time we are talking many different realities have arisen and fallen away already. Each reality arises because of its appropriate conditions; nobody can make any reality arise at all. Eyesense is a condition for seeing; without eyesense there cannot be seeing. Earsense is a condition for hearing; without earsense there cannot be hearing. When we understand that the realities of our life are conditioned we can cope with our problems wisely.

When there are the right conditions a particular reality will arise. For example, when you like heat and you experience it there are conditions for pleasant feeling. If you cannot have the heat you like or the flavour you like there are no conditions for pleasant feeling. One is attached to all objects one can experience through the senses; one keeps on thinking of them. One is attached to seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching. I think that there are many different kinds of consciousness. We can use the word consciousness instead of soul. The word soul can give rise to misunderstandings, it is not precise enough. If we use the word soul it implies something permanent. Consciousness experiences one object at a time and it is not permanent; it changes all the time.

Seeing is a type of consciousness; it is a reality which has its own characteristic. It is not the body, it is not tangible object; it is not materiality. It is an element which experiences visible object. Seeing is seeing for everyone, it does not belong to any race or nationality. Also animals see. Seeing is the same no matter what you call it. Thus, it is an absolute truth for everyone, it is an absolute or ultimate reality. We do not have to use any

names for realities; they have their own function, their own characteristic which can be directly experienced. Seeing sees visible object, whether it is your seeing or my seeing. Seeing cannot touch visible object, it can only see it. Can you touch visible object? Do you see me? You can only see visible object. After seeing there is thinking of different shapes and forms and there is memory of different things and people. A person cannot be seen, there can only be thinking about a person. Thinking is another type of reality, arising at another moment. We can gradually develop more understanding of realities and thus there will be more light in our life.

Tuna: There are different types of people in the world. Some are of a good nature, such as my mother. She is an excellent woman who has loving care for everybody and tries to do the best for all people she meets. Whereas some people do not want to help anybody, they always think of themselves. It seems that different people have different characters from birth. How do you explain that?

Acharn: People are different, they do not have wholesome moments all the time. There are wholesome realities and unwholesome realities. Kindness and compassion are wholesome, cruelty, hatred and jealousy are unwholesome. There are for everybody conditions for wholesome moments as well as for unwholesome moments. The arising of wholesomeness or unwholesomeness depends on what has been accumulated. Some people have accumulated a great deal of beautiful qualities. For them, the environment or situation can condition more wholesomeness than for others who have not accumulated much wholesomeness. People who are in the same situation react differently, they have different thoughts. In order to be a good person you have to develop wholesomeness, you have to train yourself. Just as when you want to be skillful in cooking you have to train yourself so that one day you will be a good cook.

Tuna: Sometimes one meets people who do not want to be good, they don't care about this.

Acharn: You can help them to understand the benefit of being wholesome so that they will be kind to others. Then, they will also have more happy moments instead of unhappy moments. I think that people like pleasant results but that they do not know the right causes which lead to such results. If you tell them that good and bad results come from the appropriate causes they will have more understanding. This understanding will be a condition for them to accumulate wholesomeness, which is the cause of pleasant results. If you are friendly to others they will be friendly to you. If you do not like other people they will not like you.

Religion is only a term which stands for what one believes in. But if we don't label anything we can understand realities as they are. We can understand realities which are true for everybody, no matter what religion he professes, no matter what nationality he is. Seeing is true for everybody, it is just a moment of experiencing visible object. When hearing arises there is no seeing anymore. Hearing is just a moment of experiencing sound; it does not know anything about visible object. When there are conditions for hearing one cannot help but hear. Seeing, hearing and the other realities are beyond control, they arise because of conditions and then they fall away, they are completely gone. Nobody can make them arise and nobody can make them stay on after they have arisen. Thus, life goes on from moment to moment, until death. Life is only one moment of experiencing an object and then it is gone, forever.

Chapter 5.

An Interview on Buddhism.

What follows is an interview between Gabi, Alan and Nina, while travelling in Egypt together with Acharn Sujin. They interviewed each other while on the plane and this resulted in a combination of questions and answers from the three of them.

Question: Is Buddhism different from other religions or philosophies? What is contained in the Buddhist teachings that you do not find anywhere else?

Answer: Through Buddhism we learn to understand realities which can be directly experienced. Buddhism does not teach particular concepts we have to believe in, but it teaches the development of understanding of all realities within and around ourselves. Thus, we can verify the truth. Buddhism teaches the real cause of all that happens in our life, such as gain and loss, praise and blame, honour and dishonour, misery and well-being. We learn that pleasant and unpleasant experiences through the senses are the results of kamma, the good and bad deeds committed in the past. Everything that happens in our life is conditioned; through Buddhism we learn the truth of cause and effect. When we have more understanding of conditions, we can face difficult situations in life and develop more wholesome states of mind.

Question: Do we have to have faith in what the Buddha taught in order to be a good Buddhist?

Answer: We don't have to follow the Buddha's teachings blindly. We learn what he teaches and then we have to verify it ourselves; we have to consider it carefully. Through the practice we can prove that he taught the truth.

Question: What are the benefits Buddhism can give me?

Answer: When you know the truth of all realities of life there will be less sorrow for you. When you know that the adversities of life are only conditioned realities you will be able to cope with your problems.

Question: I am quite happy; I have very few problems in my life. Many people can be happy without any religion. Why do I need Buddhism in order to find happiness?

Answer: I am not satisfied with the explanations about life which are given by science, biology or chemistry. Through Buddhism I learn what life really is: one moment of experiencing an object. There is a moment of seeing and then thinking about it. There is a moment of hearing and then thinking about it. It is the same with smelling, tasting and touching. They are usually followed by many moments of thinking. When one finds out more about the realities of one's life one realizes one's faults and vices. On account of what one experiences through the sense-doors and the mind-door, many defilements arise.

Question: What do you mean by defilements?

Answer: These are unwholesome states of mind which are not beneficial. They cause harm to us or to others sooner or later. Hatred, for example, is an unskillful state of mind. When hatred arises we harm ourselves and others. At such moments there is no peace of mind.

Q.: How do you harm yourself through hatred?

A.: At those moments there is agitation and recklessness. When people become angry, they are inclined to do something they may regret later on. In traffic jams people get out of their cars and start beating up other people. Then you can see that there is recklessness and no calm.

Q.: In history you can read that kings had rightful anger. Is there rightful anger?

A.: Anger is always unwholesome, no matter what the cause is. It harms yourself and others. This does not mean that you cannot be firm with others when it is necessary for people's benefit, but hatred and anger are always unwholesome. At such moments you have no balance of mind, you are not

sane. You cannot judge whether your actions are good or bad because you are in turmoil. When you are angry you are irrational.

Question: Are there other defilements besides anger?

Answer: There are many kinds of defilements. Three basic defilements are roots for unwholesome states of mind, namely: attachment, anger or aversion, and ignorance.

Question: What about love, is that unwholesome or wholesome?

Answer: We have to consider carefully what reality is represented by that word. Love can represent the reality which is kindness towards other people. It arises when we consider their welfare. However, love can also represent an unwholesome reality. When we are attached to a person we actually think of ourselves and that is an unwholesome reality. When we have to be separated from that person, attachment conditions aversion and displeasure. When unselfish loving-kindness arises you don't think of your own pleasure.

Question: Should there be no attachment between husband and wife, parents and children? When I consider the many broken families around me I am inclined to think that attachment is good. Why do you think there should not be love?

Answer: It is not a matter of should or should not. You are as you are. However, there can be a more precise understanding of what is unselfish love, or true considerateness for others and what is attachment, selfish love. We should understand the difference between unselfish love and selfish love. Unselfish love is characterised by considering the welfare of others. Attachment to other people is for the sake of one's own pleasant feeling. When we like to be with dear people and like a pleasant home there is attachment; we think of ourselves.

Question: I understand that attachment is not wholesome. Does this mean that we have to forsake all the joys of life, such as listening to beautiful music, going to a disco, reading books, laughing with our friends or going shopping? Do we have to give up all these attachments and all pleasant feelings?

Answer: It is precisely our daily life that has to be understood. We should live our daily life naturally, in order to understand our inclinations, our defilements. We should understand our attachment and aversion as they naturally arise. We can enjoy all the pleasant things but we should at the same time develop more understanding of the realities of our life. We should have more understanding of the true nature of attachment, aversion, kindness, pleasant feeling or unpleasant feeling. A wise person can live with pleasure and with understanding.

Question: We like pleasant objects and we dislike unpleasant objects; that is natural. Like and dislike do not always lead to bad deeds. Are they always unwholesome?

Answer: There are many degrees of like and dislike. They may be slight or they may be more intense, leading to unwholesome deeds. One may like something to the degree that one wants to take it away and then it is obvious that there is unwholesomeness. But also, when like is of a lesser degree it is not beneficial, not wholesome. After seeing, hearing and the other sense-impressions, we often have attachment which we may not notice at all. We are inclined to be attached to all the sense objects and thus attachment is bound to arise. At such moments there is selfishness; there is no generosity. Since attachment arises time and again it is accumulated. Also dislike can have many degrees. It can lead to violence and then it is obvious that there is unwholesomeness. When it is of a lesser degree there is uneasiness or moodiness; we have no peace of mind. Whenever we have unpleasant feeling, the reality of aversion has arisen. As I said, attachment, aversion and ignorance are the three unwholesome roots for the unwholesome moments of consciousness.

Question: Why is ignorance unwholesome?

Answer: Ignorance conditions all defilements. There is ignorance with each unwholesome moment of consciousness. Because of ignorance we live in darkness, we do not know what is wholesome and beneficial and what is unwholesome. Because of ignorance we don't know what is real and what is only imagination. Ignorance conditions a distorted view of realities, wrong view. When we believe that body and mind can stay, that they are permanent, there is wrong view. What we call mind is, in reality, only fleeting moments of consciousness which cannot stay. What we call body is ever-changing elements, which cannot stay. When we believe that mind and body are self or mine there is wrong view. Wrong view conditions many other defilements.

Question: How do you find happiness in Buddhism?

Answer: Through knowing realities as they are.

Question: Why does that bring happiness?

Answer: Right understanding can eliminate ignorance and wrong view. Through right understanding there will be less clinging, and that means more freedom.

Question: There are different types of Buddhism such as Tibetan Buddhism or Zen. I think that Theravada Buddhism teaches the right Path. Are the other types wrong?

Answer: I would not say that they are right or wrong. Any teaching which helps us to understand the reality of this moment is right. We should find out for ourselves which teaching is right and which is wrong.

Question: If one is interested in Buddhism how should one begin to study it?

Answer: One can read and consider what one reads and one should find the right person who can explain the teachings so that one can begin to develop right understanding of all the realities in one's life.

Question: Can you explain more what realities are?

Answer: In Buddhism we learn to understand the true nature of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching and thinking; and also the true nature of visible object, sound and the other objects which are experienced through the five sense-doors and through the mind-door.

Question: I know already what touching is. When I touch something I know what I am touching. I know when I touch my ear or the chair. Everyone knows that. I know when I touch something which is hot.

Answer: We use words and concepts in order to express what we mean. We say, for instance, that Cairo is hot or that a fire is hot. Heat itself is a reality which can be directly experienced through the bodysense without there being the need to name it. Heat is a reality which is true for everybody, it is absolute truth. When you think about Cairo or a fire you think long stories but there is no direct experience of a reality.

The real purpose of Buddhism is not to theorize about the world and to form up stories about the world and about people. The aim is to develop understanding of realities such as seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching or thinking, and also of visible object, sound, odour, flavour, tangible object and the objects which appear through the mind-door. These are realities which can be studied when they appear one at a time.

Question: What is tangible object?

Answer: The reality which can be directly experienced through the bodysense. Throughout the day we touch things which are hard. We believe that we touch a cup, plate or chair which are hard. In reality, it is hardness which is experienced through the bodysense, not a cup, plate or chair. When hardness is experienced we know through memory that there is a cup, plate or chair,

but these are not realities which can be directly experienced. They are concepts or ideas we can think about. Through bodysense the realities of hardness, softness, heat, cold, motion or pressure can be experienced. They are true for everybody, no matter how we name them. They are elements which arise because of their appropriate conditions and then fall away immediately. They cannot stay on.

Question: What is visible object, is it a car or TV? It seems that I can see them.

Answer: Visible object is that which seeing sees. It appears through eyesense. When we perceive a car we are already thinking of a concept, an idea.

Realities are physical phenomena and mental phenomena. Seeing is mental, it experiences something. Visible object, that which is visible, is physical, it does not know anything. Hearing is mental, it experiences sound. Sound is physical, it does not know anything. The experience of tangible object is mental. Tangible object is physical. The mental and physical phenomena of our life arise and then fall away immediately; they are impermanent and they are not self.

Question: I find it difficult to understand that there is no self. How can I learn to experience the truth?

Answer: The truth of non-self cannot be realized in the beginning. We have accumulated so much ignorance and wrong view. Through reading, considering and discussing there can gradually be more intellectual understanding of realities. Thus, conditions are being built up for direct awareness of realities and then understanding can grow. It develops in stages very gradually and eventually realities can be seen as they are.

Question: How can one be aware of realities?

Answer: There is seeing now. It can be realized that it is a reality which experiences visible object, just for a moment. It is not self which sees, seeing sees. You don't have to do anything special in order to see. When there are conditions for seeing you can't help but see. Is seeing permanent? You cannot go on seeing. When hearing arises there is another reality; there can't be seeing at the same time. One reality can be studied at a time as it appears. When there are the right conditions there can be direct understanding of a mental phenomenon as only a reality and of a physical phenomenon as only a reality. These can be realized as different types of realities. We should not wish to have awareness; we should always remember that the goal is right understanding of realities. Whenever there is awareness of one reality which appears there can be direct understanding of it and thus understanding can grow.

Question: What do you mean by understanding seeing as only a reality?

Answer: One begins to understand that there is not my seeing which can stay on and which is so important. The idea of self cannot be eradicated immediately, but one begins to see that there are realities appearing one at a time. One begins to understand that seeing or visible object can only arise when there are conditions for their arising and that one cannot control them. Realities are beyond control, they cannot arise because of anyone's wish. Also awareness and understanding are realities which can only arise when there are the right conditions, they are beyond control. Beyond control is another way of saying that there is "only a reality". The realities of our life are momentary and insignificant. They arise and then disappear forever.

Chapter 6.

Further Interviews between Gabi, Alan and Nina in Egypt.

Question: What should one do in order to live according to the Buddhist teachings?

Answer: One should develop right understanding of the teachings by reading, considering and discussion. One should apply the teachings in one's life as best as one can.

Question: When one develops understanding is one not preoccupied only with one's own mental progress and is this not a selfish attitude?

Answer: No, one develops more understanding of the world in and around oneself. The self is not a reality. As understanding develops there will be less concern about the self. We have accumulated so much ignorance and this conditions many kinds of defilements. When ignorance is eliminated there will be less unwholesomeness and this is beneficial for oneself and for the people around oneself.

Question: I do not feel that I have a great deal of ignorance. I know how to do my work, how to drive a car or how to cook.

Answer: We have ignorance of realities such as seeing, visible object, hearing, sound, of all the realities which can be experienced through the five senses and through the mind-door. They appear only one at a time through one of the six doorways. They appear only for one moment and then they disappear. We are deluded about these fleeting realities and we take them for the world

or the self. We mix up the six doorways and we join the different realities together instead of understanding realities as they are, as only fleeting elements which appear, one at a time. We think that realities can stay on. We have ignorance and wrong view. Would you like to understand that there is no self? Nothing belongs to you in reality.

Question: Is it not the self which performs deeds, which decides to do this or that? Is it not the self which makes the effort to achieve the goal?

Answer: Intention is a mental reality; it arises when there are the appropriate conditions. However, there is nobody who owns intention. It is the same with effort. It is a mental reality which arises because of conditions. There is nobody who can make effort arise, who owns effort.

Question: Do you apply yourself to meditation?

Answer: We have to be very careful about what we mean by meditation. I avoid using the word meditation because different people have different ideas about it. Our goal should be the development of right understanding of the realities which appear now. We can begin to notice and consider one reality at a time and then there is no need to name it or to think about it. Understanding can be developed in any situation, one does not have to change one's life or do anything special. Right understanding can develop naturally, at this very moment, one does not have to sit in a quiet place. Thus, this is different from what people generally mean by meditation. The development of right understanding or insight, vipassanā, is a kind of mental development which can be done no matter where you are.

Question: Don't you need a quiet place in order to concentrate?

Answer: Not at all, because the purpose of the Buddha's teachings is to understand the realities which arise naturally, in daily life. We have to develop understanding of realities such as seeing, visible object, hearing or sound. Sound is a reality, no matter where you are, whether it is quiet or whether there is a lot of noise. If we are in a noisy place and we have aversion towards that noise, aversion can be realized as just a conditioned reality, not "my aversion". If we know that understanding can be developed in whatever situation we are, there are conditions for its development.

Question: You were talking about sound. It is so unusual to have sound as a meditation subject. How can you develop understanding of it without retiring to a quiet place and considering it? How do you begin?

Answer: Do you have to try now in order to see, to hear or to touch? These are realities which naturally arise in your life. When there are conditions for their arising, you cannot help but see, hear or touch. When there is intellectual

understanding of realities there are conditions for direct awareness and direct understanding of them as they appear one at a time. However, we cannot fix the time for the arising of right understanding; it may arise now or later on. There is nobody who can force the arising of right understanding, it is conditioned by many factors.

Question: It is difficult to have right understanding of realities when one is a beginner.

Answer: There must be intellectual understanding of the mental phenomena and physical phenomena which are the objects of understanding. One should know how to develop understanding. One has to know that it should be developed naturally in one's daily life. Many people just want to sit and concentrate on breathing, but they have to consider for themselves whether this is the way to know the realities of one's daily life. Is this the way to know seeing, hearing and all the other realities, and to know the clinging which arises on account of the experience of the sense objects? Defilements cannot be eradicated if one does not realize them as they arise in one's daily life. Right understanding of realities can be accumulated little by little if one develops it naturally, without trying to make particular realities arise, without trying to control realities. They arise already because of their own conditions. Understanding too can only arise when there are right conditions; one cannot control it.

Question: Understanding is accumulated very gradually but is there not some result in the beginning, so that one is encouraged to continue to develop understanding? When one is a beginner one wants to see at least some result of one's practice.

Answer: The result cannot be noticed immediately, it cannot be measured. However, as understanding develops there will be more confidence. There will be more understanding of why you feel bad or why you feel happy. You will face unpleasant situations with more understanding and you will be more tolerant towards other people; you will have more understanding about their way of behaviour. You will come to appreciate the value of right understanding more and more.

Question: You spoke about seeing and hearing. It seems rather dull to have more understanding about them.

Answer: If you just read about different realities it seems dull, but you should remember that they are the phenomena of your daily life. If you develop understanding of them when they appear, it is not boring but interesting.

Question: I think that it is more interesting and beneficial to know about one's attachment, aversion and pleasant and unpleasant experiences in life.

We should come to know our defilements, but why should we know seeing, hearing, hardness or softness? Is that really necessary?

Answer: It is only by understanding all these different realities that there can be detachment from the idea of a self which conditions many defilements. We should come to understand that there is nobody who sees, nobody who hears, that there are only different conditioned realities. Thus, the idea of self will be eliminated.

Question: When I am seeing I am absorbed in what I see, but I don't think of a self which sees. When I am hearing I am absorbed in what I hear, in words which are spoken, but I do not have an idea that a self is hearing. I don't understand why an idea of self must be eradicated while one is seeing or hearing.

Answer: We cannot say that there is an idea of self every time seeing or hearing arises. However, the idea of self is deeply accumulated. When it does not appear there is still the latent tendency of wrong view. This is like a virus which is latent in the body but which can become active at any time. Wrong view can condition many other defilements. It can only be eradicated when enlightenment has been attained. Wrong view must be eradicated first before attachment to sense objects can be eradicated. It is important to develop understanding of realities such as seeing or hearing, because all realities in our daily lives should be known as impermanent and not self. We will learn that what we take for "my mind" are only different moments of consciousness and mental factors, mental realities, and what we take for "my body" are only physical realities. As understanding develops we shall learn that after seeing or hearing defilements arise most of the time. We like to see and we like visible object. We like to hear and we like sound. We are attached to all sense objects. Such moments often pass unnoticed, but through the development of right understanding we acquire a more refined knowledge of our different moments of consciousness.

Question: I find it difficult to separate seeing from thinking about what we see. Seeing and thinking of people and things seem to occur together and thus it seems that we see people and things like a car or a house.

Answer: It is important to have right understanding about seeing: it sees only what appears through the eyes, nothing else. When you pay attention to shape and form and when you perceive people and things there is remembrance of concepts, there is thinking, not seeing. Seeing conditions thinking of concepts. If we would not see, we could not think of concepts. We should know when we are living in the world of concepts and when in the world of realities. There will be less delusion if we learn to distinguish seeing from thinking.

Question: Would it not be better not to think, in order to know realities?

Answer: No. We should understand thinking as thinking, seeing as seeing, feeling as feeling; they are different realities. The experience of heat is different from knowing where the heat appears.

Question: Do you believe that you will be a better person when you understand all these things?

Answer: If there is more direct understanding of realities there will be less clinging to the idea of self. We shall think less of ourselves as a good person or a bad person. There are wholesome realities and unwholesome realities which arise because of conditions. It is beneficial when there is less attachment to the idea of a self who sees, who hears, who is good or bad.

Question: When you believe that there is no self who can do anything, does this not lead to fatalism?

Answer: There is no predestined fate ruling over our life. However, the different moments of our life are conditioned by the past and by the present. It is essential to know and understand the present moment as conditioned. Understanding the present moment will gradually lead to the eradication of the defilements that cause us to be enslaved. Understanding will eventually lead to liberation and to enlightenment.

When understanding develops you see more and more the value of knowing things as they are. You gain more confidence in the teachings and this conditions a sense of urgency to continue to develop understanding of all realities. One will have less inclination to laziness or to fatalism.

Question: Realities may not appear as they are in this life. Thus, one's confidence must be quite strong in order to continue to develop understanding. One must be convinced that one is on the right Path.

Answer: We don't have to wait for realities to appear as they are; we can still have confidence. There is confidence with each wholesome moment of consciousness, for example, when we help someone else or when we study the teachings and consider them. We can verify that confidence is a wholesome reality. We should not expect to know immediately realities as they are, but we can have confidence while we develop different kinds of wholesomeness together with right understanding. We can verify that absolute realities are not concepts.

Realities such as seeing, feeling or attachment have each their own characteristic and their own function. Their characteristics cannot be changed; they are true for everyone. Seeing is always seeing for everyone; we do not have to name it or label it in order to experience it. When we have more

understanding of what realities are, we shall be less deluded by concepts of people or self. We still cling to realities and concepts, but we know that right understanding will lead to less clinging.

Question: Even when one knows that realities do not last, that they arise and then fall away, one will still cling. One will be waiting for the next reality to appear.

Answer: Through awareness and right understanding you can see the value of being free from enslavement to objects appearing through the six doorways, even if it is only freedom for a moment.

Question: In the Suttas we read about monks who were being drawn away from the teachings, who were backsliding. When is one backsliding?

Answer: When one is no longer interested in developing understanding.

Question: I think that this happens when people become discouraged, when they think the development of right understanding is too difficult and when they do not see any results. Is that not so?

Answer: Even if it is difficult to develop understanding there are so many moments for you to start again. You can start again at every moment, whether you work or you don't work, whether you are in a hurry or at leisure, it is the same. You always have an opportunity to start again. You may regret your lack of understanding, your forgetfulness, but what about this moment now?

Question: When you work you have more problems and then you are distracted. Is that not so?

Answer: There is no difference between your working situation and your free time. We have problems when we work and when we don't work; we still have to make decisions. Our problems are caused by attachment, aversion and ignorance and these arise no matter where we are. Only when we develop right understanding of this moment, regardless of our situation, there will be fewer defilements and thus fewer problems.

Question: I cannot help regretting the lack of awareness. I have desire for the arising of awareness. Can I tell myself not to have desire?

Answer: When you understand that desire counteracts progress there will be conditions to stop wishing for results. Only intellectual understanding of the teachings, acquired by reading, considering and discussing can condition the arising of direct understanding, now or later on. There will be more patience when we remember that awareness and understanding do not belong to a self

which can make them arise. Then, we can have the courage to begin again and again to find out more about the reality appearing at this moment.
