

In Memory of Lodewijk.

The Cycle of Birth and Death

by Nina van Gorkom

www.dhammadhome.com/en

Preface

Soon after Lodewijk's passing away I decided to undertake alone a journey to Thailand. In January 2013 Acharn¹ Sujin, Sarah and other friends had organized a three weeks sejour in Thailand for a group of Vietnamese friends and other friends from different countries whom I have known for a long time. There were three different trips outside Bangkok: to Hua Hin which is near the sea, to Wang Nam Khiao or Korat, in the North East, and to Kaeng Krachan, a place where Acharn Sujin and Khun² Duangduen regularly stay and where we often had visited them before.

I had never thought that I would come to Thailand again, but it all happened according to conditions. Thanks to Sarah's encouragement I could undertake this journey, and I am most grateful for the kind concern and moral support of Sarah, Jonothan and the other friends. I was surrounded by a group of sympathetic friends who were always ready to give me assistance.

When I was young and I married my beloved one I did not think that there must be an ending too. That seemed so far away. When the end comes it is so hard to accept the unavoidable. We keep on thinking of stories, beautiful ones and sad ones. Thinking is a reality, it arises for a moment and then falls away. The stories we think of are not realities, they are imaginations.

Throughout our journey Acharn Sujin was never tired of explaining again and again the true nature of what appears right now, at this moment, like seeing, visible object, hearing, sound or thinking. I am very grateful to her that she time and again reminded us of the present moment, the reality appearing now. That is the only moment the true nature of a reality can be investigated. This helped me to understand that the truth in the ultimate sense (in Pali: paramattha dhamma) is quite different from concepts and stories which are made up by our imagination and which we find so important.

We may think for a long time about what happened in the past, about other people, what they did and said, but such moments are different from developing understanding of realities that appear now, one at a time. The whole of the Buddha's teachings deal with the present moment.

¹ Acharn is the Thai word for teacher. In Pali: ācariya.

² Khun is the Thai word for Mr. or Mrs.

It is beneficial to constantly hear about seeing, visible object, hearing or thinking that can be directly known when they appear. Otherwise we forget what is reality and what is not and we spend our days dreaming about what is not reality. A great lesson I learnt while in Thailand. These constant reminders were most helpful to me.

Chapter 1.

What is Life?

In the “Kindred Sayings”, II, 180 (Nidāna, Ch XV, § 4, Tears) we read that the Buddha said at Sāvathī:

“Incalculable is the beginning, brethren, of this faring on. The earliest point is not revealed of the running on, faring on, of beings cloakedd in ignorance, tied to craving.

As to that, what think you, brethren? Which is greater:- the flood of tears shed by you crying and weeping as you fare on, run on this long while, united as you have been with the undesirable, sundered as you have been from the desirable, or the waters in the four seas?”

“As we allow, lord, that we have been taught by the Exalted One, it is this that is greater: the flood of tears shed by us crying and weeping as we fare on, run on this long while, united as we have been with the undesirable, sundered as we have been from the desirable- not the waters in the four seas.”

“Well said! Well said, brethren! Well do you allow that so has been the doctrine been taught by me. Truly the flood of tears is greater...

For many a long day, brethren, have you experienced the death of mother, of son, of daughter, have you experienced the ruin of kinsfolk, of wealth, the calamity of disease...

Why is that? Incalculable is the beginning, brethren, of this faring on. The earliest point is not revealed of the running on, faring on, of beings cloakedd in ignorance, tied to craving.

Thus far enough is there, brethren, for you to be repelled by all the things of this world, enough to lose all passion for them, enough to be delivered therefrom.”

We are born, we die and then we are born again, this goes on and on so long as we are in the cycle of birth and death. Each life is very short, before we realize it it comes to an end. When we are reborn we do not remember our life as it is at present, just as at this moment we do not remember our past life. What has fallen away never comes back and this is true of each moment of consciousness, and each physical reality. Each moment will be immediately past, but we are deluded and take mental phenomena and physical phenomena for permanent and self. The Buddha taught about realities in detail so that they can be understood as non-self (in Pali: anattā).

For a few days I stayed in the same hotel as my friends Sarah and Jonothan, the Peninsula hotel in Bangkok. I spent a happy time in their company and throughout my journey they gave me kind advice when I was in trouble. From my window I looked across the river to the Oriental Hotel where Lodewijk and I had enjoyed many pleasant days. These belong to the past now.

The next day I heard that a good friend, Ivan Walsh, had died suddenly. We went to the temple where rituals were performed and where later on the cremation would take place. Here Acharn Sujin and several friends were present. In the morning Acharn's sister, Khun Sujid, and Khun Sujid's daughter had still seen Ivan on the street, and now he is another person. It can all happen so suddenly.

The departing from this life is similar to the departing from last life. When we passed away from last life and we were born into this life, all that happened in the past is forgotten. It is difficult to accept this because of our clinging. We do not like the idea of being forgotten by our beloved one who passed away to another life.

Acharn explained to me that it is also difficult to accept the truth of this moment: "Whom do you see? There is always someone, even now." In reality there is no person, there is no one who can stay. What we take for a person is consciousness (in Pali: citta), mental factor arising with consciousness (in Pali: cetasika) and physical phenomena (in Pali: rūpa). These are only fleeting mental phenomena and physical phenomena which arise and then fall away immediately.

Seeing-consciousness is a moment of consciousness, a citta, that sees only what is visible, visible object, which is a physical phenomenon, a rūpa. It sees visible object just for an extremely short moment, and then it falls away. After the seeing has fallen away we think with attachment about things and persons we believe we see. It seems that we see them, but in reality we do not see them, seeing has fallen away already. Because of remembrance, saññā, a cetasika (mental factor) arising with each citta, we think of persons and things and we believe that they stay. In reality seeing, visible object or thinking arise for a very short moment and then fall away. They are mere elements and nobody can change their nature. Acharn said: "What has fallen away never comes back again, never, never."

I said that it is so sorrowful when I think about Lodewijk, that he never comes back. Acharn answered:

"Think of yesterday. Where were you yesterday? And think of this morning, where were you? There is no one at all, just this moment. We have to be very courageous to know that this is true. Even when there is unpleasant feeling, it is just a moment. It has arisen, and if it had not arisen it could not be here right now."

Nina: "Right understanding is so weak."

Acharn: "Yes, because of the self, because of you. But when it is not you it is only the nature of an element. So, we do not mind how many lives will come because we

cannot force the ending of the cycle without conditions. It has to be like this. But paññā (understanding of realities) develops and develops. That is why the Buddha taught us the Jātakas, the stories of his previous lives as a Bodhisatta. Each reality has gone, sound, sight, nothing is left. Is one attached to someone in one's thoughts? But actually there are only seeing, thinking, visible object.”

The Buddha, during countless previous lives as a Bodhisatta, developed wisdom, right understanding, so that in his last life he could become the omniscient Buddha. He developed right understanding again and again of seeing, visible object, hearing, sound, attachment, generosity, of all realities of daily life. We also have to develop right understanding of realities life after life so that eventually enlightenment ³ can be attained and defilements eradicated.

Seeing is a reality, it arises and experiences just what is visible, and then it falls away. It arises because of conditions: eyesense and visible object are conditions for seeing, and it is a citta that is the result of kamma, vipākacitta. It only sees visible object, but we believe that we see a person or thing. That is thinking, arising on account of what is seen. Thinking is not vipākacitta. When we think, the citta may be wholesome citta (kusala citta) or unwholesome citta (akusala citta). It seems that we can see and think at the same time, but only one citta can arise at a time and experience one object. Cittas arise and fall away succeeding one another extremely rapidly and that is why we are deluded about the truth.

Thinking is usually motivated by akusala (unwholesomeness), and this is the case when we are not intent on what is wholesome, such as generosity, helping others or developing understanding. Citta can think of reality or of what is not a reality, but a concept. When we are living in a dream world all day, thinking of what is not real, we are deluded and the citta is akusala. We should remember that there is no one in the visible object, no person or thing. Visible object is only a kind of rūpa that impinges on the eyesense and that can be seen. We have an idea of “I see”, but there is no self who sees, only seeing sees.

Acharn explained: “When thinking of Lodewijk or Ivan, there is attachment and it hinders, it hinders the understanding of seeing, but it takes a long time to really understand this. The Path is very subtle, but very effective, paññā really knows what hinders.

Now we do not know what hinders. We cry and we think a lot about the situation we are in. When paññā sees what is a hindrance it cannot hinder any more, because it is understood.”

Sarah remarked: “People often say that they found it so difficult in the case of separation through death that they did not have a chance to say farewell, but actually, it is just clinging to one’s own thought, one’s own idea.”

³ Enlightenment, in the context of the Buddhist teachings, is highly developed paññā that eradicates defilements and experiences the unconditioned dhamma, nibbāna. There are different stages of enlightenment.

Acharn Sujin said: “Even that moment is gone, not to be thought about again. It is past and past and past, all the time. Nothing is left, only thinking and memory. Nothing can belong to anyone at all.”

This was a good lesson reminding us not to attach too much importance to the stories which are objects of our thinking. Thinking arises, it is conditioned and we cannot prevent it, but we can remember that what really matters is learning the truth of the reality appearing right now.

Ivan’s body was laid in state in the temple with one hand stretched out so that we could sprinkle water over it and remember his good deeds. Ivan had always encouraged me to keep on writing about the Dhamma. I was disinclined to use a computer but he had persuaded me to start writing on the computer, so that I could share what I wrote with many people.

Acharn remarked: “So, I smile to Ivan, and may he appreciate all my good deeds. The Buddha did not teach anyone to cry, because that is akusala. At the moment of kusala there is no aversion (dosa), no crying, but appreciation.”

When I said that there are conditions for aversion and sadness, she said:

“When there is understanding one can see that paññā is the best of all conditioned realities, that it is a precious thing in one’s life. Everything is past in one’s life, all the time. It passes away never to come back.”

I remarked that intellectual understanding does not really help. It helps for a while and then it is gone and sadness arises again.

Acharn answered: “The accumulation of right understanding can become stronger, better than other accumulations. Without intellectual understanding how could there be stronger understanding? We have to go step by step, like climbing a mountain. We cannot reach the top immediately. Each step leads to more right understanding.”

We have accumulated such an amount of attachment, ignorance and wrong view.

Acharn explained that it has to be eradicated little by little, very, very little at a time, but that this is better than none at all. We have to be courageous and patient to develop understanding of one reality at a time.

Elle, Ivan’s wife, asked Acharn how to cope with sadness and loneliness. She found it so very difficult to be alone in the house. Acharn explained that one is not alone when one studies the word of the Buddha; one is in his presence, he is addressing his words to us. This is true, but we have to listen again and again until there is more understanding of whatever appears at the present moment.

Acharn said: “As to thinking about living alone, as soon as it is known it is gone, as fast as that. Thinking follows and it seems permanent, but as soon as it is known it is gone.”

During this journey I began to see that dwelling in the past, in stories about Lodewijk’s sickbed, his last days, his suffering, is quite different from studying and considering what is real in the ultimate sense and appearing at this very moment, like

seeing and visible object. We discussed about paramattha dhammas (ultimate realities) for hours, day after day. There is a great contrast between the world of concepts and imaginations and the world of realities. This helped me not to be completely absorbed in what is not real.

Ivan's body was laid down in a case and then the monks chanted texts. Acharn spoke about Ivan's life, and this is also the life of all of us:

“He was born and he died. What did he get from his whole life? Everything arises and passes away in splitseconds, all the time, from day to day, from moment to moment. Nothing belonged to him because there is no him. The rūpa-elements and the nāma-elements arise and fall away by conditions and never come back. Everyone's life is like this because there is no self. That is why we listen to the truth of whatever appears now, to understand it as truth. To understand seeing as seeing; no one sees and it does not belong to anyone because it is gone completely, never to come back. How can it be my seeing? It is only a moment of experiencing an object. Who can prevent seeing from arising? There are conditions for its arising, and, thus, it arises.”

Life is only the experiencing of an object through one of the six doorways of the senses and the mind. Only one citta arises at a time, experiences an object and then falls away. At the moment of seeing just what is visible, there cannot be the experience of sound, these are different cittas, experiencing different objects. The citta which thinks, thinks of persons or situations. In the ultimate sense a person is mere elements that arise and fall away. We can learn that one is born alone, sees alone, thinks alone and dies alone. After passing away from this life there is no return of the same individual.

Chapter 2.

Living alone.

Acharn Sujin repeated many times that what is now today, will be yesterday tomorrow. This reminds us that all we find so important now will be past in no time. Right understanding of realities that arise and fall away will lead to detachment. We find it very important to be in the company of friends, but Acharn reminded us that in

a short while we shall not know each other anymore. In a next life we shall have new friendships. She spoke about an example in the Tipiṭaka about seven friends who in their last life did not remember that they were friends before. They attained arahatship.

Acharn said: “When we listen more there will be more understanding of seeing. There must be that which sees and that which is seen, only that. There is no other world, no one there. Cittas arise just one at a time, there is no hearing, no sound, no idea about the object that is seen and no thinking.

If nothing arises at all there is no world. Whatever arises, even just one reality, that is the world. It is the arising and falling away of different realities. The meaning of arising and falling away is: it never comes back. No one is there, only different cittas, different cetasikas, different realities. Understanding is not developed by anyone. It is developed by listening, considering; no one can do anything because there is no self. A moment of understanding is like a drop of water in the ocean of ignorance.”

Understanding is not developed by anyone because there is no person, no self who develops it. Understanding itself develops when there are the right conditions for it. There is such a great deal of ignorance, but the Dhamma is like an island in the ocean of concepts, the ocean of defilements.

Seeing is one citta and when it arises there cannot be hearing at the same time. Seeing experiences visible object. Hearing is another citta that experiences sound. It may seem that we can see and hear at the same time, but this is a delusion. Each citta can experience only one object at a time, and it falls away immediately. After it has fallen away we think of what has been seen and heard, and then we live in the world of concepts.

What we take for a person are mere elements arising and falling away. We read in the “Visuddhimagga” (XI, 30):

“What is meant? Just as the butcher, while feeding the cow, bringing it to the shambles, keeping it tied up after bringing it there, slaughtering it, and seeing it slaughtered and dead, does not lose the perception ‘cow’ so long as he has not carved it up and divided it into parts; but when he has divided it up and is sitting there, he loses the perception ‘cow’ and the perception ‘meat’ occurs; he does not think ‘I am selling cow’ or ‘They are carrying cow away’, but rather he thinks ‘I am selling meat’ or ‘They are carrying meat away’; so too this bhikkhu, while still a foolish ordinary person--both formerly as a layman and as one gone forth into homelessness,--does not lose the perception ‘living being’ or ‘man’ or ‘person’ so long as he does not, by resolution of the compact into elements, review this body, however placed, however disposed, as consisting of elements. But when he does review it as consisting of elements, he loses the perception ‘living being’ and his mind establishes itself upon elements.”

It may not be appealing to see the body as elements. We think of people as “this man” or “that woman”. We are not used to analyzing what we take for a “person” just as we analyze matter, for example, in physics. We might find it crude to think of a body which is carved up and divided up into parts, just as a cow is carved up by a butcher. When a cow is peeled and carved up and then covered again by the skin we may believe that there is a cow, but in reality there is no cow at all. Evenso we may believe that a person exists, but there isn’t any person, there are only elements devoid of “self”.

We should consider again and again that what we take for a lasting person are actually mental phenomena (in Pali: *nāma*) and physical phenomena (in Pali: *rūpa*) that arise and fall away. Consciousness, *citta*, is *nāma*. There is only one *citta* arising at a time, but each *citta* is accompanied by several mental factors, *cetasikas*, which each perform their own function while they assist the *citta* in knowing the object. One can think of something with aversion, with pleasant feeling or with wisdom. Aversion, feeling and wisdom are mental phenomena which are not *citta*; they are *cetasikas* which accompany different *cittas*. Thus, both *citta* and *cetasika* are *nāma*, they experience an object, whereas *rūpa* such as sound or eyesense do not experience anything. Some *cetasikas* such as feeling or remembrance, *saññā*, accompany each *citta*, whereas other types of *cetasikas* accompany only particular types of *citta*. Attachment, *lobha*, aversion, *dosa*, and ignorance, *moha*, are *akusala cetasikas* which accompany only *akusala cittas*. Non-attachment, *alobha*, non-aversion, *adosa*, and wisdom, *amoha* or *paññā*, are *sobhana cetasikas*, beautiful *cetasikas*, which can accompany only *sobhana cittas*.

When we lose dear people through death we are bound to feel lonely. I had the following conversation about this subject:

Nina: “When feeling lonely it is difficult to be aware of one reality at a time. But if we try to escape this situation there is *lobha* (attachment) again.”

Acharn Sujin: “That does not work. We have to be courageous, brave enough to see that there is actually no one, not even you at that moment. This is the best cure.”

Sarah: “Even when we are with people, we are seeing alone, hearing alone.

Nina: *Akusala cetasikas* are bad friends and they are gone.”

Sarah: “When feeling sorry, there are bad friends.”

Nina: “They come again and again and again.”

Acharn: “There is only *citta* with such realities. It cannot stay, it will go away. Is it good to have it?”

Nina: “It is not good to have it.”

Acharn: “So, it is better to have understanding.”

Nina: “This is not possible on command.”

Acharn: “At the moment of understanding there is no regret. One is freed from being enslaved, and this was never realized before because one enjoyed being enslaved.

When there is more understanding of Dhamma there is no wish for anything at all.

This is the beginning of understanding. It has conditions for its arising and nobody can do anything at all. We can learn to see realities, one at a time. Like now, there is

seeing and at other moments there are hearing or thinking, unknown all the time. But if there is a moment of understanding of a reality, it can arise again and go on to other realities.”

Citta experiences one object, and it is actually alone. At the moment of seeing visible object there is no one else, seeing is alone. At the moment of seeing no hearing or thinking arise. Seeing experiences the object alone. When realities are taken as a mass, a collection, there is the world of many people. Cittas arise and fall away in succession very rapidly, they are like a flash. That is why we have a concept or idea of what appears as something permanent. Acharn said that we have to be brave in order to understand that what appears is just a reality. We need courage to let go of wrong view that clings to the idea of person or “self”. Right understanding leads to detachment, but our nature is attachment.

While we were in Huahin we went to the sea where Ivan’s ashes and bones were to be let down into the water. We went out on a boat that belonged to the Water Police. While we were waiting for the boat in the harbour and also while we were on the boat Acharn kept on speaking about the true nature of the reality appearing at the present moment. We considered realities instead of dwelling too much on situations, on sad events. A monk who always listened to Acharn’s radio program was present and after he recited some texts, the ashes were let down into the water. The boat went three times around this place and we kept on throwing flowers into the water. In the end there was a circle of flowers around the place where the ashes went down. Acharn said: this is like the cycle of birth and death.

It is good to be reminded of the cycle of birth and death. The last citta of this life, the dying-consciousness (cuti-citta), is succeeded immediately by the rebirth-consciousness (paīsandhi-citta) of the following life. Our life is an unbroken series of cittas. Wholesome qualities and unwholesome qualities which arose in the past can condition the arising of such qualities at present. Since our life is an unbroken series of cittas, succeeding one another, wholesome qualities and unwholesome qualities can be accumulated from one moment to the next moment, and, thus, there are conditions for their arising at the present time. When we listen to the Dhamma and we have a little more understanding, this is never lost. Understanding is accumulated and it can grow from life to life.

Each day we had one session of two hours in the morning and one session of two hours later in the afternoon. In Huahin the sessions were in a large lounge of a bungalow where Jonothan and Sarah had one room and where I had another room. After the afternoon session, Thai friends arranged for fruits, cookies and different snacks. There was such an abundance of food that there was no need to go out for supper anymore. Our friends were most attentive to all our needs and looked after us all the time. We went out for lunch to different places and even while we were having lunch Acharn would speak about paramattha dhammas appearing right now. The whole atmosphere was most pleasant while we enjoyed each other’s company, the beautiful panorama and the great variety of dishes.

We had the following conversation about understanding realities:

Acharn: "Visible object can be understood but memory takes it for a person or a thing. There should be the development of all realities, even of thinking. One can begin to see the difference between right understanding and wrong thinking about people and things. Do not have the idea that there should not be thinking, but understand thinking as just a reality."

Nina: "Trying not to think is forced."

Acharn: "It is not natural. Paññā cannot grow when it is not natural. It arises by conditions and it can become stronger and stronger."

Sarah: "When it is time for thinking, time for sadness, it is conditioned like that. No one can change it or stop it."

Nina: "We should not select, but just be aware of any reality."

Acharn: "The self is trying. When there is trying it shows that the understanding of anattā (non-self) is not firm, not well established.

But no matter whether there is a day without awareness, it is by conditions. When awareness arises by its own conditions it is much better than trying the whole day with the idea of self. The idea of self is building up at that very moment. When awareness arises for only a moment the difference can be seen between unawareness the whole day and a moment of understanding of a reality. Only paññā can see when lobha does not arise and when it arises all the time, after seeing, hearing, at the moments of trying. Lobha is like a big boss."

Several times Acharn reminded us of the power of lobha, attachment. It is dangerous that it is mostly unknown. Only paññā can see when lobha arises and leads one astray. One may wish to have more understanding but at such a moment one clings to the idea of self.

After our sejour in Huahin, we stayed for the weekend in Bangkok. On Saturday Khun Duangduen offered us a lunch in her garden which is a pleasant, restful place. On Sunday there were sessions in Thai in the building of the "Dhamma Study and Support Foundation"⁴. It was Acharn's birthday and it was inspiring to see many people who came with gifts and paid respect to Acharn. We could watch the great generosity of the Thais. The little room Acharn uses to meet people privately was full of flowers, fruits and other gifts.

During the session we had conversations about life in conventional sense and life in the sense of paramattha dhammas. It was stressed that it is important to know the difference between concept and reality. When we think of people we live in the world of concepts and when understanding is developed of reality as it appears through one of the six doors, one at a time, we come to know the world of paramattha dhammas. We had lunch in the Foundation building at a long table with Acharn and other friends. We were enjoying the food offered by a couple who sponsored the meal.

⁴ This is the center where all sessions with Acharn Sujin take place each weekend.

Husband and wife served us with such great concern and affection, taking care all the time to see if anybody needed anything. Their children entered the room and paid respect to Acharn. I found it a special experience to be back again in the Foundation. All my Thai friends welcomed me with great cordiality and they kept smiling, radiating kindness. When everyone around us is smiling with sincere kindness, we just have to smile too and it is impossible to be sad and depressed.

Our second trip outside Bangkok was to the North East, to Wang Nam Khiao, also called Korat. On the way we visited a museum of a petrified forest. It was an exposition of the geological history of the region and one could see many rare examples of petrified trees. It was crowded with school children so that we had to wait a long time and since our visit took many hours we arrived rather late in Wang Nam Khiao. This is a mountainous region where we went out for walks in the morning before breakfast. We stayed in peaceful bungalows with a balcony situated at the waterside. We had to walk from our bungalow to the restaurant for breakfast. For lunch we went out to a variety of places. The lunch tables were outside in the garden of the restaurant so that it seemed that we were in the middle of a forest. One of our outings was to the best restaurant in the region where very refined food was served and which, as healthy air was concerned, had the seventh place in the world. This made me think of Kuru where the outward conditions and the climate were most favorable for the development of the understanding of Dhamma.

I was sitting next to Acharn in the car and I enjoyed the mountainous landscape. Meanwhile we had a most beneficial Dhamma conversation.

Acharn: “Sometimes there is very strong lobha or very strong dosa (aversion), who can condition that? The nature of attachment is different from the nature of aversion. Who can control them? There must be conditions, no matter kusala or akusala arises. The truth can appear little by little as not permanent. At this moment there can be a little understanding of what appears as uncontrollable; it does not belong to anyone. Can that which arises and falls away and never comes back be anyone? Not at all. That is the way paññā develops from pariyatti (intellectual understanding), to paṭipatti (development of direct understanding), to pativedha (direct realization of the truth).

Next life one is a different person, suddenly. But past accumulations go on. That is why people have different characters, different likes and dislikes.”

Nina: “I experience a very pleasant object with pleasant feeling, such as the mountains.”

Acharn: “It is a reality, it is conditioned. It falls away before we know what it is. As soon as it is an object that is experienced, it is gone. Then another object appears and paññā can understand that. The intellectual understanding conditions detachment from clinging when time comes. But it is not as effective as direct understanding. The difference between the two can be seen.”

Nina: “It is not so easy to know direct understanding.”

Acharn: “When awareness arises it can be seen that it is quite different. Intellectual understanding can condition direct understanding, and it keeps on going by conditions. Otherwise it is always, how, how can ‘I’ understand.”

Often we ask questions with “how can I...” and true, this is motivated by attachment, lobha. We were reminded by Acharn to keep in mind that all dhammas are non-self, anattā, and that we, in that way, never will be lost by our own thinking or by wrong understanding. We cling to having progress in understanding and this is not effective. As Acharn often said, we cannot do anything. Realities arise because of their own conditions and nobody can cause their arising. Seeing arises when there are the appropriate conditions for its arising. Visible object and eyesense are rūpas that condition seeing. Visible object impinges on the eyesense and then there are conditions for seeing. Seeing is caused by kamma, it is vipākacitta.

Some cittas are results of akusala kamma and kusala kamma, they are vipākacittas. Kamma is intention or volition. Unwholesome volition can motivate an unwholesome deed which can bring an unpleasant result later on, and wholesome volition can motivate a wholesome deed which can bring a pleasant result later on. Akusala kamma and kusala kamma are accumulated from one moment of citta to the next moment, and, thus, they can produce results later on. Kamma produces result in the form of rebirth-consciousness, or, in the course of life, in the form of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and the experience of tangible object through the bodysense. Vipākacittas experience pleasant objects or unpleasant objects, depending on the kamma which produces them.

Kamma also produces rūpas such as eyesense, earsense and the other sense organs. Without eyesense and without visible object there could not be seeing.

There are several conditions for each dhamma that arises and this shows the nature of anattā of dhammas. We cannot cause their arising.

Evenso, nobody can cause the arising of sati, mindfulness, and paññā, understanding, however much we wish for their arising. They can only arise when there are the appropriate conditions. They are sobhana (beautiful) cetasikas that can only arise with sobhana citta and there are many levels of them. When we listen to the Dhamma and we learn about the realities that can be experienced through the six doorways, one at a time, and when we consider again and again what we hear, gradually intellectual understanding can develop. If the conditions are right, direct awareness of realities can sometimes arise so that direct understanding can develop. But this does not occur so long as we are wishing for it.

Acharn reminded us all the time of clinging to sati and paññā that is deeply rooted and hard to detect. We tend to forget that sati and paññā are non-self, anattā. The development of understanding leads to detachment, detachment from the idea of self.

Chapter 3.

No Return.

We read in the “Sutta Nipata” (vs. 547-590) ⁵:

"Unindicated and unknown is the length of life of those subject to death. Life is difficult and brief and bound up with suffering. There is no means by which those who are born will not die. Having reached old age, there is death. This is the natural course for a living being. With ripe fruits there is the constant danger that they will fall. In the same way, for those born and subject to death, there is always the fear of dying. Just as the pots made by a potter all end by being broken, so death is (the breaking up) of life.

The young and old, the foolish and the wise, all are stopped short by the power of death, all finally end in death. Of those overcome by death and passing to another world, a father cannot hold back his son, nor relatives a relation. See! While the relatives are looking on and weeping, one by one each mortal is led away like an ox to slaughter.

⁵ Translated by John D. Ireland (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1983).

In this manner the world is afflicted by death and decay. But the wise do not grieve, having realized the nature of the world. You do not know the path by which they came or departed. Not seeing either end you lament in vain. If any benefit is gained by lamenting, the wise would do it. Only a fool would harm himself. Yet through weeping and sorrowing the mind does not become calm, but still more suffering is produced, the body is harmed and one becomes lean and pale, one merely hurts oneself. One cannot protect a departed one (peta) by that means. To grieve is in vain.”

As we read, we do not know the path by which a person came into this world or departed from it. We do not know his past life nor his future life. We are in this world for a very short time and since we still have the opportunity to hear the Dhamma and to develop right understanding of all that appears through the senses and the mind-door, we should not waste our life away. The understanding of Dhamma makes our life worth living. Understanding is more precious than any kind of possession.

Visible object, sound and the other sense objects that appear are present only for an extremely short while. As soon as they have been experienced they are gone already, never to return. Visible object falls away and then a different visible object arises and falls away again. It seems as if visible object can stay for a while. We cling to shape and form and we are taken in by the outward appearance of things. It seems that we see people and things, but this is a delusion.

Visible object is that which is seen. It could not appear without the citta which sees, seeing-consciousness. Seeing-consciousness is an element that cognizes or experiences, it is nāma, whereas visible object is rúpa, it does not know anything. Rúpas do not arise alone, they arise and fall away in groups or units of rúpas. Each group consists of several kinds of rúpas which always include four kinds of rúpas which are called the four Great Elements. These are the following rúpas:

the Element of Earth or solidity

the Element of Water or cohesion

the Element of Fire or heat

the Element of Wind (air) or motion

The Element of Earth appears as hardness or softness, the Element of Fire as heat or cold, and the Element of Wind as motion or pressure. These are tangible object, they can be directly experienced through the body-consciousness when they appear. The Element of Water is not tangible object, it cannot be experienced by body-consciousness. When we touch what we call water it may be softness, heat or cold which are experienced. The function of the Element of Water or cohesion is holding together the accompanying rúpas in one group, so that they do not fall apart.

These four Great Elements that arise with all other rūpas are their foundation, they support them. Thus, when visible object appears, there have to be these four Great Elements together with visible object in one group, but they are not seen. Only visible object is seen at that moment. The “Visuddhimagga” (XI, 100) states that the four Great Elements are “deceivers”:

“And just as the great creatures known as female spirits (yakkhinī) conceal their own fearfulness with a pleasing colour, shape and gesture to deceive beings, so too, these elements conceal each their own characteristics and function classed as hardness, etc., by means of a pleasing skin colour of women’s and men’s bodies, etc., and pleasing shapes of limbs and pleasing gestures of fingers, toes and eyebrows, and they deceive simple people by concealing their own functions and characteristics beginning with hardness and do not allow their individual essences to be seen. Thus they are great primaries (mahā-bhūta) in being equal to the great creatures (mahā-bhūta), the female spirits, since they are deceivers.”

Realities are not what they appear to be. Because of saññā, the cetasika remembrance that arises with every citta, we remember shape and form and immediately we cling to what we believe are things and persons.

One may be infatuated by the beauty of men and women, but what one takes for a beautiful body are mere rūpa-elements.

The “Visuddhimagga” (XI, 98) states that the four Great Elements are like the great creatures of a magician who “turns water that is not crystal into crystal, and turns a clod that is not gold into gold....” We are attached to crystal and gold, we are deceived by the outward appearance of things. When we touch crystal or gold, only hardness or cold is experienced. There is no crystal or gold in the ultimate sense, only rūpas which arise and then fall away.

We cling to our body, but in reality what we take for our body are only different elements that arise and then fall away immediately. We should ask ourselves: “where is our body?” It is nowhere to be found.

We learn about the different rūpas our body consist of, but intellectual understanding of what the Buddha taught is not sufficient. Acharn reminded us all the time to pay attention and investigate the reality appearing right now. What is past has gone already and the future has not come yet. Learning the characteristic of what appears at this moment is the only way to penetrate the truth of realities.

Hardness appears and we immediately have an idea of “my hand” or “my leg”, it is not understood yet as just a reality, just a dhamma. When we think of my hand or my leg, we think of a collection of things, of a “whole”, and that is a concept, not a paramattha dhamma. Hardness impinges on the rūpa that is bodysense, and then it is experienced by the citta that is body-consciousness. This is a vipākacitta arising in a process of cittas. Cittas which experience objects through the six doors arise in a process of cittas. When, for example, body-consciousness arises, it occurs within a series or process of cittas, all of which experience tangible object while they each

perform their own function. Body-consciousness is vipākacitta, it merely experiences tangible object, it neither likes it nor dislikes it. After body-consciousness has fallen away there are, within that process, akusala cittas or kusala cittas which experience the tangible object with unwholesomeness or with wholesomeness. There are processes of cittas experiencing an object through the eye-door, the ear-door, the nose-door, the tongue-door, the body-door and the mind-door. There is a great variety of cittas: they can be kusala, akusala, vipāka or kiriya, which is “inoperative”.

Kiriyacitta is neither kusala citta nor akusala citta nor vipākacitta ⁶. After the cittas of a sense-door process have fallen away, the object is experienced by cittas arising in a mind-door process, and after that process has been completed other mind-door processes of cittas may arise which think of concepts. We may think of hardness with attachment or wrong view. We take the hardness for a hand or leg that belongs to us.

The teaching about the different processes of cittas helps us to understand that cittas arise and fall away in succession extremely rapidly. The processes take their course according to conditions and we cannot do anything about them and this shows their nature of non-self (in Pali: anattā).

When we listen again and again to the explanation of nāma and rūpa which are conditioned dhammas, non-self, there may be conditions for the arising of sati that is mindful, for example, of the characteristic of hardness. At that moment paññā can begin to investigate that reality so that it will be understood as only a dhamma.

Acharn explained that when hardness appears and there can be awareness of it, it is not the ordinary experience of it by body-consciousness. The object is the same, but it appears more clearly. At that moment there is not vipākacitta but kusala citta accompanied by sati. When direct awareness of a reality arises there is no thinking about it. When we are thinking about realities there usually is an idea of self, we take that reality for something or someone. We can learn the difference between the moments with sati and without sati. When sati arises paññā can begin to know its characteristic, it can understand it as only a reality that does not belong to anyone.

When hardness appears we tend to think that it can stay, but it arises and falls away. We may say that there is no self, but what is it that is non-self? We may use the names nāma and rūpa, but more important is knowing their characteristics when they appear at the present moment. We can learn that what experiences and that what is experienced are different characteristics, without naming them nāma and rūpa.

Knowing a characteristic is more important than knowing the name of a reality.

I had a beneficial conversation with Acharn about concepts we are dreaming of and the understanding of realities.

Nina: “I am absorbed in stories, thinking, “O, I would have liked to share this experience with Lodewijk. He would have liked this so much. Now I cannot share this with Lodewijk.”

⁶ Kiriyacitta performs different functions within a process. The arahat has no more kusala cittas but he has kiriyacittas instead.

Acharn: "There is no Lodewijk after his death and not even while he was alive."

Nina: "I am thinking in that way because it is conditioned."

Acharn: "Then you are not living alone. In the lone world there is no one."

Nina: "When he was alive I tried to remember that there was no Lodewijk. There is a great deal of thinking, clinging to concepts and dreaming about them."

Acharn: "How rare it is to just be aware of a reality. That can happen when there is more intellectual understanding, sufficient to be a condition for right awareness. By developing more understanding one will let go of the idea of trying to know.

One may be thinking of the self and trying to understand what does not appear."

Nina: "When people have worries or dreams you will always point to the present reality. That is the only solution to our problems."

Acharn: "You want to have the solution with the idea of self and that cannot be a solution at all."

Nina: "That is quite true, we cling to an idea of how I can solve this problem while having dreams all the time, sadness all the time."

Acharn: "Actually, whose problem?"

Nina: "Self, self."

It was most beneficial that Acharn reminded us to what extent we cling to a self. We do not want sadness which is akusala and we try to find methods not to have it. There is no method. When it appears it can be understood as just a conditioned dhamma. We should not try to change the reality that appears already because of conditions. Ignorance of realities can be eliminated, but courage and patience are needed to continue developing understanding of realities.

We tend to hold on to thoughts about the past, but then we should remember that what we find so important today will be yesterday tomorrow. It is completely gone. We have no idea who we were in the past life. All realities we take for a person arise and fall away never to come back. I had a conversation with Acharn about this subject:

Acharn: "It is not I, only the way elements are, different all the time. No one can manage them or have them at will."

Nina: "I can accept this, but it is difficult for me."

Acharn: "That is because of clinging to the self. This will decrease only when there is understanding of a reality as a reality. Otherwise we are always living in a dream. Reality does not appear as it is. Today will be yesterday tomorrow, completely gone, of no importance. No matter what it is. It experiences something and then it falls away."

Nina: "The second day I was in Thailand I heard that Ivan had died and we all went to the temple. I never thought that this would happen."

Acharn: "Today will be yesterday tomorrow and then you do not think much about it. Just let it go."

You see visible object and then it is gone, like yesterday. Remembering this helps to understand anattā. There are no conditions to choose, realities have arisen already. Understanding this is the best in life, otherwise there is only akusala.”

Nina: “It was a very long, tiring day to come here, to Wang Nam Khiao.”

Acharn: “One can be very patient because of understanding. Everything is just temporary, it is conditioned. Why worry about it. Right understanding saves one from akusala.”

It is helpful to be reminded that sad events that happened the day before are all gone. When a dear person is gone for good and will never return we should remember that whatever reality appears now falls away and will never return. Seeing that appears now falls away and will never return. What we take for a person is only citta, cetasika and rupa, elements that are beyond control. When Acharn says that we should understand a dhamma that appears as just a dhamma, it means that we should not take it for self or a person. Instead of thinking of a person who will never return we should remember that each citta and each rūpa that arises now falls away never to return again. Instead of holding on to the world of concepts and situations, to our dreamworld, we can develop understanding of realities so that we will see them as elements that are beyond control. Even when we think of sad events, the thinking is only a citta that arises because of conditions, there is not a person who thinks.

Chapter 4.

Understanding of the Present Moment.

In the “Mughapakkha Jātaka” (no. 538) we read about the life of the Bodhisatta as prince Temiya who pretended to be cripple, deaf and dumb. He did not want to become a king so that he would be in a situation to commit akusala kamma. The King wanted to find out whether he was really cripple, deaf and dumb and let him undergo all kinds of trials and tribulations.

Finally the King was advised to bury him alive. When the charioteer was digging the hole for his grave, Temiya was adorned by Sakka⁷ with heavenly ornaments. He became an ascetic and preached to his parents about impermanence:

“It is death who smites this world, old age who watches at our gate,

And it is the nights which pass and win their purpose soon or late.

As when the lady at her loom sits weaving all the day,

Her task grows ever less and less- so waste our lives away.

As speeds the hurrying river's course on, with no backward flow,

So in its course the life of men does ever forward go;

And as the river sweeps away trees from its banks upturn,

So are we men carried along by age and death in headlong ruin.”

⁷ King of the Devas.

He explained to his father that he did not want the kingdom, stating that wealth, youth, wife and children and all other joys do not last. He said:

“Do what you have to do today,

Who can ensure the morrow's sun?

Death is the Master-general

Who gives his guarantee to none.”

Lodewijk and I often spoke about the lady sitting at her loom and weaving until her task is done. A life comes to its end so soon.

The text can remind us not to put off our task of developing right understanding of any reality which appears now. The Bodhisatta was unshakable in his resolution to develop right understanding. Also when he was put to severe tests, he did not prefer anything else to the development of wisdom. We are likely to be forgetful of what is really worthwhile in our life. Wisdom is more precious than any kind of possession, honour or praise.

We have learnt that what we take for a person or self are *nāma* and *rūpa*. We were often reminded by Acharn that we may say that there are *nāma* and *rūpa*, but that their characteristics can be known only right at the moment they appear. Then we do not need the words *nāma* and *rūpa*, we do not have to think about them. There is a reality that experiences and a reality that is experienced. We pay attention mostly to the object that is experienced but we should remember that if there is no reality that experiences, nothing can appear, there is no world.

Acharn wanted to help us to understand the characteristic that appears right now instead of thinking about it. When we think about seeing and visible object we only know concepts of realities. Acharn said:

“We do not have to say that seeing is *nāma*, visible object is *rūpa*. There is no need to say this because that is only remembrance of the terms one has heard many times and thought about. But what about this moment of seeing? It is so real, because whatever is seen, is seen now and that which is seen is not that which experiences or that which sees it. We do not have to say: ‘It is *nāma* which sees and *rūpa* which is seen.’ This is not necessary. That is not the way to understand it. The way to understand it is knowing that when there is seeing right now that this is seeing. What does it see, what is seen? The thing that is seen is not the seeing. So, there is the beginning of understanding the nature of a reality which can be seen as just that which can be seen, not: that which can be heard.”

Acharn kept on reminding us, saying: “There is seeing right now, seeing sees visible object.” We immediately think of shape and form of things and we do not know the

distinction between seeing and thinking about what is seen. Cittas arise and fall away in succession so rapidly that it seems that cittas such as seeing and perceiving shape and form occur at the same time, but in reality different types of citta arise in different processes. Many cittas arise and pass away between seeing and preceiving the shape and form of something, thinking of things and of persons we believe we see. When the rūpa that is visible object or colour associates with the rūpa that is eyesense, just for a short moment, there are conditions for seeing. Acharn said:

“Without the reality that experiences an object, nothing can appear. One just pays attention to what is experienced and not to that which experiences. That which experiences can be understood as a reality. Without it there is no world, nothing can appear. By understanding this little by little one can know that at the moment of seeing, seeing is not visible object but that it sees a reality, no shape and form. Now it sees. It is very difficult to understand this because we have accumulated a lot of ignorance. We learnt only about concepts. We can come to understand what is meant by right understanding, paññā. It has to be right understanding of whatever appears now. Otherwise it is not paññā, it cannot understand the true nature of the reality which appears. It is only thinking, dreaming about different things. We can have theoretical understanding when we say: ‘what is seen is visible object and then there is thinking of a concept’. And now? It is time to understand the distinction between that which is seen and that which is the object of thinking, taking it for something. Thinking of shape and form is not thinking in words. Thinking is not always thinking in words.”

It may seem very simple to know that seeing is the experience of visible object and visible object is that which is seen. But this may be only theoretical understanding. Understanding the theory is quite different from the direct understanding of what appears at the present moment. Acharn said: “And now?” The different characteristics of dhammas have to be realized one at a time at the moment they appear, right now. Penetrating characteristics of realities that appear is more important than remembering their names. Whatever appears has to be realized as just a dhamma, so that we shall really be convinced of the fact that in reality there are only dhammas, no person or thing. Dhammas do not stay, they are only present for an extremely short time. No one can condition anything.

When we returned from Korat to Bangkok, we stopped on the way back at Toscana Village for a Dhamma discussion and a lunch. The hilly landscape is somewhat similar to Toscane in the North of Italy. The area was laid out by way of terraces and there was an abundance of flowering trees. After the Dhamma discussion we enjoyed an Italian style lunch. When looking at the gardens, listening to the Dhamma discussions or tasting the food, different sense objects impinged on the doorways of the senses and the mind-door. We are constantly interpreting what we see, hear or experience through the other sense-doors. This can be compared with reading. When we are reading a book, visible object is seen, we see black and white and then we perceive letters and interpret their meaning. Evenso, there is just seeing, hearing,

smelling, tasting and body-consciousness and afterwards we are thinking on account of what is experienced. This is our life: seeing and interpreting what is seen, hearing and interpreting what is heard.

We have to carefully consider and understand each word of the teachings, even one word, for example, the word “dhamma”. Dhamma is reality which has its own characteristic and which cannot be changed into something else. When we cling to concepts which are denoted by conventional terms such as “tree” or “chair”, we do not experience any characteristic of reality. What is real when we look at a tree? What can be directly experienced? Visible object is a paramattha dhamma, a reality; it is a kind of rūpa which can be directly experienced through the eyes. Through touch hardness can be experienced; this is a kind of rūpa which can be directly experienced through the bodysense, it is real. Visible object and hardness are paramattha dhammas, they have their own characteristics which can be directly experienced. We may give them another name, but their characteristics cannot be altered. They appear only for one moment and then they fall away. They are uncontrollable. “Tree” is a concept or idea we can think of, but it is not a paramattha dhamma, not a reality which has its own unalterable characteristic, which arises and then falls away. Ultimate realities should be clearly distinguished from concepts or ideas which are objects of thinking.

Intellectual understanding of the teachings is necessary but it is not enough. It is an introduction to direct understanding. What the Buddha taught pertains to the present moment. Only the present reality can be really understood, not what is past or what is future. That is why Acharn emphasized seeing now, visible object now all the time. These have characteristics that appear and can be attended to without thinking of their names. There can be a beginning of considering whatever appears at this moment even though it cannot be precise.

Visible object which is experienced by seeing-consciousness does not fall away when seeing-consciousness falls away, because it is rūpa; rūpa does not fall away as rapidly as nāma. When an object is experienced through one of the six doors, there is not merely one citta experiencing that object, but there is a series or process of cittas succeeding one another, which share the same object. When seeing-consciousness has fallen away it is succeeded by other vipākacittas and after these cittas have fallen away kusala cittas or akusala cittas arise. Kusala cittas or akusala cittas arise because of conditions: kusala and akusala that arose in the past and that have been accumulated from one citta to the next citta conditions the arising of kusala and akusala at present. We cannot do anything, cittas arise because of their own conditions, but paññā can come to understand the true nature of realities and their conditions.

After the cittas of a sense-door process have fallen away a mind-door process of cittas follows which experience visible object through the mind-door. After that there are other mind-door processes of cittas may think of concepts. The Buddha taught about cittas arising in processes according to a certain order so that people could see that they are beyond control, that nobody can change this order.

Acharn said: “When seeing arises who knows that it is vipāka, and when thinking arises who knows whether it is kusala or akusala? Their characteristics are different, one can see the difference by not naming them. There can be understanding that seeing is different from kusala or akusala. Just like now: seeing sees and thinking thinks. There can be a beginning to understand that they are so different from each other. Understanding can grow by considering. One can know that kusala is different from ignorance, that attachment is different from non-attachment. There is no rule that ‘I’ should do this or that in order to have more kusala.”

Before the characteristics of kusala and akusala can be known precisely, they should be understood as “just a dhamma”. As Acharn pointed out, the different characteristics of realities can be known by not naming them. When we are naming them we are merely thinking about them instead of penetrating their true characteristics.

We should have no expectations as to the arising of kusala and paññā, that is attachment. When there is understanding that all cittas are conditioned it helps to have less clinging to realities as self. The Buddha taught us realities so that we can develop our own understanding instead of blindly following what he taught. When we were back in Bangkok we had for a whole day Dhamma discussions on a boat. A friend of Pinna had kindly offered us this boat trip and also the lunch that was included. We passed the Temple of Dawn (Wat Arun) and enjoyed the familiar view of the buildings and bridges, but now from a distance, from the waterside. After a delicious meal we climbed off the boat to have a walk and we looked at the dazzling colours of the shops. When we noticed all these colours we were thinking, thinking without words. Even when we do not think in words, the object of the citta can still be a concept. Some of the shops gave lively presentations of walking toy animals. This conditioned our imagination: there could be thinking of a whole story, of a real animal who was walking. Thinking was leading us away from reality. We were offered samples of herbal tea in small cups and it was explained that these herbs could cure all sorts of ailments. Acharn was also walking and then she stood still explaining for quite a while about realities appearing right now, she was never tired. Some of us had to take a smaller boat to return to the Peninsula Hotel. The captain of that boat looked with approval at what was written on the back of our shirts: “Do good and study the Dhamma”. He had been a monk, even an abbot, for ten years and he spoke about meditation. I tried to explain about studying with awareness realities, no matter where one is. There is no need for a quiet place, the realities to be studied are within us and around us. This boat was noisy, not quiet, but we could still discuss Dhamma, discuss about visible object appearing through the eyes, sound appearing through the ears, many realities. It was a good ending of the day.

Chapter 5.

Momentary death.

We read in the Kindred Sayings (V, Mahā-vagga, Book XII, Kindred Sayings about the Truths, chapter V, §6, Gross darkness) that the Buddha said to the monks:

“Monks, there is a darkness of interstellar space, impenetrable gloom, such a murk of darkness as cannot enjoy the splendour of this moon and sun, though they be of such mighty magic power and majesty.”

At these words a certain monk said to the Exalted One:

“Lord, that must be a mighty darkness, a mighty darkness indeed! Pray, lord, is there any other darkness greater and more fearsome than that?”

“There is indeed, monk, another darkness, greater and more fearsome. And what is that other darkness?

Monk, whatsoever recluses or brahmins understand not, as it really is, the meaning of: This is dukkha, this is the arising of dukkha, this is the ceasing of dukkha, this is the practice that leads to the ceasing of dukkha, such take delight in the activities which conduce to rebirth. Thus taking delight they compose a compound of activities which conduce to rebirth. Thus composing a compound of activities they fall down into the darkness of rebirth, into the darkness of old age and death, of sorrow, grief, woe, lamentation and despair. They are not released from birth, old age and death, from sorrow, grief, woe, lamentation and despair. They are not released from dukkha, I declare.

But, monk, those recluses or brahmins who do understand as it really is, the meaning of: This is dukkha, this is the arising of dukkha, this is the ceasing of dukkha, this is the practice that leads to the ceasing of dukkha, such take not delight in the activities which conduce to rebirth... They are released from dukkha, I declare.

Wherefore, monk, an effort must be made to realize: This is dukkha. This is the arising of dukkha. This is the ceasing of dukkha. This is the practice that leads to the ceasing of dukkha.”

Lodewijk found this text always very awesome and he was highly impressed by it. So long as we have ignorance there will be no end to being in the cycle of birth and death. The Buddha showed the danger of ignorance and exhorted the monks to develop right understanding so as to realize the four noble Truths.

When we were having breakfast Acharn would usually join us and speak about Dhamma. During one of our breakfasts, she reminded us of the four kinds of right effort (samma-padhānas): the effort to avoid akusala, to overcome akusala, to develop

what is kusala, namely the enlightenment factors ⁸, and to maintain what is kusala. With regard to the first right effort, she exhorted us not to have ignorance anymore, to avoid ignorance which has not yet arisen. There is no self who can prevent ignorance, but seeing its danger can condition the development of understanding. There can be a little more understanding each day. Ignorance is not understanding whatever appears. Not understanding is like dreaming, Acharn said. When there is seeing, there is no one in the seeing. We have to consider this again and again so that there will be detachment from the idea of self or person.

Acharn reminded us that when we feel lonely, we are lonely with ignorance, but when we understand the lone world, the world without self or person, we can be cheerful, without problems. Then there are just seeing, hearing and the other realities arising and falling away.

She gave us a precious reminder, saying that when one is sad and depressed one is preoccupied with “self”, one thinks of oneself. Such moments can be understood as conditioned realities which arise and fall away. When one is more attentive to the welfare of others, one will think less of oneself.

When people would say that the development of the understanding of realities is so difficult, Acharn would answer: “Now you are praising the Buddha’s wisdom.” This is true, he accumulated paññā for countless aeons, and he developed the perfections, such as dāna, sīla, mettā or patience. He was determined to develop them in order to reach Buddhahood, out of compassion for all of us. Had he not become an omniscient Buddha who could teach us all realities today, we would be ignorant and we would be enslaved, clinging forever to sights, sounds and all sense objects. We should also be patient and courageous to develop paññā and all good qualities with determination. There can be a beginning now and we should not mind how long the development of the Path will take. We cannot expect to get rid of defilements on command, they are anattā.

Sometimes people asked what the conditions are for sati of the level of satipaṭṭhāna, thus, for sati which is mindful of nāma and rūpa. We read in the Visuddhimagga” (Ch XIV, 141) that its proximate cause is strong remembrance (thirasaññā) or the four “Applications of Mindfulness” ⁹. Firm remembrance of the reality right now conditions satipaṭṭhāna. If we forget that there are now only realities there are no conditions for the arising of satipaṭṭhāna. There is not sufficient understanding of anattā to condition right awareness now.

The four “Applications of Mindfulness” include all nāmas and rūpas that can be the objects of mindfulness. When they have become the objects of sati they are a proximate cause of mindfulness. Nāma and rūpa occurring in daily life are the objects of mindfulness. There can be awareness of nāma and rūpa no matter whether we are walking, standing, sitting or lying down. Also when akusala citta arises it can be

⁸ Wholesome factors leading to enlightenment, including the Applications of Mindfulness, confidence, energy, mindfulness, concentration, wisdom and many others.

⁹ As explained in the “Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta”, they are: mindfulness of body, of feeling, of citta and of dhammas.

object of mindfulness, it is classified under the “Application of Mindfulness of Citta”. One should learn not to take akusala citta for self.

Several times Acharn reminded us that the lack of awareness was caused because there was not firm remembrance (thirasañña) of what we heard. When one listens to the Dhamma and considers it again and again there can be firm remembrance of what one has heard, and, thus, there are conditions for the arising of sati which is mindful of the nāma or rūpa appearing at the present moment. Thus, we see the value of listening. We listen but we often forget what we heard. We ought to listen more, it never is enough.

Acharn’s reminder that today will be yesterday tomorrow is an exhortation not to waste away our short time in this world as humans where we can still listen to the Dhamma and develop understanding. How fast time goes, before we realize it there will be the dying-consciousness, and we do not know our future.

Knowing the theory of the Dhamma is completely different from attending to the reality that presents itself now. Time and again Acharn reminded us of this fact. For example, we have learnt about different feelings: pleasant feeling, unpleasant feeling and indifferent feeling. In each process of citta kusala cittas and akusala cittas arise and these are called in Pali “javana-cittas”. Seven javana-cittas usually arise in each process. When we consider the accompanying feeling, we have learnt that pleasant feeling can arise with kusala citta and with akusala citta rooted in attachment, lobha. Unpleasant feeling invariably arises with the citta rooted in aversion, thus, with akusala citta. Indifferent feeling can arise with kusala citta and also with akusala citta, namely, with citta rooted in attachment and citta rooted in ignorance. We have learnt all this in theory, but feelings are realities arising all the time in daily life. We cling to feeling and take them for mine. We could ask ourselves: is there feeling now? It seems, when there is indifferent feeling, that the citta is not akusala, that we do not harm anyone. However, when our objective is not dāna, generosity, sīla, morality, or bhāvanā, mental development, we act, speak or think with akusala citta. Even when we listen to the Dhamma and consider it, thus, when we apply ourselves to mental development, kusala cittas do not arise all the time. They alternate with akusala cittas. We can see that the teachings help us to know the extent of our defilements that arise because of conditions, because they were accumulated for aeons, from moment to moment, from life to life. We can understand somewhat more the nature of anattā of the dhammas that arise. We cannot control the dhammas that arise, but understanding of them can be developed.

Before we heard the Dhamma we had no understanding of realities, no understanding of defilements. We accumulated more ignorance and clinging from day to day. We should be grateful to have listened to the Dhamma and to be able to begin developing understanding of our life, of the truth. We learn that there are many different types of conditions for whatever reality arises.

We find it difficult to accept that a dear person who has died will never return.

However, we should realize that each nāma or rūpa that arises falls away and can never return. There is dying at each moment: seeing arises and then falls away for

good, and it is the same with hearing, with the other sense-cognitions and with thinking. We shall have more understanding of what the world is: only one moment of experiencing one object at a time, and then gone for good. Even a person who is alive is actually citta, cetasika and rūpa which arise because of conditions and then fall away, which are very temporary.

Seeing dies, hearing dies at this moment, so, where are people, where is a person? Where is a person who dies? In reality there is no person. A moment of seeing cannot be a person, it arises and falls away. We think that there is a permanent person who sees, who hears, but actually, seeing is a conditioned reality that arises and falls away immediately.

Is there any difference between living in the world of concepts and living in the world of absolute realities? What is the difference? It is actually: living in the world of ignorance and living in the world of right understanding. The world of concepts consists of cup, table, person, things. But in the absolute sense, can whatever appears be someone or something permanent? They seem to be permanent because realities arise and fall away so rapidly. It seems as if there is no arising and falling away of anything at all. Even the arising of seeing does not appear and, thus, the falling away of it cannot appear. Whatever is experienced is gone as soon as it is experienced. From birth to death there are cittas arising in processes, víthi-cittas, that experience objects through the doors of eye, ear, nose, tongue, bodysense and mind. Víthi-cittas are alternated by bhavanga-cittas, life-continuum, which arise in between the processes of cittas. The bhavanga-citta which does not experience sense-objects through the sense-doors experiences the same object as the rebirth-consciousness. The rebirth-consciousness, pañsandhi-citta, is vipākacitta conditioned by kamma and this citta experiences the same object as the object experienced by the last javana-cittas that arose shortly before dying. The dying-consciousness, cuti-citta, experiences the same object as the rebirth-consciousness and all bhavanga-cittas in one lifespan. The rebirth-consciousness, the bhavanga-citta and the dying-consciousness in one lifespan are the same type of citta. The dying-consciousness is immediately followed by the rebirth-consciousness of the next life and then one is no longer the same individual. However, all accumulated kusala and akusala go on to the next life, they go on from life to life. Thus, the cycle of birth and death goes on until the dying-consciousness of the arahat. Then the end of the cycle has been reached. Acharn reminded us of three kinds of citta: The first citta (in Pali: pañhama citta) is the bhavangacitta before anything appears. When something appears, such as seeing, hearing, there is the second citta (in Pali: dutiya citta). Finally there is the dying-consciousness, cuti-citta, of the arahat (in Pali: pacchima citta, the last citta). Each life is like this: the rebirth-consciousness arises and then bhavangacittas arise and the object is unknown, nothing appears. When something appears there are process cittas, the second kind of citta. In this way life keeps going on from moment to moment, from birth to death, again and again, until the last moment of the arahat. At this moment we are in the cycle of birth and death, saósara. Yesterday there were seeing and thinking, hearing and thinking, and today it is the same, and so it will be

in the future. We are absorbed in the objects we experience, time and again, and this is the cycle of birth and death.

Acharn said:

“What has disappeared does not return again. Realities arise and fall away, arise and fall away. Should one cling? Then one would cling to what has fallen away and is no more. Where should we find it? There is clinging because one does not know the truth. There are only realities that arise and fall away in succession and this does not stop. This is the cycle of birth and death, saósara. There is an opportunity to begin to understand this.”

So long as ignorance and clinging have not been eradicated we continue being in saósara. If we do not develop insight, vipassanā, the number of rebirths will be endless. It was out of compassion that the Buddha spoke about the dangers of rebirth; he wanted to encourage people to develop right understanding of the reality appearing at this moment.

Acharn was emphasizing all the time the value of understanding this moment of seeing, hearing, thinking and all realities that appear. This helped me to see the disadvantage of being absorbed in sad events that happened in the past and of clinging to what has fallen away and will never return. Such ways of thinking are conditioned and instead of trying to avoid thinking we can learn that also the thinking that arises can be understood in order to know it as not “mine”, as only a dhamma. The contrast between living in a dreamworld while clinging to the past and beginning to understand the world of paramattha dhammas became more obvious to me than before. The difference between those two worlds is actually most striking. I am very grateful to Acharn for pointing this out time and again, in many different ways. We listen to the Dhamma in order to have more understanding of the present moment. During this journey it became clearer to me that listening to the Dhamma is the most precious in life.
