

Attachment to Another Person.

Sarah Procter Abbott, 1979

\*\*\*\*\*

During a discussion in Bangkok at Wat Bavornives, Khun Sujin explained that when we are very attached to a particular person, "one just gets more attachment, more akusala from the other". She stressed that there will always be "another and another person", and there will always be sorrow from the objects that we like so much because we cannot always have them. "Less attachment, less sorrow."

## BONDAGE?

We were also reminded that while we cling to ourselves, we cling to other beings. The sutta, 'The Bondage', (Gradual Sayings, Book of the Sevens, Ch V, 48, PTS translation), is about the attachment to femininity and masculinity in the other. If there is attraction to oneself, there is always attraction to others. When we are attached to our own khandhas, we are attached to the others' khandhas as well:

"Monks, I will teach you a Dhamma-discourse on bondage and bond freedom. Pay heed, listen well, I will speak... And what is the discourse?..."

"Monks, a woman marks femininity in herself, the feminine occupation, attire, prejudices, impulses, voice, charm. She is excited by that, delighted by that; and being so excited, delighted, she marks masculinity about her, the masculine occupation, attire, prejudices, impulses, voice, charm. She is excited by that, delighted by that; and being so excited, delighted, she desires a bond with those about her; and whatsoever happiness, well-being comes of this bond, that she desires. Monks, delighted by, attached to her own sex, she has gone into man's bondage and thus escapes not from her own sex.

"So, too a man marks masculinity in himself... is excited by that...; marks femininity about him... is excited by that... and desires a bond with those about him... Monks, delighted by, attached to his own sex, he has gone into woman's bondage and thus escapes not from his own sex.  
(But the opposite in both cases holds.)

"Verily, monks, this is the Dhamma-discourse, on bondage and bond freedom."

## LOVE?

We can begin to see the danger of accumulating strong attachment to a particular person as Khun Sujin further stressed.

Sujin: "Be aware of the danger of having stronger lobha. It's vary hard to get rid of; always wanting to experience it. One is already attached, one is attached to oneself, to one's body and one wants to possess the other being as well — too much strong attachment. It's all for enjoying one's feeling. Feeling likes to feel that way very often. One wants to see more, to hear more, to touch more. Lobha lures everyone. Just one word, 'love', and we can see its nature is only attachment and in the absolute sense it's

attachment to one's own pleasant feeling. One clings to one's pleasant feeling by experiencing such an object — that being, that person or what one takes for a person. Feeling likes to feel that way. It's just feeling, not one's own. It's a conditioned reality, so it's not permanent, the kind that attachment is attached to."

She also referred to "bursting with desire", to being "trapped and lured by attachment all the time," to "killing oneself and one's heart by one's attachment and ignorance." Attachment is like a trap or a bait. It's so attached to feelings and these don't belong to anyone. They're just conditioned, impermanent realities.

I mentioned that it seems that society encourages these feelings.

Sujin: "Society follows the individual's feeling because society comprises such individuals."

There was further discussion about strong lobha in a marriage or relationship.

Sujin: "One enjoys seeing, hearing, bodily impressions to satisfy one's own feeling. One clings to oneself and what one takes for another being as well. All are 'sammuti sacca' (conventional truths), love and marriage are 'sammuti sacca' for attachment."

FUEL?

It seemed to me that this was talking conventionally and I asked at what level understanding would understand this.

Sujin: "It depends on conditions. Right understanding understands what is what. It's not enough to do this or that. By right understanding, one understands one's conditions. One sees one's life run by conditions. Right understanding understands according to its level."

I asked if we can necessarily say there is stronger lobha when we are married or have a partner.

Sujin: "The disciples of the Buddha experienced many different ways of living. One knows one has strong lobha as long as one is not a sakadaagaamii [at the second stage of enlightenment]. Understanding knows what degree it is when it appears."

I wondered if we should at least consider certain situations as less favourable.

Sujin: "Thinking can think rightly or wrongly. Understanding can understand whether it is just thinking. It is common to have attachment, but it depends on how far one lets it go. One can consider wisely or unwisely, because a moment is gone so fast and attachment is never enough. There are always conditions to condition future attachment, because one always asks for fuel for future attachment. It's so strong that it burns and how can one stop the burning fire if one always puts in fuel? Is one brave enough to live alone? For the sake of one's life, for the sake of one's eradication of lobha."

I asked whether it was important to know what level the understanding was.

Sujin: "The sotaapanna is not a deceiver, he is straight, honest, sincere. The understanding is so straight to that moment, to what level of wisdom is there at that moment. Understanding understands accumulations. Understanding understands that level of 'complex' [accumulations] as not self. Know oneself and one's nature deeper and deeper so one can know what type of Buddha's disciple one is."

Again I wondered if we could say that the strong attachment would not arise if we were not in such a situation.

Sujin: "The feeling and the attachment to feeling will come again and again. It will not stop coming out. It all depends on conditions what will happen as long as there are beings around and there is attachment not eradicated. When right understanding understands that it's only thinking and feeling with attachment, that naama is naama, not self, it will lessen the degree of attachment."

I said something more about thinking of what's valuable in a certain situation.

Sujin: "Now there is thinking about the situation, but that situation is not now. What happens if one dies now? Only thinking of a situation that does not come now. It indicates one's attachment and clinging which will condition more in the future lives."

## SECURITY?

I asked if it was a matter of understanding attachment now.

Sujin: "That's all, because the previous moment has just gone. Life is just this arising and passing away. Life, it is conditioned. No one can keep it even for a second. If one were born as an animal, one could not help that way of life [i.e. a life with strong attachment], because there is not enough understanding to think whether to be married or not. But as a human being one has a higher level of understanding and considering. One knows the accumulations, that they are a condition for future moments.

"What about being alone in this life, since one has been married many times before? Have we not had enough yet of birth and death in sa.msaara? One can still live alone and enjoy oneself, as one does not have accumulations to be the ascetic in the jungle. Enjoy seeing people in society, helping as much as possible, leading a perfect life so one can have more time for developing kusala when one is single."

I should mention here, that Khun Sujin is not referring to people who are married or in partnerships already. We should remember that in the absolute sense, living alone is living with and being aware of realities through the six doorways now.

I asked what type of kusala she meant.

Sujin: "All types of kusala. One will sleep better, having less boredom and cares. One does not have to think about one's children and grandchildren in future."

I asked if this was for everyone.

Sujin: "It's not a rule to be followed. One cannot go against one's conditions." I then said that one can't help thinking of happiness and security in terms of material conditions.

Sujin: "What's more important in life: material conditions or right understanding? Right understanding is so difficult to grow. So people have their own way of living while developing right understanding. Depending on the degree of right understanding one will see the danger of putting happiness or security in terms of anything else."

I mentioned a mutual friend who was getting married soon.

Sujin: "It's her way. One has to take responsibility for one's own life. Who can take responsibility for the other? It is conditioned already. Stop the growth of strong attachment with mettaa. When it's kusala, it's so different from wanting the other to be so attached and being so attached. It's kindness to others if we don't cling to them or encourage them to be attached to us."

HAPPY ENDING?

I said that it did make some sense that if we are genuinely concerned about the other person we will not want to encourage the attachment, knowing how much it hurts. I asked about when we are the object of attachment.

Sujin: "When one knows one is the object of attachment, one cannot stop being the object of attachment for the others. There are ways with kusala citta to stop the other's attachment growing. When one is sincere with kusala citta, the other will understand, not wanting to increase the attachment. The other can see it is sincere, kusala citta. It's less dangerous than both having akusala citta. One day they will realise what is kusala citta... THE HAPPY ENDING."

I said that living apart without any attachment wouldn't sell at the movies as the happy ending!

Sujin: "But we can know it's a happy ending. One must be very sincere, secure, steadfast, resolute and decisive."

OILY SOOT?

In Sri Lanka, earlier this year, Khun Sujin also referred to "the game that ta.nhaa always wins." Because of a lack of understanding we follow the game of ta.nhaa wherever it

goes. With awareness, she stressed, "one lets go of desire for other objects. Even a little attachment hinders the progress of right understanding."

Attachment is a conditioned reality with stories proliferating all the time on account of such feelings. "The growth of vipassanaa must begin with detachment and go the way of detachment because attachment is very subtle and always wins when there is no understanding."

We read about Lady Sumanaa, the youngest daughter of Anaathapi.n.dika (Commentary to Dhammapada, 'Buddhist Legends', Book I, 13, translated by E.W. Burlingame, Harvard Oriental Series) who had reached the second stage of enlightenment. Yet still she died of grief because of her failure to obtain a husband, so we can understand how dangerous the attachment is. Although almost every object is an object of attachment when there is no development of understanding. Specific mention was repeatedly made in Sri Lanka of the danger of strong attachment for what is taken for another being.

However, we should also understand these comments in the context of satipa.t.thaana. There are many other examples of followers of the Buddha who attained stages of enlightenment even though they were householders, often married with large families. At any time, there are realities which can be known.

This should not stop us from seeing the danger of particular kinds of attachment, however, and a commentary note to the 'Kusala Muula' or 'The Three Roots of Action' (Gradual Sayings, Book of the Threes, 68, 'Those of Other Views', PTS), states that as lust has very deep roots in human nature, it is as hard to remove as oily soot, and a particular attachment might follow a person even through two or three lives. Lust is said to be less reprehensible than anger or hatred but harder to remove. In the sutta itself we read:

"Malice is much to be blamed, but it is quick to change. Delusion is much to be blamed and it is slow to change. But, sirs, what is the reason, what is the cause why lust that has not arisen arises, or why lust that has arisen is liable to more-becoming and growth?

" 'It is the feature of beauty (in a thing),' must be the reply. In him who gives not systematic attention to the feature of beauty, lust that has not arisen arises, and lust that has arisen is liable to more-becoming and growth. This, sirs, is the reason, this is the cause...."

## PRISON BONDS?

We read in the Commentary to the Dhammapada (Book 24, 4, The Prison-house), that visiting monks passed a prison house and saw criminals bound with fetters. Approaching the Buddha, they asked him whether there were any bonds stronger than the bonds with which the criminals were bound. The Buddha assured them that the bond of craving was a thousand-fold stronger. He remarked that wise men of old broke this bond and related the following story about a husband and wife as summarised in the introduction:

"The Future Buddha was reborn as a poor man. Not knowing that his wife was pregnant, he asked her permission to retire from the world. His wife asked him not to do so until she had given birth to her child. When the child was born, she asked him to wait until the child was weaned. While he waited, his wife conceived a second child. The Future Buddha thereupon left her, breaking the bond of attachment once and for all."

"That bond is not strong, say the wise, which is made of iron or of wood or of babbaja; Stronger far is the bond of passionate devotion to jewels and rings, to sons and wives."

"That bond is indeed strong, say the wise,  
Which, although loose, drags men down, and is hard to untie;  
By cutting this bond and retiring from the world,  
Men win freedom from desire and leave behind them the pleasures of sense."  
Dhp. 345 – 346

Until we see the danger more and more, we will continue forever in the bond.

We also read in the Commentary to the Dhammapada (Book XXV, 11, Whosoever Beholds the Law, He Beholds Me), that the Elder Vakkali, was so enamoured by the Buddha's beauty that he spent all his time gazing at him. When the Buddha went to Raajagaha, he directed Vakkali to leave him, so that he would be given a shock and come to understand the Dhamma. Vakkali was so distraught that he decided to commit suicide. However, as he was about to throw himself from the top of a mountain, the Buddha, fully understanding his grief and potential wisdom appeared to him as if in person. Vakkali was heartened and then and there attained Arahatship after hearing the following verse:

"The bhikkhu who frequently feels joy and is devoted to the Teaching of the Buddha will realize Nibbana – the Tranquil, the Unconditioned, the Blissful."  
Dhp. 381

In another story (Commentary to the Dhammapada, Book XXII, 4, The Man Whom Women Loved), the Buddha certainly pointed out the dangers of strong attachments! Khema, Anaathapi.n.dika's nephew and a treasurer's son, was a handsome young man who pursued other men's wives. When he was arrested on several occasion and taken before the king, he was released due to his father's name. The father, hearing what had happened, took him to the the Buddha to listen to the Dhamma. The Buddha pointed out the evil consequences of such deeds and Khema became a sotapanna after hearing the verses below. Apparently Khema's attractiveness to women was due to the fact that in a previous existence he had, in his ignorance, made an earnest wish that all of the women who saw him might fall in love with him.

"Four misfortunes befall the heedless man who runs after other men's wives; First, he acquires demerit; secondly, he sleeps in discomfort; thirdly, he incurs blame; fourthly, he goes to Hell."  
Dhp. 309

"Acquisition of demerit, an evil future state, brief pleasure for the frightened man and woman,  
Severe punishment inflicted by the king; - therefore a man should not run after another man's wife."  
Dhp. 310

#### FIGHTING AGAINST THE WALL?

We can begin to see the sorrow that attachment brings and how it hinders the development of understanding. In Sri Lanka, Khun Sujin emphasised how there is "no development of understanding when there is attachment and that [no such development] is very dangerous." We should also begin to see the danger of subtle attachment and "one cannot see the danger of subtle attachment if one does not read, consider or listen to the Buddha's teaching; but one can see the danger of subtle attachment right now when there is understanding of this moment as it is."

She also pointed out how difficult it is for the effect of long-accumulated attachment to be eradicated. "One cannot get rid of attachment immediately, it's the function of right understanding which develops little by little. One cannot have right understanding as many times as one wants, it depends on conditions. Every moment is dhamma. Can anyone stop the arising of this moment? It goes like this, it is conditioned to be as real as this. If one does not compare moments which are kusala and moments which are akusala, there is no way to develop any bhaavanaa...it's very, very difficult."

We read in the Visuddhimagga, (Ch IX, translated by ~Naa.namoli, BPS) that it is very hard to have mettaa for a person one is attached to. We read that an Elder was asked by a friend's son: "Venerable sir, towards whom should loving kindness [mettaa] be developed?" He was told that it should be towards a person one loves. We further read:

"He loved his own wife. Through developing loving-kindness towards her he was fighting against the wall all the night. That is why it should not be developed specifically towards the opposite sex."

In a footnote it says:

"" "Fighting against the wall": having undertaken the precepts of virtue and having sat down on a seat in his room with the door locked, he was developing loving kindness. Blinded by lust arisen under cover of the loving-kindness, he wanted to go to his wife, and without noticing the door he beat on the wall in his desire to get out even by breaking the wall down.' (Pm. 286)"

We read further on (IX, 93) that "loving-kindness is characterized here as promoting the aspect of welfare. Its function is to prefer welfare. It is manifested as the removal of annoyance. Its proximate cause is seeing loveliness in beings. It succeeds when it makes ill will subside, and it fails when it produces (selfish) affection."

However, as Khun Sujin pointed out many times in the discussions, we often don't know when it is the kusala citta with mettaa and when it is attachment (or selfish affection).

Sujin: "At this moment is it attachment or mettaa? Right understanding is there at the moment of seeing whether you are attached or whether you have loving-kindness which is kusala. It's there, not in the text or in the book, but at this moment. That's why there must be awareness and right understanding because right understanding understands correctly kusala as kusala and akusala as akusala. As one sees the other being as my son, what seeing or what reality is there? My, my, my... Very difficult; don't think that it's easy at all."

Which is better, mettaa or selfish love? When there is mettaa, we are concerned for other people's welfare. Such mettaa doesn't condition dislike of the person, whereas when there is lots of attachment, there are also conditions for dislike and unpleasant feelings. As mettaa grows, we'll think more of the benefit of others, but this can only be by understanding precisely the distinction between mettaa and lobha, attachment.

#### PERIL?

We read again and again in the Buddha's teachings about the peril of sense desires. In the "Gradual Sayings" (Book of the Sixes, Ch. 111, 23, Sense Desires) it is said:

"Monks, "peril" is a name for sense-desires; "pain" is a name for sense-desires; "disease" is a name for sense-desires, "tumor"... "fetter"... "morass" is a name for sense-desires. And why, monks, is "peril" a name for sense-desires? Monks, inflamed by sensual passions and in bondage to lustful desire, neither is one free of the perils of this world, nor of the perils of the next world. Inflamed by sensual passions and in bondage to lustful desire, neither is one free of the pain, the disease, the tumor, the fetter and the morass of this world nor of the next world."

However, we should remember that our life runs according to conditions and we have no idea what will happen next. In reality there are only phenomena being experienced through the six doorways. A friend, Jonothan, pointed out that it's no use clinging to certain ideas and losing sight of the goal. Instead there can be the development of detachment and sati (awareness) at the present moment. Otherwise we might just end up attending more to a particular situation about which we have some conceptual idea without any right understanding.

#### ALONE?

Khun Sujin also reminded us to know our accumulations better from moment to moment and to be satisfied with the 'present situation' with kusala. In an ultimate sense, as we were reminded, we are all 'alone' anyway. It's dangerous to get attached to being single or any other 'situation' and putting a value judgment on it. We should remember, as Khun Sujin often points out as well, that "life is life and there are many ways of living"; and as Phra Dhammharo pointed out in Sri Lanka, "the rule is no rules".

We should be encouraged to see the value of developing more right understanding of all realities which is the only way that all attachments can be finally eradicated.

We read in the Commentary to the Dhammapada (Book V, 10, The Rape of Uppalava.n.naa), that beautiful Uppalava.n.naa, the daughter of a rich merchant, rejected all of her suitors, became a nun and attained Arahatship. She lived alone in a forest hermitage. A former suitor, after finding out the location, went to the hermitage and assaulted her. The Buddha preached to the monks on the transitoriness of sensual pleasures. Later the monks asked whether Arahats should be blamed for gratifying their passions. The Buddha admonished them and said that sexual passion no more adheres to the Arahats than a drop of water to a lotus-leaf.

"Like water on a lotus leaf, like a mustard seed on the point of a needle, he who clings not to sensual pleasures, - him I call a braahma.na." (translation by Naarada Thera)

Vaaripokkharapatt'eva  
 Aaragger'iva saasapo  
 Yo na limpati kaamesu  
 Tam aha"m bruumi braahma.na"m  
 Dhp. 401

\*\*\*\*\*