

BUDDHIST OUTLOOK ON DAILY LIFE

BY

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PREFACE

I owe very much to Thailand because this country gave me the opportunity to know Buddhism as it is lived in daily life. I am greatly impressed by the earnestness and dedication of the monks who lead a simple life, "contented with little", trying to realise the Buddhist teachings in their life. I found that many laypeople take a great interest as well in the teachings of the Buddha. They visit the temples very often and listen to the sermons for many hours. The Thais study "abhidhamma" and try to apply their knowledge in daily life, not only in Bangkok, but in the provinces as well.

This book is a compilation of eight radio talks out of a series of talks I gave for the radio station of the "Abhidhamma Foundation of Mahādhātu Vidyālaya" in Bangkok. One wanted to have a program about Buddhism in the English language as well and therefore I was asked to contribute to this program.

I am very grateful to Miss Sujin Boriharnwanaket who helped me to understand the Buddhist teachings and who showed me the way to the practice of "insight meditation" or "vipassanā" in daily life.

By means of these articles I hope to share what I learned from the teachings with other people who take an interest in the teachings. It is not enough to be interested only in the theory of Buddhism. The realisation of the

Buddhist teachings in daily life is most important. If one only learns the theory and if one does not verify in daily life what one has learnt, it is not possible to understand the meaning of what has been expounded in the teachings. Theory and practice should always be combined. For instance one cannot understand the meaning of the different degrees of attachment or "lobha" if one is not aware of the different degrees of one's own lobha. One cannot understand the "Four Noble Truths" and the "Eightfold Path" if one has not at least started with the development of "insight" or "vipassanā".

When one reads about the Buddhist teachings for the first time, one is not likely to understand them very deeply yet. With the practical application of the teachings the knowledge will grow deeper. Then one will find out that Buddhism is quite different from what one thought at first. One denotes with the name "Buddhism" the truth, contained in the teachings. However, the word "Buddhism" often creates confusion. People are inclined to think that Buddhism is a religion merely for people who are brought up in the Oriental culture. Buddhism is something else. Buddhism is studying the realities which we can experience through eyes, ears, nose, tongue, bodysense and mind. In this way we prove whether that which we experience is real or not, whether things arise because of conditions or not, whether they are impermanent or permanent. We find out whether we take things for "self" or not, and whether we are deluded in doing so or not. We find out more about

realities such as seeing, hearing, thinking, attachment and hatred. We learn to know ourselves better and we learn what it is we take for "self". In this way we know what the truth is. It does not matter which name one gives to the truth, the truth is there to be realised by everybody, each for himself.

May we all help one another to realise the truth in our daily life!

Nina van Gorkom

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GENERAL ASPECTS OF BUDDHISM

A. What led you to the study of the Buddha's teachings?

B. When I first came to Thailand I was naturally interested to know more about the Thais. I wanted to learn more about their customs and about their way of thinking. I found the study of Buddhism essential for the understanding of the Thai culture, because the spiritual background of the Thais is Buddhism.

Therefore I started to study Buddhism and the more I studied, the more my interest was growing. When one is in Thailand one should take the opportunity to study Buddhism and to understand the practice of Buddhism as well. Deep understanding will not come from books alone. Understanding is developed above all by the practice, by understanding Buddhism as it is lived in daily life!

A. Would you tell me what you mean by the practice of Buddhism in daily life?

B. One is first confronted with the practice of Buddhism when one sees different customs of the Thais, such as giving food to the monks, paying respect to the Buddha image or reciting the "precepts" on special occasions as "uposatha day".

In the beginning I thought that those customs are mixed with many things which are not essential for the practice of Buddhism. For example I did not see how

the presenting of eggs to the statue of the “Emerald Buddha” could have anything to do with the practice of Buddhism. However, even those popular beliefs can teach us something about the practice of Buddhism.

There are many levels of understanding the Buddha’s teachings. The people who present the eggs to the statue of the Buddha express their confidence in him. This is a wholesome act which will bear its fruit accordingly. However, the people who present the eggs do not realise that it is their respect to the Buddha which will bring them a good result and not the eggs presented to him. They do not clearly see which cause will bring them which result. They would have a greater benefit from their act of paying respect to the Buddha if they would do this in a more spiritual way: they could pay respect to the Buddha in abstaining from ill deeds, in serving other people, in learning more about the teachings of the Buddha and in helping other people to understand the teachings as well.

- A. Could you tell me more about the different degrees of understanding the Buddha’s teachings?
- B. As regards paying respect to the Buddha image, people who have a higher level of understanding know that the Buddha has passed away completely. However, it still makes sense to pay respect to him. When one has studied the teachings more deeply and when one has tried to verify them in daily life, one understands that it is not

important whether the Buddha will receive people's homage or not. It is the wholesome mental state of the person who pays respect to the Buddha or who offers something to him, which will bring its result accordingly. Every good action will bring a good result to the person who performed it. One reaps what one has sown.

The person who pays respect to the Buddha with the right understanding does not have a confused idea of a Buddha in heaven who could see him or hear him. The image of the Buddha reminds him of the virtues of the Buddha. He thinks of the wisdom of the Buddha who found the Path to complete freedom from sorrow all by himself, and who was able to help other people as well to find this Path. He thinks of the purity of the Buddha, of the purity in all his deeds, his speech and his thoughts. He thinks of the compassion of the Buddha, who was teaching out of compassion for everybody.

- A. What is the meaning of giving food to the monks?
- B. As regards giving food to the monks, some people doubt whether that is of any use. They are inclined to think that the monk wants to have an easy life and that he does not have to work at all. But they forget that the real meaning of being a monk is seeking the truth.

A monk's life is a hard life: he does not have a family life, he cannot choose his own food, he does not have any entertainment as movies or football matches. The monk renounces the luxurious life of home, clothing,

food and entertainment, in order to seek the truth and to help other people to find the truth as well.

When people give food to the monks the act will be fruitful for both parties. The giver will benefit from his act because he has a wholesome mental state when he is giving: when there is generosity there is no greed or attachment. The receiver will benefit from the act of the giver because he is encouraged to study and practise the Buddhist teachings more earnestly and to help other people to know the teachings as well. He knows that the food he receives puts him under the obligation to be worthy of this gift, to work for the spiritual welfare of the whole world.

The monks are continuously reminded of their responsibility of being a monk, because twice a month they recite the rules of “*pāṭimokkha*”, in which rules their obligations are summed up.

When the receiver is aware of the wholesome mental state of the giver, he will rejoice in the good deeds of the giver and thus he will have a wholesome mental state as well, he will be inspired by the generosity of the giver.

- A. Do you not find it difficult to think in terms of “mental states”? Thinking of one’s own mental state might seem an egocentric attitude.
- B. This way of thinking is very realistic, because the different mental states make us act in this or in that way. Only if we study our mental states and the many factors

· which cause them to be in this or in that way, we will be able to understand the deepest motives of our behaviour. We have to start in being aware of our own mental states. This is not egocentric, because we have to understand ourselves first, before we can understand other people.

· The study of the abhidhamma is necessary because it helps us to understand which causes bring which effects in our life and in the lives of other people. The abhidhamma is that part of the Buddhist teachings which analyses the different states of mind and which explains in detail about everything which is real.

- A. Do you find that you can verify abhidhamma in your daily life?
- B. It was a great discovery for me to find that the abhidhamma can be verified in daily life, although one can in the beginning only experience part of the realities the abhidhamma explains.

At first one might think that the abhidhamma is too subtle and one might doubt whether it is useful to study the many different degrees of ignorance and wisdom, but one learns that those different degrees each bring their result accordingly.

In studying abhidhamma one learns to understand more about other people as well. One learns that people are different because of different accumulations of experiences in the past. Because of those different accumulations people behave differently. At each moment one

accumulates new experiences, and this conditions how one will be in the future and what one will experience in the future.

When one understands more about the different accumulations of different people, one is less inclined to judge other people. When one sees someone paying respect to the Buddha with very little understanding one knows that their accumulations are thus and that they perform a wholesome act according to their ability.

- A. Do you think that a person with very little understanding can ever reach a level of higher understanding? In other words, if one's accumulations have conditioned one's character, is there anything which can be done about it? Is it possible to improve one's degree of understanding?
- B. Everything can be done about it: wisdom can be developed gradually and thus one's accumulations can be changed. Those who have a higher level of understanding can and should help other people to develop a higher degree of understanding as well.

I shall give an example. Children can become novices. They share the life of the monks in order to learn more about the Buddhist teachings and to make merit for their parents by giving them joy in their good deeds. Many people think that the person who makes merit can literally transfer his own good deeds to other people, dead or alive. This is not the right understanding. It is not

possible to transfer merit to other people, because everyone will receive the result of his own deeds. Older monks who have reached a higher level of understanding could help the novices to have more understanding about the wholesome act they are performing. If they would correctly understand the meaning of the merit they make, their renunciation would even be more fruitful. The novices are performing a very wholesome act in renouncing to be with their relatives in order to study the Buddhist teachings and to train themselves in the precepts, which are moral rules. This gives them a good spiritual foundation for their whole life. They will receive the fruit of this wholesome act themselves. The merit they make cannot automatically be transferred to other people. However, other people, no matter whether they are deceased or still alive, might have wholesome states of mind, inspired by the good deeds of someone else. Their own wholesome mental states will bring them a wholesome result. If the deceased parents are in planes of existence where they might be able to rejoice in the good deeds of their child, they will have wholesome states of mind and in this way receive the result of their own wholesome mental states. The expression "transfer of merit" is a misleading one, because it does not give us the understanding of the real cause and effect.

- A. You used the expression "mental state". Would you explain the meaning of it? I would like to ask you in general whether you find the English language ad-

equate to render the real meaning of the realities which are described in the abhidhamma?

B. The English language is not at all adequate to render the meaning of the realities which are described in the abhidhamma. The "Three Collections" of the teachings use the Pali terms, and therefore it is better to learn the Pali terms and their meaning. For instance, the word "mental state" which is a translation of the Pali term "citta", is misleading. By "state" is something implied which stays for some time, be it short or long. However, each mental state or citta falls away immediately, as soon as it has arisen, to be succeeded by the next citta. This happens more rapidly than a flash of lightning. The different cittas succeed one another so rapidly that it seems that there is only one citta. That is the reason why people take a citta for "self".

For the same reason the word "mind" gives one a wrong idea of reality. One often hears the expression "mastering one's mind", or "controlling one's mind". Many people think that the mind is something static which can be grasped in order to control it. There are many different mental states none of which can be considered as "self" or as belonging to a "self".

In the "Lesser Discourse to Saccaka" (Cūlasaccaka-sutta, Maj. Nikāya, Mahāyarnakavagga) we read that the Buddha asked Saccaka whether he could be master of his body or of his mind, just as a king rules over his subjects. The Buddha asked: "When you speak thus:

‘the body is myself’ have you power over this body of yours (and can you say) ‘let my body be thus, let my body not be thus’?” He asked the same question about the mind. Saccaka answered that it is not possible.

In daily life we can find out that this is true. If we would be master of our body we would not grow older, there would not be sickness, and we would not die. However, old age, sickness and death are unavoidable.

Neither can we be master of our mind, the mental states which arise are beyond control. Like and dislike are beyond control, they arise when there are conditions. When we eat food which is prepared to our taste, we cannot help liking it. If someone insults us we cannot help feeling aversion, we may reason later and try to understand him, but we cannot help feeling aversion at first. Like, dislike, and even reasoning about our like and dislike are not “self”, they are different mental states which arise when there are the right conditions.

We are all inclined to take mental states for “self”, for example when we like something we take the like for “self”. However the next moment there would be dislike, and we might wonder where the like which we took for “self” has gone.

It is very human to like the idea of a “self” and to hold on to it. The Buddha knew this and therefore he was after his enlightenment for a moment inclined not to teach other people the Path he had found. However,

the Buddha knew that people have different levels of understanding. We read in the Saṃyutta Nikāya (chapter VI, Brāhmasuttas) that the Buddha surveyed the world with his "Buddha-vision" and saw people with different levels of understanding, some of whom would be able to understand his teachings: "As in a pool of blue, red, or white lotuses, some are born in the water, grow in the water, do not rise out of the water, but grow submerged in it; some are born in the water, grow in the water, and reach the surface of the water; while some are born in the water, grow in the water, but stand out above the water, unstained by the water; even so surveying the world with my Buddha-vision I saw beings of little impurity who had little dust in their eyes, beings of much impurity who had much dust in their eyes, with keen or dull faculties, of good or bad conditions, easy or hard to teach, and some too I saw who perceived the dangers and faults affecting a future life." Therefore the Buddha decided to make the Path known which he had discovered.

A. People have different accumulations. They are conditioned in many ways. We have been using the word "condition" several times already. Could you explain the meaning of this term?

B. I will give an example from daily life. My husband comes home from his office, feeling tired and somewhat irritated. I tell him something amusing which has happened and he can laugh and feel happy again. Thus

one can notice that there are different cittas, and that each citta has its own conditions. The amount of work at the office is a condition for my husband's tiredness and irritation. Afterwards there is another condition which makes him feel happy again.

Cittas are conditioned and each citta accumulates a new experience, which will condition cittas in the future. Everybody accumulates different tastes, abilities, likes and dislikes. One cannot always know the conditions which make people behave in this or in that way, but sometimes it is possible to know. For instance people are addicted to different things, some of which are very dangerous and some not too dangerous. One's education and the surroundings in which one is living can be a condition for those addictions. In some countries or regions it is the custom to drink an enormous amount of coffee the whole day, and people even give coffee to very small children. Thus one acquires the taste for coffee from one's youth. As regards attachment to alcoholic drinks, there must be a condition for that as well. One starts with a little drink every day, and gradually one's attachment increases.

Everybody should find out for himself how much attachment he accumulates, and whether this brings him happiness or sorrow.

A. There is not anything which one can control. Even each citta which arises because of conditions, falls away immediately, to be succeeded by the next citta. It seems

as if the situation is hopeless. Could you tell me whether something can be done to walk the right way in life?

B. The situation is not hopeless. Wisdom, the understanding of reality, can condition one to have more wholesome mental states and to do good deeds.

There is no "self" which can suppress our bad inclinations, there is no "self" which can force us to do good deeds. Everybody can verify this in daily life. For example, if we tell ourselves: "today I will be very kind to everybody", can we prevent ourselves from suddenly saying an unkind word? Most of the time it has happened before we realise it.

If we are able to suppress our anger for a while we are inclined to think that there is a "self" which can suppress anger. In reality there are at that moment cittas which are not conditioned by anger, but which arise from other conditions. Afterwards there will be anger again because anger is not really eradicated by suppressing. Only wisdom, seeing things as they are, can very gradually eradicate everything which is unwholesome in us.

We can develop this wisdom step by step. Even wisdom is not "self", it can only arise when there are the right conditions. We can develop wisdom in knowing and experiencing all mental phenomena and physical phenomena in and around ourselves. When we have experienced that none of those mental and physical phenomena stays or is permanent, we understand that we cannot take any phenomenon for "self".

The Buddha explained to his disciples that just “comprehending”, seeing things as they are, will eradicate unwholesomeness. In the “*Indriyabhāvanāsutta*” (Maj. Nikāya, Saḷāyatanaṭṭakavagga) the Buddha says to Ānanda that when the “bhikkhu”, the monk who is still learning to develop wisdom, notices that he has unwholesome cittas, he is “troubled about it, ashamed of it, loathes it.” The “ariyan saint” whose wisdom is developed just “comprehends”. He knows that there is no “self”, and that everything arises because of conditions. Thus he is not troubled, he is only aware of the present moment.

The word “comprehending” is used in the suttas many times. Thus we can see that we do not have to perform extraordinary deeds, we should only learn to be aware of the present moment in order to see things as they are. Of course wisdom cannot be fully developed in one day. For a long time we have been used to the idea of “self”. In conventional language we have to use the words “I” and “self” continuously to make ourselves understood.

- A. Thus wisdom is wholesome. Not understanding things as they are is unwholesome and it will bring us unhappiness. Do you find that you can prove this from daily life?
- B. Yes, I will give an example. We are inclined to take our body for “self” continuously, although we know that it does not last. Thus, when we suffer from sickness or pain, or when we become old, we attach so much

importance to those facts that we feel quite oppressed by them. If one of our sense organs does not function or if we become an invalid, we feel as if we are the most unhappy person in the world. Attachment to our body only brings sorrow. Whereas if we would see things as they are, there would be less sorrow for us.

If one wants to see the body as it really is, one should distinguish the body from mentality. It is true that in this world body and mentality condition one another. However one should know the different characteristics of each, so that one will experience them as they are.

The same elements which constitute dead matter constitute the body as well. Both dead matter and the body are constituted by the earth-element or solidity, the element of water or cohesion, the element of fire or temperature and the element of wind or motion. One is inclined to think: "Is there not a soul which makes the body alive and is therefore the body not different from dead matter?" There is not a soul, there are only physical phenomena and mental phenomena which arise and fall away all the time. We are not used to distinguish the body from the mind and to analyse what they really are. However, this is necessary if we want to know reality.

The body itself does not know anything, in this respect it is the same as dead matter. If we can see that the body is only a composition of physical phenomena which arise and fall away completely, and not "self",

and that the mind is a series of mental phenomena which arise and fall away and not "self", the veil of ignorance will fall from our eyes.

One could try to develop this understanding and see for oneself what the result is. One could find out whether this understanding brings one more freedom from attachment. Attachment brings sorrow.

The Buddha taught people to see things as they are. One does not have to fast or to be an ascetic. It is one's duty to look after one's body and to feed it. The Buddha taught the "Middle Way": one does not have to force oneself to difficult practices, but on the other hand one should learn to be detached from the things in and around oneself. Just understanding, seeing things as they are, that is the "Middle Way".

A. Just seeing things as they are, that is the practice of vipassanā. Most people think that it is a complicated form of meditation which one can only learn in a meditation center. That is the reason why most people will not even try it. But from our conversation it appears that vipassanā is only seeing the things of our daily life as they are. Do you find that one has to have much theoretical knowledge before one starts the practice of vipassanā?

B. The word "meditation" frightens many people, they think that it must be very complicated. But in reality one does not have to do anything special. Before one

starts one needs some theoretical knowledge. One does not have to know about physical and mental elements in detail, one only has to know that the body is constituted by physical elements and that the body is different from mental elements. There are many different physical elements and those elements change continuously. There are many different mental elements: one citta arises and falls away, then the next citta arises and falls away. Cittas arise and fall away successively, one at a time. Seeing is one citta, hearing is another citta, thinking is again another citta, they are different cittas.

Developing vipassanā does not mean that one has to be aware of all those different elements at each moment, that would not be possible. One can perform all the activities of one's daily life, one does not have to do anything special. One gradually begins to understand that there are only physical phenomena and mental phenomena and one begins to be aware of those phenomena quite naturally, without having to force oneself, because there are mental phenomena and physical phenomena all the time.

When one understands how important it is to be aware of those phenomena in order to know them, the awareness will arise by itself little by little. One will experience that awareness will arise when there are the right conditions. It does not matter if there is not a great deal of awareness in the beginning, it is important to

understand that also awareness is not "self", but a mental phenomenon which arises when there are the right conditions. One cannot force awareness to arise.

In understanding more about physical phenomena and mental phenomena and in being aware of them in daily life one's wisdom will develop. Thus there will be more wholesomeness and less unwholesomeness.

- A. Do you find that awareness in this way brings you happiness?
- B. When there is understanding of what things really are, there will be more wholesomeness in one's life. There will be less the conception of "self" when one performs good deeds, and thus good deeds will be purer. One does not refrain from evil things because one has to follow certain rules, but because one understands more which causes bring which effects, there is more understanding of what things are.

The right understanding of what things are will very gradually eradicate unwholesomeness. When there is less unwholesomeness there will be more happiness in life.

Everybody should verify this for himself!

RIGHT UNDERSTANDING IN DAILY LIFE

What is the effect of the Buddha's teachings on people's actions, in which way could the Buddha's teachings effectively help people to perform wholesome deeds? Is it possible to do good deeds because a person with authority tells us: "Be detached and do good deeds."?

From experience we know that a good example might help to some extent, but the source of the good deeds is within ourselves: our mentality determines our actions. If someone wants to do his utmost to help other people he should understand himself first, he should understand the causes which make him act in this way or in that way. If he develops the right understanding of those causes he will be able to lead a more wholesome life and to help other people in the most effective way.

Mentality is the source from which the deeds spring; it is therefore not possible to determine the degree of wholesomeness from the outward appearance of the deeds alone. There are many gradations of wholesomeness depending on the mentality which motivates the good deeds.

Some people give money to needy people, but there may still be conceit or other selfish motives. Others give without conceit, but they may have attachment: they give only to people they like. There are people who give out of pure loving kindness, without any thought of attachment. This way of giving has a higher degree of wholesomeness.

We may wonder whether the study of so many details is necessary. In daily life we will see that it is very helpful to know the different kinds of citta and to know which citta motivates which kind of action. When we are able to know the different kinds of citta which succeed one another very rapidly we will see that even while we are performing a wholesome deed, the unwholesome citta can succeed the wholesome citta very closely.

“Wholesome” is the translation of the Pali-term “kusalā”. A wholesome deed in its widest sense means a deed which brings no harm to oneself or to other people at the moment the deed is done or later on.

In the “Discourse on the Foreign Cloth” (Bāhitikasutta, Maj. Nikāya, Rājavagga) we read about wholesome deeds, wholesome speech and wholesome thoughts. King Pasenadi asks Ānanda what is wholesome or “skilled” bodily conduct:

“But what, revered sir, is skilled bodily conduct?”

“Whatever the bodily conduct, sire, that has no blemish.”

“But what, revered sir, is the bodily conduct that has no blemish?”

“Whatever the bodily conduct, sire, that is non-injurious.”

“And what, revered sir, is the bodily conduct that is joyous in result?”

“Whatever bodily conduct, sire, does not conduce to the torment of self and does not conduce to the torment of others and does not conduce to the torment of both.”

The same is said about wholesome speech and wholesome thoughts. These words render the meaning of wholesome or “kusala” in its widest sense. However there are many intensities of kusala. There are higher degrees of wholesomeness than just abstaining from ill deeds which will harm oneself and others. In developing “Right Understanding” or wisdom one can cultivate more wholesomeness.

“Wisdom” is a translation of the Pali-term “paññā”. Paññā does not only mean knowledge acquired by the study of books, paññā is insight into the realities of daily life as well. Paññā can be developed in daily life. The degree of wholesomeness depends on the degree of paññā which accompanies the wholesome citta. There are many levels of paññā, and each degree brings its result accordingly.

It is a typical Buddhist approach to life to study and to be aware of the different mental and physical phenomena which one can experience through eyes, ears, nose, tongue, bodysense and mind. If one is not used to this approach one might feel somewhat bewildered at first. After one has studied more the mental and physical phenomena one will find out that this is the only way to understand how oneself and other people behave in this or in that way and which

causes bring which effects in life. It makes no sense to speak in vague, general terms about realities, because the real understanding of our experiences in life can in that way never be developed.

Someone told me about a monk who is preaching in a way which is very helpful for daily life. When I asked what the monk was speaking about, the answer was that he was speaking about "citcai". "Citcai" is the word in Thai for "state of mind", in Pali "citta". The monk had an approach to life which was very right. One should follow the example of the Buddha: one should not only tell people to do good deeds, but one should teach them as well how to do good deeds. In order to know how to do good deeds one should go back to the source of the good deeds: the mental states or "cittas". It is to be preferred to use the Pali-term "citta". Translations from the Pali do not render the meaning of the terms correctly. For example the English translation of "citta": "state of mind" or "mental state", implies something which stays, which does not change. However this is not the characteristic of citta. When one has learned more about "cittas", one will find out that there is no citta which stays for a second. Each citta which arises falls away immediately, to be succeeded by the next citta. Cittas determine one's own life and the life of other people; they condition the actions one performs in life.

Many people are not used to this approach, they are used to look at the outward appearance of things. Scientists are very advanced in the study of outer space, but little is

known about what goes on inwardly in man. People are used to pay attention to the things they see and hear, but they are not used to attend to seeing-consciousness and to hearing-consciousness. They do not think of the cittas which perform the functions of seeing and hearing.

Seeing-consciousness and hearing-consciousness are realities as well and it is therefore important to know more about those realities. That part of the Buddhist Scriptures which analyses and explains mental phenomena and physical phenomena in detail, is called the abhidhamma. The abhidhamma speaks about everything which is real. The abhidhamma can change one's life.

Many Thais listen to lectures about abhidhamma, not only those who were educated at a college or at the university, but those who did not receive a higher education as well. I heard of cases in which the study of different cittas helped people to lead a more wholesome life. I heard of someone who was first inclined to have feelings of revenge towards other people, and who gradually was able to overcome those feelings, in understanding what those feelings were. Many Thais know about the realities which are taught in the abhidhamma, and they know how to apply their knowledge in daily life. Foreigners usually do not hear about this, because nobody speaks about abhidhamma to foreigners.

Unwholesome mental states or "akusala cittas" and wholesome mental states or "kusala cittas" are realities of daily life. In order to know more about those realities one

should try to understand oneself first. If one does not understand oneself one cannot help other people. This does not mean that we have to wait our whole life before we can start helping other people. Even those who just begin to understand things as they are, can help other people to have right understanding as well.

Paññā is the opposite of ignorance, which is the root of all defilements and sorrow. Paññā is important for the development of kusala cittas. It is possible to do good deeds without paññā, but if one wants to make progress in wholesomeness, paññā should be developed. In understanding what is unwholesome and what is wholesome, and in understanding what is the result of unwholesome and of wholesome deeds, people will be able to lead a more wholesome life.

There are many degrees of paññā. When a teacher explains to his pupils that wholesome cittas with gratitude or honesty will bring a wholesome result, and that unwholesome deeds motivated by greed or anger will bring an unwholesome result, the explanation may be the condition for them to have some degree of paññā. With paññā they may be able to cultivate kusala cittas and to perform more wholesome deeds.

There is a higher degree of paññā when people realise the impermanency of all things they enjoy in life. When people see how short human life is, they will try not to be attached too much to the pleasant things of life. This

understanding will stimulate them to a greater generosity and to more readiness to help other people. They will be less selfish.

Some people who have this degree of *paññā* might change their way of life and live contentedly without any luxury. Others might decide "to go forth from home into homelessness", they might decide to become a monk. A monk's life is not an easy life, a monk is living without a family, he is "one who is contented with little". In the "Discourse on the Sixfold Cleansing" (*Chabbisodhanasutta*, *Maj. Nikāya*, *Anupadavagga*) we read about a monk who speaks about his renouncement of the world: "after a time, getting rid of my wealth, whether small or great, getting rid of my circle of relations, whether small or great, having cut off my hair and beard, having put on saffron robes, went forth from home into homelessness."

The Buddha explained that people are too much attached to the sense-impressions, received through eyes, ears, nose, tongue and body. He speaks about the "five strands of sense-pleasure". We read in the "Discourse with Subha" (*Subhasutta*, *Maj. Nikāya*, *Brāhmaṇavagga*) that the Buddha speaks with Subha about the five strands of sense-pleasure: "These five, brahman youth, are the strands of pleasures of the senses: what five? Material shapes cognisable by the eye, agreeable, pleasant, liked, enticing, connected with sense-pleasures, alluring. Sounds cognisable by the ear.....Smells cognisable by the nose.....

The Eightfold Path leads to nibhāna. Nibbāna is the end of all defilements. It can be realised here and now, in this life. When paññā has not yet reached the degree necessary for the realisation of nibhāna, it is still “mundane” or “lokiya paññā”. When paññā is so much developed that one can realise nibhāna it is “super-mundane” or “lokut-tarā paññā”.

When one has realised nibhāna one understands what it means to be “awakened to the truth”.

we will receive in the future. If we understand more about vipāka which is the result of our own deeds, it will help us to cope with the unpleasant results in our life. We will not blame other people for unpleasant vipāka we receive, because kamma is the real cause of vipāka. We will give in less to our feelings at the moment of vipāka when we know the different cittas which arise at different moments.

Indeed, the Buddha showed his great compassion in teaching people to understand reality, in teaching them dhamma!

kindness and compassion, they could develop wholesomeness in this way.

Paññā conditions one to perform kusala kamma, no matter what one's duties are. Wholesomeness can be developed at any time we are with other people, when we talk to them or listen to them.

Helping other people with kind words and deeds alone is not enough. When it is the right moment one could help others in a deeper and more effective way, which is helping them to understand who they are, why they are in this world and what is the aim of their life in this world. This way of helping is included in bhāvanā or mental development.
