

**Edited transcript of an informal discussion that took place between Ajahn Sujin Boriharnwanaket and Ven Bhikkhu Bodhi at the Mahabodhi Vihara, Bodh Gaya, India, on 18th January 2019**

[Notes:

1. *Achan Sujin is Thai and is President of the [Dhamma Study and Support Foundation](#) in Bangkok, Thailand.*
2. *Ven Bodhi is an American Bhikkhu ordained in the Theravada tradition. He is the President of the [Buddhist Association of the United States](#). He lives and teaches at Chuang Yen Monastery, Carmel, New York.*
3. *This transcript was prepared by members of the [Dhamma Study Group](#), an internet discussion forum.*
4. *A copy of the audio recording of the discussion can be found [here](#).]*

**Ajahn Sujin:** Is there anything you'd like to talk about? Abhidhamma, or realities ... ?

**Bhikkhu Bodhi:** You just continue with what you were saying before.

**Ajahn Sujin:** At the Foundation when people come to listen to the teachings, we stress realities right now, because what is real must be at this moment. The past moment has gone and the future one hasn't come yet. If there is no understanding of the truth of whatever appears, it's not ariya sacca. That which appears has to arise by conditions, and as soon as it has arisen, it falls away, in split-seconds. So actually, in saṃsāra from nothing there is something and then nothing. What just appeared is gone, never to return at all. So the moment that can be understood must be this very moment.

Realities are very, very different from each other. For example, seeing performs the function of seeing. It cannot do anything else at all. No one can make it change its function. And seeing is different from hearing. They cannot arise together at all, they arise by different conditions. Seeing arises and falls away, and there are many cittas in between each moment of seeing (as we learn when we study *vīthi citta*<sup>1</sup>). And similarly hearing arises and falls away with many cittas in between. It seems like they arise together, simultaneously, but actually that's impossible.

In saṃsāra, we live in the world of *saññā* (memory) - just thinking about that which is seen, but not knowing it as it is. The visible object (a *rūpa*), also arises and falls away in split-seconds. It seems like there are so many things around now, but each one has to be conditioned to arise and fall away. So when we think about "the world of nothing", that can lead to detachment - because what we like cannot stay at all; it's gone, all the time, unknowingly. We live in a world of *moha*<sup>2</sup> and *saññā*<sup>3</sup>, and all *nimitta*<sup>4</sup>.

I think the teachings are very deep and we have to study just one word at a time. It's not like we've heard the teachings and have understood everything. That's impossible, because they're so very deep. For example the newcomers at the Foundation have no idea about the anattanness of seeing, hearing and thinking. From birth until then, at the Foundation, there has been the idea of "I" all the time. What can eradicate the *anusaya* (latent tendency) of unwholesomeness? Even in a dream, or any moment of *citta*, *anusayas* are there as the source or germ for *akusala*. While one is asleep there is the idea of self as *anusaya* (latent tendency), and also as soon as there is a moment of seeing.

Seeing is not that which is seen. Seeing arises at the eye-base (a very special *rūpa* which can be the base for the arising of *citta*). When we talk by way of *vatthu* (base), there are six: the eye-base, ear-base, nose-base, tongue-base, body-base, and heart-base, *hadaya-vatthu*. By way of *dvāra*, there are

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<sup>1</sup> *Vīthi citta*, process of *cittas* (moments of consciousness). Discussed later in this section.

<sup>2</sup> *Moha*, ignorance, a *cetasika* (mental factor) that accompanies each *akusala* (unwholesome) *citta*.

<sup>3</sup> *Saññā*, memory, a *cetasika* that accompanies each *citta*. It remembers and marks the object that is experienced.

<sup>4</sup> *Nimitta*, the sign by which *dhammas* (realities) is known or experienced. Discussed later in this section.

also six, but different in meaning: vatthu is the "place of origin" for citta's arising. Dvāra is just the doorway - not only for seeing but also other cittas which arise before and after seeing, until the rūpa is gone and is no more.

That which is heard is true, because it is the word of the Buddha. It depends on pariyatti<sup>5</sup> being very skilful in understanding the conformity of the different words by way of dhātu, by way of ariya sacca, by way of āyatana. But it must be now. Even paṭiccasamuppāda is now.

If we study the teachings as a scholar, Pali expert or translator, that's not the right way. Because the Buddha taught that what appears now can be known as it is. And he asked the persons who came to see him, "Is seeing permanent?" At that moment, the person who had accumulated enough right understanding could understand seeing right then. And the moment of direct awareness is satipaṭṭhāna. That's different from those who just came to listen, and who thought on their own about this and that.

The best way is to study, respectfully, one word at a time and see how it conforms with the other words that he spoke all the time for forty-five years.

**Bhikkhu Bodhi:** But we see in the suttas (the discourses) that the Buddha teaches a graduated training. He doesn't begin immediately by asking people to contemplate what is occurring in their immediate experience, but first they have to lay a secure foundation of sīla – of moral discipline, moral conduct.

**Ajahn Sujin:** Yes, but take just the word 'sīla'. People understand sīla to be the behaviour of speech and deeds. But actually in the Tipiṭaka itself, in the Paṭisambhidāmagga, what is sīla? A rūpa cannot do anything, so there's no sīla for rūpas at all. Sīla must be for citta and cetasika only. It means the behaviour of citta and cetasikas – by way of akusala sīla when akusala citta arises, kusala sīla when kusala citta arises, and abyākata<sup>6</sup> sīla for the arahatta. Seeing cannot do anything – it just arises to see. But the javana cittas, which are conditioned by many cetasikas, can be wholesome or unwholesome, and only the unwholesome citta is akusala sīla. People think about the five sīla, or the eight or ten sīla<sup>7</sup>, but actually sīla is the behaviour of citta and cetasikas only.

The Buddha taught from his great understanding, and we just learn to try to understand his words. If we don't consider carefully, we might go wrong. If it's not understanding of *this moment*, what else can be understood? Everything other than this moment is gone. Without understanding, there's only thinking about things that have gone already. And if pariyatti is not firm enough, if it's not sacca ñāṇa<sup>8</sup> yet, there cannot be conditions for paṭipatti. Paṭipatti is direct awareness *with* understanding, happening very naturally.

The teachings are about the path to the eradication of atta, so the path has to begin with understanding anattā-ness, and it has to be the understanding of anattā-ness all the way, *all* the way. And that understanding has to be very natural, just as natural as now. Right now, nobody thinks about seeing while there is seeing, it's so common. And at the moment of hearing, they have no idea about what hearing is at that moment. By carefully thinking about it, however, it can be seen that if there's nothing arising at all, there's no world, that would not be possible; but as soon as a reality arises, the world is there. Anything lokiya<sup>9</sup> is worldly because it is conditioned to arise and fall away; different from what is lokuttara.

<sup>5</sup> **Pariyatti**, the right intellectual understanding of realities which leads to paṭipatti, the direct understanding of them and paṭivedha, the direct realization of the truths.

<sup>6</sup> **Abyākata**, any realities which are not kusala or akusala. The arahat has kiriya cittas which cannot produce results of kamma, instead of kusala cittas.

<sup>7</sup> The five, eight or ten sīla are the precepts or rules of training taken up respectively by lay followers, anagarikas and novice monks.

<sup>8</sup> **Sacca ñāṇa**, the very firm intellectual understanding of the Four Noble Truths; this leads to kicca ñāṇa, the direct understanding of the Truths which is paṭipatti and eventually kata ñāṇa, the understanding of the Truths which have been realized by insight and enlightenment.

<sup>9</sup> **Lokiya**, mundane or worldly. "It is disintegrating (lujjati), bhikkhu, therefore it is called the world (loko.)" (SN 35:82, Lokapañhāsutta). **Lokuttara** is supramundane. Nibbāna is the lokuttara dhamma which does not arise and fall away.

Many things are now appearing, so there must be many, many conditions for everything to arise and fall away in split-seconds. What is left is just the sign or nimitta of everything: the sign of rūpa, the sign of vedanā, the sign of saññā, the sign of sañkhāra and the sign of viññāṇa. It's impossible to directly experience just one citta at a time; no matter what, it appears as nimitta. For example, unpleasant feeling is conditioned to arise and it grows, so it appears. How could there be the precise experiencing of just one moment of feeling at a time?

Also, according to the teaching on *vīthi cittas*<sup>10</sup>, many, many cittas arise as bhavaṅga and then, before seeing, there is only one moment of citta, the pañca-dvāra-āvajjana citta. Pañca-dvāra-āvajjana citta cannot see; only seeing itself can see. But the rūpa, the visible object, is there<sup>11</sup>. After seeing consciousness there are only three more moments of citta and then the āsava<sup>12</sup> are there. Who knows that? The āsava are not like nivāraṇa<sup>13</sup> or kilesa; they're so very, very, very subtle. Like now, we are talking, thinking, considering dhamma, *among akusala*, the akusala that is arising after seeing and hearing all the time.

It's a long, long, way to understanding truly, exactly, one dhamma at a time what this moment is. When we think about the world we think of many things, but without one entity there cannot be anything right now. What we take for "something" must be arising together with many, many other things (like the four primary rūpas). At the moment of hearing, who knows that although only sound is heard, the sound arises in a kalāpa of nine rūpas (when the sound is not conditioned by citta)?

This life is not enough to fully understand the teachings, but when understanding is firmly cultivated it can grow, little by little. And paññā knows how weak or strong it is. But when it's not paññā we have to ask the other: "How much understanding do I have?" or something like that, which is not right. Paññā itself knows. Another person cannot know. No-one can know, only paññā can know.

The best thing in life is right understanding of the teachings of the Buddha. Whatever the question, the answer is there, in the Tipiṭaka. People misunderstand words like 'pariyatti'. They think that simply knowing about nāma-rūpa can condition paṭipatti, but it's not like that. Pariyatti is the very skilful and confident knowing of realities. If it's not about realities, it's useless to learn the Tipiṭaka. Each word of the Buddha represents reality right now. Like hardness. No one thinks about it, but it's just the element which can be touched, and it's not-self. And as soon as it has arisen, it falls away. But it seems like it's there all the time, lasting many, many moments. And this is only one doorway. What about seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching and thinking?

The world is in darkness until the words of the Buddha open up the truth of that which is now: only citta, cetasika and rūpa. There is no-one there, no things there. So live with the understanding of the Buddha. Some people who do not understand the teachings look for the truth, but they don't know that the truth is now and here. People just think about doing something. For the word 'bhāvanā' in Pali, they use the word 'meditation'. But bhāvanā is the cultivation of right understanding, from moment to moment, by right understanding itself.

The other cetasikas cannot perform the function of paññā - only paññā which has previously arisen and is there, accumulated, able to condition right understanding with right awareness of *one reality at a time* only. At such moments the conceptual world disappears, completely, there is only the reality which experiences and the reality which is experienced. The first vipassanā ñāṇa<sup>14</sup> is nāma-rūpa-pariccheda-ñāṇa, knowing the distinction between nāma and rūpa, no idea of a person. But that is not

<sup>10</sup> The *vīthi cittas* are the process of cittas which experience a sense object through one of the sense doors or and object through the mind door after the bhavaṅga (life-continuum citta) have been interrupted. The pañca-dvāra-āvajjana citta is the sense-door advertent consciousness which adverts to the sense object before seeing consciousness sees it.

<sup>11</sup> Each rūpa lasts for as long as seventeen cittas.

<sup>12</sup> *Āsavā*, taints or intoxicants, the subtle kind of defilements. Here referring to their occurrence with the akusala (unwholesome) moments of consciousness which usually follow.

<sup>13</sup> *Nivaraṇa*, the five hindrances, relatively gross defilements which are more readily apparent

<sup>14</sup> *Vipassanā ñāṇa*, the first of the sixteen insight knowledges. More detail can be found in "A Survey of Paramattha Dhammas" by Sujin Boriharnwanaket.

enough yet because the idea of self is so very deeply rooted. It takes a long, long time - aeons and aeons. And one has to be so truthful according to the ten pāramī, including sacca pāramī, adhiṭṭhāna pāramī and viriya pāramī<sup>15</sup>. When people read the Tipiṭaka without careful consideration, they take the word "viriya" to mean "I will try very hard to get it", but that's impossible, because it's the idea of self added in, not just then but on and on and on and on.

**Bhikkhu Bodhi:** But of course, at the outset people will practise rooted in the idea of the self attaining something. But it's when the practice advances that then the idea of self will gradually become diminished. But it's quite natural for people to think within the conventional terms of "I" and "my attainment".

**Ajahn Sujin:** Even that has to be known by paññā. Otherwise the five khandhas – rūpa khandha, vedanā khandha, saññā khandha, saṅkhāra khandha, viññāṇa khandha – cannot be known. We usually, in a day, do not see the lobha and moha because seeing is not known, hearing is not known, thinking is not known. Everything is not known.

Even at the pariyatti level, one has to be very careful – like with the word "practice." It's not the self doing something, but it's when the accumulated understanding conditions a moment of understanding reality. For example, no one can escape from hardness, it's there all the time, from the moment one wakes up. But at the moment of touching, there is no understanding, even though that world is there. No other world is there at that moment, only that one world of touching and hardness is there to be known. Whatever is the object of citta should be known, naturally.

It's so very, very difficult to eliminate the idea of self, because it's always there and it always comes in, trying to concentrate, trying to catch, trying to know. But paññā knows that's wrong. Paññā grows step by step, little by little, detaching from clinging with the wrong idea of self.

For example, right now seeing is not known as that which experiences visible object, and this hinders the understanding of the next reality; because that seeing is instantly taken as "something", until it is known as just seeing and that which is seen. It gradually begins to be understood in daily life, by conditions, starting from pariyatti. If pariyatti is not enough yet, it cannot condition the letting go of anything in daily life. It has to be in daily life and it has to be daily life understanding, because that's how paññā works its way.

The word "practice" can be misunderstood. No-one is practising. Paññā knows the characteristic which appears, knows it as it is. Hearing now is not sound. And it's not understanding the meaning of the sound—that has to be a different moment from the hearing. Understanding has to be very natural. Just like we may not want to hear a sound, but hearing hears it. Or we may not want lobha to arise or dosa to arise, but it's there. Any moment can be understood, but only by paññā.

**Bhikkhu Bodhi:** But there are specific methods of training to reduce the impact of lobha and dosa. The Buddha, in the suttas teaches very much like a skilful physician prescribing the right medicine to address the particular illnesses of the mind.

**Ajahn Sujin:** Yes, and the skilfulness is paññā.

**Bhikkhu Bodhi:** Yes, but not all the methods that the Buddha teaches in the suttas are directly aimed at the strengthening of paññā, in the sense of understanding ultimate realities. For example, for reducing lobha, especially in the form of kāma rāga (sensual desire), the Buddha teaches the meditation on the impure nature of the body.

**Ajahn Sujin:** But without understanding it as not-self, it's the self who's trying to have less.

**Bhikkhu Bodhi:** Yes, well that kind of conceptual understanding of not-self will be in the background of

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<sup>15</sup> *Sacca, adhiṭṭhāna and viriya pāramī*, truthfulness, determination and energy, three of the ten paramis or perfections of the Buddhist path.

somebody who has learned the dhamma properly. But if a meditator has a particular problem with sensual desire, then they would use, not the method of noting what's occurring exactly in the present, but they would use the method of contemplating the unattractive nature of the body.

**Ajahn Sujin:** But if there's no understanding of conditioned reality as not-self, one thinks that one knows. One likes, one dislikes, one 'understands'; it's always "I" who knows. Even at the moment of trying to think in the right way, lobha is there. That's why before paññā can develop on and on and on until the lokuttara citta arises, there's not only one vipassanā ñāṇa but many, one is not enough.

In Thailand (and I think all around the world) there are meditation centres, but in the Tipiṭaka there are no meditation centres. And people select for themselves the subject or object to meditate on. That cannot be the moment of understanding anatta, because it's 'I' who heard about this, 'I' who selected this, 'I' who just wants to know *only* this.

**Bhikkhu Bodhi:** I think the idea of meditation centres is a pretty recent development, maybe beginning in the nineteenth century. In earlier times, people who wanted to do intensive meditation usually would become monastics. Or else lay people who wanted to do intensive meditation would go to the monastery and the monasteries would have facilities for lay people to stay, to do the meditation.

**Ajahn Sujin:** Can anyone do "intensive meditation" without paññā itself having developed little by little from hearing the Teachings? There is not just suta-maya paññā<sup>16</sup>, there is cīnta-maya paññā also. In the Maṅgala Sutta<sup>17</sup> it's said that to listen to the teachings is a maṅgala and to discuss the teachings is also a maṅgala. That shows how difficult, how subtle it is. If there is no paññā it's impossible to understand what is that which is not self which sees and hears naturally. The words of the Buddha can help people understand what's right and what's wrong. Otherwise one has one's own idea that "this is right", and one tries to do that.

**Bhikkhu Bodhi:** Of course, one has to always check one's understanding against, I would say, the suttas, and if one has the fortune to meet competent teachers then to check one's understanding against that of competent teachers who could correct misunderstandings. That's the value the Buddha places on kalyāṇa mitta, having a good spiritual friend.

**Ajahn Sujin:** And the best kalyāṇa mitta is the Buddha, so his words are the best kalyāṇa mitta.

If one thinks carefully, one can understand the way, the path, leading to letting go. Otherwise one 'does something' with the idea of self all the time. And that is wrong, because that person turns away from the teachings, in this life and on and on in other lives as well. Reading is not enough, studying is not enough, and considering is not enough for right awareness to arise. But when awareness does arise, one knows it arose from hearing, from thinking, from considering and from understanding, better and better. It has to begin from now.

**Bhikkhu Bodhi:** Yes, but I think if one looks at the structure of, say, the satipaṭṭhāna system taught by the Buddha, that the Buddha begins – very, very skilfully – the system of satipaṭṭhāna with kāya anupassanā, with the contemplation of the body, with methods of meditation that take the relatively gross object of the body as a way, first and initially, to stabilize the mind. And then one has the contemplation of dhammas. Particularly, contemplation of the eye and forms, the ear and sounds, seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, comes only in the fourth satipaṭṭhāna, the fourth foundation of mindfulness.

So we can see that there's a gradual progression through the foundations of mindfulness. So one wouldn't start the practice of satipaṭṭhāna by noting seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching and their respective objects, but one first has to be able – and this is my own experience – to stabilize the

<sup>16</sup> *Sutamaya paññā*, understanding based on hearing, *cintāmayā paññā*, understanding based on considering, and *bhāvanāmayā paññā*, understanding based on mental development.

<sup>17</sup> *Mangala* is a great blessing. This sutta lists thirty-eight great blessings (Sn 2.4, Khp 5)

mind with some form of meditation, some form of practice that's based on the body.

**Ajahn Sujin:** And that's the idea of self.

**Bhikkhu Bodhi:** I don't think so. Not necessarily.

**Ajahn Sujin:** If we keep going on the right track, on the right way of anatta, there's no idea of "I will select or try to have such-and-such as object".

Understanding has to be conditioned spontaneously, unexpectedly. Like when Sāriputta first met Assaji, he had no idea that he would be there listening to such-and-such words and would then become enlightened. It happened unexpectedly, by conditions. Or Aṅgulimāla; who would have thought that he would become an arahatta? Understanding has to happen so very naturally and unexpectedly, by way of anattanness.

People hear the word sammā-sati or satipaṭṭhāna, and they just want to do something. They don't want to understand what sammā-sati is or how it can be satipaṭṭhāna. There are so many "views" around, the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind. Who can select a citta and get sati to arise and be aware? Sati is conditioned – as soon as it arises it is aware instantly of the object, by itself. It cannot be told to be aware of this or to be aware of that.

And lobha is so very crafty. It can lead to any slip of understanding. *Silabbata-parāmāsa*<sup>18</sup> can be eradicated only by sotāpatti magga citta. Leading up to that, paññā knows and paññā lets go, knows and lets go, all the way. Otherwise, lobha is there.

When people hear the teachings lobha is there, just wanting to be enlightened. There's no thinking that it's a long way to understanding, naturally, seeing right now, hearing right now.

**Bhikkhu Bodhi:** Yes. Of course attainment is not a matter of personal ambition. But my point is that one has to make a determination to practise the teaching and then one has to go through the progressive stages of the teaching until the conditions are established for being able to contemplate, in a selfless manner, the occurrence of phenomena at successive moments.

**Ajahn Sujin:** It's difficult to see that lobha is there, in the idea of "I'd like to intensely follow the teachings". Understanding what appears now is much different from that.

**Bhikkhu Bodhi:** Yes, but say I'm living in the United States. I hear about Buddhism. I decide I want to become a Buddhist monk. So then I decide to go to Asia. If I were to think that the essence of Buddhism is just understanding what's occurring right now, I never would have left the United States to go to Asia to become a monk. I would've just stayed at my house in the United States observing what's arising, and hearing, seeing, smelling, tasting, touching.

**Ajahn Sujin:** Being a monk is not for everyone. Even laypeople such as Anāthapiṇḍika and Visakha Mahā Upāsikā attained enlightenment, by their own accumulations, by conditions. People should learn to understand the teachings very well, and to understand their own accumulations – whether they would be able to follow the teachings and follow the Vinaya perfectly.

**Bhikkhu Bodhi:** Yes. Of course, that requires some kind of perhaps past connections, connections from a past life.

**Ajahn Sujin:** The best thing is to understand reality correctly.

**Bhikkhu Bodhi:** Of course, that's the high level of practice.

**Ajahn Sujin:** Each word should be studied very carefully. Even right now, there's no direct awareness of

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<sup>18</sup> *Silabbata-parāmāsa*, wrong practice. *Sotapatti magga citta*, the Path consciousness at the first stage of enlightenment.

any reality because of lack of understanding as pariyatti.

Pariyatti will lead to paṭipatti, but people today do not study, they just want to practise, instantly ...

**Bhikkhu Bodhi:** Yes, that is true.

**Ajahn Sujin:** ... but that's the self and ignorance. If we ask them about seeing right now, they have no idea. As much as they can say is, "According to the teachings, it's not self."

Right understanding accompanies right awareness. The eightfold path is led by right understanding. Even now, there are many objects to be understood, but because of not having firm pariyatti, there is no awareness. But when awareness arises, paññā is there. Paññā knows, even if it's very short. It can arise so naturally. And it depends on whether it is strong enough to let go or not. If it's not strong enough yet, one needs to learn more by anatta, not by self, to understand whatever appears by sati – not by "I".

So it's not that "I practise", but that understanding is conditioned by accumulated pariyatti, and understanding is the leader. This is letting go. But when one tries hard, it's not letting go.

That's why when the Buddha became enlightened, he didn't just want to teach at once: his teaching is so very subtle.

**Bhikkhu Bodhi:** Yes, that's always an interesting passage<sup>19</sup>. That the Buddha after becoming fully enlightened, his initial impulse was not to teach, but to ...

**Ajahn Sujin:** Even though he was enlightened, and he's the Buddha, he was not thinking about teaching directly after his enlightenment.

| *Sound of car horn in street* | See, no one makes hearing and sound appear. | *Sound stops* | And they are gone, never to return. Each life, each moment, each paramattha dhamma, does not return at all – gone, never to return. And seeing this can lead to letting go of life. From life to life, it's just like that: being born, having everything, and then no more – nothing at all. And where did everything go? They are only paramattha dhammas, realities arising and falling away. No one can stop that; it's their way.

In the Tipiṭaka, there's a saying: "Just live for paññā to arise." That's the point; not, to become enlightened without knowing anything. Very naturally, one knows whether there is satipaṭṭhāna or not: it arises by conditions and then it's gone. To know that it cannot stay, that it arises and falls away and is dukkha, can lead to detachment from clinging to saṃsāra.

Each moment is gone; with ignorance or with paññā, that's the only difference. And there are many degrees of wholesomeness and kilesa. If the Buddha hadn't taught, we wouldn't know that now is all about paṭiccasamuppāda, even sound. Phassa, vedanā, taṇhā, upādāna, all occurring very rapidly. No one can stop anything from arising ...

**Bhikkhu Bodhi:** Yes, it's interesting that when the Buddha hesitated to teach, the two things that he mentions as difficult to impart to others are dependent origination and nibbāna. Those are the two.

**Ajahn Sujin:** People think that nibbāna is quite near. They think they can just go somewhere and do something, and then they've "got" nibbāna.

**Bhikkhu Bodhi:** I don't know anybody who has that view.

**Ajahn Sujin:** Right understanding doesn't need a particular place. It needs development, accumulation, by careful study, careful considering.

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<sup>19</sup> SN 6.1 Brahmāyācana Sutta

Each moment can be anatta to paññā, but to ignorance, it's always someone, something, some story.

| *More traffic noise from outside* | If there is no awareness, the sound does not appear as sound. When it's not the understanding of this very moment now, it's impossible to let anything go.

**Bhikkhu Bodhi:** Well even the mind that identifies the sound as sound is not the same as the mind that actually hears the sound.

**Ajahn Sujin:** Why do we have to say “the sound as sound”? There's no need. The characteristic of sound, which is not-self, should be attended to as a reality, arising and falling away. Like the visible object, there are objects arising alternately all the time at the six doorways.

**Bhikkhu Bodhi:** And if one is very mindful when listening to what you call a sound, it actually breaks up into a series or sequence of individual sounds.

**Ajahn Sujin:** There are two ways: one is wrong and one is right. The wrong way is trying to have mindfulness and being glad that one has it. The other way is that mindfulness is conditioned, that no one can make it arise; and after it has arisen it's gone – nothing remaining.

Lobha is so very crafty – it's a “cheating” reality. It does not appear as it is. But paññā can know that just as the sound is gone, other realities fall away and are gone too. No one can make a reality arise, no one can stop it from falling away, never to return, and this is happening at each moment. When paññā knows that, paññā develops with awareness so as to understand better and better.

But it has to be awareness and understanding arising by themselves, the realities of the eightfold path (or bodhipakkhiyā dhammā), happening very naturally because they're conditioned. Just like smiling, hating or whatever happens by conditions. Paññā must be developed until it is strong enough to let go.

When there is awareness and paññā, life is not as difficult as it used to be. Paññā knows that everything that falls away is gone. And it's gone and it's gone. Without that paññā, there cannot be the letting go of the idea of self in daily life, just the make-believe that there is enough paññā for letting go. But that's wrong; paññā has to understand whatever appears, completely, absolutely.

The person who can read the Tipiṭaka is the person who understands the words of the Buddha, otherwise they interpret the Tipiṭaka in their own way.

**Bhikkhu Bodhi:** Well, many people can read the Tripitaka but develop different interpretations.

**Ajahn Sujin:** And misunderstanding, too.

**Bhikkhu Bodhi:** There can easily be misunderstanding.

**Ajahn Sujin:** Like the word “sati”. In the Thai language, we use many words from Pali, but we use them wrongly. Like for “be careful”, people say “have sati”. Just for crossing the road, they say “have sati”!

**Bhikkhu Bodhi:** Well I would say that's also an application of sati – crossing the road.

**Ajahn Sujin:** But actually it's not, because sati is a wholesome cetasika, it has to be by way of dāna, sīla or bhāvanā<sup>20</sup>. Sati has become a Thai word now.

**Bhikkhu Bodhi:** I'd say that's a very mundane, wholesome kind of sati, to be mindful or careful when crossing the road.

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<sup>20</sup> *Sati*, awareness, is a cetasika that arises with all kusala cittas. Kusala cittas arise at moments of *dāna*, generosity, *sīla*, morality, and *bhāvanā*, the development of samatha and vipassanā.



**Ajahn Sujin:** But the nature of that cannot be sati at all. It could be concentration<sup>21</sup>.

**Bhikkhu Bodhi:** I don't know that it's concentration because it has an element of care in it, whereas concentration is just focused one-pointedly on a subject. When crossing the road, I would say it's a kind of sati-sampajañña, not at the high level, it's not ...

**Ajahn Sujin:** But according to Abhidhamma, sati has to arise only by way of dāna, sīla or bhāvanā – all wholesome moments only.

**Bhikkhu Bodhi:** I think sati can be a more general psychological condition which is being used in the context of the Dhamma in a specific sense. That doesn't mean that there can't be sati outside the context of the Buddha's Dhamma.

**Ajahn Sujin:** It's not the Buddha's word if it's translated like that. That would mean that any person has the right to use any word in any way they like. But this is the beginning of having wrong understanding of the teachings, from not carefully studying them. Adults tell their children to "have sati", but actually what they are talking about is not sati at all.

**Bhikkhu Bodhi:** Well that could be the beginning of a training in sati that will go on to higher levels.

**Ajahn Sujin:** But I think it's the wrong beginning.

**Bhikkhu Bodhi:** I'm not so sure about that. To be careful, OK, one is careful in crossing the road. Again, one is learning to, let's say, be aware of potential dangers.

**Ajahn Sujin:** Like the word 'awareness' in English. Its meaning in the dictionary is not according to its meaning as a reality.

**Bhikkhu Bodhi:** Of course, the English word 'awareness' has many, many shades and meanings. But let's just stick to 'sati'. OK, in crossing the road ...

**Ajahn Sujin:** Otherwise one has sati all day, if one does everything carefully. But that's not right, it has to be wholesome (sobhaṇa) cetasika.

**Bhikkhu Bodhi:** Yes, but don't also forget that the suttas speak about micchā sati (wrong mindfulness).

**Ajahn Sujin:** Because there is micchā practice...

**Bhikkhu Bodhi:** Yes.

**Ajahn Sujin:** ...so all eight path factors are wrong.

**Bhikkhu Bodhi:** But crossing the road carefully, I'm not saying that that's micchā sati. I'm just saying that the word sati can have many, many applications.

**Ajahn Sujin:** When it's akusala but not dosa or moha, it is lobha-mūla citta for sure. They are very close. Like with metta – its proximate foe or enemy is lobha.

**Bhikkhu Bodhi:** Yes, I think what's said in the Visuddhimagga, I think the word used might be affection.

**Ajahn Sujin:** There are many, many words for lobha, depending on the degree. We may use Pāli words in daily life, but when we read we have to be careful. Otherwise people get them mixed up, and they think that they have kusala all day. When we talk about concentration while crossing the street, concentration (ekaggatā cetasika) arises with each citta, and at that moment lobha would like not be

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<sup>21</sup> Concentration, *ekaggatā cetasika*, arises with every citta including akusala cittas.

crashed into by a car; it just wants to go safely.

For the four mahā satipaṭṭhāna, it doesn't matter whether kāya anupassanā is first. Who can make sati follow a path or certain order, sati of this first and of that second? It's not possible. Each moment shows anattā-ness, there is anattā-ness all the time. No-one can tell sati to be or to do this or that because it's conditioned to arise and be aware. That's all.

**Bhikkhu Bodhi:** Yes, but sometimes the conditions that cause things to arise will be the cetanā (the intention, volition) in the present citta. That is what is responsible, say, if somebody is taking up the practice of satipaṭṭhāna.

**Ajahn Sujin:** But intention is not part of the eightfold path.

**Bhikkhu Bodhi:** But the cetanā is a mental factor ...

**Ajahn Sujin:** It arises with each moment.

**Bhikkhu Bodhi:** Yes, so there are different cetanās, and so there will be a cetanā which, in the case of somebody who's taking up satipaṭṭhāna practice, it's the cetana ...

**Ajahn Sujin:** Cetanā is there, but cetanā is not the path.

**Bhikkhu Bodhi:** I'm not saying that cetanā is the path, but cetanā is the factor that, together with viriya, will give rise to sati.

**Ajahn Sujin:** Many cetasikas arise together.

**Bhikkhu Bodhi:** One question that sometimes comes up is "why is there no cetasika in the Abhidhamma scheme for fear?"

**Ajahn Sujin:** It's accompanied by domanassa vedanā<sup>22</sup>, so it has to be a dosa-mūla citta.

**Bhikkhu Bodhi:** Yes, but fear is not mentioned ...

**Ajahn Sujin:** Dosa includes all unpleasant moments.

**Bhikkhu Bodhi:** But it seems to me that there is such a big difference between hatred and fear that one word doesn't adequately cover both. If you look in the Dhammasaṅgāṇī, all of the words that are used to explain dosa are words like vyāpāda, paṭigha; things like ill-will, aversion and so forth, but no words that correspond to fear.

**Ajahn Sujin:** Fear is real so it has to be citta and cetasika. And it's unpleasant.

**Bhikkhu Bodhi:** Definitely it's real; certainly it's unpleasant.

**Ajahn Sujin:** There are only 12 akusala citta. It's not lobha, it's not moha, so it has to be dosa.

**Bhikkhu Bodhi:** One could sort of infer that it would be in the paṭigha-sampayutta citta<sup>23</sup>.

**Ajahn Sujin:** It's when one rejects the object. That's why the Buddha taught so often about the vedanā in each citta – what vedanā is there, how many kinds of feeling there can be with lobha...

So being aware of only one khandha is not enough. And one forgets, one thinks "That's the way", that just one thing is enough. But it's not enough.

<sup>22</sup> *Domanassa vedanā*, unpleasant mental feeling. It is always accompanied dosa, aversion of any kind.

<sup>23</sup> *Paṭigha-sampayutta citta*, citta accompanied by paṭigha, which is dosa, aversion.

**Bhikkhu Bodhi:** Of course, one has to understand all five of the aggregates.

**Ajahn Sujin:** And one has to understand all that happens in a day, as it is – not-self. No matter how pleasant or whatever life is, it's just for a moment and then nothing. Knowing this will lead to letting go of life, so as not to be born again. But no-one can *do* it; it depends on conditions only.

And āṇāpāṇasati is not easy.

**Bhikkhu Bodhi:** No, it's a very difficult meditation.

**Ajahn Sujin:** But people think it's very easy.

**Bhikkhu Bodhi:** I don't know anybody who has tried to practise āṇāpāṇasati seriously who thinks it's very easy. If you read about it, it sounds very easy, but when you sit to practise, it's difficult.

**Ajahn Sujin:** And it has to be anattā too. Sati cannot be told to be aware of this and that, but people are told all the time, "Be aware of this, be aware of that."

Discussion of dhamma is a maṅgala, bringing more right understanding and letting go rather than clinging to wrong understanding.

People cannot tell the difference between samma-samādhi and miccha-samādhi. They think that any samādhi is samma-samādhi, but without right understanding, it cannot be *samma*-samādhi. And they don't know what paññā knows, so they take miccha-samādhi for samma-samādhi.

The development of paññā in daily life is very, very difficult because the object cannot be selected – it's determined by conditions only.

**Bhikkhu Bodhi:** Yes.

[Ends]