

What Is *Dhamma*? How Can We See It?

Preface pages 4-6

The booklet entitled “What Is *Dhamma*? How Can We See It?” is an edited version of lectures on *Dhamma* given at two locations—Vipassanā-Kammaṭṭhannā Center, Chanrom village, Muang district, Surin province, and Wat Buddha Paññā, Muang district, Nonthaburi province. I have revised and made appropriate additions to the transcripts that Dr. Aworani Phinit had kindly made of the taped lectures.

Preparation of the booklet came about as Sarin Kinderkaten had asked permission to print it for distribution over the New Year to parents and friends who are interested in practicing *dhamma*.

The lectures are about the meaning of *dhamma* in its simple form that everyone experiences and can examine every day of his life. Moreover, suggestions are given as to how to cultivate mindfulness and consciousness in living one’s life, which are basic and very important to gaining insight into *dhamma* later on.

May I express my gratitude to those who have taken part in preparing this booklet and my thanks to those who have come to practice *dhamma* and have shown me great kindness. I humbly beg the Triple Gem and all of my teachers to forgive me for any errors that I may have inadvertently made through my ignorance and would like to ask the reader to accept my apologies for any mistakes herein.

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May I pay obeisance to the Triple Gem and greet every one of you who are seeking *dhamma*.

We are here to practice *dhamma*. To practice it properly or successfully, we have to first of all know what *dhamma* is and how we can see it. To accomplish what we have set out to do we have to always bear in mind these two questions. When we listen to and understand *dhamma*, we can then put it into practice to provide ourselves with a tool that would help us study *dhamma* and recognize it.

When people talk of *dhamma*, they don't usually know what they refer to. It is sometimes remote, on some mountains, at some temples, or with some monks. One group believes that *dhamma* is a long way off, which is not quite right. The other group is a bit better. It believes that *dhamma* is quite near. Members of this group study *dhamma* so that they could make use of it. They think they would learn about the four sublime states of mind—loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and even-mindedness; and the four paths of accomplishment—zeal, perseverance, dedication and investigation. This way of thinking is a little better but still not quite correct.

Dhamma is neither far away nor close by; it is actually within us. We are born with *dhamma* and die with it. However, we do not know it; we do not open our eyes to have a look at it; we avoid it. Consequently, we go around in circles and our heads are spinning. We live in misery day in and day out because we don't understand *dhamma*. It is, therefore, important to realize that *dhamma* is within us, in our body and mind. It is what we experience every day, this or that person we encounter, and numerous activities that we participate in. *Dhamma* is the ultimate truth, which is inevitable and inescapable. It is true because it cannot be false. It is that way because it cannot be otherwise.

Everyone knows that any person born into this world will grow old, become ill and die. This is absolutely true and cannot be gainsaid. We meet people, and then we have to part. We know happiness but it is transitory. Happiness is short-lived and dissolves in no time. We become strained and worried. We meet with various people and experience pleasant and unpleasant situations. All of these are *dhamma*. We cannot escape them. Though we can't see them, they are still that way. Each of us rarely thinks that our life will come to an end. Can we then escape death? Certainly not, for it is *dhamma*. When we are happy, we seldom think that a little later we will be miserable. Happiness is transitory. Even though we don't look at it, it is still so. We have lovely parents and before long they have to leave us. We have children and sooner or later we have to leave them. Even though we haven't thought of leaving them, parting is inescapable. The truth is right there before us and with us every day.

Everything is the way it is. What we consider to be our own self, body and mind, results from change. The process goes on continuously. This is true of everything that happens in our life. It comes in and then goes away. This is *dhamma* but we have not seen it. We have not opened our eyes to look at it. The Buddha's teaching is meant to wake us up and open our eyes to the truth. His teaching is thus known as Buddhism. He woke up first, saw the truth and imparted it to us. Neither did the Buddha figure out *dhamma* nor did he create it. *Dhamma* has always been the way it is. The Buddha said: "Whether I had been born into this world or not, *dhamma* would still be what it is as it is natural to be so." Thus is the nature of *dhamma*. All conditioned states are transient; they are subject to suffering. All states of *dhamma* have no selves. They have all been that way from time immemorial. The Buddha discovered this ultimate truth. He told us to wake up and look at it so that we would be free of delusion and attachment. The freedom will enable us to live happily.

First of all we have to figure out what *dhamma* is. *Dhamma* is our own self—our body and mind. It originates from causes and conditions. Once it comes into being, it changes, subjecting to impermanence, suffering, and non-self. What we take to be our own self is not us and not really ours. Do we look the same now as when we were small? Certainly not! Our physical appearance now is different from what we were when small. Our present life begins with the combination of elements from our parents and then consciousness, which is supposed to represent our 'self,' embeds deep down. This consciousness does not leave the body. It remains there, going continuously through the cycle of dying and being reborn. A tiny blob then grows with a head and limbs and the body develops its eyes, ears, nose, tongue and a seat for the mind. Then it is ready to come out of its mother's womb. At first it cannot eat on its own; it has to suck blood from its mother. It has a navel, symbol of a blood-sucking creature. With nutrients from its mother, the body and mind continues to grow. The sense organs—eyes, ears, nose, tongue and body—are then formed as means to feel, touch and perceive the outer world. Once it is delivered it gets nutrients from elements of the earth. The body continues to grow and become what we are today.

This physical appearance is called a material form. It is not our self; it consists of elements—earth, water, fire, and air. We think we are big, clever, capable and very important. Actually we are not; we are dependent on these elements. If they are not in balance, we will cease to exist. For instance, the air we breathe in and breathe out is part of the air-element. What happens when we breathe in but do not breathe out? We die. Our life is thus of little consequence; it depends on elements. If we do not eat, we will lose our strength. If we do not drink, we will not be able to go on. We depend on these elements to survive. What happens if it is too hot outside? We have to get in the shade. Well, no matter how big we are, if we are exposed to the sun for a while, we will feel very hot and the fire-element will be unbearable. At night when it gets very cold, we have to find blankets to cover ourselves. If it rains, we are afraid that we will come down with a cold. We may think that we are important but actually we are not. We exist through maintaining the elements in balance. This is the "body," while the

“mind” has four components—*vedanā* (sensation), *saññā* (perception), *saṅkhāra* (mental formations) and *viññāṇa* (consciousness).

Vedanā, sensation, arises from causes. It may be physical or mental feeling, physical comfort or discomfort, happiness or unhappiness, or indifference. After sitting for a while, you will have a backache. Have you told your back to ache? No. You haven’t even looked at it but it aches. The aches and pains arise from causes. Those of you who are young can sit longer without suffering the discomfort. With older people they don’t have to sit down to experience the aches and pains. This is only natural. The body follows the same course. We haven’t asked it to be ill but it becomes ill without telling us.

Saññā, perception: it is a way you think about something and your idea of what it is like. We manage to get along in the world because we are able to notice and recognize what we see. *Saññā* enables us to tell people apart, for example, and some of you seem to recognize me. This is important for communication. Without it, we cannot get in touch with other people. *Saññā* has equipped us with information so that we can live our lives. We recognize it as a token that is agreed upon. Suppose we say that a piece of paper is money worth 1,000 and can be used to purchase things. We then assume that 1000 is worth more than 500. This is something that we endorse.

Take another example—a piece of rock. If it falls down on a path, it could be an obstacle, an unwanted addition. We would pick it up and throw it away. However, someone who sees a dog running towards him may pick it up and hurl it at the dog. The rock then becomes a weapon. Someone may use it to make a building. We know that pieces of rock could be used as building materials. It depends on what we want to do with it or what we think of it. A similar piece of rock could be used to make an image of the Buddha for people to worship, but some would worship the rock just as it is. Our perceptions may differ. We realize that banknotes could be used for doing this and that, or trading because of our perception. We feel we are this or that person, have this or that thing, or attain this or that rank, even own a house and money in a bank. All these result from our committing them to memory. However, what we take to be our own self does not actually exist. It comes into being because we think it is. For instance you are here and think that you are practitioners of *dhamma*. Is it true that everyone who comes here practices *dhamma*? You consider me sitting here as a teacher. Is there really a teacher? It is possible to say that there is in a situation like this. When I go to work, I feel I am a different person. It depends on our duty. Our lives here in this world depend on how we perceive them.

Next we will consider ***saṅkhāra***, which refers to mental formations. It may put us in a good or bad mood; it may make us feel bored, become disinterested or sleepy. Various things that come into our minds will affect them in a good or bad way, in a wholesome or unwholesome course. The process of formation will go on. When you first arrived here you were in one

frame of mind. When you had not heard me talk, you were quite excited. After listening to me for some time there was no more excitement and you became sleepy. Your mind will go on being in a state of flux. Excitement will give way to boredom; diligence will turn to idleness. Your mind will change back and forth according to whatever affects it. This is what we call *saṅkhāra*.

Viññāṇa is consciousness, which mainly connects us with the outer world. Eye-consciousness, known as *cakkhu-viññāṇa*, enables us to see. Ear-consciousness, known as *sota-viññāṇa*, enables us to hear. Nose-consciousness, known as *ghāṇ-viññāṇa*, enables us to smell. Tongue-consciousness, known as *jivhā-viññāṇa*, enables us to taste. Body-consciousness, known as *kāya-viññāṇa*, enables us to feel warmth and cold, softness and hardness, tautness and movement, or aches and pains by touching. Mind-consciousness, known as *mano-viññāṇa*, enables us to be aware of our thoughts, happiness, suffering, stress, worry, and composed or restless mind.

What is supposed to be our own self is made up of five components, which are called five aggregates—form, sensation, perception, mental formation, and consciousness. These five aggregates keep changing. From nothingness, something comes into being, and then it turns into nothing. What we see is not really our own self. This is evident when we look at a picture of a person. When he was small, he was a different person from what he is now.

Vedanā or sensation is not our own self. If it really is, we should be able to control it. We should feel happy for ever and never be miserable. Can we order it to be this way or that way? We cannot, for it does not belong to us. It seems that we are able to control it. But we really can't. We like to think that everything is within our reach and we have power over it. In actual fact, it is the other way round. We are within the power of something much greater. We are in the reach of old age. A person is born to be old and gets in the hands of death. We ourselves are under the control of a great many things. We are under the control of suffering; we move around in circles within it. Even *rūpa* or body is not ours; neither is *vedanā*. If it were ours, we would be able to order it to be this, and not that. However, it actually is what it is through causes and conditions.

This is also true of *saññā*. It is not ours. Certain things that we want to remember just slip our mind, but those we don't want to remember are retained in our memory. We are not in control of *saññā*. When we get old, we become forgetful. This is only natural. Sometimes old people grumble that their memory is very short, not like when they were young. Is it possible for it to remain the same? Naturally it can't be so. *Saññā* is *anattā*; it is non-self.

Saṅkhāra is also non-self. It cannot really be put under control. We all just want to be happy and not unhappy. Nevertheless, we are sometimes happy and sometimes unhappy. Actually we are unhappy most of the time. As we are listening to *dhamma* here, we want so much to understand it quickly but it does not happen the way we want. We want to achieve our goal

and free ourselves from suffering. Everything goes along in accordance with its causes. Whether we could attain *dhamma* or free ourselves from suffering depends on the causes; we cannot have it the way we want to. For instance, after sitting for a while you get bored. To get rid of boredom you keep yourself busy with something else. In a short while you will get bored again and the process of ridding yourself of boredom will be repeated.

Actually everything originates from its causes and conditions. If we could live with it, we would not be miserable. However, most of us have high expectations and tax ourselves to realize them. We don't know how to live with boredom. When we get bored, we find something to do. We turn on television to get out of boredom. Does it work? It works for a short while for everything is transient. Soon we get bored again; we can't really find a lasting solution. We have been keeping ourselves busy with all kinds of things because we believe that *saṅkhāra* is corporeal and that it is ours, under our control. As a matter of fact, we can't really control it. Boredom originates from causes. If we know it, we will be able to live with it and won't have to do anything. However, we all don't know how to live with boredom. When we get bored, we say to ourselves: "Good gracious! How can we get rid of boredom?" We keep ourselves busy; we make phone calls, or get friends to talk to about nothing important and end up talking nonsense. If we watch farcical shows, films or plays, we will fall into ruinous ways of life. We will move around in circles. We will sink into the quagmire of misery as usual because we don't know the true nature of *saṅkhāra*.

Next comes *viññāṇa*, which is also non-self. The eyes that see are *chakku-viññāṇa*; they are non-self. They perform their function; that is, they see both good and bad things. Some people wonder why they have to see bad things too. They should see only good things. Well, in that case let them become blind. Most people want to be that way. Actually it is good that we sometimes see good and sometimes bad things because we have eyes. Our ears perform their function of hearing. We hear good and bad words. It is only natural that we can hear praises well as verbal abuses. However, we just want to hear praises or sweet-sounding words. This is like wanting to be deaf. The senses of smell, taste, and touch are also similar. Some people grumble when they have aches and pains. They don't want to be in pain; they want to be happy and only wish to be able to withstand pain. At first they can cope with it and feel quite happy. However, after sitting for a long time they become miserable. Then they can no longer stand it and have to shift about, which is only natural. Some people only want to be happy; they do not want to suffer pain. When they are in pain, they grumble. A person whose body does not respond to touch is suffering from paralysis and has lost the ability to feel pain. It is good that we have not lost our sense of touch and can feel pain.

As for you who have come here to practice *dhamma*, after sitting for a long time you will have a backache. This is something to be congratulated on for you are not suffering from paralysis. However, some loonies say that people practicing *dhamma* should sit for a long time until their pain goes away. It is like training to become trees. Actually the practice is to make us ordinary

human beings and appreciate the true nature of *dhamma*. In so doing our body consciousness will be aware of sensations that give rise to happiness as well as suffering.

As for our mind, as long as it is healthy it will be aware of various ideas and sensations—some good and some bad, some right and some wrong. It may fluctuate between tranquility and restlessness. All of this is only natural. But some people who do not understand *dhamma* and the true nature of things believe that we should only think of good things. Is it at all possible to do so? Of course, it is not. As a matter of fact, it is natural to have some good and some bad thoughts. Most of our thoughts may be bad at first. But for some people whenever a bad thought comes to mind, they believe it is very wrong and tell themselves they should not allow it. This kind of thinking will make their minds wander around in circles. It is usual for our thoughts to be sometimes good and sometimes bad. Good thoughts are transitory and so are bad ones.

Some people only want their minds to be tranquil. Is it possible for them to be that way all the time? Of course, it is not. They will at times wander wildly to strike a balance. Those who try to escape what they consider wrong, such as stress and wild thought, will not be free of it. All conditions we consider undesirable occur naturally; they arise from causes and pass away with the cessation of causes. Many bad thoughts come to you and go away, don't they? Good thoughts also flit around too. Have you ever felt relaxed and peaceful? You have but the feeling does not last long. All things are transitory; they come and then are gone. This is the way of *dhamma* and so it is with *saṅkhāra*, which is impermanent.

We all have made mistakes. We are wrong when we believe that practicing *dhamma* will give us peace. Is it really possible? We may find peace for two or three days. Then there comes an explosion. For most of us, the peaceful feeling is not real but artificial. It is not of our making; we feel peaceful because no one disturbs us. If anyone comes and disturbs us, there is no peace any longer. Sitting in a room where Buddha images are kept, we have peace because there is no one to disturb us. It would be strange if we did not feel at peace there. However, in the case that we expected to get something special but did not get it, we might be sitting tense in the room. Most of us do not know true peace; we only know its imitation. We have a feeling of peace because nobody disturbs us. Some people who get upset when someone disturbs them while working would stop what they are doing to find peace. They would feel very peaceful when they are not working. That kind of feeling is artificial as it is due to absence of disturbances. However, a person who has found true peace would remain calm and collected and see the truth despite the presence of other people disturbing him or all the commotion while working. We want true peace. We have come to practice *dhamma* in order to attain true peace, not its imitation.

Dhamma is what we suppose to be our own self and all the things that we experience—seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and feeling as well as mental consciousness or awareness of our

thoughts, some good and some bad, which are all transient. If we watch them, we will realize that they come and go, arising and passing away. We will then not hold on to them. As for our thoughts we used to have several bad ones; naturally, one more wouldn't make any difference. It only is one of those thoughts that arise and pass away. Good thoughts that arise pass away too. Happiness is like any of those conditions; it arises and passes away. Suffering is that way too; it arises and passes away. Everything that happens follows the same course.

Have you ever been verbally abused? You have, haven't you? This is one of those things that arise and pass away. It is natural. The truth is right there in front of us but most of us fail to see it. We have a saying in Thai that describes this kind of situation: "a strand of hair hides a mountain." It points to our failure to see the truth, which is perfectly obvious. Everything arises and passes away. Moreover, we have encountered this kind of situation numerous times. But when it recurs, we are blinded to it. We have been verbally abused many times; when we suffer it again, it blinds us and makes us hate people who abuse us. We think it very wrong for them to do so. We are blinded by a strand of hair even though humans, including the Buddha, have all been verbally abused.

This truth is like a mountain that we should be able to see but we are blinded by a strand of hair. If people praise us, we feel we are floating on air. Since everyone has been praised sometimes and verbally abused sometimes, there is no need for us to feel like floating on air when praised. However, we are blinded by a strand of hair and hold on to praises so we float away. We have had happiness several times and try to get it again even though it has never lasted long. Suffering is also the same. It has come to us several times. What difference would it make, should it come one more time? No difference at all as it arises out of causes and then passes away. Why is it like that? It is that way because it cannot be otherwise.

Most problems, therefore, should not cause any trouble because *aniccatā*, impermanence or transiency, will deal with it. Suppose today we are tense, we should know that tomorrow there will be light, and undoubtedly the tension will be gone. We do not have to do anything, just watch it, walk to and from, or do something for fun and it will soon pass away for certain. Tonight it is dark; soon there will be light. There is light now, soon it will be dark. It has been this way all along. This is the mountain of truth. However, we have been blinded by a strand of hair. We are conscious of our feelings and erroneously cling to them; we want to gratify our desires to be this or that.

The truth is right in front of us and it has always been that way, but we have not paused to look at it. In all probability, we do not want to die and do not realize that death is a certainty. Look at the truth. Is there anyone that is born and does not die? We are blinded by a strand of hair and live our lives as though we'll never die. We'll get this and that, seeking wealth and fame while everyone is born to die and cannot take anything with him. We can see from history that there had been many great monarchs. They all died, didn't they? They could not take anything

with them, could they? All things could give us lessons, piling up like a mountain. Even our own conditions, everything outside and all that happens can give us lessons in *dhamma*. However, we are blinded by a strand of hair.

Practicing *dhamma* here is training to remove the strand of hair that blinds us. We have not come here to get more of it. Some people have come for peace only. But mental formations that are permanent do not exist. There is no permanent peace. Our mind can be calm and cool sometimes and sometimes it wanders. When you listen to *dhamma*, is it possible to fully understand it without being confused? You are asking for the impossible. It is only natural that when you listen to *dhamma* or listen to me talking you get confused. After listening for a long time you get bored. Boredom is also natural. We are here to train to know everything as it really is, and to realize that it arises out of causes. Soon it will pass away when the causes are exhausted.

When you get bored, you don't have to do anything. Just sit and watch yourself the moment you feel bored or take a walk. There is no doubt that soon the boredom will pass away because it is transitory. However, with most of us when boredom arises, the strand of hair called boredom blinds us and we try various ways to get rid of it. Actually, if we don't do anything, it will pass away of itself. Take our case; once we were born into this world, death will surely come without us doing anything. Whether we accept it or not, we will die. What should we do? If we do not accept it, we will suffer. If we accept it, we can live with it without suffering and feel happy as in other situations. When some good thoughts and some bad thoughts arise, the question is whether we accept them or not. If we do, we will not be miserable. If we don't, they will cause us misery. We will ask ourselves why we have become so bad, why we have thought that way. We become miserable because of our thoughts, while people all over the world also think good thoughts and bad thoughts like us.

We have come to practice *dhamma*, not because we are looking for anything special. We are looking at things that we already have, and get rid of misapprehensions, delusions and attachments, which I have been comparing to strands of hair. When they have been removed, the truth that is right in front of us will be visible. When your eyes are clear, you can see it. Therefore, there is no need to go anywhere to practice *dhamma*. You can stay at home with your children and grandchildren; everything will teach you *dhamma*. Suppose you have a grandchild; he makes you happy sometimes. However, your happiness is transitory. When he runs out and steps on a thorn, you will suffer because he is in agony. You are happy for only a moment and become unhappy again. Happiness and suffering move around in a circle without end. Now you know the answer to the first question: What is *dhamma*?

We come then to the second question: How can we see *dhamma*?

To see *dhamma*, know what it is, and accept it. I have said earlier on that we have to open our eyes to it. We must have tools that enable us to see and observe it. We will recognize *dhamma* if we have been trained to have perceptive eyes. According to the Buddha, if you follow the guidelines he has given us, you will obtain perceptive eyes and gain insight. When you have perceptive eyes, you will see the truth which is right in front of you as I have already pointed out. All of you have been through this experience, have seen the truth, but have not accepted it or are unable to accept it. You look at it as something unusual, unlikely to occur.

Actually, everything originates from causes and conditions. What we assume to be our own self is not so. We were born to be transitory, to suffer, and to be non-self. Our bodies are not really us. We cannot control them. To understand this, we must be trained so that we would have perceptive eyes. To practice *dhamma* is to train ourselves to be wide awake and see the truth. It will wake us up to see things as they are, not to be deluded into a maze of thoughts or our own imaginations, or be misled into attaching ourselves to one thing and pushing off another. It wakes us up to see things as they really are.

Mindfulness and awareness are important tools. Living your life in full awareness will enable you to see things as they really are. You should be conscious of what you are doing. When a notion enters your head, you should be aware that you are thinking that way at the time and soon it will change into something else and will change again later. If you are conscious, you will have a tool to study it. If you are tense, and are aware that at this point tension arises, soon it will pass away. You will learn that tension is transitory. When happiness arises and you are aware that you are happy, then something happens and its impact on you makes you unhappy. You should know that this is suffering. Happiness a little while ago is gone; it has now turned into suffering. Is happiness long-lasting? Of course, it is not. If you live your life with awareness and are not deluded by this or that, you will understand the truth that is right before you.

If someone abuses you verbally, you are aware of what he is doing. You become angry and know it. When anger arises, it is good enough if you are aware of what is going on. Soon when someone praises you, you are aware that you are being praised and that your heart is filled with joy. Then you are aware that is the way your heart reacts. You must realize that whatever comes into being will pass away. There is no reason to be glad when happiness arises. Soon it will be gone. There is no need to be tense when suffering comes. You don't have to push it away for it will be gone in a short while. It is natural that people who don't like you will hurl abuses at you. Don't retaliate and don't get tense. If you live your life with full awareness, you will gain insight which is a key in training your eyes to see *dhamma*. This seems a very simple method but you don't know it. You have taken the wrong path; you have been busy following other people. You accept whatever they say. If they say the world is good, you agree with

them. If they say it is not good, you suffer with them. If your children are good, you are happy; if not, you feel miserable. When you get a position, you are glad; when you lose it you are sad.

Actually there is no getting or losing as you understand it. There is only something arising and passing away; there is only change. You get money in order to lose it. You get money through transiency, and it also makes you lose your money. It is the same with people who have come into this world. Because of transiency one day they will die and disappear from the world. It is the same in my case; I can meet you here thanks to transiency. If it had been for it, I would not be able to come. Last night I was staying at a hotel in Surin. I would not be here if morning had not come. I am here talking to you because of transiency and finally we will all go our own ways. There is no exception to this. It is the truth, the absolute truth. Why do we call it the truth? Because it is definitely that way; it cannot be otherwise. Whether you see or do not see it, it still is that way. It is indisputable. However, we all close our eyes to pretend ignorance of its existence. Everyone born into this world must die. Seeing or not seeing death, he cannot escape it. If you get a position, you will lose it one day. If you haven't lost it before, you will lose it when you retire. People who are together will have to part; if they don't part while they are alive, they will part when they die. Like me, I came here and then I have to leave. It is something that is bound to happen; it is natural.

One technique in training your eyes to see *dhamma* is to raise awareness in the way you live your life. You should be conscious of every movement you make—walking, standing, sitting or lying down. You should be aware whether you are stepping forward or backward, looking in front or looking back, bending or stretching, putting on your clothes, defecating or urinating, eating, drinking, doing something, speaking or remaining silent. In short, you must be aware of every movement of your body. Practicing *dhamma* means training for the condition of self-consciousness. When you are equipped with self-consciousness, you can practice *dhamma* wherever you are for it is present everywhere. What you have to do is to be conscious and not be deluded by all the things you perceive. Do not get attached to this or that. Remove the strand of hair that blinds your eyes so that they can see the truth.

To sum up, the answer to the first question is: *dhamma* is our body and mind and all the things that happen. It is *dhamma* with regard to *saṅkhāra*—whatever comes into being is subject to impermanence, suffering, and non-self. This is what we call *dhamma*.

The answer to the second question is: we should be conscious of how we live our lives. We must have self-consciousness, mental discipline, and perseverance. We will then see *dhamma* and acquire The Eye of Truth.

Now I will tell you techniques for practicing *dhamma* in this course. It does not matter how much you have achieved. Since you know the techniques, you can practice on your own at

home. It is important to keep being aware. Most people tend to fall asleep. Sitting a long time may make you fall asleep; standing or walking a long time may have a similar effect, that is, your mind is inattentive, not awoken to the truth. Awareness could be developed mainly by walking and sitting. At first, you must walk a lot, walk back and forth, which is called *caṅkama*. This kind of walk will keep you conscious of what your mind and your body are doing, not unmindful. We generally become unaware. How many times a day do you breathe in and breathe out? Well, a great many. How many steps do you take each day? Oh, lots and lots. Are you aware that you are walking? Well, not at all. This is called unawareness.

Generally you are unaware. Now you will be trained to raise your awareness. When you walk you should be aware that your body is walking. If you are not, your body should know which foot you are putting forward, left or right. Don't be serious; do it for fun. Take it easy; walk quickly or slowly as it suits you. The right pace for each person will differ. Some people walk fast; some walk slowly. This does not really matter. How do you know that the pace is right for you? You must be aware of how you feel. If the pace is not quite right, you will feel strained. If it is, you will feel at ease. Just try walking. If you feel strained and a little dizzy while walking slowly, then walk faster. If you feel dizzy while walking fast, change to a slower pace. Dizziness and tightness in the chest are signs of a wrong pace. If you get attached to something without letting go, you will feel dizzy or tight in the chest for attachment makes your heart heavy.

Caṅkama walk is walking to arouse your awareness. When you don't have anything to do, leave behind all worldly concerns and go walking back and forth. If you are at home or at your office, use this technique whenever you are free; for instance, before going to work or in the evening just walk back and forth for a while, or walk back and forth after lunch. Actually, you can practice *dhamma* all the time by frequently inspecting your body and mind.

It is good for you to walk a lot, walk until you feel tired then sit down. Walking will raise your awareness better than sitting. Sitting makes you concentrate better but you fall asleep faster. Those of you who lose your concentration easily and fall asleep while sitting, walk a lot first and then sit. When you sit, sit in a position you like. There is no need to be perfectly proper. What is important is constant awareness. Whatever method you use in doing your meditation exercise, continue with it: for example, uttering "Buddho," watching the rising and falling of your abdomen, or watching the air being inhaled and exhaled. You must be aware of what you are doing. If you are not, keep shifting your position, massaging yourself to rouse your awareness. You could hit yourself with your fist, or keep wriggling to prevent yourself from falling asleep. This course is very easy. It does not matter how much you have accomplished. The focus is on being conscious. You have to practice this way because day after day you delude yourself with this or that. When you are equipped with awareness, you will then practice meditation (*samatha*) for tranquility, and contemplation (*vipassanā*) for intuitive vision. The practice will enable you to attain morality (*sīla*), mental discipline (*samādhi*), and insight (*paññā*).

What is considered proper awareness?

Some people try to be aware all the time. This is not the proper approach because awareness is transitory. It is all right if you are aware some times and unaware sometimes. It does not matter if you start with being only slightly aware. With a little practice you will become a bit more aware. At first you might be distracted 100%; after a few days you will get a little better. That is good enough. You know that you walk with proper awareness if you are conscious that you are walking, you are moving your feet, your left foot is stepping forward, and your right foot is moving along. Soon you will be distracted. When you realize that you have been distracted, you must pull yourself back to walking. If you are distracted again, you must be aware of it. If your mind wanders, thinking of this or that thing, you must be aware that your mind is wandering. Leave it for a while and then bring it back to walking. In your practice there should be some points where you stop so that if you are not aware while you are walking, you will become aware when you stop. *Caṅkama* walk is therefore very useful for practicing awareness. If you walk aimlessly, when you are distracted it will be a long time before you become aware of it. With *caṅkama* walk, if you are distracted while walking, there will be time you become aware that you are standing. It does not matter that you are distracted if you are aware of it and get back your awareness. If this process is repeated frequently, the period of distraction will get shorter and shorter.

Some people want to accomplish a great deal. They set their minds on getting so much of this and so much of that. If you try to gratify your desire, your effort will not bear fruit. The proper approach to practicing *dhamma* is to be above expectation, craving, and desire. Expectation is the root cause of disappointment. Some people have high expectations of everything they do. When they practice *dhamma*, they expect something from it. For instance, walking will give them this or that thing. If any of you are thinking along that way, refrain from walking for a while and go over your thoughts. Pause to watch what comes into your mind and see what it wants before resuming your walk. Don't be afraid of your thoughts for they arise from causes and soon they will pass away. If someone abuses you verbally, don't say anything to retaliate just yet. Watch your desire to do so. Watch it until it goes away and then speak. Most people don't react that way. They will do what they want to straightaway. This is training for you to see through desire and enhance your awareness. If you want to resume walking, examine your thought first. Then continue with your walk. Take it easy, don't rush. It's important that you become aware. It's all right if you slip up. Just get back to your awareness. This is the method; it is very simple.

As a rule you should observe yourself. If you get tired from walking, you will feel that the front of your thigh is getting taut and your body is alert. When you sit down, you will not fall asleep. You will be perceptive of strong mental formations. You will be able to watch *vedanā* (feeling) and *citta* (mind), such as fatigue, pain, boredom, apathy, and confusion that arise until you realize that whatever arises will pass away.

Training yourself to become aware while sitting is like training to do so while walking. You must be aware of breathing in and breathing out, of your abdomen rising and falling, of your body moving

however slightly, of clenching and opening your hands, or of your mind drifting. If you are not aware, you must know that you are not and get back your awareness. If you are sleepy, be aware of it. If you are about to succumb to sleepiness, get up and walk. Take it easy; don't rush yourself. Most people like to focus their minds on something. The right approach to awareness is to realize that you cannot be aware of any condition for long for soon another will arise. If you pay close attention to something in particular, watching it closely, you will see only one thing, for example your foot. This is fixing your eyes on one thing.

You should feel relaxed and become conscious of it. People tend to attach their minds to various things, for example, breathing in and breathing out. They feel that they have to watch it all the time. This is fixing too much attention on one thing. Just relax and become aware that you are breathing in and breathing out. Don't cling to it. If an idea comes into your head, you should know that you are being distracted and get back to your breathing. Don't look at anything long. It is a good idea to look at several things. It may help if you shift yourself occasionally. Knowing what your body is doing is being aware. It is not difficult. You know how to do it but lack of practice makes your mind wander. You become distracted easily. For example, suppose there is a dog running towards you, you turn your attention to it. You are not aware what your mind or your body is doing, whether you are breathing in or breathing out. This is getting distracted. You, therefore, have to practice being conscious of your body and your mind so that you won't be distracted easily.

(pp 61-82)

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Wat Buddha Paññā, Nonthaburi province

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May I pay obeisance to the Triple Gem and greet every one of you who are seeking *dhamma*.

This is the last session for today and you will go home afterwards. When you are going here and there, you seem to have some hope. Finally, however, you end up, not being able to go anywhere. When your time comes, you die. You don't know where to go; you can't find a way out. If you know that you will go here or there, you have some hope. If you still have hope, you will get caught in a vicious circle of suffering. The Buddha said: Do not look back to the past with cravings and erroneous views. The past was that way, but you want or do not want it to be that way again. You look back on those days in the past; for example, you had been an important person, had already done this or that, had experienced such a situation or such a mental state, had been informed of this or that event, etc. Do not look back on the past with

such cravings and erroneous views. Meanwhile do not think of the future with cravings and erroneous views either. Do not hope that the future will be better. Do not expect that the future will bring you this or that position, will give you this or that thing or make you prosper. That kind of thinking is expectation fed by cravings, known as *tañhā*, and erroneous views, known as *diṭṭhi*.

Looking back to the past makes you feel that your “self” exists. Thinking of the future, however, gives you hope that you will become this or that; it is one way of extending your life forever. You will, therefore, go on living; you will continuously be in the cycle of birth and death. If you have given up hope in this world, you put your hope on the future. This will go endlessly through the force of *tañhā* and *diṭṭhi*.

The Buddha directed us to focus on things as they are at present. What thing is right here at this moment? It is our body and mind of the present. Now let’s see what it is doing. Is the body breathing in or out? Is it walking? Is it putting the left or right foot forward? Is it clenching or opening its hands? Is it stretching or bending? Is the abdomen rising or falling? You should realize that the body functions in such a way but it is not your “self.” It consists of four elements—earth, water, fire, and air. These are main elements that enable the body to function and the body is not your “self”; it is *vedanā* or sensation which arises at times, *saññā* or perception which also arises at times, *sañkhāra* or mental formations some of which are good and some are bad, and *viññāṇa* or consciousness of what is going on.

If you know the truth that your body and mind at the present time is non-self, only something that arises when there are causes. When the causes are exhausted, what arises will be gone. Accumulate a lot of this kind of knowledge. The more you know of the present, the less you will think of the past and the future. When you don’t think or expect much, you will not get so tense or worried. You will not set your mind so much on getting this or that, or being this or that. You only have to practice mindfulness, and your suffering will decrease. The reason is that suffering comes from your thoughts. If you don’t know their true nature, you will cling to them, thinking that you are this or that person. If you don’t get what you want, you become miserable. When you live with the present, you will become aware if your mind is drifting and that you are being distracted. Then you will let go whatever comes into your mind and will not take it seriously. Suffering therefore will not arise. So you are advised not to think of the past nor expect anything of the future. Know whatever comes to pass in the present thoroughly; be resolute and firm in your pursuit of it; do not hold on to it nor push it away. Accumulate experiences of this kind; know the true nature of things. The past and the future will be no more because the past had come and gone and the future never comes. When it arrives, it has turned into the present.

Some people want to change the past. For example, they say that they should not have said those words. What is true is that they had said them, not any other words and those words

had vanished a long time ago. What they said is of no importance now. However, they keep thinking about it until they become tense and worried because they are trying to find ways to remedy the past. Others want to control the future though it has not come yet. Someone gives this advice: “Make today a really good day; tomorrow will certainly be better.” Actually, we don’t know whether tomorrow will come. How can we be sure that we won’t die before it arrives? The teaching of the Buddha is not at all like that. According to him, we should not be expecting anything; we should have presence of mind and be aware of the present state of the body and mind. If we have not taken a fancy to one object of consciousness and a dislike of another, that is acceptable. We should accumulate experiences of this kind. If we are not able to do so, we have to cultivate mindfulness. We have to know the true nature of what we are up against. If we like something, we should know it. If we don’t like something, we should know it too. If we are gratified, we should know that we are; if not, we should know that we are not. If we get bored, stale, or irritable, we should know it. Do not try to find ways to correct your mental state because whatever comes to pass will go away. You only have to look at it and observe it often, you will then understand it.

The right way to practice *dhamma* is: look back on yourself, examine your body and mind at present, become mindful, aware, and not reckless. Then try to develop *samatha* (tranquility) and *vipassanā* (spiritual insight), which are qualities that have to be developed together in order to obtain *sīla* (morality), *samādhi* (concentration), and *paññā* (insight). Your practice will bear fruit only if you are equipped with mindfulness and awareness. If you are negligent and satisfied with just getting a little of this and a little of that or fail to observe yourself and are obsessed by a desire to get possession of this or that, you are negligent.

The Buddha has taught us to be attentive. When you listen to *dhamma*, you should gather that nothing in this world can be relied upon, as everything usually deteriorates. This is the Buddha’s last instruction that we have committed to memory. It is satisfactory if you know this much after studying *dhamma*.

Vayadhamma saṅkhāra: It is natural that mental formations are all subject to deterioration. No matter what they are—concentration, tranquility, or anything else that is believed to be our refuge—they will usually deteriorate.

Appamādena sampādetha: You all should perform each of your duties with attentiveness. You must be aware. No matter what you are doing, saying, or thinking, you should have presence of mind and consciousness while doing so. Accomplish everything you do with perseverance.

Most of us tend to be negligent. After learning to concentrate and finding that our minds are tranquil, we are quite content and become negligent. Now that we are in good health, we are less observant. While our children are well-behaved, we are not attentive to them. However, when they are a bit off the right path, we are in a panic. We cannot be negligent for all things

are subject to change because they are *saṅkhāra* or mental formations. We must practice until we can gain insight and see the truth that all things are transient and cannot be controlled. We will not be safe until we let them go and do not depend on them for happiness or suffering.

Can't you see how important attention is? Awareness of your body and mind enables you to succeed in whatever you do. Some people say that they have practiced *dhamma* for 10 – 20 years and have seen this and that, or have had some peace of mind. This does not really count. What counts is whether you are aware or not aware, or whether you are attentive or inattentive. What do you know about the present state of your body and mind? The former state is gone. If you know what the present state is, it will be of help to you. If anything happens, you will be on your guard and will not break any moral code or be deluded into being pleased or miserable by whatever comes along. You will not suffer because you will have presence of mind to hold you back and have insight to see the truth.

The Buddha has told us not to think of the past or put any hope on the future, but be mindful of the present.

It is important that you watch the mental state that arises at the present, and study it. You must be firm, not waver; you must not get fascinated by one thing and detest another. You should accumulate experiences of this kind. It does not matter how much you have progressed, if you are aware at this moment, you will be able to attain *sīla* (morality), *samādhi* (concentration), and *paññā* (insight). If you become inattentive, *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā* will be beyond your reach. *Paññā* is not something that you get from studying, listening, or memorizing a great deal. Suffering will not go away with that kind of *paññā*. The kind that you really need is the insight that will end suffering. You will get it through practice. It is not a matter of right or wrong; right or wrong is only by comparison. Assessment here is by means of asking: "Are you aware or not at this moment?" If you are, then it is the right practice; if not, it is wrong. If you are aware, you will become mindful and insightful, and you will see the truth. If you are not aware, you have been distracted. If you are aware that you have been distracted, it is right then.

In short the practice taught by the Buddha is to get people to rid themselves of negligence. In order to achieve this all knowledge and skill have to be put together— awareness, attentiveness, mindfulness and consciousness. If you do anything with awareness, you will be able to attain *sīla* (morality), *samādhi* (concentration), and *paññā* (insight).

When you have practiced until you are free of inattentiveness and in possession of mindfulness, you should go on practicing two skills together, *samatha* (tranquility) and *vipassanā* (spiritual insight). *Samatha* is attentiveness to any one object of consciousness to calm your mind so that it could relax, be happy and gain strength. In practicing *samatha*, focus your mind for quite a while on any of the 40 sense-objects that have been listed to gain strength. You will get good result if you are attentive and guided by mindfulness. While you are practicing *samatha*, your

mind will be calm, firm and undisturbed by defilements. As thoughts arise one at a time, if you focus on a wholesome sense-object, which is free of defilements, you will be able to rid yourself of defilements at times. Such a period will get longer and longer.

Another skill that should be developed along with it is *vipassanā*—attentiveness given to natural conditions that arise from causes and cease when the causes are gone. Attentiveness to natural conditions will reveal that whatever comes to pass will go away. There is only suffering that forces us to do this or that; and there are only non-self objects that cannot be controlled. Conditions are all similar in this respect. Whatever arises is transient, distressing, and non-self. It does not matter which condition you look at, but do so from a similar angle and look at it until you can see *tilakkhaṇa*, or the three characteristics—impermanence, suffering, and non-self.

As for *samatha* you can look at any sense-object that does not arouse defilements. It should make you happy, calm, and comfortable. Instead of letting your mind drift, find a sense-object where your mind can stay. It seems that everyone knows how to focus his attention on a sense-object, which is called *samatha*. What is important is for you to practice it with awareness and ease.

Vipassanā is a bit more difficult. There must be a Buddha who has attained Enlightenment to make known the way. You have to listen carefully until you can grasp it. You have to train your mind until it is ready to cultivate *vipassanā*. However, do not leave off *samatha* but find a sense-object that does not arouse defilements and stay with it; for instance, listen attentively to *dharmā* without thinking of anything extraneous, your mind will become calm. If you are interested in respiration, just watch your breath coming in and going out, and you will be calm. If you walk and get interested in your steps, counting 1, 2, 3, continuously, you are practicing *samatha*. If you want to advance to the level of *jhāna* (meditation) or be good at *samādhi* (concentration), you should supplement the usual practice with your own strategy. If you look at a sense-object with firm mindfulness and awareness, you will be able to stay with it for a long time for you will not be distracted by any other objects or dominated by desire or delusion. With those whose mindfulness and awareness are not strong, in a short while they will be dominated by other sense-objects or by delusion, or will feel sleepy or have fantasies.

Regarding *vipassanā*, you have to understand quite well how to do it. The way to *vipassanā* is the practice of *brahmacariya* (sublime life) as the Buddha had instructed. *Paññā* will only come to a disciplined mind with firm determination. You, therefore, have to practice mindfulness and awareness, get to know your mental states thoroughly, and grasp the true nature of your mind. This kind of practice is known as *adhicittasikkhā* or training in higher mentality. In knowing the true nature of your mind, you will be able to differentiate various mental conditions—calm or restless, wholesome or unwholesome, etc. Moreover, when you see that your mind is getting you to do this or that, you will not be led astray. If your mind gets to this stage, it can be said that your mind is stable, concentrative, not given to misjudgment, indifferent to various

conditions that come to pass. A mind that is concentrative is clear, light and happy, blissful, gratified, gentle, and ready for work. How firm it is depends on the force of *samatha* or concentration behind it. A mind in this condition will equip you to watch your body and mind and reach the stage of contemplation, seeing things as they really are. Therefore, to practice *vipassanā*, or contemplation, you must do so with a concentrative mind.

We all have only one obligation—to practice mindfulness, so that we will be careful and aware of everything we do, say, or think. In other words we are talking about two things—you should practice *samatha* alongside *vipassanā*. When you are developing *samatha*, choose an appropriate sense-object—listening to *dharmā*, watching yourself breathing in and out, or uttering the word “Buddho” to make your mind calm, at ease, happy and strong. Then practice awareness until you reach the stage of concentrative mind. When you have set your mind firmly in concentration, proceed to develop *vipassanā*, examining your body and mind until you grasp the truth that it is impermanent, subject to suffering and non-self.

Samatha and *vipassanā* should be practiced together. It does not matter which one you practice first. What is of great importance is for you to be aware, mindful and attentive. If you are aware and mindful, and become calm with one sense-object, practice *samatha* first. When you are sufficiently calm, go on to develop *vipassanā*. Or else train yourself by living your life as usual with mindfulness and awareness. If you find that you cannot stay calm with one sense-object, go on developing *vipassanā* first so that you could see that all things are subject to impermanence and are not controllable. After practicing *vipassanā* for a while, if you find that your mind gets tired and weary, let it return and rest at any sense-object. Then proceed with the practice of *samatha*. In sum if you can practice *samatha* first, begin with it and practice *vipassanā* later; if you cannot start with *samatha*, practice *vipassanā* first. However, they should be practiced one after another.

It is said that *samatha* and *vipassanā* are two mental states that should be developed together and the attainment of both depends on attentiveness and mindfulness. If you practice *samatha*, or concentration, with inattentiveness, you may end up with *samatha* of an ascetic. Some people enjoy tranquility, having visions of this and that. Be wary of that because it does not free you from suffering and you won't attain true insight.

The Buddha has taught us to practice *samatha* because it is needed for the practice of *vipassanā*. *Samatha* helps strengthen the mind. If we practice *vipassanā* by itself, the mind might become weak. Such a mind would wander and could neither fully grasp the true nature of suffering nor gain insight into the truth. The two complement each other and have to be developed together to gain insight and understand the truth so that we could free ourselves from delusions and attachments.

In brief, you must keep yourself aware and mindful. When you can do so, start practicing *samatha* and *vipassanā* using any approach you like. If you prefer a simple and natural way, try

to apply what I have suggested. You have to rely on mindfulness and consciousness and develop *samatha* and *vipassanā* together. Some may have developed a lot of *samatha*, while others only a little. It does not really matter how much you have developed. A person who has practiced a lot will be happy and his mind will become stronger. However, this is not of great importance. What you have to do is practice as much as needed to gain insight into the truth and free yourself from delusions and attachments. If you gain this much, you have achieved your goal.

It is time for the session to come to a close. May I thank you all and express my deep appreciation for your patience and attempt in practicing *dhamma*.

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