

JOS talks

There are three people participating in these talks:

1. The teacher, Phra Achan Bunchu (**A**)
2. The student, Jos (**J**)
3. And the translator, Roti (**T**)

During the conversation, when the translator (**T**) translates from Thai to English what the teacher (**A**) says, and from English to Thai what Jos (**J**) says, you will see a **J** and an **A** respectively. Only when the translator talks directly (that means, without translating) to any of the two participants, you will see a **T**.

Background: Jos (**J**) is a German 19 year old who stayed at Dhamma-garden for a month (January-February 2016). A friend of his who had stayed here recommended him to come; however, since the first day he got here, basically every day he was thinking about going back to Bangkok. It was after about a week of having arrived that he asked for a talk with the teacher.

JOS 1 **(First talk)**

A: Mr. Jos how do you feel? So what are you thinking now, you think you're going back or you think you'll stay?

J: I'm not sure.

A: Whom do you miss the most that's making you go back? You can talk from your heart, directly from what you feel.

J: Ah, when I say I'm going back I don't mean home. It's just... because here I don't have as many distractions as in Bangkok, for example, so... I become more aware of my longing. So... I just want to go to Bangkok, or maybe to Chiang Mai to... to...

T: To distract yourself?

J: Yeah.

M: What do you think it is best for him to do, Roti, go or stay?

T: Well, I don't know, I guess it is his decision.

A: Yes it's up to Jos if he decides to stay or to go. If you want to stay, that's ok; if you want to go, go ahead, there's no problem. Here, Dhamma-garden, is free-style. You can stay or go.

J: Yes. I thought so. My purpose was studying Buddhism, at first, but when my longing begins, and... my feelings become stronger, everything else seems so... senseless, so

meaningless, so... I feel so lost. Like I'm just floating around with any purpose, (chuckling), and I can't put any sense to it...

A: To what?

J: ...to my life; and the only thing I can think about is... to... distract myself from that, because I'm totally defenseless.

A: So you say that your first point was to learn Buddhism, but what happened then?

J: It was my purpose but... as I said when I'm somewhere where I don't feel so good, confident, it's hard for me to actually do something, because I'm so caught up in the bad feeling; so my mind is so attached to it, that there's no attention to anything else, and I don't have any motivation to do so...

A: Before we come to learn Buddhism, we have to learn about our own heart/mind. When you say you learned about Buddhism, what is it that you learned?

J: I think exactly that: to learn about my feelings, about my heart.

A: Umm, yes, you have to learn that now. Your restless mind –your mind that wants to go– you have to learn about it now, because if the power of this restless mind is strong, then you are not going to be able to stay, and you will have to go. I heard you were asking about the buses, at what time, how often they leave, and so on –that's the mind that wants to go, the one I'm talking about.

T: Because a little while ago I told the teacher that you asked me if there are plenty of buses going to Bangkok every day or not.

A: You should study this kind of mind. To study that your mind is like this, that you're restless and agitated because you have an object ahead of time: you wish to go to look for wherever is enjoyable and entertaining, amusing. But all of that is completely pointless, you have been entertaining and enjoying yourself a lot already, for 19 years.

J: During the day I'm fine... with myself. I feel like I can stay here, I don't think about the future or the past –sometimes I do but it's not powerful. But when the light fades and the night comes, I have a feeling in my stomach that I should be somewhere else, I long to be somewhere else, and... also a lot of fear comes. And, yeah, you know, when... when... right now I think I can stay here! It's not a huge problem for me. But then around six o'clock, when it starts to get dark, I can't stand it.

A: (Chuckling).

J: At that time it becomes too much... to actually be aware of it, to study what is happening –I don't have the awareness to do so.

A: You don't have other kinds of troubles (*dukkha*: mental or physical suffering, or unpleasant feeling), like regarding the heat or the food, right?

J: Not at all.

A: Like this you can study easily, because you only have one thing that is a problem. So learn about your heart and mind with no words, with no language, without a method to fix it.

J: So I just... should just... let it... be or...?

A: Yes. When the mind understands, acceptance arises by itself. But right now it still doesn't accept it, it still repudiates it, it still dislikes it. It still wants to leave. But when one understands enough it will accept it by itself. And it will be able to be, to stay –then one can learn from it. And about what you said that at night you cannot be, that you're thinking and decorating things up...¹ but why during the day is it not like that? Because at night we start thinking about the past over and over again, the same thing, so the object gets very strong. And you end up just thinking about leaving.

J: Well, first there's the feeling and then there's the thinking about leaving, you know. I'm fine during the daytime, totally fine ...well, totally fine would be exaggeration but... I'm ok. And... then the feeling comes, and then... the feeling I can't stand it anymore, I just want to leave and distraction arises. But... what can I do in order to understand my feeling?!

A: You have to understand the mind that wants to leave, that creates stories in the mind. Let's study it right now; do you have it right now?

J: Yes.

A: Just to know it, like that. That's all. Because usually we have all this information in our minds about it, but when one knows it, one does it without having to dislike it. If the mind is making things up, creating stories, wanting to leave, we just know it. That's all.

J: It's hard!

A: Yes. The "I" makes up stories through thinking, the "I" that wants to leave: "I want to go", "I want to get rid of this". We are very familiarized, or accustomed, with the "I". All this thinking has to do with past issues –also future ones. But there's the condition that knows, that is aware, and that condition is present moment. For example, the moment we become aware that our mind is wandering, then at that moment wandering stops – probably stops for just a second. Studying this is like seeing a silent movie. Because the nature of the condition which knows –or is aware–, and the objects which are known, are

¹ Here we are using the word "decorating" as the final way to explain a Thai term which could also be translated as to dress up, touch up, add, make up, decorate, concoct, season, garnish. In Pāli language it would be *vitakka-vicāra* "thought-conception and discursive thinking", which are verbal functions (*vacī-sankhāra*) of the mind, the so-called "inner speech" ("*parole interieure*"). Thought-conception (*vitakka*) is the laying hold of a thought, giving it attention. Its characteristic consists in fixing the consciousness to the object. Discursive thinking (*vicāra*) is the roaming about and moving to and fro of the mind... It manifests itself as continued activity of mind (*Vissuddhimagga IV*); and it's compared with the striking against a bell, with its resounding; (with the seizing of a pot, with wiping it). *Vitakka-vicāra* can be both skillful and unskillful. In this case it's obviously unskillful. When, for example, vipassanā insight has been developed, *vitakka-vicāra*'s function it's no more manifested in the form of "thinking".

both mute. Real things are quiet and silent. But all that which can speak and come to conclusions is not real, it's conceptual. All the language and talking in the mind is conceptual. Like right now, do you have thinking?

J: Yes.

A: Do you have it or not? Try and see...

J: I have it.

A: There you are, then. That which thinks is one thing. That which knows is something else.² That which knows does not think. But we join them together in one thing: the "I". "I think". But the knowing is not a self, it's not an "I". It is awareness (*sati*) which knows. This awareness is mute; it's not speaking any words. So now let's pay attention again, is there any thinking?

J: Yes.

A: Only that. To know just that is enough. Normally we never see this, we are never aware of it. When we want to go, we just go on and follow that pattern of thinking. Thinking about leaving has to do with the future, but *the natural condition which knows* is the present moment. By knowing it often, moment by moment, skillfulness (*kusala*) arises steadily. And so when the mind is skillful [wholesome], the study of it becomes amusing. It's not difficult, if you understand it is easy. Because it is there already, the thinking is there, happening already. But the condition which knows, which is aware, is usually not there. If you start becoming aware in this manner over and over again, then you'll be knowing the present more often. Just to know with no words in your heart/mind, like this, with this kind of awareness. A moment ago you said it was hard, but now it's easy, because you have understood that this kind of awareness exists.

J: Right now, I'm at the point where there's a bit of understanding. But... I often have that. And then... when... the stories and the feeling and the longing –the missing– get more powerful... it's like everything is just... like a big river coming from the mountain –"whoosh!"– and I'm in it! And there's nothing I can do about it. I'm not standing at the outside and thinking –no, not thinking– being aware of, "Oh there's a river right now, I'm in it! I'm down the hill! I flow with the water!" There's nothing I can do about it, because it's so powerful. And it's hard for me to be aware in these moments because there's so much identification with it. It goes so deep to what I think I am... that... the pain... is too much!

A: You don't have to do anything with it, you just know impassively. Because you cannot suppress it, coerce it, disapprove of it. There's a Thai proverb that says, "When the water is flowing vehemently, don't put a boat in the way.", because the boat will sink. Don't try to suppress the heart/mind when it is thinking vehemently, because you will not be able to stay. Nevertheless the mind flows stronger than water... when you think too much, that makes you unable to stay. The more you suppress it, the more it arises. The more you dislike it, the more it arises. You have to become accustomed, familiar, with it.

² In this case, that which knows –or is aware of– the thinking.

J: So the teacher advises me to stay?

A: It's up to you if you stay or not, that's another matter. We don't forbid or force anything. And we will not implore either – (chuckling)...

T: Implore?

A: Beg him to stay. It's up to him.

J: I know, I know. If I ask for advice, just advice –I know I will do what I will do, but just from the teacher's point of view, when he says... that I should become familiar with it, [it means] that I shouldn't try to distract myself, right?

A: That's right. You need to familiarize yourself with it, to study your own mind. You have distracted yourself a long time already, nineteen years already, and you don't know yourself at all. (Chuckling).

T: Ha-ha-ha.

A: But if you can come to know your own heart and mind, that has much more value than the 19 years that have gone by. When one does not learn about it at all, then it will be like this always. How many years? 50 or 60 years can pass and one hasn't learned anything at all about our mind's true nature. But if you start learning now, in 50 or 60 years you'll have more knowledge. Ignorant people are not those lacking education, ignorant people are those who do not know their own mind. Knowing your mind means knowing your defilements.

T: Do you know what defilements are?

J: I heard about them but I forgot.

T: Defilements are what make the mind dirty, or something like that... in the sense that they make the mind unable to see clearly, to understand clearly. Desire, anger, wrong view (the idea of a self), and a few more, are what defile the mind. And in order to eradicate such defilements –or begin to decrease them little by little– one has to become familiar with them. As the teacher says: "How can you get rid of something if you are not aware of it?"

A: But if one understands one's own mind already, one's defilements, in this way, then one has education, knowledge. This is called to know one's own defilements. If you still live 50 or 60 years more, you'll have no trouble, because you'll know your own defilements. When you are 40 or 50 you can have more understanding about yourself. But if you haven't learned about this at all, it'll be the same as the years that have gone by; it will go on like this and even increase. You will just go on looking for sensual objects, pleasure, and entertainment –external conditions. Enjoyment with the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind.

J: Right now I can follow and I agree. But... when the river comes, I just... it's too much!

A: To know a lot about other people has not much usefulness, but if one comes to know and understand one's own heart and mind, one's own defilements, that is very beneficial. The aim of what the Buddha taught is to be able to come to know one's own defilements.

J: I think I'll try today. And...try to... try to know... I don't know how to put it in the right way but...

T: ...to be aware.

J: I will try to be aware. And... tomorrow I would like to talk with the teacher again and... maybe, he, maybe... you know what I'm trying to say?

T: ...and we'll see tomorrow what happens.

J: Yeah. And to tell him about it, about what happened.

A: Yes. Today you have some homework to take with you: to study your heart and mind. (Chuckling).

J: Unusual. Ha-ha-ha!

T: As usual?

J: Un-usual!

T: Oh. Jos says it's a kind of homework he has never had.

A: Yes, but actually we had this since we first had life –but there's been nobody to tell us, to advise us about how to know it. Everyone has this likewise.

T: Has the same homework?

A: Has the same defilements. The same thinking and wandering mind like this; everyone has it likewise. Probably you've never been alone, by yourself. Because when one stays alone, one starts thinking about the past, about the future, often the mind starts wandering. And often when one is by oneself, whoever one starts missing again and again, then one wants to go and look for that person. But one hasn't come to know one's mind. For example, one starts missing one's mom, then the mind is at that place already, but about the mind itself one is not aware. In general, people are like that, they go with the objects –past and future–, but they haven't come back to see their own mind and heart. But when one sees one's own mind, this stops by itself, without having to suppress anything. So try and investigate once more your heart and mind: How's the mind now? Having awareness now. Is there talking in the mind? Is there thinking and wandering mind? Let's become aware of the present now. If there's wandering mind one knows it and if there's no wandering mind one knows it. One just knows it as such.

J: I can't... put so much sense to it... ...what this knowing is supposed to... I don't know what to say! I just have to try it out, I guess.

A: Sadhu! (It is well!)³ (Chuckling). You can continue studying. If there's something I can help you with, you can come and we can talk again.

J: Thank you –both of you.

A: Sadhu!

—Here ends the first talk—

JOS 2 **(Second talk)**

A: What are you coming to talk about, Jos? What is it that I'm going to help you with?

J: I don't know. Maybe it's just about understanding. Yesterday you said that thinking and knowing are different, but I noticed that every time I think I know, I think!! Ha-ha! If that makes sense!

A: And have you been aware of this before? ...About thinking and then becoming aware of it, of the thinking?

J: I have the feeling I force it, you know? It's not natural, because I WANT TO KNOW. Because I see it as something good.

A: But such wanting to know... such wanting is greed (*lobha*). But the natural condition that knows, which is awareness (*sati-sampajañña*), that is skillful (*kusala*).

T: If it's skillful, that means it cannot be associated with greed or any other defilement.

J: Yes, I begin to understand, slowly. But it's... I have the feeling that it's such a... It takes so much time! So much patience! There's so much restlessness in me! And... and so much desire to fix myself! It's hard to get there, to that point where you just...

A: Here, to *just know* means you know without having to think.

T: But Jos thinks that is very difficult! He says he has no patience.

A: Umm, that's all right, it's no problem. If there's thinking you just know it. But there's this condition that knows without having to think. Roti, have you seen it? The awareness that goes to know, to know the thinking, or the mode (*ākāra*) of what we are doing?

³ Here the meaning of "Sadhu!" is "Well done!".

T: He asked me if I've been aware of the thinking, or of whatever activity I'm doing (like washing the dishes or folding my clothes)—just knowing without thinking...

J: I think... I have, but, then again, maybe I just wanted to...

A: Yes, that could be so. But what I told you about—about that which knows—is awareness; it's not wanting to know. However, if the wanting to know arises, you only know it.

J: Most of the time I follow it, because it's so subtle, you know?

T: You follow what?

J: The *wanting* to be aware...

T: Oh I see, you're *doing*; you're wanting to be aware.

J: I force it: "I want to be aware now! What am I doing right now?!" Like that. Ha-ha!

A: It's not like that; that's not the meaning...

J: I know! I know that's not what the teacher is talking about...

T: But that's how you react automatically.

J: How it looks for me.

A: You just know it. You know that it is greed; it's wanting to know. And if you do that for a long time then you'll start having side effects, you know? Like a headache, or you start feeling dizzy, tense, aching, stressed...

J: Like cramped shoulders...

T: Have you been having them now?

J: Yes.

A: Those are side effects. And it is not correct. If you understand correctly then you have to be relaxed, not stressed—not tense, not strained, not dizzy. When the mind is thinking and *decorating things up*, then you just know it—it's not about having an intention or determination to go and know it. But it's good that you told us about your feeling [the tension in the shoulders], because if you don't say it, then you go on doing it and thinking it's correct.

J: Sometimes you have to say it out loud in order to realize it yourself, (chuckling). You know? I wasn't really aware of it until I said it.

A: Yes. And when this is happening, even when you have an intention to listen, you also get tense.

T: Intention to listen?

A: Yes, intention to listen in order to understand. And sometimes after listening you go and “do”.

T: To “do” means an action that contains something extra, that is to say, a resolution, a determination, an intention. You listen to the teacher and then you want to put into action the things he said. You have this resolution to go and do what the teacher said, to do it correctly, etc.

A: This is what is called: to listen and understand incorrectly. You understand that you have to “do”. There’s an intention that is determined to do. But what I have told you is not about having an intention in that way. Whatever arises –unpleasant bodily feeling, wandering mind, thinking, etc.– you go from not knowing it to just knowing it. That’s all.

The conversation has to be both ways. Reciprocal. Once you have listened, what did you understand? If you tell us about it, that’s very good. You have to understand correctly first, so that you can then put that into practice also in the correct way.

J: So as far as I understood what Achan Bunchu is talking about is... the knowing comes by itself, you cannot force it because it is a natural condition.

A: Yes.

J: Through what is it conditioned?

T: You mean, what conditions it to arise?

J: Yes.

A: From listening. Once you listened, proper consideration arises (*yoniso-manasikāra*), right understanding. You listen, you understand correctly, and then you apply it in the correct way. You can also listen and understand incorrectly: that’s when you understand you should “do”, you should contemplate, observe, focus, have an intention, arrange, organize. You already listened but you understood incorrectly. Therefore, it is very important that the conversation has to be both ways –has to be reciprocal– so that the teacher can know that what you understood is correct or not.

J: So when the teacher says something I just tell him how I understood it and then he corrects?

A: Yes. So I can know if you understand correctly or incorrectly.

J: Sometimes the teacher is talking so fast I have no option to stop him, ha-ha-ha.

A: I’m actually speaking slowly, in parts, so that Roti can have the option to translate. But probably Jos is not yet familiar with this kind of language (these kinds of topics or information). This is probably something new for Jos.

J: Right. Not what I would talk with my mother about.

A: If I speak fast it doesn't really matter, because Jos has to wait for Roti to translate to him anyway.

J: But I mean, not fast, but, he says something, you translate, he says something, you translate, and I'm getting all this information...!

A: Oh! (Chuckling), it doesn't really matter, because I'm putting on the tape later on so you can review or go over it!

J: Ha-ha-ha, ok, ha-ha-ha.⁴ So... but... is there something I can do... to... stop myself... from forcing myself?? I think the answer will be: "relax".

A: Right! (Chuckling). But if you practice and get symptoms –rigidness, stress, dizziness, aching, pain– then that's already not it. If you do this for a long time, then you also start having difficulty going to sleep.

J: And I think I did it wrong yesterday, most of the time, (chuckling).

A: Never mind. Wrong is a teacher. It's not like newcomers come and right away they do everything correctly. Some people have been coming for many years and they still don't understand correctly at all! Right now we have the opportunity to talk in this way, openly.

J: I think it is a really subtle thing, at the bottom of things, a really pure thing, that's why it's, maybe, easy to misunderstand.

A: Right! And then there's craving (*tanhā*) which wants everything to be good, to be correct.

T: (Chuckling). Craving, which means desire, wants to know everything, wants to practice correctly.

J: Is there something in particular that I can read?

A: Yes, there is. Talking is very helpful, but also reading can be, and if there are points you don't understand come and ask and we can talk about it. Whatever doubts you have, you can also ask Roti because he's the translator; he has translated everything into English, and you both can talk in English, which is easy for you.

J: Yeah. Thank you very much.

A: Because language communication is important. You should use whichever language you understand. But you have to force yourself into reading a little bit, because this is not like the fiction tales that you like.

T: Not like what, Achan?

⁴ The laughter here is because the teacher used to put the tapes on early in the morning and Jos would get upset because he couldn't go on sleeping!

A: Not like what he is fond of reading. This teaching (Dhamma) is not like what he likes to read. It's not fun.⁵ But it's about our heart/mind, our defilements.

J: I think that if it leads to understanding... it's fun, (chuckling).

A: Yes, it's fun regarding Dhamma. Actually it is about our own mind and heart; the defilements arise in our own mind and heart. Skillfulness (*kusala*) and unskillfulness (*akusala*) arise in the heart and mind, which is the place where we have to come to study. This knowledge that the Buddha taught, if you actually learn it, it enables you to abandon defilements.

J: But... again, if you have a desire to get rid of them because you see them as something bad, I think... you misunderstand the teaching.

A: Yes. You still don't understand correctly.

J: But what I wonder is how the Buddha went all that way of understanding by himself.

A: The Buddha was able to realize this [by himself] because he accumulated perfections (*pāramī*) –he did this kind of practice– for a very long period of time, incalculable Eons (*Asankheyya-kappa*)⁶ after the Buddha Prediction.⁷

J: Billions of lifetimes.

A: For us it's easy because the Buddha has told us what is skillful and what is unskillful, what ought to be developed and what ought to be abandoned. He pointed out the way already.

J: Yes, but it's not like he's alive, (chuckling). Still, if you read something from him, you always, I think, have to double-check and see what intention the translator might have had, because, I mean, he lived 2,500 or something years ago, the Buddha. And how can I know he really said that, because the teaching went through... thousands of mouths and thousands of translations...

A: Probably there's some of that. However, whenever skillfulness or unskillfulness arise it is the same now as before: when greed arose in people, in sentient beings, a long time ago before the Buddha got enlightened, it was the same: people got delighted, pleased, happy, wanting to get, entertained.

J: I understand... that you can still apply what the Buddha taught because the human nature didn't change; it's still the same.

⁵ The teacher says this because Jos arrived from Bangkok reading a novel about dragons in medieval times.

⁶ *Asankheyya* – An indefinite and incalculable time period. According to *Anguttara ii*, 142, there are four periods called incalculable epochs (*asankheyya-kappa*) within a great aeon or world cycle (*maha-kappa*). The duration of each of these epochs cannot be enumerated even by taking hundreds of thousands (*laks*) of years as a unit, hence the name “incalculable aeon”...

⁷ This means the prediction by the former Buddha to the Bodhisatta, or Buddha-to-be, who had just embarked on the path. A Bodhisatta passes through many existences and many stages of progress before the last birth in which he fulfills his great destiny.

A: Right. The same. And the Buddha himself also became aware of these conditions, of the various unskillful phenomena like greed, anger, and delusion, in the same way we do it right now. But the Buddha, when he became aware of them, was also able to eradicate them –and to come and tell us about it.

J: But still... I think it's something else to read it in a book or to hear it from himself.

A: Yes.

J: I don't want to complain, ha-ha. Thank you.

A: Sadhu!

—Here ends the second talk—

JOS 3

(Third talk)

A: Mr. Jos, what can I help you with?

J: Today... it feels... really senseless to stay here to me.

A: Oh, you can go right away to wherever there is sense. (Chuckling). Go right away. Wherever there's sense go. Go to the places you truly like; wherever you don't like don't go.

J: A lot of thoughts today...

A: That's no problem.

J: ...a lot of thinking...

A: The mind that wants to leave, it's hard to suppress. Do you agree Mr. Roti?

T: Yes.

A: If you see there's no sense in being here you can go right away.

J: Ok, but I would go with... a bad view towards myself, I know that. I will feel like, "you didn't make it", (chuckling), "to enlightenment", ha-ha-ha, you know?!

A: Oh... you want to achieve enlightenment, and because you didn't achieve it you'd rather go?

J: No. I... my mind... views itself as... I view myself as... imperfect, and because of that, I'm worthless ...I would say it, maybe in that way.

A: So what can be done to become worthy?

J: I can become... a lot of things. I can have muscles. I can be good at sports. I can be good at Buddhism. I can...

A: Oh. Yes.

J: I can be good at something.

A: Oh.

J: When we... last time we spoke, when the teacher said, “*Sadhu!*”, one part of me felt really good, because the teacher, you know, gave me some... good feedback about what I said, and...

A: Yes. If you say *Sadhu*, like *jakunā samvara saddhu* (not to be careless through the eye is worthy of being called *Sadhu!*), it’s because it brings you beyond suffering.⁸

T: That’s a Pāli language phrase in the scriptures, which means that being mindful about what is being seen, it’s *sadhu* (propitious, or worth of being praised) because it takes you to the goal of enlightenment, that is, to the stopping of rebirth.

A: Right now you want to leave. (This means) you don’t know mindfulness. So how can we “*Saddhu*” you?

J: That’s true. So... you know, I see mindfulness, awareness, as something good, as something I want to have.

A: Wanting to have is greed. Therefore all you get is greed.

J: And I don’t want to have greed because greed is something bad, you know. I slowly become aware of this, this...

A: You don’t want greed but it arises often...

J: ...this aversion towards something. But I don’t want it to arise.

A: Understand correctly. It’s not about slow or fast.

J: I know, but sometimes I don’t understand... anything at all...

A: (Chuckling).

J: ...and then I just feel really empty

A: Ooh.

⁸ *Sadhu* is a Pāli word which means good, excellent or auspicious. Examples of the word’s use are: ‘It is *sadhu* to see noble ones’ (Digha Nikaya I.88), ‘It is *sadhu* to control the mind’ (Dhammapada 35), and ‘Even one who leads a *sadhu* life will decline by consorting with a lazy person’ (Itvuttaka 71). *Sadhu* is also occasionally used in the Tipitaka as an exclamation. To show his appreciation of something Sāriputta had said the Buddha responded: ‘*Sadhu, sadhu, Sāriputta!*’ (Vinya I.56). Today it is common for people in Buddhist countries to say *sadhu* three times to express their happiness or approval of something related to the Dhamma.

J: And I know that, well... I'm not sure how to say this....

A: There's one Chinese saying: "Knowing that one still does not know, is the first step towards knowing." Do you understand?

J: Yes.

A: Ok.

J: I know that in the end what you practice here –this knowing– is really easy, because it is just what it is: there's the condition, and that's when it arises, and that's it! Nothing to do with a self or something. But for me, right now, when I think that there's no self, that everything is impermanent, and... as Roti told me last night that in the end one is alone, a lot of sadness about it...

A: Yes. Nobody can know us better than we ourselves, right? Other people cannot know us better than we ourselves. But why when you know this you also get sad, can you know it and not get sad? Because sadness is aversion, is unskillfulness. And the point here is to become aware of one's own defilements.

T: The point of what?

A: The point of practicing. The point of the practice is to become aware of our own mental defilements. Someone used to say that ignorant people are not those lacking education, but those who don't know themselves.⁹

J: For me... knowing myself and... seeing all my mist-a-a-kes and... It's ha-a-rd right now!

A: Why is it hard? It's hard because you have not paid attention to yourself before. And so when you come to know yourself you reject it, you don't like it. Aversion arises. But if we understand ourselves, know our defilements, can we not have aversion arise?

J: Can you say that again?

T: Can you know yourself –the things you find unpleasant about yourself– without aversion?

J: Yes, because then, I think, you really know yourself, because you know it's not your fault, it's just... conditioned!

A: Yes. Because we still have defilements like that, there are conditions for it to be like that, so it must be like that. But when we get new conditions, that is, correct our understanding, then we can know more about our defilements.

J: Would he say I could do it in Bangkok too, for example?

A: Do what in Bangkok?

⁹ "To know ourselves" and "to know our defilements" is the same thing.

J: Get to know myself.

A: Right now you cannot know, so what would you take to Bangkok to do it with? An example, somebody who doesn't know how to drive a car, if he goes and buys one, would that make him able to drive?

J: If you don't know how to drive it, no. You could try but it will go wrong.

A: Right. So you still don't understand at all the practice of mindfulness (*Satipaṭṭhāna*), how can you then go somewhere and do it?

J: It's a good question.

A: We are not forbidding you to go, if you want to go you can go.

J: I know.

A: Right. This is because in order to develop *Satipaṭṭhāna* (the foundations of mindfulness) you have to know your own defilements.

J: Yes, but... when the teacher says it, it sounds, "Ah, yes, it makes sense!" But then again when I'm alone, in the evenings...

T: What happens then?

J: I... don't have the right understanding to... see my emotions as what they are...

A: You still don't understand. Once you understand you can see them. Roti, do you have some advice that can help him understand this when he's by himself?

T: Well, I think he doesn't like the objects or emotions that arise...

A: Yes, that's a cause. So what can he do in order to like or be able to see them?

T: He has to accept.

A: And what do we do in order to accept? What is the method or strategy that enables us to accept? Do you Roti have any experience with this? (Chuckling.)

T: (Chuckling). So that one can accept? Well, one needs proper consideration (*yoniso-manasikāra*), that is, he needs to understand various things...

A: Ok, so let's use or talk about "not-self" (*anattā*) for now. *Not-a-self* indicates, for example, that what one thinks cannot be suppressed, it's not under one's power to do so, and therefore it is not a self in this way. If it were a self (*attā*) then one would be able to control it.

T: This means that the arising of things depend on conditions, not on a controlling-agent.

A: Do you understand?

J: A bit.

A: Normally, we haven't contemplated ourselves. We haven't contemplated or been aware of our heart and mind. And once we contemplate it, we don't like it. We only like the nice part, the nice things. When we see the bad things we have done, we don't like it. This is how it has been in the past, it's just that we haven't been aware of it. When we see things about ourselves, which are past already, which are already gone, and which are not nice, we dislike them. But then there's a natural condition which is awareness, a skillful condition which becomes aware of unskillfulness. This natural skillful condition knows unskillfulness, knows the not nice things we did, we spoke, we thought in the past. This awareness of the unskillfulness is skillful. *Sabbe dhammā anattā* (both skillful and unskillful are not-self). *Sabbe dhammā nālaṃ abhinivesāyā* (all things are not fit to be clung to). If you cling to them you get suffering. If you have understood, and so you don't cling and grasp, then you don't get suffering.

J: I think that the idea, the concept, of "me" or "I", that there is something that stays forever, a soul or spirit, is really deep in the subconscious.

A: Still you can know it...

T: Know the not-self characteristic, right?

A: Yes, it can be understood.

J: Yes... but...

A: If you're able to know it, to understand it, then you gain access to the foundation of the Buddhist teaching. The purpose of the practice is to become aware of our own defilements. Once one understands them, then one can abandon them. But here, once you see the defilements, you fall into dislike. Therefore, you don't get the chance to know them. Not only you don't get to know them but you also increase them, you add more dislike and aversion.

J: Yes, I... I see...

A: Do you understand a bit more?

J: I think yes. When I talk with the teacher, and he says it, it's different than when I'm alone.

A: You have to take the understanding to use it, because you have to be by yourself. You need to listen and understand, then take it and use it correctly. When you're by yourself and you still cannot understand, then we can get together and talk again like this until you understand. Once you have understood it's like when you've learned how to drive a car, wherever you are you can drive it right away.

J: I would have to come back to Achan a lot, I think.

A: You need to bring the understanding into use. Once you understand you can be anywhere. Like Roti, when he's cooking he can have awareness. Or when eating he can have awareness. Can you, Roti?

T: Yes, sometimes. Sometimes I don't.

A: Tell Joss about it a little bit...

T: I don't have the expectation to have it. Or it is not like when I have it I feel "Oh now I'm a good person because I have it". I know it's not under my control. You just know that awareness is something valuable. You understand why it is something worth developing —that's important, to know why to have awareness is something good. And then —once this information is in the mind— it will just depend on conditions. When you're doing your daily activities, like cooking or... eating, then... it may come or it may not come. One knows it just depends on conditions.

A: Expectation is greed. Do you agree?

J: Of course. Of course, I think I do, but...

A: But how long did it take you, Roti, to have some understanding? How many years? More than ten years?

T: Ha-ha-ha-ha.

J: How long do you stay here?

T: I've been studying this for about fifteen years.

J: No, I meant, until when are you in Thailand?

T: Oh, I'll be here until March.

J: March. Ok.

(By some unknown mistake the end of this talk's recording was cut)

–The End–

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