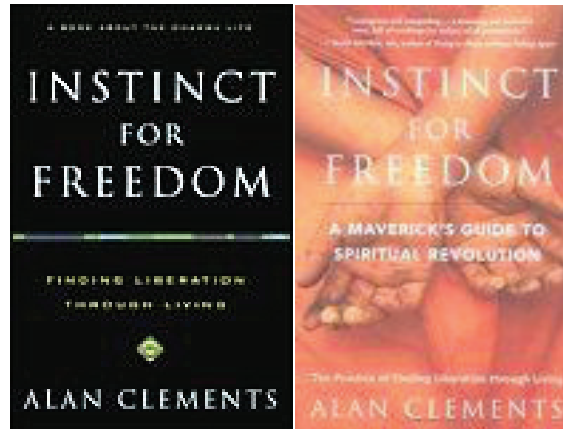


Instinct *for* Freedom

A Book About Everyday Revolution —
Finding Liberation Through Living

by Alan Clements



INTERVIEW WITH VENERABLE SAYADAW U PANDITA
PANDITARAMA MEDITATION CENTER, RANGOON, BURMA

Alan Clements / March 1996

Alan Clements: What is the basis of genuine dialogue, say, when two people or parties disagree with the others opinion and or position?

U Pandita: Truth. The Buddha made this point clear. If truth is the basis of a discussion then there's possibility. Otherwise, one will tend to stay entangled in one's views biased by fear and ignorance.

AC: Who determines the truth?

UP: Freedom is the best yardstick of determining anything of value.

AC: What is the essential difference in attitude of a Bodhisattva — a being striving for Buddhahood in order to help as many beings awaken as possible — and say, a puthajjana — one who, as theory states, is unenlightened but sincerely strives for full liberation — Arahantship? As you know, this fundamental distinction is the major difference in Mahayana and Theravada doctrine. Perhaps you could shed some light on the difference? Not many Asian Theravada teachers, if any, talk about this basic difference.

UP: The difference is one of motivation. The motivation of a being striving for Buddhahood — a Bodhisatta — is more noble than someone who is striving just for their own liberation alone.

Also, a Bodhisatta's dhamma zeal, or chanda, is much stronger. Another major difference is compassion. A Bodhisatta will be profoundly moved by compassion. Whereby the one aspiring for self-

liberation is working only for his or her own attainment and realization. In other words, self-liberating types are primarily concerned with only passing the examination, while a Bodhisatta aspires to pass with distinction. Of course, by passing with distinctions you will be much more effective in helping others.

AC: I would like to pursue the issue from the angle of dhamma attitude, or right understanding. You clearly advocate and train others to pursue self-liberation. In so doing you exhort your students to restrain the senses and to see the dangers in pursuing sense pleasures. In addition, you work from a basic premise, in your words, “one must begin to see the inherent flaws of nama-rupa, that is — all mental and physical phenomena are subject to three common characteristics, that of anicca or impermanence, anatta or emptiness, and dukkha or suffering.” Essentially, what I hear you saying is that the basic fabric of existence — consciousness itself — and every facet of conditioned experience upon that fabric — is fundamentally flawed due to the fact that it changes by nature, is empty of a permanent self, and therefore inherently unsatisfactory. Am I misrepresenting you?

UP: Please continue.

AC: So, the spiritual seeker motivated by self-liberation must step out of life so to speak, remove him / herself from people, renounce relationships, at least while they are in retreat and submit fully to the training of intensive meditation until they are enlightened, so the story goes. On the other hand, a Bodhisatta has an opposite attitude, he or she is not renouncing life. They are approaching the issue of liberation from a radically different motivation.

Am I right in saying that the Bodhisatta is in need of people? That he or she wants to be near people, close to them and involved with them? Isn't the Bodhisatta saying, I want to make people my highest priority? In fact, I need to be with people because without others compassion is empty. It would be fantasy compassion. So I need people, I need existence, to fulfil my aspiration as a Bodhisatta.

My question is this. How to reconcile this attitudinal difference. On the one hand for a self-liberating type seeing the essential flaws in nama-rupa. And the Bodhisattva who needs people to accomplish the development of the paramis. Couldn't you turn the whole thing around and say that without the kilesas — afflictive mind states — and nama-rupa — the mind and body — I would never find liberation from them? In other words, I need life to know life. I need bondage to know release from it?

UP: Let me say it this way. The Bodhisatta's attitude would be just like a parents attitude towards their children. Profound parents have metta and karuna for their children. Whatever situation they are in, whether delinquent, bad or good, the parents will always have metta and karuna. They constantly strive for their children's happiness. They always want to be near them and not separated from them.

Also, such parents are able to endure any response from their children. They are able to endure any form of suffering inflicted upon them by their children. No matter what it is, even if they are insulted, abused or criticized, profound parents maintain love and compassion towards their children. They keep it foremost in their heart towards their beloved children. So too will a Bodhisatta endure samsaric sufferings. He or she will endure any insult by beings, any abuse, any transgression. Because, for the true Bodhisattva, all beings are his children. They are his life.

However, the inherent flaws of nama-rupa, of existence itself, remains the same. Reality is reality. In fact, seeing these flaws, that of annica, anatta and dukkha, more distinctly gives rise to greater compassion in an individual. The distinction of the two types, the self-liberator and the Bodhisatta, is one of how you handle that discovery. One seeks to go the distance as fast and they can. And the Bodhisatta chooses to endure overwhelming samsaric sufferings for the sake of developing the paramis — the ten accomplishments of a Buddha — for the sake of optimizing his skill in helping others.

AC: Would you please say a more about the motivation of a Bodhisatta?

UP: A Bodhisatta is ready to take pain and suffer loss, come what may, for the sake of realizing the goal of full awakening. A Bodhisatta is dedicated to harmlessness — not harming others. Mahakaruna, or great compassion, is the mark of a genuine Bodhisatta. Compassion is responsible for dhamma zeal — the staying power, or spiritual stamina, to face and endure any and all obstacles with courage. The Bodhisatta endeavors to withstand any samsaric sufferings — anything. Not just ordinary sufferings but everything. And you can use your imagination here to try to fathom this point. Look around you. Look at the sufferings people must endure. A Bodhisatta welcomes it. A Bodhisatta thrives on it. Lives for it. Why? For a Bodhisatta compassion must be the foremost quality in everything he or she does.

Consider the Bodhisatta as a ‘Great Mother’ who endures everything for the sake of her child’s welfare. The Bodhisatta follows in the spirit of ‘Great Motherhood’ by including more and more people in their sphere of love and compassion. One’s heart must become big.

But compassion is not enough in supporting the welfare of others. Unless one knows what should be abstained from and what should be observed there will be misguidance. One must have wisdom or panna. Without wisdom you cannot differentiate between abstention and observance. Compassion alone will not serve the purpose. There must be panna when associating with people.

Understand it in this way, one associates with karuna and one disassociates with panna. Both qualities are essential when supporting the welfare of others.

AC: In what way do you use the word ‘disassociate’ with panna?

UP: Compassion brings you intimately close to people. Panna allows you to understand what to do and how to succeed in the task of helping others overcome their suffering. As you work with others, you work with yourself in developing the paramis. You must have these dual qualities. If you only feel compassion you don’t know what’s right or wrong, skilful or unskillful, or what to abstain from and what to observe. Without wisdom you’ll be misguided and you will misguide others as well. In other words, you will not know what should or should not be done. Only with panna can one truly work for the welfare of others. Compassion is not enough.

Let me put it another way, only when one fulfills the causes will one accomplish the effects. Accomplishment of causes leads to the fulfillment of results. But first there must be self-fulfillment, then fulfillment for others. Without fulfilling the causes, and one is claiming results, such a person is an opportunist. If one has fulfilled the causes and results, and is not helping others, then, that would be selfish.

After the Bodhisatta fulfilled the causes, such as the full development of the paramis and the complete eradication of the kilesas, the result was Buddhahood. Only then did he work for the welfare of others.

It seems that you’ve taken a liking to Mahayana Buddhism?

AC: Was the Buddha born in Burma (Sayadaw’s laughter)?

I’m trying to understand the nature of compassion, that’s all. And if that requires inquiring within other spiritual traditions, well, why not. I’m also very much engaged in the world today and that has brought my dharma life front and center into a quest to understand interrelatedness, or how to find liberation through living.

UP: Many years ago I met a Mahayana Buddhist monk in Hawaii who asked me about the issue of self-liberation versus working for the liberation of others. I asked him, “if you’re both stuck in the mud how can you save each other?” After some dialogue, the monk agreed that one of the two “stuck monks” must have a sure foot on solid ground before he could help the other.

Helping oneself and helping others are both important aspects of the dhamma. Thus the Buddha

stated, liberating oneself is most important. After that one can help to liberate others. Not the other way around.

AC: Isn't that a bit idealistic? Don't they both go hand-in-hand, as one seeks liberation so too we help others? Of course within our means.

UP: You mean to say that you do them at the same time?

AC: Yes. That's been my experience.

UP: Would you give an example of how that works?

AC: You just used the example of two people stuck in mud. If I may, I'd like to see that they both made it out of the mud, jumped into the ocean to wash the mud off, but in so doing, they got in over their heads. How I see how both aspects of the dhamma go hand-in-hand is like this: perhaps the stronger of the two, the one with more physical strength or perhaps the wiser of the two, sees the shore and decides that they must back it back to solid ground. This person assists the other one. He swims with him on his back, and while doing so, perhaps encourages the other fellow not to lose faith, or not to give up. If the stronger one tires perhaps he shows the weaker one how to float for a moment and maybe, just maybe he regains his strength. If not, he grabs him and keep swimming towards the shore.

Fundamentally, what I'm saying is that I'm not working from the basis of perfection or even an ideal. In fact, perfection has been a type of unseen noose around my neck. Always striving for an impossible goal and therefore always graded by a lie: my unwillingness to be human and as such, true to my own instincts. Which, in this case, means, helping others as I help myself.

UP: But first you must know how to swim. You must have proficiency. If both are not skilled it won't help.

Please explain, how do you see it will help? If they are in shallow water it may help but in deep water it won't.

AC: Obviously I don't understand the magnitude or depth of samsaric waters. Nevertheless the hand-in-hand method of living the dharma is my truth.

UP: One must be proficient first. You must first train in life saving before one can help another. Your point is not realistic.

AC: I'll give another example. Everyone with functioning legs can generally walk. Now two people are on a trek together but they miscalculated their food and water needs. Soon their supplies run out and they are not skilled in knowing which plants to eat nor can they locate water. But they are determined to strive on with the hopes of reaching the next village. One of the two falls ill. The stronger of the two assists and perhaps carries the other along as best he can. Isn't this a realistic possibility?

UP: It is, but you must have the strength to put him on your back.

AC: Yes, but my point is, even if he dies along the way you do what you can to help your friend. Even if you both die, you both died with honor and courage and dignity. Thus, hand-in-hand, or assisting others as we assist ourselves, makes the most sense to me.

UP: Yes, but you must be stronger than others. You must first build up your strength. Otherwise, you would

be deluded to go on such a trek.

AC: I'm not saying that you save anyone but you do the best you can considering the circumstances. But it may be that you both make it our alive.

UP: Of course, that's realistic. But not to the superior quality of saving others. You're talking 'only' about a very ordinary quality.

AC: Would you give an example of a superior quality of saving others?

UP: For example in the story of the hermit Sumedha. At that time he could have become an Arahant, he had the qualities during Dipankara Buddha's time. But he renounced an opportunity to become an Arahant because of seeing the danger in samsara. Beings driven by fear and craving going round and round in a mad swirl of suffering. Sumedha had great compassion well-up in him. And with this great karuna he had the notion, an able man like myself should not just swim across from this bank to the other shore alone. I should assist others by becoming a Buddha. On that he renounced his opportunity to become an Arahant in order to strive for Buddhahood. This is not ordinary. This is a super-normal quality. Because of this we have the dhamma today. This is Buddha Gotama's sasana, who was Sumedha at that time.

AC: I have another question about reversing dhamma attitude; seeing value in adversaries. Maybe Sayadaw could help me with this. We all know the story of Devadatta — the Buddha's cousin. At the time of Devadatta's death some monks celebrated, but the Buddha demanded of them to stop, saying that Devadatta would become a Pacceka Buddha in a future existence.

I have also read, the exact place I'm not sure, perhaps in the Jatakas, Sayadaw can correct me if wrong, where the Buddha explained that without Devadatta having shadowed him for innumerable existences — harassing him, tormenting him, aggressively seeking his demise and even his death — he would never have been able to mature khanti paramita, or patience. I find this very interesting.

In saying this, wasn't the Buddha praising Devadatta, not so much as a person, but as an epic opportunity — an archetypal manifestation of an adversarial energy — and without Devadatta's aggression — his role as the Bodhisatta's nemesis, well, Buddhahood would have been impossible. The interface of opposites served the ultimate spiritual purpose, equally, for both individuals. In other words, the confluence of opposing energies became the nexus for dhamma transformation. Patience and compassion developed from wise engagement with disagreeable situations. Was the Buddha referring to conventional obstacles as dhamma opportunities?

UP: Yes, in a destructive way Devadatta was helping the Bodhisatta. Like the opposition party in Parliament criticizing the government in a destructive way. If skillfully dealt with adversaries assist governments by forcing them to rethink their position and possibly refine their party's policies.

AC: But is it ever possible to be certain, say, in the case of Devadatta, that his actions were ultimately wrong? After all they were leading him to his own Buddhahood. My concern here is this: why draw distinctions, ever? Why should life be a wrong condition to be made right? Why not be beyond doing, choosing, seeking, but equally, do, choose and seek, if you know what I mean?

UP: Causes have effects, simple! It wasn't that Devadatta in every existence was doing unwholesome deeds. Take his final moments of life. At the last minute prior to his death, he confessed openly to the Buddha. He realized his wrong doings, his shortcomings and with honesty in his heart he offered his body, skin and bones, openly to the Buddha. He was remorseful. He knew the Buddha was right and he was wrong. His last

minute kusalas were noble...quite praiseworthy.

AC: Let me say it more bluntly. Correct me if I'm wrong, but from a strictly Theravadan point of view, birth and the life that follows, is essentially a nightmare, a bad dream. Samsara is dukkha, no matter how you cut it, full stop. And who could argue the point, really? With life, so many things, torture, rape, starvation, genocide. It can be a bad show. So what I'm hearing is that proper dhamma attitude, the profound type of intention that really wants freedom, is essentially a quality of striving for nirvana, extinguish the defilements, and get the heck out of dodge. Am I wrong?

UP: The Buddha taught suffering and a release from it. But continue.

AC: My question is this; is there any place in your understanding from either a personal application of dhamma or from the study of the Pali Canon, that lust, desire, anger, torment, indeed any of the afflictive emotions, from mild to obsessive forms, even madness itself, rather than seeing them as evil or demonic and therefore destructive, can they be viewed in an opposite way, that is to say, constructively — in service of liberation and freedom? Call it spiritual alchemy if you will. In other words, please talk to me about turning hell into heaven or poison into wine — the transformation of negatives energies into positive forces. This issue interests me a great deal at this point in my life. It's plain easy to love loving people and down right difficult to even be patient with morons. And how much more difficult it would be to compassionately embrace a man who raped my partner, or a group of generals who raped my country.

UP: Interesting question. There is an explanation of this found in Patthana — the book on Conditional Relations within the Abhidhamma — of how akusala, or unwholesome mind states, can be a cause or condition for kusala or wholesome states of mind. However, three main conditions must first be met. To begin, you need a kalyanamitta or a skillful spiritual friend, and then with proper dhamma consideration, afflictive mind states can be an object of meditation. That is, if one applies sati or mindfulness. Without right causes there'll be no dhamma results.

AC: What is 'proper dhamma consideration' in this case?

UP: A person should consider in this way: an unwholesome state of mind has come upon me, and if I allow this akusala condition to persist I'll drown in this akusala. This negativity will engulf my being. It will shroud my consciousness negatively so I should befriend this condition and skillfully use it to my benefit. Thus this agonizing condition will be used to my benefit and eventually for the benefit of others.

It's essential that one knows this state as it really is — the first Noble Truth of Buddha's enlightenment, that of Dukkha Sacca, the Truth of Suffering. You fully hold to this knowledge, and only this: 'this is the Truth of Suffering.' From there the akusala becomes one's sole object of attention. He or she is mindful of it, meditates on it, knowing the truth as truth, knowing things as they exist, here and now, and only now. The pure and basic truth I'm experiencing akusala, that's all, just as it is, now. This is called vipassana kusala or impeccable mindfulness at the moment of occurrence. This is cultivating insight knowledge. So in this way, an akusala condition serves as a cause for kusala.

AC: Could you give a practical example of this, say from the texts?

UP: At one time there was an elder monk named Mahvisa who was quite learned in scriptures. He reflected one day on the limitations of mere scriptural knowledge. Thus, he aspired to become an Arahant. Not only Arahantship, but he wanted to eradicate all the kilesas in a very short period of time. In fact, just a few days time. He was quite ambitious. So he went into a forest for solitude, determined to attain liberation by

Visuddhi Parinna, the confession day of the monks. He wanted to pronounce his freedom to everyone on that day.

However, he wasn't so fortunate. He not only failed to attain his goal of Arahantship but was unable to realize any stage of freedom. Even worse, all the other monks were able to achieve Arahantship on the day he desired. Thus, everyone celebrated except poor Mahavisa. He was miserable and for the next nineteen years Mahavisa felt grief and sadness. But those nineteen years were not wasted. They served to strengthen his resolve to become fully enlightened. Why? Because he vigilantly continued his dhamma practice, reflecting with courage in the way mentioned earlier.

He was no ordinary monk. He was brave. See, this elder's domanassa or grief was the type of dosa or anger that sinks inward. It was a self-directed sadness. This kind of anger is not the type that often arises when someone insults you whereby you react. Rather, it arose from self-reflection. It arose from knowing that he was unable to free himself. Therefore, he felt a self-directed sadness.

In this way, his misery, grief and sadness became conditions for him to turn into a beneficial purpose. They became the support for him to perform wholesome mind states in the face of unwholesome ones. So in this way akusala mind states support the arousal of kusala. Akusala generates kusala when right conditions are involved. Without proper conditions there are no dhamma results. In this way, one sees that everything is not only interrelated in a lawful way, it can be an opportunity for liberation.

Take for example snake venom. It cannot be used as anti-venom without first being mixed and processed further. Some additives must be there in order for it to save lives. So too can akusalas, these so-called inner poisons, can be made into good use by mixing them with satipatthana — intelligent awareness. But if akusalas are not processed with satipatthana they become more and more poisonous. In this way poison becomes a condition for purity.

AC: Moving along to another subject, please. Throughout my sixteen years of association with you I cannot recall hearing you give a dhamma talk about the subject of 'nonduality,' at least never with the use of that word. I'd like to keep the question quite simple to start. Is there a Buddhist Pali word for nonduality?

UP: (With a smile) How do you spell it?

AC: N...o...n...d...u...a...l...i...t...y. (Sayadaw picks up his English to Pali dictionary, thumbs through it, then closes it).

UP: (Shaking his head) No such word. (Pausing for a long time) Do you mean the view that there's no right or wrong, sort of what you were alluding to earlier, when you said, "beyond doing, choosing, seeking, but equally, to do, choose and seek?"

AC: Sure, let's start there. Why make any distinctions at all?

UP: We say, in seeing just seeing, in hearing just hearing, present and pure presence of mind. In this way, yes, there's the suspension of this or that. Just a moment of reality, as it really is. This is called an indeterminate state of consciousness, neither akusala nor kusala. This is sunnata, suchness, voidness of self. Call it zero.

AC: Is anatta and sunnata the same or different?

UP: Identical, one and the same, just usage.

AC: So the undifferentiated state of mind I'm referring to means 'embodying zero' as a way of being. Only now, unbound, containing all things, all time, past, present and future. My question is this: how to go from

two, to one, to zero?

UP: Are you asking about the ‘view of nondoing?’

AC: Let’s start there?

UP: This is called akiriyavada, or the doctrine of nondoing. Is it that you don’t like doing?

AC: Why differentiate doing from nondoing?

UP: So you like being swept down stream thinking it’s up stream?

AC: Why considering it up or down. In an infinite circumstance there’s no absolute direction, no centrality, no ultimate vantage point. The ocean is boundless. It Is.

UP: The ocean is also deep. Are you over your head?

AC: It doesn’t feel that way.

UP: It may be time to swim (both of us laughing). Look at it this way. With clear considerations you speak and act with good results. With unwise consideration you get the opposite. This “It Is” is conditioned. It is interdependent. It is a cause and effect interrelated eternity. You know that. And the layers of this truth are deep and subtle. Now because someone might assume they are comfortably floating on the surface of the ocean, doesn’t mean they will either remain floating or even float in a favorable direction. It might appear that way for awhile, maybe a long while, a few days or years or even a decade or two, maybe longer but it’s a rudderless existence.

Anusaya kilesas do not simply disappear by floating on top of them. Samsaric currents are strong and powerful and beings cannot escape those currents by floating to the other shore. Throw anything at all in the ocean and see where it goes. This is why we direct the yogis to observe their minds — to note seeing as merely seeing, and hearing as hearing, nothing more. Not to go beyond that. Otherwise it will be kusala or akusala. In this way one withdraws themselves from the cycle of becoming on deeper and more subtle levels. But at first you draw distinctions to lead yourself out of the current of delusion, out of the habitual responses to avoid or attach to this or that sense perception.

We’ve come into being as humans. There is nothing we can do about that, except not to perpetuate the cycle of kusala and akusala. Since we’ve come into existence we note this effect. This effect is with us all the time. The value or result of awareness is that it eradicates the cause of becoming. So we note the existing things which are present — seeing, hearing, and so on.

When there’s no cause, there will be no effect, no becoming and no suffering. By observing effects we eradicate causes. Therefore, no effects. Without effects there’s no becoming. Humans are like fruit trees and as such, we try not to let it grow into a new tree. This is basic Theravada: the end of suffering is the end of becoming.

AC: This leads me to the next question. Theravada is often criticized as essentially an escapist doctrine and practice. How would you respond to that?

UP: Goodness, you know as well as I do that there will be all kinds of views about everything. Theravada Buddhism is not exempt. Some will call it as you said, escapist. While others will have the compassion and zeal to give the method of escaping to others. Just as someone who is trained in medicine, they will have

proficiency in medicine and healing. Some might just use their knowledge on themselves, for their own benefit. Others might go beyond that and teach others in medicine. Why? They appreciate good health and know the pain of illness and disease. From compassion a person desires to help others and with wisdom they give the remedy.

Compassion seeks to help others escape suffering. Wisdom knows the way to do this. When you are sick and in distress do you not desire to escape the affliction? Wouldn't you do anything to get better?

AC: Yes. Unless it was terminal, then I think, I'd just hang out, keep on living my dream until I died.

UP: Would you be an escapist for desiring to get rid of your pain?

AC: No. Seems practical and wise.

UP: Theravada practice is of three kinds — dana, sila, and bhavana. They are the cure for kilesa agony. They are not about selfishness.

There are two types of enemies, internal and external. The internal enemies are more dangerous and only when one gains victory over the internal enemies will one be able to control the faculties. When we can control or safeguard ourselves we can then consider the welfare of others. Greed and anger are dangerous qualities. You watch the news. It's a dangerous world. And these dangers root in consciousness. If we can't control these destructive fires we not only harm ourselves but we are dangerous to others as well. Only when we subdue and eradicate the internal afflictions do we uplift ourselves, uplift our dignity and our honor. From this we not only become true human beings we become noble human beings. So by eradicating inner enemies we indirectly safeguard others by not harming others. If we are free of the kilesas we safeguard others. In this way two things are accomplished together.

So the truly cultured human is one who doesn't harm others, knowingly or unknowingly. And this is accomplished by the dual qualities of panna and karuna, which we discussed before. With wisdom one safeguards oneself and others, and with compassion we safeguard others, and likewise we're not defiling ourselves.

This is so simple to understand. You drive a car. Of course, when you're driving it's important to avoid accidents. If you follow the rules and stay aware, vigilantly aware, others will not be harmed by you. You're not dangerous. This is respectful and beneficial to others. Is this escaping?

AC: No. It's practical, respectful, and necessary.

UP: This is the Theravada doctrine. Not to harm others because of your mistakes. Of course, you may be harmed by other's mistakes but do not seek to harm others through your mistakes. Buddhism teaches us not to be a nuisance.

AC: Reducing fear in the world by subduing projection and blame?

UP: Stop at red lights. Don't cross lanes haphazardly, so on and so forth. Most of all stay awake, be aware and be present. That's all.

AC: Is it possible to discuss in any realistic way the consciousness of a liberated being — an Arahant — without being fully liberated oneself?

UP: No, not directly, but you can through deduction and inference.

AC: Well then, I'll ask a question. I've come to understand through your dhamma talks and reading dhamma literature that in the mind of an Arahant the kilesas are eradicated. What does 'eradicated' mean?

UP: It means the anusaya kilesas, the latent or dormant unwholesome tendencies within consciousness are cut off, completely. Gone. Even if there are conditions for kilesas to arise they don't, and can't.

AC: For clarification sake, kilesas mean any form of defilement within consciousness — energies rooted in greed, anger or delusion?

UP: That's right.

AC: So, what you're saying is that under no circumstance whatsoever can greed, anger or delusion arise in the consciousness of a fully liberated being?

UP: That's right. Such mind states as you described cease to exist. However, certain propensities or tendencies or personality traits still exist. These vasanas, as we call them in Pali, remain intact.

Say for example, there was an individual who before attaining this stage of full liberation, or Arahantship, was proud or conceited and had the habit of denigrating or belittling others. These vasanas or psychological habits would remain with him, but the kilesas would be eradicated. The difference is the intention or cetana. A fully awakened being would not have aversion as a cetana, but he or she could still denigrate others so to speak.

AC: Can you give an example of how vasana and kilesa are different?

UP: Vasanas are like the smell of whisky or the scent of honey that remains in a bottle once it has been emptied and washed. Kilesas are the substance, vasanas are the smell. But vasanas are not found in the mind of Buddhas. There is no tendency from the past that exists in the mind of a Buddha.

AC: Can you tell from observation whether someone is fully liberated?

UP: There is one story found in the traditional Buddhist literature that speaks of one follower of an Arahant. The student attended on his teacher in many ways. He once asked the Arahant what were the characteristics of a fully enlightened being? The Arahant replied, that even though you may follow an Arahant day and night, observing carefully his speech and demeanor you would never come to know through ordinary eyes if he was indeed an Arahant or not. He went on to say, but one test to determine Arahantship is through fear. If at any time fear arises this person is not an Arahant. An Arahant is free of fear. Fear arises from anger or dosa, and anger roots in moha or ignorance. So fear is a good test of one's freedom.

Another test is whether raga, or lust or passion arises. By lust I mean lust for a man towards a woman or woman towards a man — sexual passion for another person. An Arahant is free of raga.

The only practical way to at least get a feel of the Arahant's mind is to practice vipassana up to the stage of sankharupekkha nana or the stage of equanimity towards all mental and physical formations. At that stage of insight one can get a taste of the Arahant's mind.

AC: I'd like to end by asking your advice about an important issue. The other day when we were walking through the monastery you turned and said, 'you were the one responsible for first bringing me to the west.' You then asked if I thought Theravada had really taken root in America? In all honesty I said, I wasn't sure. Something is taking root but I'm not sure it could be called Theravada.

You then asked me, what was it? I replied, 'I think it's fair to say that everyone who teaches does so

as best as they can from their personal experience. Which brings me to the question. What advice would you give to western dhamma teachers and to those who may come to them for guidance as they continue in their own ways to spread the Dharma in the west?

UP: The most important thing is to know are the true qualities of a spiritual friend — a kalyanamitta. Eloquence, humor or intensity of speech isn't what I mean. Those are only superficial qualities. The main quality of a kalyanamitta is his or her depth — the twin qualities of wisdom and compassion. They should be well developed.

Next, one must approach this spiritual friend and practice dhamma. Only after you practice and achieve good results then you can take that method as beneficial and correct. A teacher's personality can be like honey but unless it's free and not sticky the fly will die. So the method of freedom should exceed attraction to personalities.

Another aspect of a strong spiritual teacher is that they do not criticize others. Anyone who understands the true dhamma, especially after they have reached the stage of Ariya, there will be no such thing as uplifting oneself or denigrating others. The Buddha made it clear that the objective of dhamma was to end dukkha, to extinguish the internal fires of, greed, hatred and ignorance. In so doing the goal of practice may be the same yet the approach may be different.

For example, all know there are many different schools of medicine. The point is to know medicine, to help others, be of great value to others. But first one needs training. They approach a good school with competent teachers. Through persistence and great dedication one gets a preliminary degree in both theory and a bit of practice. Then if one wants to specialize, become highly proficient, one goes on, or goes further in their training. Nevertheless, no matter how well trained someone becomes, medicine is a complex area of study and as the saying goes, nothing can fully prepare you for the test of application once you are outside of school. But without training you're a quack, and a danger to society. You're dealing with people in life and death circumstances and you better know what you're doing.

However, as I said, when one goes outside into the real practice of medicine one may encounter certain diseases never before known or come across. So instead of treating them in the usual way, or the traditional way, the doctor may invent a personal approach to the treatment of that disease. But in so doing, a doctor may treat just the symptoms and the symptoms may subside in the patient. The patient may temporarily even feel good again and the doctor may shout success. This isn't the dhamma. This is nothing more than smothering a fire with a blanket, thus forcing the fire to go underground where it resurfaces someplace else at a later time. All the while it smolders in the soil of their spirit.

Kilesas are a complex issue and treating them is equally complex. So when a doctor treats a patient with his or her own method, providing it actual works, such a person may take pride in that cure and might denigrate others. In fact, this is common. How do you say? It often comes with the territory. But there really is no need for pride or conceit. Arrogance is a rather lame response. Nevertheless, it is quite common. Sometimes the arrogant rooster gets his head cut off before the hens. So one must be watchful of roosting so to speak.

On the other hand, there are teachers who are quite intelligent but cunning. This is a type of fear. These teachers and we have them in Burma, often like their popularity as dhamma teachers more than the dhamma itself. Of course, they would never admit to this but we see it even in Burma. It's quite common. Since the wind blows in many directions, and since some teachers may be like a flag, in other words, they enjoy being at the top of the pole, so they behave like a good flag, and flap in the right direction. But sadly, they are controlled by the wind. The wind is the need for popularity and they're controlled by it. But because they're presently the flag — and often a mere symbol for their followers — tied up high at the top of the pole, they do their duty as a good flag does, and just keep blowing in the direction of the wind. This is spineless. Flags take no stand. Rather flags are attached to poles, not the other way around. A pole might stand but flags come and go and no matter what with so much wind flapping the flag eventually becomes

tattered and ripped. People like this wear out in time. It's natural.

A true spiritual friend isn't concerned with being a symbol for people. They're courageous, fearless and willing to stand alone if need be. The dhamma needs no support, it's free.

A final example and we'll end. Say, you want to pay your respects to the Shwedegone Pagoda in Yangon. Now there are four main gates in which you can approach the pagoda. So one person goes up from one particular gate, another person goes up yet another gate and so on. Isn't it silly to criticize others for going up another gate other than the one you went up? Really, this is unnecessary and foolish.

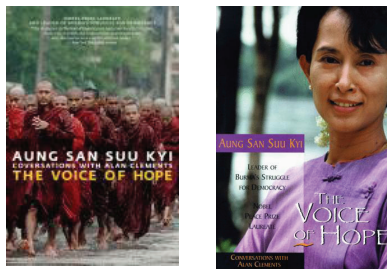
What's important is to see and to visit the pagoda, to be inspired by its splendor, and not how you come to the pagoda. That's missing the point. But now the times have changed, we have elevators at the Shwedegone, so it's much easier for you to get to the top. You can't say that it is wrong or incorrect. The purpose is the main criteria. To reach the pagoda, pay your respects and carry that inspiration with you when you leave is what is important. Nevertheless, if you take the wrong way up you will end up in the wrong place. Now one who teaches the wrong way to the pagoda must indeed be criticized. Not in a negative sense but with encouragement and with love in the heart. This is the correct type of criticism. It brings unity of purpose.

AC: Thank you.

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