

## Questions and Answers (February / March 1995)

(1) Why do we remember the past happenings if everything is transitory and impermanent?

(2) How are the awareness, concentration, wisdom etc. cultivable in the midst of mental concomitants which are simultaneously arising and passing?

These two questions will be dealt with one answer. First of all, you should know the general characteristic of each and every consciousness. Mind or consciousness is just awareness or cognisance, no more, no less. Due to the association with other mental properties it varies as good or bad; being associated with such bad mental properties as craving, hatred, jealousy, ill-will etc. it becomes bad. In the same way, being associated with such good mental properties as generosity, friendliness, benevolence, altruism etc. it becomes good. But as it has long been associated with evil properties, it is usually cunning and wicked and it takes delight in sensual enjoyment and evil deeds so many beings are therefore tempted to lead unhappy lives because of it.

Nevertheless, it can be trained and tamed by embracing suitable habits and meditation practices, later on being properly concentrated, it gives concentrated force to consciousness for the development of benevolent action and wisdom or investigation into philosophic truth which again transforms an abstract perception into a penetrating knowledge, i.e., inner realization. It means that, consciousness by the assistance of concentration and being consolidated by mindfulness and effort, transforms the ordinary powerless mind into a concentrated, powerful one and transforms it into a conscious comprehension like a steam engine which produces heat and transforms it into energy.

The perception, on the one hand, is naturally blind and misleading. Just as a coil of rope appears as a snake in the dark or dim light people have misleading perception and they experience a great fear. But later on, when it is found to be a mere coil of rope by the help of light the fear and agitation disappear. So also inner realization supported by deep concentration sheds the light upon deep-rooted false views, so conscious awareness comes to arise regarding mind-body phenomenon.

Furthermore, just as the images of the sun, the moon, clouds etc. which are reflected in the mirror or on the surface of placid water do not contain any substance or are not really substantial, although they appear as massive objects in one's own perception, so also the reflection of some objects, is not real substance but the creation and manifestation of our mind or to be exact, our perception.

This object is not in actual existence but a shadow of past experience which took place as a flash of lightning. Supposing, you are sinking in day-dream and various and divergent mental objects are passing in your imagination. These are also the function and manifestation of your mind, very quickly moving, arising and dissolving.

On the other hand, the inventive and creative power of the mind of famous philosophers, scientists or men of letters has extremely sharp capacity and will-power. But it is not a result of one day's or one month's learning and practising but it takes a considerable number of years and ages to achieve such potentiality. In this case, it should be noted that thought processes including many, many temporarily lasting thought moments gain momentum by a train of repeatedly occurring processes.

Though impermanent or *Anicca* in reality, they are powerful mind and mental concomitants, constantly changing arising and passing. Though they are constantly changing arising and passing, they are able to amass and generate strong force just as when an aeroplane is flying on the strength of massive air, the momentum is collected by tremendously powerful engines and propellers which though themselves are constantly changing arising and passing, are able to amass and generate the collection of air by way of transforming energy to subsequent ones. It means to say that the flying aeroplane the strongest engines and the most powerful propellers are all in tremendously rapid motion and at the same time this very motion is the greatest source of energy and utmost efficacious achievement.

Memory and remembrance are the capacity and potentiality of perception which is encouraged and strengthened by mindfulness and attention, but our memory is not always clear but very often it appears intermittently or dimly. As a matter of fact, a great deal of memory can totally fade away. If it were lying on the subconscious level it would appear very clearly every time as you would see the pictures in an album. There is no such state as subconscious level in Buddhism. Actually speaking, the very power of memory is nothing but the function of consciousness accompanied by a strong perception. According to Buddhist philosophy mind or consciousness can take note of various objects whether they may be past or present or future. But you should not forget that consciousness alone cannot think of and consider different objects. In the absence of concentration and wisdom it cannot take note of objects exactly and rightly. Of course, with the meditative practice when you gain thoroughly deep and strong concentration you will be able to reach past lives and look into future happenings.

It is the nature of mind or consciousness that it can take very remote visions and scenarios as its objects; not to mention the past or future occurrences or lives. It is called the law of psychic order (*Cittaniyama*)

You may raise an argument that when we were sleeping we saw dreams which have been stored up in the sub-conscious level. Of course, dreams are something like memories, but they are occurring during our sleep. From the Abhidhamma point of view, we cannot see dreams when we are sleeping because the types of sleeping consciousness are not active states but passive states called *Bhavanga* (Life Continuums) which do not take other objects except one or the other objects out of the three, i.e., Kamma, the sign of Kamma (*Kammanimitta*) or the sign of future life (*gatinimitta*). Dreams, as a matter of fact, come to exist during a specific occasion in which one is lying between two states, sleeping and waking, alternating in an utterly rapid rate and in which one is at a loss of reins of attention and mindfulness. At such a time one sees or experiences something which one usually comes across in the waking hours in the past. The dreaming consciousness is neither too active nor too passive but it has some ability to take real or imaginative happenings as a dream without any strict law or habit or custom or without making any distinction between clear and blurred objects. Sometimes we see such dreams as horrible scenes, as if falling from a height or climbing very high summits of mountains. Sometimes people see dreams as a sign of one's own future happenings. So there is no such thing as experiences stored up in the subconscious level of our mind.

Regarding the development of mental factors such as mindfulness, concentration etc., and taking place at the same time, the profound nature of thought processes should be learned. Before meditating we have an intention to keep the mindfulness firmly and fixedly on the meditation object and then we started to pay great attention to develop the very factor. Then the process of consciousness comes one after another successively in a tremendously rapid order among which some special impressive thought moments called *Javana* take place grasping the object, then concentration, energetic effort, wisdom etc. come to exist, performing each function, bearing their respective characteristics and manifestations. They are co-existing factors, raising their respective standard one after the other among the subsequent thought processes. Within a split of second, it is said in the *Abhidhamma* scriptures, thousands and thousands of thought processes take place continuously one after another, obeying the law of psychic order, that is, immediately after arising one consciousness passes away. They never exist two together and they do not remain still for two consecutive moments.