

**Venerable Dr. Khammai Dhammasami on a Dhamma tour in Hungary
(4-13 Oct.2008)**

The Venerable Dhammasami has been visiting Hungary on dhamma tours since October 2006. His first visit was to find out more about the first ever Buddhist university in Europe. The Dharma Gate Budapest Buddhist University, founded in 1992, just after the collapse of the Berlin Wall, is financed by the Hungarian government. It is now a member of the International Association of Buddhist Universities, IABU, of which the Venerable Dhammasami is the Executive Secretary.

His second visit in July and August 2007 was arranged by the Hungarian Vipassana Meditation Group. He conducted a two-week retreat for about fifteen people in a small village near the famous lake Balaton. Two months later, he was back in Budapest again, this time to conduct a series of evening lectures in Buddhism and meditation for young middle class people who came straight to the lecture from work. The venue of the lecture, the Imladris Cultural Centre (www.imladris.hu), is situated at the heart of the tourist area, Vaci Utca, on the bank of the famous Dangué River.

This fourth visit is also arranged by the Hungarian Vipassana Meditation Group. It consists of four evening lectures and meditation at the Imladris. The Venerable is talking on: The Buddha and the Heart of His Teaching; The Buddhist Path; Meditation & a sutta reading.

Apart from the above schedule, the Venerable will also give some dhamma talks and public lectures. Indeed, on Sunday, 5th, he was invited to be a guest lecturer at the School of Integral Psychology in Budapest. He was asked **to discuss whether and how the Buddhist classification of the five khandha (aggregates) and nirvana relate to psychological training.**

The Venerable, who is also professor at ITBMU and visiting professor at MCU, says that from the Buddhist viewpoint, the khandha are everything that a person can call life, and nirvana is the goal of life. **The khandha and nirvana are connected, but at the same time are completely different.**

Connection: it is like a lotus flower coming up from the muddy water and the stem and roots that remain in the mud and water. The lotus flower itself is like nirvana. The lotus flower is connected physically with the stem and the roots that remain deep down in the

muddy water. The mud, water and the lotus plant in the water are like the khandha. So, it is not difficult to see the connection.

Difference: In the present state of being, the lotus flower is neither wet by the water nor dirtied by the mud. It is above both. But the plant and the roots are dirty and wet, still. This is the difference. They belong to different realms altogether.

The Khandha are what we call this physical body, the feeling, the perception, the mental formation that includes intention, and the consciousness. The Buddhists believe nothing in the world exists outside the five khandha. So, the first thing one should do to understand the khandha is to ask oneself, when one sees anything with one's eyes, to which khandha a particular thing belongs. The whole material world comes under the first khandha (rupa) which has no ability to feel and understand.

The world of feeling is the second khandha. This is important for the study of psychology, for people think as they feel; their mood is governed by their feelings; their choice, inferences and conclusions are dominated by the way they feel towards a certain person or thing as well. Buddhist Psychology claims that it is the sensation that breeds both greed and hatred.

Based on what one feels, one goes on to form a view, perception, opinion or memory. This is the third khandha. We can see clearly how the feeling and memory/perception are linked. They influence each other. E.g. if one is moody, all one remembers from one's past are the negative things. When one is in a good mood, one will speak only about the good things. See, how the feeling dominates one's memory; in turn, memory also colours the feeling, e.g. if you have a negative perception of a person, you will also feel negative towards him.

But these two khandhas, Vedana (feeling) and Sanna (perception) are just reactions. They do not initiate things. The initiator is the fourth khandha, the mental formation (sankhara). Intention is a big part of this. The three unwholesome roots (greed, hatred, delusion) and the wholesome ones (detachment, universal love, wisdom) are all part of this. Mindfulness is here, too. So are compassion, joy, jealousy, conceit, anxiety and so on. This group is the active one, initiating mental action, verbal action and physical ones, too. What it initiates the others react to. This is how the five khandha function.

The fifth khandha is the mind or consciousness itself. By nature, it is pure and innocent. But the fact that it has to always work with the other khandha means it can become good or bad. This fifth one has

three functions: 1) to be aware of an object that presents itself through the sense-doors; 2) to think about that object; and 3) to understand it. These three functions can be coloured by the state of the above three khandha (2, 3, 4). So, it is difficult for the mind to remain neutral and innocent.

This is why we say, analyse your actions in terms of good and bad kamma. Do only the good ones. Or else, the mind will always be unhappy. Kamma means (1) the link between cause and effect / result; (2) a belief that we individuals are responsible for our actions and their results; (3) that we can change and modify them; and (4) the kamma determines the differences in the world. But kamma comes to an end when nirvana, the goal of life, is attained.

Nirvana is a state where the mind is not affected by its environment any more. Someone may gossip about you or feel jealous of you at work, but that does not make you unhappy any more; instead, you feel compassionate towards the person for he is suffering through jealousy. When you help someone to cross the road and if that person does not say thank you or perhaps may even insult you and leave; even this situation would not make you unhappy. Your mind is at peace all the time. This is nirvana here and now.

When nirvana is realised, the function of the khandha becomes totally different and transformed. Your peace of mind and happiness are not dependent on acquiring something or being somebody any more. The peace and happiness achieved is completely independent and is not shaken by either the credit crunch on Wall Street or the increase in oil prices at home.

Needless to say, the lecture, which lasted two and half hours, received many questions.

The evening lectures began on Monday, 5th and will go on till Thursday 9th October. It is open to all.

There was an unscheduled program last night, 7th Oct. **Radio Cafe 98.6 FM** invited the Venerable to discuss about Buddhism and meditation for two hours from 22-24PM. He was asked by the two producers, Dora and Konrad, to do a guided meditation for the listeners for seven minutes. The response was very good. One of the SMS texted in during the program insulted him! Many other SMSs thanked him for the meditation and discussion.

“Why do we have to meditate?”, was one of the many questions asked. The Venerable explained: It is just to know where our mind is as usually people have only a dim idea of where their mind is. As

you start focussing on your breathing-in and -out, you will find your mind immediately. Then, you discover, how it can run away and how it gets bored easily. The mind does not want to stay in one place. Indeed, many people do not have a place to call home for their mind. But few realise their mind is homeless. Meditation is to address this problem. Once the mind feels at home with the breathing, it will feel more secure, relax and work more efficiently. For Buddhist or non-Buddhist, the working of the mind is the same. Anyone who breathes can meditate and benefit from it.

One of the questions from the lecture on **The Buddha and the Heart of His Teaching** was: **"You said that only by confronting and investigating suffering that we can develop compassion and wisdom, in other words, to find nirvana. Sometimes I see suffering and do not want to care about it. What should I do?"**

A: Imagine yourself in the place of the person suffering. Then, imagine all others you know in that situation, too. The first one is to develop **compassion**. But sometimes you may get scared. So, you should also imagine others in the same situation, which will give you **confidence** and **wisdom** into suffering.

Another question was: **"I usually see suffering, e.g. anger as suffering; but it does not go away. Why?"**

A: It is because of the wrong diagnosis of the cause. When people see a person in anger; they see not just anger. When you are angry, you identify yourself with that anger by justifying your action/feeling and blaming others. At times, you may also blame yourself. When you do so, you think you have found the answer and feel temporarily satisfied. But anger comes back, indicating the solution/answer has not worked. It is a problem of reaching a wrong diagnosis.