

to the discourses a beginning point of the faring on in *samsāra* under the influence of ignorance can not be found (*S. II*, 178; *S. III*, 149; *A. V*, 113). This leaves little scope for speaking of a mind that is originally pure in the true sense of the term. The task to reach real purity, which is the central theme of the *Vatthūpama Sutta*, is thus not to revert to some original condition, but rather to gradually purify the mind from the beginningless influence of defilements and ignorance until the purity of total liberation from bondage has been accomplished.

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References

- 1 *T.* stands for the Taishō edition.
- 2 A criticism of the belief in purification through bathing in sacred rivers can also be found in the verses of *bhikkhuni Puṇṇikā*, who points out that if such practices were able to purify, fishes and other animals living in such rivers should all go straight to heaven, *Thīg. V241*.

VEDANĀ, "feeling" or "sensation", is the second of the five aggregates and the seventh link in the *paṭicca samuppāda* series, the link that leads to the arising of craving. Its role in these two contexts reflects the importance of *vedanā* in the early Buddhist analysis of reality. In fact, according to a dictum found in several discourses, all phenomena converge on feeling, *vedanāsamosaṇṇā sabbe dhammā* (*A. IV*, 339; *A. V*, 107; cf. also *A. IV*, 385, which makes the same statement for thoughts and intentions, *saṅkappa-vitakkā*). Hence an appraisal of *vedanā* and its implications is certainly a desideratum for an understanding of early Buddhism in general and of the path to liberation in particular. For this reason, the theme of *vedanā* will be treated in two successive articles. While the present article focuses on the topic of *vedanā* from the perspective of its nature and types, a subsequent entry on **VEDANĀNUPASSANĀ** takes up *vedanā* from the perspective of insight, delineating the main aspects of *vedanā* that need to be understood during actual practice of the path to liberation.

The term *vedanā* can be derived from the root $\sqrt{\text{vid}}$, whose range of meaning covers both "to feel" and "to

know". *Vedanā* can thus be understood to represent the affective aspect of the process of knowing, the 'how' of experiencing, so to say. Though due to its affective role *vedanā* has a strong conditioning impact on emotions, *vedanā* does not include emotion in its range of meaning, which would perhaps find its closest Pāli counterpart in *citta*. *Vedanā*, however, just refers to feelings, one of the building blocks of such complex phenomena as emotions. As such, *vedanā* stands in an intimate relationship with the cognitive type of input provided through *saññā* "perception", since what one feels, that one perceives, *yaṃ vedeti taṃ saññānāti* (*M. I*, 293). According to the standard definition given in the discourses, feeling 'feels' in the sense that it feels such affective tones as pleasure, displeasure and hedonic neutrality, *sukha, dukkha, adukkhamasukha* (*S. III*, 86).

The basic distinction between pleasant, unpleasant and neutral feelings can be expanded further by combining this triad with each of the six senses, by distinguishing between feelings that are related to the household life and those that are related to renunciation, and by taking into account whether feelings are past, present or future. In this way, a total count of one-hundred-and-eight types of feelings can be obtained (*S. IV*, 232). Such different modes of analysis are, however, merely complementary perspectives on the phenomenon feeling, and none of them should be grasped dogmatically as the only right way of reckoning feelings (*M. I*, 398).

In addition to analysing feelings into different types, the discourses illustrate the nature of feeling with a range of similes. One simile indicates that the different types of feelings are like winds in the sky, which come from different directions and can at times be dusty, hot or cold, mild or strong (*S. IV*, 218). This imagery illustrates the somewhat accidental character of feelings, whose nature is to manifest in ways that are mostly out of the control of the one who experiences them. This simile highlights that, just as it is meaningless to contend with the vicissitudes of the weather, similarly the arising of unwanted feelings is best born with patience. Of a similar import is another simile that compares feelings to various types of visitors that come to a guesthouse from any of the four directions (*S. IV*, 219). Feelings are just like such visitors, they come and go, hence no need to become agitated and obsessed with the particular way in which a feeling might manifest at present.

The ephemeral nature of feelings, already alluded to in the imagery of visitors that come and go, becomes more prominent in another simile that compares feelings to bubbles on a water surface during rain (S. III, 141). On investigating this matter an onlooker would soon come to the conclusion that these bubbles are insubstantial and without any essence. Similarly feelings, in whatever way they manifest, are insubstantial and without any essence. Just like a bubble, they will manifest only to disappear right away again, thereby revealing their utterly ephemeral and insubstantial nature. The insubstantial nature of feelings comes up again in another simile, which compares grasping feeling as a self or as belonging to a self to a man who is carried along by a mountain river and tries to grasp the *kusa* grass that grows on the river bank. The *kusa* grass will tear off and break due to his grasping, and the man will be unable to extricate himself from the current of the river in this way (S. III, 137).

Insubstantial and void as they are, feelings are simply the product of conditions (S. II, 38). Several similes bring out this dependent nature of feeling on contact in particular. The affective tone of any feeling is the product of the type of contact based on which it arises, comparable to heat that is produced when two fire-sticks are rubbed against each other (S. IV, 215). If the two fire-sticks are separated the heat ceases, just as with the cessation of contact the respective feeling will also cease. Again, just as the radiance of a lamp is the product of oil, wick and flame, and due to the impermanent nature of these three has to be impermanent as well, so too feelings are the product of contact through any of the six sense-doors and therefore must be as impermanent as the sense-doors themselves (M. III, 273). Or else, just as the shadow of a tree is the product of the root, the trunk, the branches and the foliage of the tree, so too feelings are the product of contacting the objects of the senses, and thus share their impermanent nature (M. III, 274).

Painful feelings in particular are comparable to a bottomless abyss, an abyss deeper than the unfathomable depth of the ocean. The reason for this is that worldlings react to painful feelings with sorrow and lamentation, thereby perpetrating their experience of suffering (S. IV, 206). The *Salla Sutta* explains that by reacting with aversion to painful feelings, the

worldling is as if shot by two arrows, as in addition to the bodily experience of pain the arising of aversion causes the affliction of mental agony and distress (S. IV, 208). Being thus immersed in bodily and mental pain, the worldling knows no other way out but to search for sensual pleasure as an escape from the painful experience. By giving fuel to the underlying tendency to aversion when reacting to pain, as well as to the underlying tendency to lust by yearning for sensual pleasure, and by giving fuel to the underlying tendency to ignorance through not attending to the true nature of feelings, the experience of pain leads to ever greater bondage. In contrast, the noble disciple does not react to pain but simply bears it with composure. For this reason, only a single arrow afflicts him or her, and aversion to the pain will not arise, nor yearning for sensual pleasures as a way to escape from pain. In this way, the experience of feeling leads to insight and the bondage to feeling diminishes.

In addition to providing this instructive imagery on how to handle pain, the *Salla Sutta's* distinction between being afflicted merely by the single arrow of bodily feelings and being the victim of the additional arrow of mental feelings is of relevance to an understanding of the distinction between bodily and mental feelings in general. The notion of 'bodily feelings' may at first sight seem puzzling, since feelings are by definition mental and related to the mind, *cetasikā dhammā, cittapaṭibaddhā* (M. I, 301). For this reason feelings are part of *nāma*, "name", in the context of an exposition of *nāma-rūpa* (M. I, 53). Hence to speak of a 'bodily feeling' must refer to the source from which such feeling has arisen, namely the body, not to the nature of the feeling itself, which by definition has to be a mental phenomenon. This much would follow from the exposition in the *Salla Sutta*, whose purpose is to clarify that, in addition to the painful feelings that may arise due to bodily affliction, the second dart of affliction manifests due to feelings that originate because of the mental reaction of aversion and distress at being confronted with bodily pain.

The distinction between bodily and mental feelings is thus a mode of analysis that aims at the sense-door based on which feeling arises, a mode of analysis that alternatively may take into account all sense-doors and distinguish feelings into six types, *cha vedanākāyā*, covering those that arise based on contact by way of the eye, the ear, the nose, the tongue, the body and the mind (S. III, 60).

Yet, does this mean that the experience of feelings is entirely mental and bears no relation to the body? This does not seem to be the case, in fact common experience will tell that the actual experience of pleasant or painful feeling involves the body as well as the mind. Joy may lead to raising of the hair and goose pimples, pain to tension and cramps, obtaining or losing desirable objects can affect the heart beat and blood circulation, intense feelings can cause faster breathing etc.

In the listing of the five aggregates, feelings are placed right after the body and before the other mental aggregates. This positioning may well reflect the intermediate role that feelings have within the context of subjective experience. Due to whatever sense-door a pleasant or painful feeling may have arisen, its actual experience will affect the body as well as the mind. The *Kāyagatāsati Sutta* depicts how the pleasant feelings of deeper concentration during *jhāna* experience suffuse the whole body (*M. III, 92*).¹ The effect of painful feeling on the body can be seen when a monk is rebuked for his mistaken view by the Buddha. As a result of such a rebuke, or more precisely of the mental evaluation by the monk of the words he just heard, he sits in dismay with shoulders drooping and the head hanging down (*M. I, 132*). Clearly here the mental evaluation has caused the arising of feelings that, in addition to being experienced in the mind as dismay and perhaps shame, manifest bodily to such an extent that the whole posture is affected.

Feelings can thus be seen as an intermediary between body and mind that has a conditioning effect on both. One aspect of this intermediary role is that whatever happens in the body is mentally felt through the medium of feelings, while the other aspect is that the affective tone of mental processes affects and influences the body through the medium of feelings. The actual experience of feeling thus usually involves body and mind. An exception is the attainment of any of the immaterial spheres, where the bodily component of feeling totally disappears. With such types of experience the affective variety of feeling similarly disappears, as during these attainments (or else when reborn in the corresponding realms) only neutral feelings are experienced. In the normal living situation of the average human being, however, the experience of feeling involves body as well as mind.

In the language of the early discourses, the bodily and mental aspect of feelings are often considered together, such as when *sukha* or *dukkha vedanā* are defined as comprising bodily as well as mentally felt experience, *yaṃ kāyikaṃ vā cetasikaṃ vā... vedayitaṃ* (*M. I, 302*). In the context of an exposition of affective experience from the perspective of the five affective faculties (*indriya*), the terms *sukha* and *dukkha* are, however, only used for feelings arisen from the body, *kāyasamphassaja*. Feelings that originate from the mind, *manosamphassaja*, are treated under the headings *somanassa* and *domanassa* (*S. V, 209*). This mode of presentation dominates the analysis of feelings in the *Abhidhamma* and the commentaries. According to the examination of feelings undertaken in the *Abhidhammattha Saṅgaha*, *sukha* and *dukkha* are only experienced in relation to the body sense-door, whereas the other sense-doors of eyes, ears, nose and tongue are invariably associated with neutral feelings, and the mind with *somanassa* and *domanassa* type of feelings (*Abhs. 2*; cf. also the exposition in *Dhs. 139-145*). Occurrences of *sukha* and *dukkha* in the early discourses, however, often are umbrella terms for any feeling of the corresponding affective tone and need not stand for feelings arisen from the bodily sense-door alone.

In addition to analysing feelings into bodily and mental types, the discourses also distinguish between feelings that are worldly and unworldly, *sāmiṣa* and *nirāmiṣa* (*M. I, 59*). The rationale behind this distinction is to draw attention to the relation of feelings to underlying tendencies, *anusaya*. Worldly types of feelings tend to activate the underlying tendencies to lust, aversion and ignorance. Unworldly types of feelings, such as the joy or the equanimity of deep concentration, or the sadness of not yet having reached liberation, do not activate these underlying tendencies (*M. I, 303*). A similar perspective underlies the distinction into feelings that are related to the household life and those that are related to renunciation, *gēhasita* and *nekkhammasita* (*M. III, 217*).

Another two-fold analysis of feelings distinguishes between feelings with and without affliction, *savyābajjha* and *avyābajjha* (*M. I, 389*). This perspective is in particular related to the issue of karma and rebirth, since it is due to the afflictive nature of one's volitions and deeds that one eventually has to face afflictive feelings as retribution. In a way, the affective tone of such karmic retribution can be seen

as a determining factor of the different realms within which rebirth can take place. While rebirth in hell is felt as an entirely painful and unpleasant experience, rebirth in heaven will be felt as entirely pleasant and agreeable (*M. I*, 74). Rebirth as an animal or a ghost (*petā*) involves mainly painful experiences, whereas with rebirth as a human being pleasantly felt experiences prevail.

In regard to the relationship between karma and feelings,² a discourse in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* specifies that it would not be correct to assume that the retribution of a deed will be felt in a way that exactly corresponds to the nature of the deed (*A. I*, 249). Such an assumption would result in determinism and undermine the possibility of successful spiritual practice. Rather, the retribution to be felt depends on a range of circumstances. According to a simile given to clarify this point, the same amount of salt will have quite a different effect when it is thrown into a small cup of water or into a large river. While in the first case the water will become undrinkable, in the second case the salt will hardly affect the drinkability of the water. Similarly, the experiences that are to be felt in retribution for a particular deed may vary considerably, depending on the overall nature and degree of mental development and purity of the person who earlier committed the deed.

An example for this principle is the case of Aṅgulimāla, who by going forth and becoming an arahant was able to avert the prospect of prolonged suffering in hell due to his former evil deeds (*M. II*, 104). Yet, in spite of his remarkable progress and personality change, he could not entirely avoid retribution, which affected him in the form of being physically attacked and beaten when going for alms. That is, though the intensity of retribution to be felt varies according to a set of conditions, retribution as such cannot be avoided (*Dhp.* 127). It is not possible to afterwards change a deed whose retribution is to be felt into a deed whose retribution will not be felt at all (*M. II*, 221), only the intensity of the retribution can be influenced. Hence the painful results of former deeds will even touch an arahant, as in the case of Aṅgulimāla. A similar case is described in the *Udāna*, which reports how a monk who was seated in meditation was experiencing painful feelings as a result of former deeds, *purāṇakammavipākajam dukkham* (*Ud.* 21). The commentary explains that this monk was also an arahant (*UdA.* 165). Thus he too was

apparently experiencing a remnant of retribution for former deeds. Being an *arahant*, he bore the pain without generating the second arrow of mental affliction.

Though the experience of feelings may often be related to former deeds, karma is not the only cause for the arising of feelings, which could also manifest due to bodily disorders and imbalances, due to a change of climate, due to careless behaviour, or due to being attacked by another being (*S. IV*, 230). Therefore it is not possible to categorically proclaim that the experience of *sukha* or *dukkha* is due to oneself, or else that it is due to another. The correct position is rather that the experience of feeling is the dependently arisen product of contact (*S. II*, 38). Hence it is meaningless to inquire due to whom feelings arise, or else to query who is the one who feels, *ko vediyati* (*S. II*, 13).

The notion of the one who feels and experiences the retribution of former deeds, *yo ... vedeyyo tatra tatra kalyāṇa-pāpakānam kammānam vipākam paṭisaṃvedeti*, can easily lead to mistaken self notions (*M. I*, 8; cf. also *M. I*, 258). The *Mahānidāna Sutta* traces three main modes in which self notions can arise in relation to feelings (*D. II*, 66).³ These are to identify feeling as the self, to consider the self to be without feeling, or to assume that it is the self that feels, in the sense of being subject to feeling. In the first instance the impermanent and conditioned nature of feelings would imply that the self is similarly impermanent and conditioned, an untenable notion. In the case of the second and third proposal the problem arises that in the absence of any feeling, the notion 'I am', *asmi*, or the notion 'I am this', *ayam aham asmi*, will not arise at all. The argument in the latter two cases shows how closely the experience of feeling is bound up with notions of self-awareness and a sense of identity. If feeling were to be removed, the very point of reference required for self-notions would disappear as well.

Feelings are not only the breeding ground for self-notions, but are also intrinsically related to the genesis of views in general. The *Brahmajāla Sutta* relates the Buddha's transcendence of the obsession with views, prevalent among his contemporaries, to his penetrative insight into the true nature of feelings (*D. I*, 17). From his perspective, these various views were merely the result of being under the influence of feelings and of

lacking vision and knowledge, thereby succumbing to the grip of craving and becoming subject to worry and agitation, *ajānataṃ apassataṃ vedayitaṃ taṃhā-gatānaṃ paritasita-vipphanditaṃ eva* (D. I, 40). The point behind this perspective on the process of view-formation is that often enough logic and thought serve merely to rationalize already existing likes and dislikes. Due to the arising of pleasant or unpleasant feelings, thoughts and associations are often coloured and influenced, resulting in a strong conditioning impact on views and opinions that often is not noticed.

The conditioning impact of feelings on experience and reactions is the central theme of dependent arising, *paṭicca samuppāda*, which highlights that craving, the main culprit for the *saṃsāric* predicament (See also TAṆHĀ), arises due to feeling. Hence it is in particular at this junction of the dependent arising of *dukkha* that insight is required (See VEDANĀNUPASSANĀ). One who has reached the destruction of craving through full liberation has gone beyond the controlling power of feeling as well. Being devoid of lust towards any feeling, he or she has become a *vedagū*, a knower of feelings as well as a knower of the highest knowledge, *sabbavedanāsu vītarāgo sabbaṃ vedam aticca vedagūso* (Sn. 529).

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References

- 1 Though the term *kāya* can at times stand for the entirety of one's experience, comprising body and mind, the circumstance that the suffusion of the *kāya* with joy and happiness during *jhāna* experience is listed in the *Kāyagatāsati Sutta* alongside other contemplations that are concerned with the physical body makes it quite probable that the same sense of *kāya* should also apply to this instance.
- 2 The relationship of contemplation of feelings to karma has been examined by Lily de Silva: "Vedanānupassanā: On the Management of Kamma", *Sri Lanka Journal of the Humanities*, 14/1+2, 1988: 171-178.
- 3 See also M. I, 300 and SAKKĀYADITṬHI on a four-fold pattern of developing notions of selfhood in regard to any of the five aggregates.

VEDANĀNUPASSANĀ stands for "contemplation of feelings". Due to the conditioning role of *vedanā* on craving, which constitutes an all-important function in the twelve-link chain of dependent arising, *paṭicca samuppāda*, contemplation of feelings and of their conditioning impact on subsequent mental reactions has received considerable attention in the early Buddhist analysis of reality.¹

According to the instructions given in the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, contemplation of feeling requires one to be clearly aware of the affective tone of any feeling as either "pleasant", *sukha*, "unpleasant", *dukkha*, or "neutral", *adukkhamasukha* (M. I, 59). This basic division of feeling into three types is then to be further developed by distinguishing between "worldly" and "unworldly" manifestations of feelings, *sāmisa* and *nirāmisa*. In accordance with a mode of practice that is applied to any object of *satipaṭṭhāna*, contemplation of feelings then comprises internal and external feelings, *ajjhata/bahiddhā*, and focuses on their arising and passing away, *samudaya/vaya*, with the aim of dwelling independently and without clinging to anything, *anissito ca viharati na ca kiñci loke upādiyati*.

These rather succinct instructions cover considerable ground in the field of insight and require a detailed examination. The first step envisaged in the *satipaṭṭhāna* training scheme for contemplation of feelings is to clearly recognize the affective tone of present experience, and to stop at that, namely at the bare experience of feeling itself, without giving room to any reaction. Having stopped short at the bare feeling itself, the experience of this feeling should be observed from the perspective of its affective nature, without getting involved with the individual nature and characteristics of whatever feeling may have manifested at present, whether this be, for example, 'feeling an itch', or perhaps 'feeling thrilled', or whatever else. Instead of getting carried away by the individual content of felt experience, awareness should be directed to the general character of experience in terms of its three possible feeling tones.

The rationale behind this distinction of feelings into three affective types as being pleasant, unpleasant and neutral can be understood in the light of the *Mahānidāna Sutta*, which points out that these three types of feeling are mutually exclusive (D. II, 66). That is, at the time of experiencing one of these three,

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