

Vedanā — Feeling

Bhante Bodhidhamma · DhammaBytes · 7:29

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namō tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namō tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

So we're still investigating these *khandhā*, the five aggregates into which the Buddha dissected our experience. It's the body with its sensations, *saññā*, which were the perceptual faculties which grow into concepts, our intellect. Today I want to talk about *vedanā*, which is feeling. The fourth was *saṅkhāra*, which just loosely we can sometimes translate as volitional conditioning. So it's where the will comes in. And then finally our act of cognition or consciousness.

Just looking at *vedanā*, there are five types and it's a slightly different way of looking at things. Two of them are physical, that's pretty straightforward for us. We have pleasant and unpleasant sensations, that's pretty easy for us to distinguish. But there are also distinguished pleasant and unpleasant mental sensations, and that's where the confusion comes in. Normally speaking we talk about feelings and emotions, and I think they shade into each other. Emotions are very complex things, but when you just go into the body they manifest as some sort of feeling. Depression is heavy, anger is hot and all that, and that's what we're looking at when we are just feeling a sensation in the body which we recognize is caused by a mental state rather than the body itself. It's distinguishing those two. And the fifth one is of course the neutral states of both the body sensations and the mental sensations.

The reason we distinguish those two is because the Buddha taught that the physical part of our nature and the mental part were two actually distinct forms of energy. They both suffered from impermanence, they don't constitute a self or a soul or a person, but they are two different energy systems, the one affecting the other. When you're sitting and you get a sore knee, the mind becomes agitated. If you feel depressed, then the mind becomes heavy. Or if you feel tired, the body becomes heavy.

So that distinguishing, that deconstructing of our experience is part and parcel of understanding that this psycho-physical organism that we experience ourselves to be does not actually constitute an entity as such, something which is whole, entire, self-subsistent, can exist outside this universe. It just isn't that.

He also splits it up again, dissects it again into the various feelings that arise from the six senses. So sight, what we see is also a sensation, it also comes under the physical feelings. Hearing, what we hear comes under physical feelings, bodily feelings. So by dividing that, then of course we can see that there are something like thirty different types of sensations and feelings. These are only types, as you know. Within each type there are myriad types of feelings and sensations. I dare say it's never the case that one is

exactly the same as the other, like leaves on the tree, they're not the same.

The other thing to say about *vedanā* is that they're always in any level of consciousness. So whenever you're conscious, there has to be the factor of *vedanā*. So if you're seeing, there's the feeling or sensation of light. If you're hearing, there's the sensation of sound and so on. So it's not possible for there to be a conscious moment without there being some sort of feeling.

Now the importance of the way he separates this out, feeling, comes up in the discourse on how to establish right mindfulness, which is about seeking liberation, the *Satipaṭṭhāna* discourse. And there's a second section there, after physical feelings, bodily feelings, there comes *vedanānupassanā*, which means to see feelings in feelings. It's a funny construction, it's what's known as a locative case where you're in something. So it's to feel, to see, to experience feelings in feelings. Now that seems like a double take.

But all he's saying is to try and separate out feelings completely from perceptual things, from emotional fantasies and stuff, and to just center completely on feeling. What is a feeling? To ask yourself the question, what is a feeling? What is a sensation? Because normally speaking we don't experience life in this way. We just experience it in the fullness of our personality and physical contact with the world. But by doing so it's all part and parcel of seeing how this life works for us.

This confusion between emotion and feeling, when I say confusion, it's the English and it's the way that we experience things, is something that we deal with when we come to the *saṅkhāra*, which is the next section to do with the will. So then it becomes quite complicated because everything then begins to motor up into what we would consider an experience.

So that, short and sweet, is the description of *vedanā*. I hope my words have been of some assistance. May you be fully liberated from all your painful *vedanā*, sooner rather than later.

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