

Saññā Perception & Vedanā Feeling

Bhante Bodhidhamma · DhammaBytes · 12:39

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 carrying on with the *khandhas*, these five heaps. Now, when you look into the body when you're meditating, you can see it's made up first of all of the sensations coming from the body. So we did that last time, the *rūpa*, the body, and we can break down most of these sensations into these four categories of pressure, some sort of weight, some sort of temperature, movement, and some form of cohesiveness, elasticity.

Then there are all these other things that we can feel in the body, feelings that come from the mind that we can describe as emotions. And thoughts, images. So that's the Buddha's first three: the *rūpa*, the body; *saññā*, the perception; and then *vedanā*, feelings. And tonight we'll do this *saññā*.

So, in Buddhist psychology, when you attend to something, it will always have a feeling content, and it will have a perceptive content. They arise together. You can't have one without the other. They're said to be in every moment of attention. And what the *saññā* does is it records the basic characteristics of something.

So the zabutons, these mats you're sitting on, the basic thing would be the shape of it, its rectangular shape, and the colour. And it would record that, and these things slowly become your memory. And by seeing many colours, many shapes, then it begins to discriminate between all the different colours and shapes that you can experience, or that you do experience. So it's that perceptual memory. And as it grows to a higher level, then it puts labels on it. So there's the growth of the intellect coming from the perceptual level, these basic percepts. And therefore it has the job of recognising things. It's your basic memory.

The other factors of a moment of attention you might be interested to know is these two that I've mentioned, the feeling and the perception. There's also the moment of contact, which I'll come to at another time, which is part of the dependent origination, where you must have an object. You must have a sense organ and you must have the awareness of it, consciousness. And remember that there are six sense organs in the Buddha's teaching, the sixth one being the mind itself. The base of that presumably is the brain, the brain itself.

Then there is will. There must be some power there within that moment keeping things together and pointing them. And then there's that one-pointedness of attention. It's a quality. Then there's that quality of attending which is best expressed in that sentence "to pay attention." It's actually a quality, and it's

called mental life faculty. That's the basic energy, the basic mental energy. And it is said that all these seven factors, mental factors, are within any given moment of attention.

Now, what happens is that the quality of these perceptions join with the emotional base, and then through the act of will, through that act of attending, you get this creativity. At worst it's known as *papañca*, which is a lovely word which means proliferation, and your mind's going all over the place. But at its more important level, it's the growth of the conceptual mind, the growth of thinking, and eventually of philosophy and the arts. So that all begins from that particular perceptual base of *saññā*.

So we're still really investigating these *khandha*, the five aggregates into which the Buddha dissected our experience. So 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 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.

So 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's also distinguished as pleasant and unpleasant mental sensations, and that's where the confusion comes in because normally speaking we talk about feelings and emotions. And I think they shade into each other. Emotions are very complex things, but when you 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 feeling a sensation in the body which we recognise is caused by a mental state rather than the body itself, and it's distinguishing those two. And the fifth one is of course the neutral states of both the body sensations and the mental sensations.

And 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. And you're sitting when 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, all that sort of stuff. It just isn't that.

And you can also—he also splits it up again, dissects it again into the various feelings that arise from the six, well seven 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. And I dare say, it's

never the case that one is exactly the same as the other, like leaves on a 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 *vedanā*—the way he separates this out, feeling, comes up in the discourse on how to establish this 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 centre 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 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.

And 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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