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17	Sensations (Feelings)(Vedana) (1) Basic considerations
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Article 17

Satara Satipathana Sutta (Discourse on the Four Foundations of Mindfulness) VEDANANUPASSANA (CONTEMPLATION OF SENSATIONS) (1) Basic Considerations

Previous articles have dealt with introductory aspects of Mindfulness. Here we try to get a full view of Sensations.

Sensations are one of the five aggregates that form a person, an individual or a name-form combination. The full set is matter (Rupa), sensations (Vedana), perceptions (Sanna), volitional formations (samskara) and consciousness (Vinnana).

Sensation does not imply pain. This confusion is related to the meaning of the word vedana in Sinhala which means pain. A sensation can arise in six ways connected to the six senses, eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind.

A Sensation arises because of a contact between a sense, and an object causing a consciousness (or citta) commonly called the mind. While the sense contacts

an object that is visible, and the mind becomes active, an eye-sensation is said to occur. In Abhidhamma a sensation belongs to the broad category called Cetasika (a mental state). It does not belong to the category of matter but to the category Nama (name) which is part of the mind.

If the sensation is pleasant it is called Sukha Vedana. If it is unpleasant we call it Dukkha Vedana. If the sensation, sometimes called Feeling, is neither pleasant nor unpleasant, we call it Adukkha-Asukha Vedana (neutral sensation). In Pali the word Adukkhama Sukha is used but it is not to be mixed with Sukha Vedana. The neutral feeling has little impact on the body. Most sensations belong to the third category but very little notice is taken about them due to the prevalence of ignorance.

Sensations help a meditator to see the realities regarding the body (material aspect). Sensations are pronounced and therefore are effective in seeing things as they are. It is useful to take note of neutral sensations as best as we could.

Pleasant feelings are pleasant as they arise, and unpleasant as they go away or subside in keeping with impermanence. Unpleasant feelings are unpleasant as they arise, and it is pleasant to see them go away. Neutral feelings are pleasant if the person is awakened to it but not so when one is not aware of its arising.

The mind is often unaware of the arising of neutral feelings which seem to dominate available time. One needs to develop the ability to recognise the incidence of neutral feelings. Ask the questions, is this pleasant is this unpleasant.

The impact of sensations on the mind in the long term is very important from the point of view of insight. If the mind is not kept alert and guarded, a pleasant feeling can leave a remainder of desire and attachment. An unpleasant feeling may give rise to aversion. Neutral feelings in a similar case may lead to ignorance or delusion. Awareness can help avoid unwanted results. **That is why mindfulness meditation is so valuable.** In Note (2) at the end of this article a few practical hints related to this meditation of this type are given to help a beginner.

Awareness helps one to see the operation of cause and effect in all the above situations. It also brings to light the feature of impermanence, suffering and the no-self idea. It shows the occurrence of arising and connected ceasing. Ongoing change in the mind can also be seen by observing the above phenomena.

If an unwanted attraction is perpetuated by a pleasant feeling, contemplation of any negative aspects of the object becomes useful in changing track. Contemplation of putrid (asubha) or worthless (adinava) aspects also help.

This is insight in a worldly sense and continued practice is likely lead to Right View (Samma Ditthi). In its purest form this (right view) is the door-step to Nibbana (enlightenment).

Madhu Pindika Sutta and Girimananda sutta are helpful in understanding Feelings. In the latter ten selected signs (perceptions) are described in detail.

(Although this illustrates the power of contemplating sensations, many meditation teachers hold the view that we should not commence a mindfulness meditation with sensations but rather from a body meditation (kayanupassana) such as breathing, or walking or other starting points mentioned in the discourse on the Four Foundations of Mindfulness (Satara Sati Patthana). Otherwise they say we might end up in concentration (samadhi) thinking of it as the destination.

OTHER ASPECTS OF SENSATIONS

Feelings have been classified in many ways. The 9-types classification is one of them. These are as follows:

- 1 Pleasant feeling
- 2 Unpleasant feeling
- 3 Neutral feeling
- 4 Worldly (amisa) pleasant feeling
- 5 Worldly (amisa) unpleasant feeling
- 6 Worldly (amisa) neutral feeling
- 7 Sublime (niramisa) pleasant feeling
- 8 Sublime (niramisa) unpleasant feeling
- 9 sublime (niramisa) neutral feeling

Here worldly means belonging to the sense world (Kama Loka), including the human plane. Sublime feelings are experienced in absorptions (jhana) or in the Magga and Phala (sotapatti to Arahat) citta.

The last three sub-categories become particularly useful in learning Vedana Anupassana (contemplation of feelings) meditation and in practising these ardently.

Feelings are associated with the six senses. For each sense there are factors that contribute to the experience of feeling. For example, a feeling arising from the

eye contacting an object will be supported by the existence of illumination; for the ear, a medium facilitating the transmission of sound and so on.

Feelings need to be examined in greater detail. This will be done in future articles. Feeling also leads to perceptions. This too needs further examination.

NOTE (1):

This article has been compiled by Rahubadde Sarath-Chandra. Expositions given by Venerable Ellawala Vijithananda, meditation master, and by Venerable Kahagala Sarananda, chief monk of the Sanghawasa in the university of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka, via ZOOM programs conducted by the Sri Lanka Buddhist Monastery, Ellen Grove, Brisbane, are gratefully and respectfully acknowledged.

It is also expected to publish a couple of more articles on Vedana in subsequent issues.

NOTE (2):

A few simple practical hints are given here. For example, assume that you are trying breathing meditation in the seated position. **Firstly**, after some time you will notice contact occurring, that is you will notice the breath contacting the nostril. **Secondly**, when you continue probably you will notice a sensation, that is the out-breath is slightly warmer than the in-breath. That is a sensation though very simple. **Thirdly**, after some more time you might begin to like the in-breath as it is cold, and you might dislike the out-breath as it is warm or vice-versa. It is also possible that you are neutral about it whether it is warm or cold.

To give another example, say you are trying walking meditation. As the heel of the left foot touches the ground, contact arises. The feeling (sensation) of hardness, roughness or smoothness may result. You may like the feeling, dislike the feeling, or remain neutral. Again, you have the contact, sensation and Like or dislike or neutrality.

The liking or disliking or neutrality will have a cumulative effect. This is how craving (tanha) or repulsion (hatred) builds up. These keep us in Samasara (involving suffering of all forms).

In meditation we train ourselves to ward off both craving and hatred, first in a small way and then with practice in complex situations we face in life.

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THE END OF THE 6 PAGE QSA DHAMMA MAGAZINE FOR MARCH 2021

Issued by the President of QSA, Reverend James Wilson

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