

Dedicated Practitioners Program Reading and Homework March 2003

The themes for this month's homework are the Second Foundation of Mindfulness (feeling tone or *vedana*) and compassion practice. The Buddha considered the feeling tone of pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral that is present in every sense experience an extremely important factor to pay attention to. As well as being one of the Four Foundations, it is one of the Five Aggregates, and is a central link in the chain of Dependent Origination. Compassion is the quality of heart that connects directly to the suffering we encounter, in ourselves and in others.

Readings: 1) *Contemplation of Feeling: The Discourse-Grouping on the Feelings* (Vedana-Samyutta), the Introduction and The Place of Feeling in Buddhist Psychology. Translated from the Pali, with an Introduction by Nyanaponika Thera. Found on the Access to Insight website at

<http://www.accesstoinight.org/lib/bps/wheels/wheel303.html>.

2) "Compassion Practice" by Guy Armstrong, attached as a Word doc.

For further reading: The remainder of Nyanaponika's text.

Reflections

1. Think of something that you have strong or habitual desire for. Investigate the vedana associated with that experience. Is the feeling tone continuous, or does it change? What do you discover about vedana in this inquiry? Be sure to notice vedana connected with the sense experience itself as well as the mental state associated with it.
2. Think of something that you have strong or habitual aversion to, or is a habitual difficult mind state. Investigate the vedana associated with that experience. Is the feeling tone continuous, or does it change? What do you discover about vedana in this inquiry? Be sure to notice vedana connected with the sense experience itself as well as the mental state associated with it.
3. Think of an activity or experience that you routinely do that you think of as neutral. Take some time to investigate this experience more closely to see if it is actually completely neutral, or if you notice a tinge of pleasant or unpleasant.
4. We often characterize a moment of experience as either pleasant or unpleasant. But, in fact, there are usually many different kinds of experience arising at the six sense doors. Take a closer look at your experience and see how many different kinds of vedana you can notice at one time. Does it make sense to characterize a moment of experience as pleasant or unpleasant?
5. The near enemy of compassion is pity. During this month, when you encounter a situation where someone is suffering (you or another), investigate whether what you are experiencing is compassion or pity. How do you tell the difference?

Practices

Daily Life:

1. Every time you encounter someone suffering, either directly or through hearing or reading about it, stop and do a few sets of the compassion phrase.

2. Anytime you become aware you are having a strong experience, take a moment to notice which type of vedana is present. How does noticing vedana effect the experience?

Sitting Practice

Week	Attention	Suggestions
1	Noting Vedana	Note continuously the changing objects of your experience. After each note, also note the feeling tone of the experience. When you become established in this practice, drop the initial note, and just note vedana.
2 & 3	Pleasant	Pay particular attention to pleasant feeling tone. Can you be with the bare experience of "pleasant" without greed arising?
	Unpleasant	Pay particular attention to unpleasant feeling tone. Can you be with the bare experience of "unpleasant" without aversion arising?
	Neutral	Pay particular attention to neutral feeling tone. Can you stay with the bare experience of "neutral" without spacing out or disconnecting? Do you actually notice any experiences that are truly neutral?
4	Compassion	Spend some time each sitting doing formal compassion practice. Begin with someone you know who is suffering. After a few days, move on to yourself, a friend, a difficult person and lastly all beings.

Please schedule a time to connect with your dharma buddy for a discussion of this month's reflections and practices, and for an interview with your mentor if you are receiving monthly interviews.