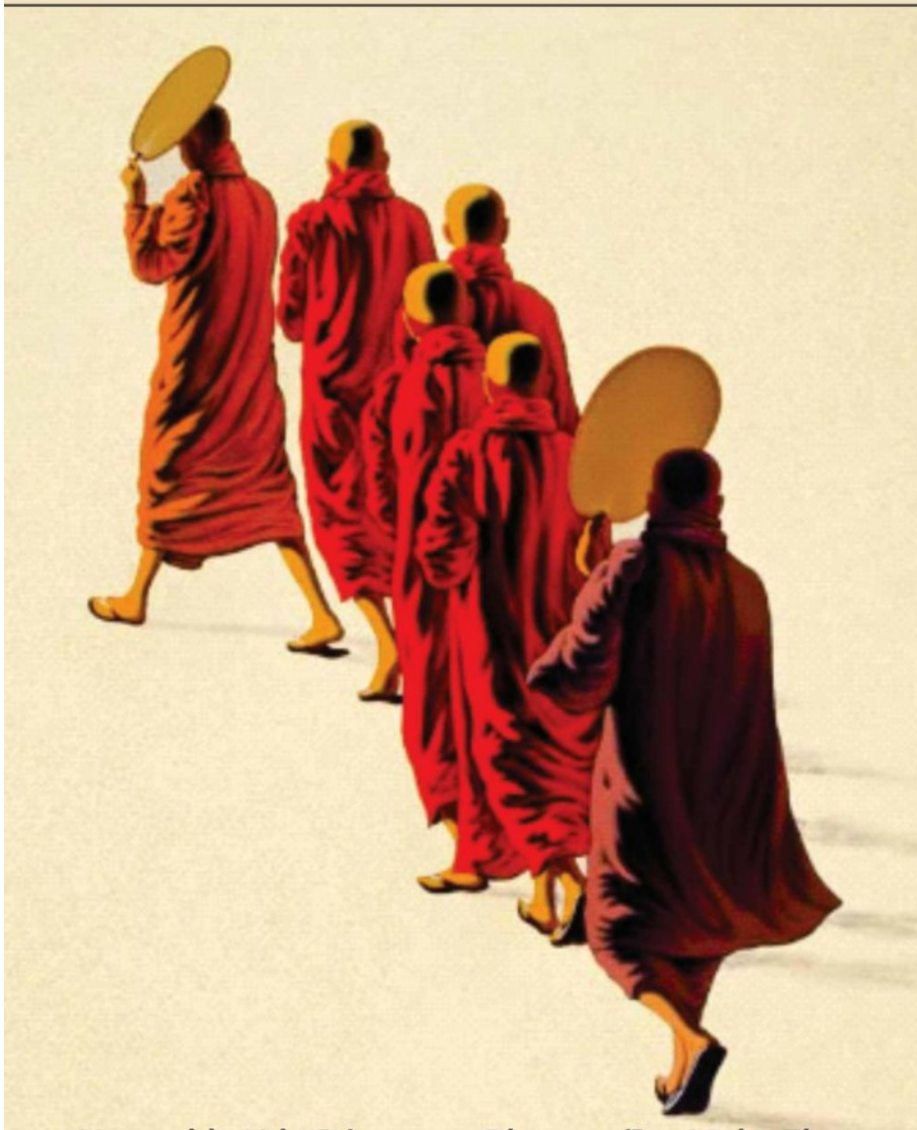
A Mind Revealed

Teachings on the dependent arising of sensory consciousness



Venerable Uda Eriyagama Dhammajīva Maha Thero

Vipassanā Fellowship Edition

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Edition 2.0 published April 2017 by
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Acknowledgment

The translator is indebted to Mr. Kenneth Morris and Ms. Barbara Janus of the Saddhamma Foundation, USA for their suggestions, corrections, inspiration and criticism in reviewing a draft of this book.

Translator's Foreword

A Mind Revealed is a compilation of translated excerpts of Venerable Dhammajiva Maha Thero's teachings on the *Dutiyadvayaṃ sutta* imparted to the resident monks and *yogis* at Meetirigala Nissarana Vanaya.

Although relatively concise in comparison to the other detailed teachings of the Buddha, *Dutiyadvayaṃ sutta* is comprehensive in its analysis of sensory consciousness, its causality, operation and cessation; sensory contact, its associated feelings and their dependent origination and cessation.

Sensory consciousness is a theoretically complex exposition of the Buddha's teachings, both conceptually challenging and technically subtle to the unenlightened mind. Venerable Dhammajīva brings the analysis to one's own breath and meditation practice, to emphasize the benefits of commencing this theoretically complex understanding with an awareness of body-consciousness, to observe sensory consciousness by noting the breath and its contact with the body.

Mindfulness is his compass and the breath, his tool to explain the Buddha's profound and deep analysis of sensory consciousness. Venerable Dhammajīva simply urges *yogis* to observe the sensations experienced through the contact of the breath, as coarseness, as coolness, as heat, an inward gush or an outward release – all being, manifestations of sensory contact.

Gradually, the instructions navigate to a point where the breath, once perceivable, becomes subtle and appears to fade away in one's awareness. Through this process, he aims to explain the causality and dependent origination of sensory contact, its

associated feelings and their cessation. The detailed instructions for this observation are supported by Venerable Dhammajīva's lucid and direct style of teaching.

Sitting in the audience as the meditation master imparts his wisdom, one instantly draws inspiration from his candour. His strict discipline and adherence to the *vinaya,* dedication and generosity towards his students and the simple magnetism of his presence is impossible to translate into the words contained in this publication. Yet, it is hoped that at least a glimpse of his detailed understanding of the Buddha's wisdom, which he himself has tested through direct and dedicated practice**,** is conveyed in this translation.

Some *Pāli* terms remain in their original form. This has been done to introduce a precision of meaning that is only available in the Buddha's teachings. A glossary of some of these terms has also been included. Whilst the translation attempts to impart the necessary meaning that has been conveyed in the Sinhalese medium, some parts of the discussion have been omitted to preserve the flow of the editing process.

(October, 2008 (and revised in September 2016))

About the Author

Venerable Uda Eriyagama Dhammajīva Maha Thero is the Abbott and Chief Preceptor of Meetirigala Nissarana Vanaya, a monastery in the strict forest tradition in Sri Lanka, one of Sri Lanka's most respected meditation monasteries. The monastery was established in 1968 and led under the guidance of the great Venerable Matara Sri Nānārama Maha Thero.

Venerable Dhammajīva spent several years of training under the late Ovadacāriya Sayādaw U. Paṇḍitābhivaṃsa, a leading Burmese meditation master who followed the lineage of the great Venerable Mahāsi Sayadaw.

Venerable Dhammajīva is fluent in Sinhalese, English and Burmese, and has translated many meditation guide books as well as Dhamma books from Burmese to English and to Sinhalese and has authored a significant collection of publications in both the English and Sinhalese medium.

Chapter 1

Causality of Sensory Consciousness

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa
Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa
Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa

Dvayaṃ bikkhave, paṭicca viññānam sambhoti
Kathañca, bikkhave dvayaṃ paṭicca viññānam sambhoti
Cakkhuñca paṭicca rūpe ca uppajjati cakkhuviññānaṃ
Cakkhu aniccaṃ vipariṇāmī aññathābhāvi
Rūpā annicā vipariṇāmī aññathabhāvino
Itthetam dvayaṃ calañceva vayañca aniccaṃ vipariṇāmī aññathābhāvi
Cakkhuviññānaṃ aniccaṃ vipariṇāmī aññathābhāvi
Yopi hetu yopi paccayo cakkhuviññānassa uppādāya, sopi hetu sopi paccayo anicco vipariṇāmī aññathābhāvi

*Dutiyadvayaṃ sutt*a, available in the chapter dedicated to '*Salāyatana*' in the *Samyutta Nikāya*, discusses the operation of the six senses (*salāyatana*), the associated feelings, how the mind perceives sensory contact and the perceptions and mental formations resulting from it.

Consciousness (*viññāna*) is the discerning ability of the mind, which enables us to identify sense objects separately and is the

primordial form of our being. Even if thoughts or feelings are absent, as long as we have a consciousness, we are alive.

Consciousness has often been misconceived as permanent. It was thought that if the five *khandas* are compartmentalised, the body (the coarse aspect) is at the exterior. This was conceived to be followed by an inner layer of feelings, within which there are perceptions and mental preparations; thoughts lie within that further layer of feeling, perception and mental preparations. Very last is consciousness, being the most subtle of the five *khandas*. From this misconception emanated a popular myth that consciousness shadows a person from birth to death and from life to life.

Yet, the Buddha instructs that consciousness is not enduring, is impermanent, causes suffering and is devoid of a self. It is a result of causality and is subject to dependent origination, arising due to two (*dvaya*) factors (*dvayaṃ bikkhave, paṭicca viññānam, sambhoti*).

Causality of eye-consciousness

Eye-consciousness arises when a visual object attracts sensitivity of the eye, is dependent on the eye and the visual objects seen in a given moment (*cakkhuñca paṭicca rūpe ca uppajjati cakkhuviññānam*).

All visual objects, (in addition to sounds, smells, tastes and tangibles) are *rūpa.* A healthy eye is required to see (colourful) objects. Without an object, eye-consciousness is inactive. To see the object, there must be colour, visible form and light. Eye-consciousness is inoperative in darkness.

Generally, during a session of walking meditation, mindfulness is retained on the movement or the touch of the feet. When you come to a stop at the end of the walking path, continuity of mindfulness on the footsteps can be lost and the mind may wander to pursue an external sense impingement caught by eye-consciousness.

Immediately, the mind's attention would be taken to the visual object and your experience changes to "seeing", which is entirely different from the experience of feet touching the ground. Continuity of mindfulness will not be disturbed if you become aware of this transition, but if you continue with the process of "seeing", unmindfully, you will indulge in it.

A visual object can be recognised and its attributes and form identified, only when it is continuously viewed for at least four to five thought moments. An object that is seen fleetingly may not penetrate your cognitive capacity. If your attention does not follow after the visual object, it will return to the movement and the touch of the feet without breaking continuity with the walking meditation.

Impermanence of eye-consciousness

The eye is impermanent, subject to old age and decay. It dies with the physical death that marks the end of our life.

Scientific experiments have proved that every seven years, our bodies undergo a complete replacement of all the cells comprising it due to metabolic bodily cycles. The eye changes, it disintegrates, grows old and is impermanent.

By personalising the eye and creating a persona associated with it, we experience suffering, because, by its very nature, it is subject to change and death. Just like our eyes, objects seen by it also follow the same course of decay and disintegration.

If the two causes that underpin eye-consciousness are impermanent, then, eye-consciousness must also be impermanent and subject to change. When we attach to what we see, we experience much suffering because the eye and the visual objects seen by it are inherently impermanent and subject to change.

All visual objects are separate from us and are entirely independent entities. They wear out, disintegrate, deteriorate and diminish over time. Whenever they are claimed as "mine", one experiences great sorrow, as they are subject to change and are impermanent by their very nature (*aniccaṃ vipariṇāmī aññathābhāvi*). If they are not claimed by us, they simply arise and pass away according to their cycles of nature, without causing any suffering to us.

A lighted candle will dissolve with each burning flame. The candle gradually dissolves, then evaporates, giving rise to light. As long as the flame burns, the candle melts. When it dissolves completely, the flame burns out.

In a similar way, eye-consciousness, arising due to two impermanent causes, which by their nature are subject to change, must follow the same course of impermanence (*sopi hetu sopi paccayo anicco vipariṇāmī aññathābhāvi*).

Observing the causality of eye-consciousness in practice

When one continues to focus one's attention on the in and out breathing during a session of sitting meditation, one can observe the operation of consciousness caused by each of the sense faculties and the mind's priority given to each one of them, in turn. For example, by observing the transition from "hearing" to "thinking" to bodily pains, one is able to maintain continuity of mindfulness.

When mindfulness is continuous and sharp, one's attraction to the object experienced through sensory consciousness loses its force or strength as an "object" and its appeal/ influence, is substantially tempered. Observing the mind's shift from one sense faculty to another, there is less attention given to the content of the object; the details of pains and thoughts will no longer be observed and they will not hinder continuity of awareness on the breath. Details of thoughts, sounds and pains become irrelevant when the attention is retained on the mind and its movement from body consciousness to ear-consciousness etc., from one moment to the next.

Once, a *yogi* on retreat, climbed over a nearby mountain, overlooking the sea. It was the end of the day and the sun was setting and he silently enjoyed the beauty of the setting sun, its vibrancy, colour and peaceful descent into the ocean. He thought to himself, "how beautiful the world is, yet people are so caught up in worldly pursuits that they never pause to appreciate the beauty that unfolds naturally. They take pictures of these beautiful images or try to capture them in paintings and take them home to be appreciated later, when they have some respite from their busy daily schedules".

On his return, he recollected his experience to his teacher. His teacher listened and explained to him that if he had paid attention to the operation of eye-consciousness, he would have realised that his mind was far more intriguing and beautiful than the setting sun. Without this state of mind, he could not have appreciated the beauty of the scene that unfolded before him.

If you are absorbed in the beauty of an external projection, you betray the beauty of the mind receiving it. In reality, the intrigue and beauty of the external is only a projection of the mind. It is the mental state receiving it that makes what is seen, appear so special! When you mindfully observe the operation of your mind, you see that the quality attributed to the external object is in reality a projection of your own state of mind.

Beautiful objects are frequently seen through our eyes. In order to appreciate their beauty, our minds must be even more beautiful. The Buddha explained that the operation of our mind is far more intriguing than the objects we see. A mind that is in an unpleasant state will only see unpleasantness in this world. A beautiful mind will always see noteworthy qualities. This is the reality of perception and external projection.

There is no difference in sense impingement on a mind that is enlightened and a mind which is not. The difference is in the projection of qualities attributed to the external object. An unenlightened mind usually indulges in sensory consciousness. An enlightened being does not indulge in the experience and instead, sees the external object separately from the sense faculty receiving it, becoming aware of their interaction, knowing the operation of sensory consciousness as “seeing”, ” h earing”, “smelling”, “tasting” (etc), in addition to the triple

aspects of impermanence, suffering and non-self underpinning them. Accordingly, the response to external objects is one of equanimity, one of "choiceless" observation and detachment.

It is not the "quantity" of sensory experience that measures progress in life experience. Seeing more visual objects or experiencing numerous sounds does not make one superior to others. Rather, it is the capability to observe the operation of the mind and its external projections correctly that marks progress in mental development.

If you are a cop determined to catch the ring-leader of a gang, you wouldn't rely on running after the thieves, attempting to catch them, would you? The skill of a good cop is to know the *modus operandi* of the thieves, catch them and question them to extract as much information as possible about the gang in order to map out their operations and the location of their ring leader. Simply following after the thieves will not take the cop to the real mastermind ordering the execution of various crimes by the gang of thieves.

Similarly, to know the operation of the eye, it is pointless to chase after external sense impingements. Following after them would take your attention away from the mind; instead, you need to catch the eye and the mind receiving the visual projection in order to really comprehend the operation of eye-consciousness.

So, how can one observe the operation of eye-consciousness in the practice? Say you are practising walking meditation – as you walk up and down the walking path, your awareness might be taken to a visual object seen through the eye. Without reacting to it, becoming attached to it or rejecting it, note it as

"object, object" or "form, form", thus, becoming aware of "seeing". You then note it as "seeing, seeing" (and not as "object, object"), being aware of the experience of "seeing". The more advanced state of mental noting is to note it as a process – "seeing, seeing". This leaves less room for the interaction of perception and memory (*saññā*). It is *saññā* that fuels the unconscious compulsion to enhance our identities by identifying with the visual object, building it into a mental structure according to an illusory identity of a "self".

With sharpened mindfulness, the experience gained through the eye seeing something, or the foot touching the ground would be noted simply as states of mind characterised by just "knowing". When mindfulness is continuous and steadfast, your experience of sense impingements is neutral - the body-contact (*kāya samphassa*) and the eye-contact (*cakkhu samphassa*) experienced are just states of "knowing". You realise that this is the point of demarcation in sensory operation; from this point of "knowing", priority is given to sense impingement and accordingly, a person changes from one who "sees" to one who "hears" and so forth.

Remaining with just "knowing", one remains in a state of primordial equilibrium. One is at home. It is from this junction of "knowing", an impartial state of mind, that the six sense faculties and sensory experience are noted.

The magnetism of the eye towards a visible object makes it difficult to backtrack from observing the visible object to the knowing mind. So, it is recommended that you commence with body-consciousness (the breath) and gradually go back to the "knowing" state of mind that appears to be unrelated to the five physical senses.

During a session of sitting meditation, when the in-breath and the out-breath are continuously observed from the beginning, through the middle and to the end, the breath gradually becomes inconspicuous and one no longer observes the two processes, as in-breath and out-breath.

When there is nothing concretely available for one's observation, one's awareness is confined to the point at which the breath appears to have disappeared. In other words, there is a change from noting the movement (and the touch of the "in-breath" and the "out-breath") to just awareness of the neutral, "knowing" state of mind.

Observing the breath continuously can become rather boring. Seeing it again and again can become tedious. When the breath becomes inconspicuous, being in a state of just "knowing" can be even more un-stimulating.

So, just by observing the breath, you can see how it changes from gross to subtle, from interesting to boring, its' impermanence and unsatisfactory nature, how it changes and results in boredom. At least theoretically, you must understand this process.

Often, we are bewildered by the concept of an entity, both in ourselves and what we experience through sensory consciousness. If we dissect sensory operation, we can understand the true nature of our experience. We need to understand impermanence by knowing the attributes of impermanence and see the dissolution, disintegration and decay in all existence. In order to understand impermanence, we need to contemplate impermanence in our daily activities; to realise

the truth of impermanence underpinning all existence, one must directly experience the impermanent nature of phenomena during meditation.

In *rūpa* (sense impingements and sense faculties), we must see the dissolution, how they change from one moment to the next. The impermanence, dissolution and disintegration in everything we see, hear, smell, taste or think can be directly observed when our meditation gathers momentum. We begin to understand the impermanence of consciousness: if the two factors upon which consciousness is dependent (the object and sense impingement) are impermanent and subject to change, then, consciousness will (and must) invariably follow the same course of nature.

One can mindfully see that the object seen through the eye and the person "seeing" it, are separate and independent from each other; and how consciousness connects the subject and the object (the internal and external). It is the contact between the subject (sense faculty) and the external object that activates eye-consciousness, to make the external object something of interest, disinterest or indifference.

Unless the external object captivates our eye-consciousness and we attribute a mental quality to what we see, it will just arise and pass away without our attention or interest. So, we see how our consciousness connects us to our surroundings, to create the world within which we operate. When we impart a "self" to this process and attribute greed, conceit and self-view to all that we experience, a conceptual reality is created around our existence.

Dvayaṃ bikkhave, paṭicca viññānam sambhoti

Katañca, bikkhave dvayaṃ paṭicca viññānam sambhoti

Kāyañca paṭicca phoṭṭabe ca uppajjati kāyaviññānam

Kāyo anicco vipariṇāmī aññathābhāvi

Phottabhāannicā vipariṇāmīno aññathābhāvino

Itthetam dvayaṃ calañceva vyayañca aniccaṃ vipariṇāmī aññathābhāvi

Kāyaviññānam aniccaṃ vipariṇāmī aññathābhāvi

Yopi hetu yopi paccayo kāyaviññānassa uppādāya, sopi hetu sopi paccayo anicco vipariṇāmī aññathābhāvi

This section will briefly consider the causality of body-consciousness and its operation by observing the movement of the breath during a session of sitting meditation. Although the subject of sensory consciousness is theoretically complex, observing the operation of body-consciousness and its causality during a session of sitting meditation is not a complicated task for a practicing *yogi*.

Consciousness is dependent on two (*dvayaṃ*) factors: the object (sense impingement) and the sense faculty.

Causality of body-consciousness

Body-consciousness is activated when the body makes contact with a tangible object. To experience the contact of this impingement, the body must be alive and contact with a tangible object.

The Buddha recommends that *yogis* go to a quiet place and close their eyes before commencing *Ānāpānasati bhāvanā* (mindfulness of the in-breath and the out-breath) because eye-consciousness and ear-consciousness are particularly strong in their magnetism towards external sense impingements.

To avoid distractions arising due to eye-consciousness, one may have to go to a place where there are no visual objects (which is nearly impossible) or close one's eyes. Eye-consciousness is the dominant sensory consciousness in our realm of sensory existence. If we go to a quiet place, close our eyes, then eye-consciousness and ear-consciousness, both very powerful tools of distraction, become rather inactive. When this is done, we can direct our attention to the body.

Being seated in an erect posture, we close our eyes and give priority to body-consciousness, becoming aware of the posture, of being seated upright on the floor, the posture being balanced and symmetrical like pyramids in Egypt. Your body muscles must be relaxed. It is possible that the mind's attention will be taken away by sounds that impinge upon your ear-drum. If this happens, just become aware that your attention is not with body-consciousness, but, with the hearing. If thoughts continually arise, don't reject the process, but simply be aware that mind-consciousness has taken priority. Make a soft mental note of the thought as "thought, thought"; when the thoughts cease, come back to the movement of breath and the touch of the in-breath and the out-breath.

Observe the in-breath and the out-breath separately and become aware of the most prominent point at which the breath manifests. The operation of body-consciousness can be observed once your attention is confined to this point, maybe at the tip of

the nose, the top of the upper lip, the throat area, the rising and falling of the abdomen (etc). Allow it to manifest in its natural course.

Discerning the in-breath and the out-breath is due to consciousness. With the discerning ability of consciousness, you can observe the rubbing sensation of an inward gush – the "in-breath" and the outward flow of an exhalation. With continuous mindfulness, you can identify the air-draft touching your body and its associated sensations.

The in-breath may be noted as an inward rubbing sensation and the out-breath, as a quick exhaled release. It is with the assistance of consciousness that the operation of the in-breath and the out-breath can be observed, separately. The operation of body-consciousness and the causes underpinning its arising and cessation can be observed in this manner.

Unaware of the operation of sensory consciousness in your chaotic and hasty daily life, you act like a mad monkey, jumping from one experience to another. Slowing down the pace and being mindful enables you to see how the mind moves swiftly from one sense faculty to the other. Without indulging in what you see and hear, you have to be aware of "seeing" and "hearing" as a process, observing the operation of sensory consciousness. When you are mindful, you can discern which one of your sense faculties is activated by a sense impingement, to know that your attention is with ear-consciousness and not with mind-consciousness or eye-consciousness (etc).

A useful analogy to clarify the operation of sensory consciousness can be the performance of a stage play. When watching a stage play, one can see how the spot light moves

across the stage to focus on different areas, as well as on particular characters involved in a scene. Following the spot light, as intended by the director, you recognise the actors and become aware of the plot as its actions unfold. Similarly, when the spot light of mindfulness is projected on the performance of sensory consciousness in each of the six sense faculties, you can see which aspect of the performance is in operation (whether ear-consciousness or eye-consciousness, etc, is the main actor). It may be eye-consciousness seeing a visual object, or the ear listening to some music or the nose experiencing a scent. Being aware of sensory consciousness mindfully, you can note which part of the play is being performed and thus, observe the drama, the performance of your 'consciousness'!

Your role as a *yogi* is to note the process involved in body-Consciousness: "I sat down, closed my eyes and experienced an inward gush - this was the in-breath. Then an out-breath occurred. I noted it as such because it was an exhalation, an outward rubbing sensation". In this way, you observe the movement and touch of the in-breath and the out-breath as they occur in their natural rhythm. To fully understand the process, the attributes of the process need to be observed in minute detail and with accuracy.

Observe how body-consciousness (arising due to two causes that are by their nature, impermanent) is subject to change and cessation. The body is subject to old age and death. The breath just arises and passes away. As the two ingredients underpinning body-consciousness are impermanent, body-consciousness must also follow the same course. The experiences gained through body-consciousness change from one moment to the next.

For example, if you hold anything, even a piece of cotton-wool in your hand, the experience of it will change with time. Initially it may seem light, but with the passing of time, it will seem to become heavier and heavier and more and more cumbersome.

When the operation of the breath during a session of sitting meditation is continually observed, the changes in the breath and its touch can be vividly seen. If the two causes upon which body-consciousness is dependent are impermanent and subject to change, how can body-consciousness be permanent and enduring? The in-breath changes from the beginning, through the middle to the end. The out-breath undergoes the same process. The first five minutes of a session of sitting meditation are different from the next five minutes and the manifestation and experience of the breath changes from one moment to the next. Continually being mindful of each passing in-breath and out-breath, one can observe how the sense impingement underpinning body-consciousness changes from one moment to the next.

Practicing like this, you will reach a stage where you can observe thoughts arising in your mind and sounds coming within the range of your ear-drum, along with continuous meditation on the breath. Although your attention shifts from the breath to the thought and comes back to the breath towards the end of an in-breath, there is continuity of mindfulness, because you have noted the operation of the mind, how your attention was with the breath and taken away to the ear and then came back to the body. In this way, you directly observe how the mind operates and interacts with sensory consciousness.

During walking meditation, you might see many visual objects, even though your attention is supposed to be on the touch sensation of the feet. If you are aware of the shift in attention and not caught up in the detail of the visual object, you will naturally come back to body-consciousness (bodily sensations).

It is our habit to be immersed in the detail and not in the shift. If we remain 'choiceless' and become aware of the six-fold operation of sensory consciousness mindfully, observing the operation of the mind and how its attention shifts from one faculty to the next in our day-to-day activities, we will not be taken over by the variety in sensory experience. When we are mindful of how the mind receives sensory consciousness, we press the , pause` button in our *samsāric* cycles.

Instead, by indulging in distractions presented through sensory contact, we are assured of nothing but another round in the carousel of sensory experience which simply takes us from one life to the next in our endless cycle of *samsāra.*

Chapter 2

Operation of Sensory Contact

Yā kho, bikkhave, imesaṃ tinnaṃ dhammānaṃ sangati, sannipāto, samavāyo, ayaṃ vuccati cakkhusamphasso

When eye sensitivity catches sight of a visual object (*paṭicca rūpa*), giving rise to eye-consciousness and the mind becomes aware of it, "seeing" occurs. Unless the attention is focused on eye-consciousness, "seeing" does not occur. Dependent on the eye and forms, eye-consciousness arises. The concurrence of the three is contact (*cakkhusamphassa)*.

Operation of sensory contact can be seen during a session of sitting meditation by observing the movement and touch of the air-draft, moving in and out. When an air-draft touches the body, it gives rise to body-consciousness. When the mind becomes aware of it, you experience it.

Body-contact can also be observed with the feet touching the ground during walking meditation; when one wears robes or washes the alms bowl. The body touches an object, giving rise to body-consciousness; when the mind becomes aware of their concurrence, there is sensory (body) contact (*kāya samphassa*), then the mind gives priority to body-consciousness over sensory consciousness occurring through the other five faculties.

Observing the detail in sensory contact

Generally, the characteristics (*linga*), the signs (*nimitta*) and the modes (*ākāra*) of a visual object which comes within the sphere of perception, through eye-consciousness, can only be described after "seeing" occurs for four to five cognitive processes. Separately identifying the shape and the manner of the object that has activated our eye-consciousness is possible by fixing our attention on it continuously for four to five thought moments. Seeing an object only fleetingly would not enable us to describe its characteristics (*linga*), signs (*nimitta*) and modes (*ākāra*), but if four to five thought moments pass with our attention retained on the same visual object, we can describe it with some discerning clarity.

Providing a detailed account of one's meditation on the primary object is difficult in the early stages of one's practice. Gradually, with continuity of awareness and diligent attention, one becomes skilled in their practice, recollecting how the primary object was observed, its' intrinsic characteristics, and its signs and modes. It is only after the breath is continually observed for four to five thought moments that a *yogi* is able to describe the movement of the air-draft, its characteristics (*linga*), signs (*nimitta*) and modes (*ākāra*). With an in-breath, a *yogi* observes its movement, noting its natural characteristics and with the out-breath, comes to know clearly that an exhalation is taking place.

Noting the object in this way, one is aware of an exhalation as one experiences an outward flow or an outward rubbing sensation, discretely, from that of the in-breath. With precise aiming and diligent effort, awareness is retained on the in-breath from the beginning, through the middle and to the

end. Throughout this process, one observes the characteristics (*linga*), signs (*nimitta*) and modes (*ākāra*) of the in-breath. The out-breath is observed in a similar manner. When 'choiceless' awareness of the breath as it manifests is present, observing its characteristics (*linga*), signs (*nimitta*) and modes (*ākāra*) as they are, does not leave room for perception to operate, as continuous mindfulness meets the object directly, as and when it arises. This is the beginning of seeing things as they are.

Sounds, in general, may impinge upon the ear-drum during a session of sitting meditation. But, intent engagement with the in-breath and the out-breath facilitates uninterrupted mindfulness. You must train your mind to observe the characteristics (*linga*), signs (*nimitta*) and modes (*ākāra*) of the in-breath and the out-breath clearly and separately. The in-breath may manifest as coolness and the out-breath as a warm sensation or a warm outward flow. Whatever attributes, characteristics (*linga*), signs (*nimitta*) and modes (*ākāra*) of the two processes are discerned; note them, becoming aware of their operation.

One gains direct knowledge of sensory operation by observing the detail in sensory contact. Sensory contact is a very fine and subtle observation, difficult to catch, unless one's mindfulness is sharp and well-developed. Further, it is difficult to relate the experience to one's teacher during an interview. Generally we are aware of the experience of sensory contact (i.e. the coolness of the in-breath or the warm outward flow of an out-breath). By the time we experience sensory contact, it has already occurred and passed. So you must diligently and continuously follow the process of the breath moving in and out.

Thoughts or sounds may arise in your stream of consciousness, but, as you mature in the practice, you will not be disturbed by them and mindfulness will be continuous. Bodily pains will occur, especially after having been seated in the same posture for a while, and although the mind becomes aware of the pain, it will not be distracted to an extent where the attention is drawn away from the primary object (the breath). It is like walking along a busy street. Many vehicles pass by and pedestrians cross a street that is full of hawkers; but without waiting for the road to clear, or interfering with pedestrians or worrying about the number of vehicles, you would just continue to walk along the street skillfully, without any reaction, uninterrupted by external distractions.

As the practice matures, you will continually be with the breath, from the beginning, through to the middle and to the end, noting its characteristics (*linga*), signs (*nimitta*) and modes (*ākāra*), clearly, amidst distractions such as pains, thoughts or sounds. This clarity of awareness will enable you to describe your experience clearly to your teacher, to discuss the attributes that are unique to the in-breath, as compared with the out-breath. This is a real breakthrough in *vipassanā* practice.

When we observe the movement of the air-draft as going "in" and "out" of our body, we can describe body-contact. This is a very subtle observation. Generally, we describe the experience of sensory contact by recollecting our perception or the mental formations associated with it. Sensory contact is particularly discernible when the mind develops to a stage of *vipassanā* concentration (*khaṇika samādhi*), where the mind notes each and every object, as and when it arises, discretely and without delay.

The Buddha taught that as long as the eye, a visual object and the resulting eye-consciousness operate together and the mind becomes aware of this operation, there is contact through the eye (*cakkhusamphassa*) and we experience ‚seeing' (*yā kho bikkhave imesaṃ tinnaṃ dhammānaṃ sangati, sannipāto samavāyo ayaṃ vuccati cakkhusamphasso*). Continuously observing the process for four to five thought moments, we are able to describe what we are seeing. The Buddha teaches how eye-contact is subject to change and is impermanent; if eye-contact is due to a particular factor (or factors), that is (are) impermanent and subject to change, then, eye-contact must also undergo the same course. The outcome of something predicated upon an impermanent cause that is subject to change, must also be impermanent and subject to change by its very nature.

Interplay of mind and matter in sensory contact

In the *Mahānidāna Sutta,* the Buddha discusses the interplay of mind (*nāma*) and matter (*rūpa*) in sensory contact, explaining how sensory experience becomes relevant to us, when we are able to describe the characteristics (*linga*), signs (*nimitta*), modes (*ākāra*) and exponents (*uddesa*) of the sense object that is being experienced (*adhivacanasamphassa*). An object has no relevance, unless it creates a verbal impression on us; to enable this, there must be some contact (resistance impression) (*paṭighasamphassa*). If we can't describe the *rūpa* that we experience, we can't make it relevant to us.

For example, our bodies are composed of the four elements: air element (*vāyo dhātu*), heat element (*thejo dhātu*), earth element (*pathavi dhātu*) and the water element (*āpo dhātu*). During a session of meditation, if your awareness directs itself to a contemplation of the elements (*dhātu manasikhāra*), the vibrating

quality of the air-element can be observed and you are able to describe its characteristics (*linga*), signs (*nimitta*) and modes (*ākāra*) in terms of your verbal impression (*adhivacanasamphassa*). Although the body is comprised of a collection of the four elements, by observing the characteristics (*linga*), signs (*nimitta*) and modes (*ākāra*) of the elements, their unique and innate characteristics, you can separately identify the vibrating quality of the air-element from the liquidity/ cohesiveness of the water element. When your observation of their independent and intrinsic nature and attributes can be described with clarity, there is no confusion. Your verbal impression (*adhivacanasamphassa)* of the elements is clear. You will not personalise the experience, by importing a "self" into this composition of the elements.

So you see how sensory contact (*samphassa*) of any incident occurs with a combination of both verbal impression (*adhivacanasamphassa*) (when we are able to describe the characteristics (*linga*), signs (*nimitta*) and modes (*ākāra)* of the sense impingement) and resistance impression (*paṭighasamphassa*).

At the onset of any thought process, cognitive series or event, there are really no defilements created. Our reaction - indulgence, rejection or ignorance of sensory experience is what gives rise to defilements. Otherwise, the incident (sensory contact) is just a neutral occurrence.

Our delusion about the sensory world is a result of the illusion created by perception *(saññā)*. It is *saññā* that fuels the *samsāric* knotting process. In the *Māgandhiya Sutta*, (*Sutta Nipāta*), the Buddha described that for those who are free of perception, there is no knotting process (*saññā virattassa na santi gantha*). It

is not the external object that makes us accept or reject sensory experience, rather, it is perception (*saññā*) that makes us grasp or reject sensory experience.

With each sound, smell or taste, we experience seamless inner chatter. From morning to night, we regurgitate our sensory contact and the mental formations created around it. It is our regurgitation of sensory contact that causes us to travel through *samsāra*. By recollecting the detail in sensory contact, which is usually coloured by perception, we create defilements. But, if we are choicelessly aware of *rūpa,* there are no defilements created.

So, how can we do this in practice?

One must clearly and continuously observe the characteristics (*linga*), signs (*nimitta*) and modes (*ākāra)* of the in-breath, as and when it arises, without a gap. The object must be described clearly, how it was observed and what was noted in the process (what were the characteristics (*linga*), signs (*nimitta*) and modes (*ākāra*) of the in-breath versus the out-breath). In order to describe your experience clearly and precisely at the meditation interview, the object needs to be observed during meditation as and when it arises, without delay and negligence. With the in-breath, you observe its characteristics (*linga*), signs (*nimitta*) and modes (*ākāra)* and then do the same with the out-breath. This is an aphorism in insight meditation.

When your attention is detailed and continuous, thereby observing the differences in the movement of the in-breath and the out-breath, you gain a closer observation of the breath, and see more detail of the natural characteristics in the in-breaths and out-breaths. With such clarity of awareness, you can

communicate your experience clearly and precisely to your teacher. You can also note the sounds that attract the attention of ear-consciousness, how you experienced the sounds, whether you reacted to them or were able to continue with mindfulness on the breath - how you experienced pain; for example, if there was a reaction to it, maybe it was temporarily in the foreground of mindfulness and the awareness of the breath was temporarily in the background.

Practicing like this, you can continue with uninterrupted mindfulness of the primary object. Slowly, you will understand without any reaction, the nature of sensory experience, as and when it arises.

Gradually, you reach a stage in practice, where the primary object becomes subtle and you are not able to describe the characteristics (*linga*), signs (*nimitta*) and modes (*ākāra*) of the breath, since it is no longer perceivable. At this stage, there is no difference in the characteristics (*linga*), signs (*nimitta*) and modes (*ākāra)* of the in-breath and the out-breath and therefore, it is not possible to describe the discerning attributes of the in-breath and the out-breath as the practice advances. Although this stage marks progress, it is common for *yogis* to become distracted or confused when there is nothing to observe discriminately and to note clearly. As a result, they hesitate to attend interviews and report their experience to the teacher, thinking that it is a sign of a lack of mindfulness or concentration.

In the discourse on the *Paṭicca samuppāda,* the Buddha describes how sense faculties give rise to sensory contact (*salāyatana paccayā phasso*). Alternatively, the Buddha describes that for sensory contact there must be a mental (*nāma*) and physical (*rūpa*) aspect. Previously, scientific thought assumed that an

experiment on a particular object (*rūpa*), conducted in either the northern hemisphere or the southern hemisphere should arrive at the same conclusion and could be repeated with the same results. Now it is said that this is inaccurate as the conclusion reached depends on the scientist's perception of what is being observed. Two scientists, conducting the same experiment on an object in two hemispheres will perceive what is revealed in the experiment in two different (or opposite) ways, thus, giving rise to two different conclusions. So, it is clear that the mental perception of an object (*rūpa*) is what gives rise to variety in description.

A popular Zen Buddhist query provides a useful analogy here. The query is whether, if no one is present, would the sound of a large Sandalwood tree falling in a forest in the Himalayas be heard? The response is clearly "No"! For it is impossible to hear the sound of the tree falling without a person being present to hear it. For "hearing", there has to be an ear, which comes within range of the sense impingement (the sound of the tree falling). Hearing cannot take place without the aid of a live ear (just like it is impossible to clap without the aid of both hands).

So, we see how sense faculties and sense impingements exist separately and independently. It is our reaction to what is experienced that causes tension. From morning to night, we react to incidents of this world, which just occur independently, through their own cycles of nature. We personalise them unnecessarily due to greed (*taṇhā*), conceit (*māna*) and self-view (*diṭṭhi*), the three hallmarks characterising the hallucination of a "self". So, our reality becomes a reflection of the illusory "self".

Observing what unfolds without the interference of an "I" gives one a taste of the truth underpinning one's existence. This is the

function of mindfulness. It enables one to observe the process directly and choicelessly.

As long as we remain with the detail involved in the process, perception (*saññā*) loses its space of operation and our observation is unlikely to be propelled by an "I". It is just a process of "seeing", "feeling" or "hearing". There is no person To "see", "feel" or to "listen".

Sensory contact occurs due to *nāma* and *rūpa.* This much is clear. To hear the falling tree, there has to be an active ear and the mind must become aware of the ,hearing`, through ear-consciousness. As long as perception and thoughts relating to sensory contact are present, there will be good and bad, pleasant and unpleasant, attractive and ugly (etc); creating diversity and tension in our existence. Yet, if there is a cessation of *nāma* and *rūpa*, sensory contact will also cease and this tension will no longer be present.

In the *Kalāhavivāda sutta,* a man asks the Buddha, "where does *nāma* and *rūpa* cease?" The Buddha responds that sensory contact ceases where *nāma* and *rūpa* ceases. So, during meditation, when we experience a state of mind which does not perceive an apparent breath, we experience the cessation of our perception of *rūpa* to a certain extent. It appears as if sensory contact has ceased. We become aware of an experience that cannot be expressed in words, a state of mind that is characterised by the dialectic of a seeing that is not apparent, a hearing that does not generate a sound, being alive when you feel as if personality is dead. The 'contact' experienced does not generate any 'arising'.

When the perception of the breath appears to have ceased during meditation, there is no apparent sensory contact, as the characteristics (*linga*), signs (*nimitta*) and modes (*ākāra)* of the causal link of *rūpa* ceases. Your perception of *rūpa* at this stage is not ordinary (*na saññasaññī*), neither have you fainted (*na visaññsaññī*) nor have you reached the immaterial *brahma* realms (*no pi asaññī*), yet, you are not without a perception either, and you are alive and not dead (*na vibhūtasaññī).* In this state of equilibrium, you experience contact which does not arouse any mental proliferation (*evaṃ sametassa vibhoti rūpaṃ saññānidānā hi papañcasankhā*) or a mental reaction, either positive or negative. The *rūpa* (form) you experience cannot create defilements and for the first time, to a certain extent, you are beyond *taṇhā, māna* and *ditthi* – you transcend "personalisation".

You have steadfast mindfulness when you reach this stage in the practice. It is not an ordinary awareness, but one that is strengthened by continuous attention on the primary object. So, at this stage, you must skillfully, and without interruption, be aware of *vibhūta rūpaṃ* (*rūpa* devoid of perception) for as long as possible, to progress towards a stage of finer mental development.

Being continuously aware of this "knowing" state of mind, one can progress to experience the enlightenment factors of rapture (*pīti*), joy (*sukha*) and tranquility (*passaddhi*). One must exercise caution and be aware of two possible traps at this stage of the practice: firstly, one could fall asleep due to lack of dynamism or the relatively "uneventful" nature of practice; secondly, one may entertain doubts, wondering whether the path is wrong or whether one's mindfulness is weak. These traps could be avoided if a *yogi*'s mind is well prepared to meet them in the practice.

Of the six sense faculties, the operation of body-consciousness is a relatively gross experience. Sensory contact is generally discussed first with reference to eye-consciousness and eye-contact, although, practicing *yogis* can benefit from a discussion of the operation of body-consciousness; and body-contact as it can be directly experienced during a session of sitting meditation.

Observing the operation of sensory contact during meditation

Yā kho, bikkhave, imesaṃ tinnaṃ dhammānaṃ sangati, sannipāto, samavāyo, ayaṃ vuccati kāyasamphasso

A *yogi* establishes continuous mindfulness on the movement of the in-breath and the out-breath by undertaking *Ānāpānasati bhāvanā* and clearly notes and discerns the experiences gained through an inhalation and an exhalation as well as the bodily sensations that arise.

Bodily sensations may also arise through the body's contact with the floor or a meditation cushion or due to the touching of the two palms, whilst being seated.

Body-consciousness (*kāya viññāna*) arises when there is awareness of the breath (*vāyo poṭṭabba*) at the moment it contacts the body (*kāya*). Three elements need to operate together (*sangati sannipāto samavāyo*) to experience the associated feelings and sensations. In the example of breathing, these are: the striker element (air-draft), the base element (the tip of the nose or the top of the lip (the body)) and the ignition element (body-consciousness). Feelings are a direct result of sensory contact. There is no other way for feelings to arise.

Body-contact (*kāya samphassa*) is experienced when one becomes aware of the movement of the in-breath and the out-breath. When the breath moves in and makes contact with the body, the mind perceives it, thus, clearly noting the sensory contact that occurs through an inhalation. As long as one is aware of the three elements of the breath (the sense impingement (*ārammaṇa*)); the body sensitivity (*dvāra*) and body-consciousness (*tadupapanna*)), body contact is experienced; and being aware of their interplay, one observes sensory contact.

Continuous awareness of the breath (body-contact), enables one to clearly discern the operation of sensory contact: the interplay between the sense impingement (the breath), sense faculty (the body) and body-consciousness (which registers in the mind). Contact through the other faculties also involves the same three ingredients. Whatever we experience involves a contact of the senses (*salāyatana*), an object and the resultant consciousness. To experience body-contact, the mind's awareness must rest within the field of perception of an impingement on the body (i.e. the "in" and "out" breath).

Throughout this observation, a *yogi* continues to experience sounds entering the ear, smells entering the nose as well as various tastes experienced through the tongue. Further, images imprinted in our memory could also manifest in our stream of consciousness. The mind may wander to experience such sensory contact, although, when it returns its attention to the in-breath and the out-breath, sensory consciousness experienced in the other five faculties will not manifest. The other faculties continue to make contact with sense impingements, but, we don't experience the sensations gained through them, as long as our consciousness is engaged with the body (the breath).

So, it can be discerned how the mind gives priority to sensory consciousness arising in one sense faculty at a given time and experiences the associated sensations. When the mind's attention is drawn to the movement of the breath, and is sustained there, it may not be possible to assimilate the experiences gained through the other sense faculties. Although sounds and thoughts may have interfered with the stream of consciousness, you can now continue with uninterrupted mindfulness upon the breath.

If the mind's attention is drawn to sounds entering through the ear or thoughts arising in the mind, you will experience sensations arising through ear-consciousness and/or mind-consciousness, and at that time, the touch of the in- breath or the out-breath is not experienced. Once the hearing or the thinking is over, the attention would return to body-consciousness (the movement and the touch of the breath).

Continuous transactions occur between the six sense faculties and the objects attracting their attention, although priority can only be given to one of them within each passing moment. When the sensations of body-consciousness are experienced, it may not be possible to assimilate the experiences gained through the other faculties. Unless we are continuously mindful of sensory contact, it is impossible to discern these individual and separate transactions because the mind moves at an extraordinary speed.

A mind that continually runs after sensory experience has no clarity of awareness. It is simply a muddled state of mind, perceiving a myriad of sensations, intermingled with emotions, manifesting as one unified (and confused) sensory experience. This is how the unwieldy mind experiences sensory contact. A

yogi however, notes clearly and knows the discerning feelings of the in-breath versus the out-breath, and the experience gained through body-contact, compared with the eye-contact, due to well-developed mindfulness.

When we experience sensory contact, we experience the associated feelings. When the mind becomes aware of sensory consciousness, there is sensory contact - dependent on this contact, feelings arise. To trace this dependent equation, during a session of *Ānāpānasati bhāvanā,* we must note the experience of the in-breath and the out-breath separately and independently, identifying clearly the discerning features of the two phases, as much as possible.

When we refer to sensory contact, we refer to the sensory consciousness that has won the attention of our awareness. If we know that our mindfulness continually remains with the in-breath and the out-breath, through the associated sensations of the in-breath and the out-breath, we can discern that our awareness is retained on body-contact at that moment.

The information gained by observing the two phases will confirm that the mind's attention is with the breath and that *Ānāpānasati bhāvanā* is in progress. This is a sign of diligent effort and precise aiming. At that point, there isn't any sensory contact with eye-consciousness, ear-consciousness, and so forth.

We become aware of this directly in the practice of *Ānāpānasati bhāvanā*, because we are observing the phase of the in-breath, separately, from the out-breath, clearly noting the sensations arising in each process. Through the sensations and feelings experienced, with continuous mindfulness from one sense faculty to another, we become aware of the operation of sensory

consciousness. So, if our attention is on the in-breath and the out-breath, sounds that enter our stream of consciousness will not be heard, or at least they will not disturb our meditation.

When *Ānāpānasati bhāvanā* is in progress, we continually maintain awareness of the point at which the in-breath and the out-breath touch, and accordingly, the mind retains its awareness on body-contact from one moment to the next. We can clearly see the operation of the three elements: body sensitivity (*kāya*), the breath (*vāyo poṭṭabba dhātu*) and the resultant body consciousness (*kāya viññāna)* – the three elements that the mind experiences as sensory contact, which in turn gives rise to sensory experience (feelings).

As long as these three aspects operate, they give rise to sensory contact (*samphassa*) and its associated feelings. The feelings and sensations experienced through the in-breath and the out-breath can be clearly noted in this process. The indifferent feelings experienced in the gap between the in-breath and the out-breath can also be noted. With continuous mindfulness, we observe the sensory contact of the in-breath and the out-breath, and the sensations that they create; then we can discern that feelings are experienced because we have sense faculties (*salāyatana*), and their contact with sense impingements.

In any sensory transaction, becoming aware of the associated feelings enables us to know that the mind is now with the eyes, the ear, in-breath and the out-breath (etc). The presence of sensory contact is confirmed by the feeling associated with it. Continuing to observe sensory experience of one sense faculty, the experiences gained through the operation of the other five sense faculties lose the opportunity to manifest in our awareness, to materialise in perceptions or mental formations.

By confining our focus to the operation of the most prominent and conspicuous sensory consciousness (in this case, body-consciousness), one has clarity of awareness to observe the causality underpinning sensory experience.

Discerning the difference in experience gained through the in-breath versus the out-breath enables one to clearly note the operation of body contact during *Ānāpānasati bhāvanā*. However subtle, there is a difference in the feelings experienced through the in-breath compared with the out-breath. It is only with uninterrupted mindfulness and precise aiming that such a detailed and subtle understanding is possible.

Similarly, during walking meditation, the difference in the experience gained through the touch of the right foot compared with that of the left foot needs to be seen. There is a difference in the experience of the touch sensations of the right foot, compared with the left. As one continues to walk up and down with uninterrupted mindfulness, it is possible to observe how one's attention shifts from body-consciousness (the touch sensation of the foot) to eye-consciousness if one is distracted by an external object at the end of the walking path. With sharpened and continuous mindfulness, the shift from one sensory consciousness to another can be clearly discerned.

Even closing and opening of our eye lids occur with sensory contact and give rise to feelings, but to observe this, it is necessary to have well developed mindfulness. Without continuous mindfulness, it is simply impossible to observe the numerous transactions that continually occur through the six sense faculties. By retaining our attention on the feelings experienced through the sensory contact of one sense faculty, (for example, the breath touching the body), two important

observations are possible: that, (1) the other sense faculties are inoperative and have not won the attention of our awareness; and (2) without sensory contact, there can't be any feelings. Observing this directly in practice, one directly observes how feelings are experienced due to sensory contact in one of the six sense faculties.

During the time that the Buddha was residing at *Jetavanāramaya*, the resident Sangha were dedicated to their meditation practice and had strict adherence to the *vinaya*. Inspired by their commitment and dedication, the lay supporters developed deep reverence towards them. The wandering ascetics of other sects, out of jealousy for the respect lavished upon the Sangha, began to condemn their practice by slandering the Sangha, whenever they saw them. Everything that the Sangha did was criticised. So, the Sangha complained to the Buddha. The Buddha listened patiently and asked whether they experienced pleasant and unpleasant feelings as a result. When the Sangha responded, "yes", the Buddha taught about the benefits of not personalising any pleasant or unpleasant feelings; or attributing their cause to someone else.

If sensory contact is experienced with greed (*taṇhā*), conceit (*māna*) and self-view (*ditthi*), one identifies oneself with them and creates defilements. If the Sangha had not experienced sensory contact through a prism of greed, conceit and self-view, they would not have been affected by the derogatory comments. To remain neutral amidst any adversity or triumph, one must reach a state of mind neutral to sensory experience – a consciousness that appears to be unrelated to the sense impingements (when you behave as if you are blind when you can see, or act as if you are deaf when you can hear (etc)). As long as tension is created (both positive and negative) due to a

sense impingement and perception is still anchored upon greed, conceit and self-view, one will continue to react mechanically to sensory contact.

The Buddha's response regarding this incident appears in the *Udāna,* recollected as a spontaneous utterance of joy:

Gāme araññe sukhadukkha puṭṭho,
nev'attato no parato dahetha,
phusanti phassā upadhiṃ paṭicca,
nirūpadhiṃ kena phusseyyuṃ phassā.

"Touched by [pleasure and] pain in village or in forest
Think not in terms of oneself or others
Touches can touch one, because of assets
How can touches, touch him, who is asset-less?"

Here, the term "assets" or *upadhi* refers to our grasping to the five *khandas*, when we are carried away by worldly conventions due to greed, conceit and self-view.

So, the Buddha recommends that *yogis* go to a solitary place, be seated in a suitable posture and focus their attention on the movement and the touch sensation of the in-breath and out-breath and the operation of body-consciousness; exercise moral restraint; develop concentration restraint and spread awareness on body-contact and the experience of associated feelings.

Practicing in this way, we dispose of our attachments gradually (although temporarily) and cleanse our consciousness (*citta*) of the five hindrances to experience a freedom from the five hindrances (*cittaviveka*). Yet, within us remains greed (as a latent tendency), fuelling our attachment to the five *khandas*. This attachment to the five *khandas* gives rise to a

perpetuation of an ego or an enduring identity of a "self". If sensory contact is experienced through the triple proliferation of greed, conceit and self-view, we would create defilements unnecessarily. So we must transcend sensory indulgence and reach a state of mind virtually devoid of sensory contact and experience. This is the practice that the Buddha prescribed for *yogis*.

During *Ānāpānasati bhāvanā,* our experience of the breath becomes subtle and gradually reaches a stage where, due to its subtlety, our mindfulness cannot beam upon it to discern its movement or touch. We experience a state of mind almost devoid of the operation of impingement contact, a preliminary or primordial form of consciousness - one that appears as if it is unavailable to the five physical sense faculties. There is no apparent experience gained through the five physical sense faculties. The only experience that was available through body-contact (the breath) is also now no longer perceivable. It is only when this somewhat neutral consciousness connects to the senses that we perceive and experience sensory contact.

At this stage of practice, a *yogi* experiences a contact which does not give rise to feelings that can be described in words. It is a neutral state of mind where contact is present, yet is not easy to explain, its quality is neutral and does not cause any mental arousal. It does not fuel attachments, unless one imports greed, conceit or self-view to its subtle state of awareness.

So a *yogi* commences the practice by observing the operation of sensory contact and feelings to transcend sensory contact, gradually, in order to encounter an experience that is somewhat beyond the spatial and time dimension, where the mind cannot perceive the location, time or any conceptualisation. Then, for

the first time, one experiences a glimpse of the "self" or ego (*sakkhāya diṭṭhi*) being absent in one's awareness. Progressing without fear or entertaining doubts during this stage of practice, without importing greed, conceit or self-view to this observation, one experiences great joy and rapture, which marks a stage of extinguishment or 'giving up' (*paṭinissagga*) of gross sensory experience.

Our *samsaric* inclination is to develop greed, conceit and self-view through sensory contact and experience. So, in order to understand sensory contact in meditation, we must begin with an awareness of body-consciousness (*kāyānupassanā*) and gradually progress towards an awareness of subtle sensory contact, which is almost not apparent.

At this stage of practice, the obsessive forms of defilements lose their momentum in our stream of consciousness and we experience an 'extinguishment' of the hindrances whilst creating a foundation for the development of *vipassanā* insights. This foundation is the necessary stepping stone to free ourselves finally of the greed that fuels attachment to the five *khandas*. By contemplating upon the body (*kāyānupassanā*) and body-contact and seeing its cessation during meditation, we understand sensory contact and will forsake it to transcend our illusion of a "self", although temporarily, for the first time.

We then realise that our *samsāric* existence was basically fueled by sensory contact. To reach a stage devoid of sensory contact (at least temporarily), is a triumph, a significant step towards giving up greed, conceit and self-view. When we transcend sensory contact in this way, our observation is without an identity. There is no personality in the experience. We observe

what unfolds just as it is, without a self or an ego. It is like awakening to our dream!

Then, all experience, whatever it maybe, will unfold in practice without the interference of a personality. There will be no "I", an opinion, preference or any other conceptualisation rooted in a self. In this way, the fire that fuels the perpetuation of an enduring identity and our attachment to the five *khandas* will be extinguished in our very awareness, just with the simple observation of body-contact. When we transcend sensory contact and its associated feelings in this way, we progress towards liberation.

Chapter 3
Sensory Experience (Feelings)

Yopi hetu yopi paccayo kāya samphassa uppādāya, sopi hetu sopi paccayo anicco vipariṇāmī aññathābhavī
Aniccaṃ kho pana, bikkhave, paccayaṃ paṭicca, uppanno kāyasamphasso kuto nicco bhavissati
Puṭṭho, bikkhave, vedeti, puṭṭho ceteti, puṭṭho sañjānāti

The causes that give rise to body-contact *(kāya samphassa*): i.e. the body, sense impingement and body-consciousness are impermanent, subject to change, so body-contact must also be impermanent and subject to change. Feelings can be experienced due to sensory contact (*samphassa*) and because of body-contact we experience coolness, warmth, coarseness or softness (etc). If sensory contact that gives rise to feelings is impermanent, the resultant feelings must also be impermanent and subject to change.

This chapter considers the three-fold feelings accompanying sensory contact, their causality and cessation.

Observing sensory experience during meditation

We have six sense faculties, although, when eye-consciousness is experienced, sounds that impinge upon our ear-drum cannot be heard because our awareness is not available to it. At that time, there is no sensory contact experienced as "hearing". Flavors may touch the tongue, but, cannot be experienced while the attention is retained on eye-consciousness.

Only one-sixth of our sensory inputs can be experienced at a given time. Although we are invited to experience sensory consciousness occurring through the other five faculties, our mindfulness cannot focus upon it as long as our attention is drawn to sensory contact experienced through the eye (or, any other faculty, as the case may be).

During a session of sitting meditation, when the attention on the in-breath and the out-breath is continuous, one does not hear sounds or become interrupted by internal thoughts. Inclining one's mind to these secondary objects may invariably interrupt the continuity of mindfulness on the breath, as other sense faculties continue to receive objects, the mind's attention could momentarily be drawn to sense impingements such as thoughts or sounds. An experienced *yogi* however, will aim to come back to body-consciousness (the movement and the touch of the in-breath and the out-breath). Although, thoughts may arise and the mind's attention is taken away from the breath for a split second, awareness of the primary object will not be disrupted.

Thoughts will no longer be an obstacle to a diligent *yogi* who understands the operation of sensory consciousness. There may be thoughts, pains and sounds, but, if mindfulness upon the primary object is steadfast and uninterrupted, embryonic thoughts arising in your consciousness have no grounding. They just arise and pass away without leaving an impression. Being aware of these impingements (partially), a diligent *yogi* will continue with mindfulness upon the breath. Under such circumstances, you may gain a closer observation of the primary object and any disturbances may (in comparison) appear far away.

Similarly, during a session of walking meditation, although one's eye is open to numerous objects, the mind's attention is retained on the movement and the touch of the right foot and the left foot on the ground (i.e. body-consciousness). The touch sensation is sensory experience due to sensory contact - the foot touching the ground.

For sensory contact, there must be sensory consciousness, a sense faculty and an object. We experience sensory contact when our mind becomes aware of the sense impingements received through the sensitivity of eye-consciousness; ear-consciousness and so forth. Sensory contact has its associated feelings. With continuity of mindfulness, diligent effort and precise aiming, we can observe this in practice.

Indulging in sensory experience

Let's take the example of our experience of lightening. Generally, we will see the lightening before we hear the sound of thunder, although, in reality, both the lightening and the thunder occur at the same time. Similarly, there are many sense objects present at one time, but we only experience one at a time.

Assume you are deep in thought. Suddenly, you see a beautiful object, which attracts the attention of your eye-consciousness. You will give up your internal chatter to fix your attention on the object that has captured the awareness of eye-consciousness. You will, unmindfully, indulge in it. Continuing to experience sensations channeled through eye-consciousness, you begin to qualitatively discern the object through recognition (*puṭṭho sañjānāti*). You may either attach to

it or reject it, depending on the quality of mind (the reaction) you attribute to the object.

When eye-contact is continuous, you classify it as good or bad, indulging in it by attributing a preference to it. Sensory contact (your awareness of the beautiful object that captured your vision) must be continuous enough for it to penetrate your cognitive capacity. First, there is cognition, followed by recognition. As a rough rule of thumb, in order to recognise the sense impingement, you must continuously be mindful of it for at least four or five thought moments. Whether it is a smell, taste or a thought, your attention must be continuous to recognise the detail in it.

The priority given to sensory consciousness is random. To catch the mind's shift from one sensory consciousness to the next, you must note it as soon as the changeover occurs. So, if you change from "seeing" to "hearing", you must become aware of the new process as soon as the mind shifts.

If you are doing some pottery, to mould the shape of the pot, you must do so when the clay is moist and flexible. Once it is burned, alterations are not possible. As the common saying goes, you have to strike while the iron is hot! Similarly, in the continuum of a chain of thought moments, the perception upon which the thought was initially constructed is important, as it determines the resulting mental formations, which set in motion the chain of thoughts. Becoming aware of the transition from "seeing" to "hearing" as soon as it occurs, you note it without delay, to determine the direction of the resulting causal equation. If you are negligent and delayed in your observation of the object which has arisen, you will end up day-dreaming or bewildered.

Our tendency is to indulge in sensory consciousness that attracts our attention by attaching to it. Simultaneously, there is an invitation to experience sense impingements that captivate the sensitivity of the other five faculties, but, becoming aware of the particular sensory consciousness that has randomly attracted our attention we are unaware of the other sense impingements. Experiencing something continuously, we place emphasis upon it, creating mental formations based on preference.

Take the example of watching television. If we tune into a channel showing a depressing movie, by engaging in it for a long period of time, we can become sorrowful. We may even become tearful. Throughout that time the other channels have been in operation, projecting various programs, but, we didn't know about the shows they featured because we did not tune into them. So, if the movie becomes tragically depressing, we can overcome our state of sorrow by simply switching to another channel and watching the news, sports or something else. We can even switch to the comedy channel to swiftly change our mood to one of laughter!

Three-fold feelings accompanying sensory contact

Although the selection and priority given to sensory consciousness is a coincidence, it is generally dependent on a number of factors beyond our control. By continually indulging and engaging in a chosen sensory consciousness and attaching ourselves to it, we betray the discerning ability of our minds. Our tendency is to fix on one experience and indulge in it. If we are *yogis* trained in observing sensory consciousness, we know that there is an invitation to experience sensory

consciousness through any one of the other five sense faculties. Whatever the disturbance, a diligent *yogi* will continue with attention on the primary object as much as possible.

Feelings experienced through sensory contact are threefold: pleasant, unpleasant or indifferent (meaning neither pleasant nor unpleasant) feelings. An ignorant person experiencing sorrow will only experience it and not the pleasurable or indifferent feelings accompanying it or would not simply be aware that they exist. Similarly, a person seeking to engage in only pleasurable feelings will not be aware of the indifferent and unpleasant feelings accompanying them.

On the other hand, an enlightened being (an *arahant*) would see any of the three types of feelings in the same scenario. When observing an unpleasant sight, an *arahant* is well aware and able to view it as pleasant or indifferent. Even indifferent feelings can be viewed as pleasant or unpleasant by an enlightened mind. Whatever the sensory contact, an *arahant* (as he or she wishes) can experience it in a three-fold manner.

In our practice, to experience indifference and the pleasure in unpleasant feelings, we must mindfully embrace pain, without a preconceived view in order to directly observe it in detail. This simply means, seeing pain (or any feeling), diligently, without delay, from its beginning, through to the middle and the end. We experience a heroic moment in our meditation practice when we endure pain in this way and see the pleasure and indifference within it. There is joy hidden in sorrow! Any moment of adversity awaits triumph, which can be materialised with endurance. To experience the joy accompanying sorrow, we must penetrate pain with *vipassanā* insight. Observing pain

directly without classifying it as "pain" is *vipassanā* investigation. This is to gain a distance from the pain.

Having the opportunity to experience sensory contact in a threefold manner, at any given time, we have eighteen options (including the six-fold sensory contact and six-fold feelings). A *yogi* must know this and in each sensory transaction, become aware of it. Seeing the indifference in sensory contact is a detailed and subtle understanding, which is far more beneficial than seeing feelings in their gross nature, as either pleasant or unpleasant.

Vipassanā investigation requires a *yogi* to patiently observe sensory experience in a three-fold manner. Directly becoming aware of the freedom available through the eighteen options of sensory experience, one reaches a triumphant moment in the practice, realising the value of a human birth and the capacity for discernment.

One comes to know that the end of pleasurable feelings gives rise to displeasure and vice versa and that awareness of indifferent feelings gleaned through *vipassanā* investigation can be joyful. To know the three-fold nature of feelings, one must be aware of the beginning, the middle and end of a painful feeling and endure it to its very end. In the end, we find indifference and pleasure. *Vipassanā* investigation demands penetration beyond sorrow in order to extract the pleasure beneath it. During meditation, when one witnesses the three masks of feelings and their interchanging operation, one becomes skillful in experiencing sensory contact and the associated feelings. Of course, it will be difficult to endure painful feelings at the beginning. But, in time, one develops resistance and immunity towards moderate forms of pain. As

one advances in the practice, one develops the resistance to endure more acute forms of pain.

When we become dexterous enough in our practice to see the interchangeable nature of the three-fold feelings that are available to us in sensory contact, we may question the need to continue to exert effort in our quest for progress. When we directly see and understand the three-fold nature of sensory experience (the eighteen options available to us in any sensory transaction), we might think there is no longer anything else worthy to attempt; the momentum of *vipassanā* investigation will continue to reveal ever new insights as there is nothing else one must set in motion in order to halt the causal equation of dependent origination.

Causality of sensory experience (feelings)

We perpetuate pleasure, reject pain and fall asleep (or remain unaware) in the face of indifference. Our habit is to indulge in feelings or to reject them – there is always a reaction. Instead, observing sensory contact (being aware of the interplay of sense impingements and sense faculties, giving rise to sensory consciousness), and the feelings that ensue, we can directly see the causality of feelings. In order to become aware of feelings and to meet them directly during meditation, continuous mindfulness is necessary.

Feelings arise due to sensory contact and there is no other way for them to manifest. If the causes that give rise to sensory contact and feelings are subject to change and dissolution, sensory contact and feelings experienced, by their very nature, must follow the same course. We must be patient to see this with insight.

A sense object can give rise to two prominent feelings at a given time (either liking or disliking). The same object can be viewed in two completely different ways by two persons based on the mental interpretation attributed to that sensory experience. We develop greed, conceit and self-view through sensory experience. The diversity and tension in human experience are caused by our attachment to sensory experience. So, people react; some even fight for and yearn after sensory experience. If we dissect this diversity and tension, see the causes attributing to it, that they are subject to change and dissolution, we can extract the remedy for enlightenment within it. Through direct observation, we see this causal equation unfold: that sensory contact gives rise to feelings, due to feelings we have recognition or identification, which in turn, gives rise to mental formations and thoughts. If this is the causal equation, then the dissolution or cessation of the causes giving rise to sensory consciousness and contact will see an end to the arising of feelings.

Transcending feelings and their arising requires a deep commitment to meditation practice. Because of sensory contact, feelings arise, which in turn gives rise to mental formations or intentions. In the *Madhupiṇḍika sutta*, the Buddha describes that when we experience feelings, we tend to classify them. If it is pleasurable, we try to perpetuate and indulge in it. If it is unpleasant, we reject it; if it is neutral or indifferent, we ignore it and might fall asleep. Thus, we create mental formations around feelings, depending on perception and the quality of mind we attribute towards them. In between this dependent transaction, *taṇhā* (greed) ferments.

In my early years as a *yogi*, I recall very vividly, discussing with my meditation group whether we can be mindful of any incident at the stage of sensory contact, the associated feelings (*puṭṭho vedeti*), recognition or identification of the incident (*puṭṭho sañjānāti*) or the thoughts created around it (*puṭṭho ceteti*). We discussed how difficult it is for us to become mindful of sensory contact at the beginning as it is extremely subtle, so that we had to become aware of the feelings following an incident (after it passes the level of contact).

Because it is impossible to observe sensory contact as a preliminary step, we spread awareness on the associated feelings and become aware of the sensory contact preceding it. Gradually, we can train our minds to work through this causal equation, backwards, to trace the cause that gave rise to the feelings and the mental formations (namely, the contact).

Phuṭṭho, bhikkhave, vedeti, puṭṭho ceteti, puṭṭho sañjānāti
Itthetepi dhammā calā ceva vayā ca aniccā viparināmino aññathābhāvino
Evaṃ kho, bikkhave, dvayaṃ paṭicca viññānam sambhoti

Each sense faculty gives rise to consciousness (*viññāna*): eye-consciousness, ear-consciousness (etc). As long as the eye, the object and eye-consciousness operate together, there is sensory contact through the eye (*cakkhu samphassa*). Consciousness is the discerning ability of our mind, which separately identifies sense impingements attracted by the six sense faculties. We experience feelings because of sensory contact (*puṭṭho bikkhave vedeti*). When we recognise feelings (*puṭṭho sañjānāti*), we contemplate upon them, classifying them as good, bad, pleasant

and unpleasant etc. (*puṭṭho ceteti*) and create mental formations associated with them.

Our lives are consumed by sensory experience and if we are unmindful, we move from one experience to another, without an agenda. To understand this process, we must clearly note the sense faculty that is activated, observe the operation of sensory consciousness and become aware of the sensory experience associated with sensory contact as much as possible.

By becoming mindful of a particular consciousness experienced through one of the five sense faculties, one can discern the experiences gained through the eye, the ear, the nose, the tongue (etc), and their individual characteristics. As long as your attention is fixed on one particular consciousness (e.g. the eye-consciousness), you are assured of not creating defilements through the other five sense faculties. For example, if you see a flower, a river or any other object, you tend to fixate upon it and classify it as pleasant, beautiful, unpleasant or unattractive and create mental formations associated with that visual object. As long as you are with the visual object, five of the six faculties will not generate defilements or create *kamma.*

In other words, there aren't any defilements created through the other five sense faculties, although one would continue to create defilements through the eye-consciousness that has won one's awareness. As long as one's attention is fixed on an object, identifies and classifies it, one will create defilements. Instead of perpetuating the arising of any desire (or displeasure) at the object in front of you, becoming aware of "seeing" by noting (or labelling) it as "seeing, seeing", you mitigate against any defilements arising through eye-consciousness. Or, at least, you

gain a better understanding of the mechanism involved in creating defilements.

When your awareness is retained on eye-consciousness, knowingly you can experience a freedom from the defilements created through the other five sense faculties. Sound may continue to impinge upon your ear-drum. But, for the ear-contact to arise, the mind's attention must detach from other sensory contact, and be drawn to the sounds impinging upon your ear-drum.

Similarly, during *Ānāpānasati bhāvanā,* when the focus is steadfastly maintained on body-consciousness, eye-consciousness or ear-consciousness is no longer available. Taking advantage of such circumstances, when your attention is firmly fixed on the movement and touch of the in-breath and the out-breath, you will note that the breath loses its gross manifestation, gradually becoming inconspicuous. This is a sign that there is continuity of mindfulness - it demonstrates the precision of your focusing power. At this stage, any defilements and/or hindrances that can be created through body-consciousness and the sensory experience of the breath also become faint. If continuity of awareness is diligently retained on the breath, you will gradually experience a state of mind characterised by equanimity (calmness, evenness of mind and temper).

Feelings experienced at this stage of practice are neutral as well as subtle; one reaches a state of mind apparently free from defilements, whilst the mind retains its attention unswervingly at the point at which the movement and contact of the breath was previously observed. Then you can clearly observe sensory experience (neutral feelings), the mental classification of it and

the mental formations created as a result of it. Although there is sensory (body) contact, the feelings caused by the contact with this formless and inconspicuous breath object are neutral. This is a feeling and an experience which is indescribable. Unless you are well instructed, in the absence of gross manifestation of a pleasurable or painful feeling, you might become bored with the neutral feeling, not wanting to persist in noting it. This is a crucial stage of development in the practice and you are instructed to remain in this stage for as long as possible, without entertaining doubts, or falling asleep. In this neutral state of awareness, you clearly see the operation of sensory consciousness. Persisting with your attention on this neutral form of consciousness, you experience rapture (*pīti*), which is a natural progression on the path towards enlightenment.

Retaining awareness of indifference is difficult unless we are appropriately instructed, as our experience is to observe gross manifestations. Defilements are activated where there is pleasure or displeasure. In order to progress skillfully with a neutral state of mind, you must continually become aware of the point at which the breath was previously noted in a gross manner and the sequential progression towards the more subtle state. It is only in a neutral state of mind when feelings are associated with the subtle breath that one could experience non - material joy and rapture.

Progressing without attachment to non-material joy and rapture, by retaining one's awareness on the neutral state of mind, for the first time, one clearly observes mental preparations (the play of perceptions and feelings). Continuing with diligent effort and precise aiming, there will be cessation of mental preparations (*passambhayaṃ citta sankhāraṃ assasissā mī'ti sikkhati*). One experiences enormous joy and rapture (an

intoxicatingly blissful state of mind) (*abhippamodayaṃ cittaṃ assassisā mī'ti sikkhati*), a contentment and feeling that exceeds ordinary human experience (*abhippamodayaṃ cittaṃ assassisā mi ti sikkhati*). It is an unalloyed and inalienable experience - a state of mind commonly described as *amānusī rati*.

Yet, this is not enlightenment. These are reversible experiences. It is only by developing the nine-fold *vipassanā ñāna* (insight knowledge) that you experience the first stage of enlightenment (*sotāpatti magga phala*). This progression is irreversible.

The *Nandakovāda sutta* provides a useful analogy for a discussion on a liberated mind. Generally, as a matter of practice, Venerable Nandaka avoided his turn to give instructions to the resident nuns (*bhikkhunīs*). They were the first *bhikkhunīs*, five hundred in number, to be ordained by the Buddha.

One day, Venerable *Mahāpajāpati Gotami*, the senior *bhikkhuni* arrived at Anāthapindika's Park and requested instructions from the Buddha. That day was Venerable Nandaka's turn to instruct the *bhikkhunīs*. The Buddha commanded Venerable Nandaka to honor his turn. Venerable Nandaka had no option but to do as the Buddha wished.

The reason for his reluctance is given in the commentary to the *Majjhima Nikāya* (Middle-Length Discourses). In a former birth, Venerable Nandaka had been a king and those *bhikkhunīs* had been his wives. He thought that if another monk, who possessed psychic power of the knowledge of past lives, saw him instructing those *bhikkhunīs*, he might think that Venerable Nandaka was still attached to his former wives. The Buddha

however, could see that Venerable Nandaka's teaching were crucial for the *bhikkhunīs*.

Venerable Nandaka presented himself before the five hundred *bhikkhunīs* (nuns) to give instructions. His instructions followed the style of questions and answers. The following dialogue took place:

Venerable Nandaka: *Sisters, is the eye permanent or impermanent?*

Bhikkhunīs: *Impermanent, bhante.*

Venerable Nandaka: *Does that which is impermanent cause suffering or give rise to happiness?*

Bhikkhunīs: *No bhante. It is full of impurities and subject to old age and sickness. It causes suffering.*

Venerable Nandaka: *Is what is impermanent, suffering and subject to change, fit to be regarded as a self?*

Bhikkhunīs: *No bhante.*

Venerable Nandaka: *Are the sense objects seen from the eye permanent? Do they give rise to contentment or cause suffering?*

Bhikkhunīs: *They are impermanent, bhante. So we have to see them over and over again. Because they are impermanent, cause suffering and are devoid of form (an 'entity').*

Venerable Nandaka: *If the eye sees an object and eye-consciousness occurs, is that eye-consciousness permanent? Does it give rise to contentment (or cause suffering)?*

Bhikkhunīs: *Eye-consciousness is subject to change and is impermanent and therefore, causes suffering.*

Venerable Nandaka: *Then, sisters, can this impermanent eye, sense objects and eye-consciousness that give rise to eye-contact result in contentment?*

Bhikkhunīs: *If all the three attributes that give rise to sensory consciousness are impermanent, then how can the sensory contact occurring through the eye, which is also subject to change and is impermanent, not cause suffering?*

Venerable Nandaka: *When a lamp contains a burning flame, the oil that supports the flame will diminish over time. The wick will also burn out. The wick will give rise to a radiant flame as long as it has the oil to support it. Yet, the lamp, the wick and the oil are impermanent. If this is the case, then can the flame be eternal; everlasting or is it subject to change? Does it give rise to contentment (or cause suffering)?*

Bhikkhunīs: *No bhante. The radiance of the flame is subject to change and is impermanent and causes suffering and is devoid of form (an 'entity').*

Venerable Nandaka: *This body, the air that touches it, the body-contact and the associated sensory experience (the feelings) that it gives rise to, are they permanent?*

Bhikkhunīs: *No bhante. It is not possible to classify the feelings as permanent, pleasant or unpleasant.*

Venerable Nandaka: *Why not sisters?*

Bhikkhunīs: *Bhante, if a feeling arises dependent on its corresponding condition, with the cessation of its corresponding condition, it ceases.*

Venerable Nandaka*:* *Sisters, this is how feelings should be observed. If there is a well grown tree; its roots are impermanent and causes suffering and is devoid of an 'entity'; the bark, the branches and the leaves are the same; then can the shadow of a 'tree` be permanent and give rise to contentment?*

Bhikkhunīs: *No bhante. Because the root of that tree, its trunk, its branches and foliage are impermanent, its shadow must also be subject to change.*

Venerable Nandaka asks one final question from the *bhikkhunīs*: *'If a skilled butcher were to kill a cow and carve it up with a sharp butcher's knife, without damaging the inner flesh and the outer hide, then cut, sever and carve away the inner tendons, sinews and ligaments with the sharp butcher's knife and cover the cow again with that same hide, could he refer to that cow as being just as it was*

before?` The *bhikkhunīs* respond– '*No bhante. It is impossible to call it the same cow because the nerves and veins that connect the flesh are no longer there. Instead, there are just cubes of meat, wrapped around using the outer hide*` .

Venerable Nandaka then explains that he gave this simile to convey a meaning: 'The inner mass' of flesh is a term for the six internal bases. 'The outer hide' is a term for the six external bases. 'The inner tendons', sinews and ligaments represent lust (*rāga*). 'The sharp butcher's knife' is a term for noble wisdom that cuts, severs and carves away the inner defilements, fetters and bonds.

After Venerable Nandaka had given this discourse, the Buddha requested him to repeat it the following day, not as a punishment for his previous reluctance, but because he could see that the *bhikkhunīs*' minds had not been quite ready for developing insight on the first occasion.

When Venerable Nandaka gave the same discourse the next day, all the *bhikkhunīs* attained a stage of enlightenment. Ironically enough, because of this great success, the Buddha declared Venerable Nandaka to be the foremost monk in instructing the *bhikkhunīs*.

So, if greed (*tanhā*) towards a feeling is extracted, as instructed in the *Nandakovāda sutta*, could it be classified as pleasure or pain?

If the feeling and the reaction are separated with the sharpness of wisdom, pain and pleasure will no longer arise.

One may experience pain in the knees during a session of sitting meditation. If one knows the operation of sensory experience, one knows that it has arisen because of sensory contact. If sensory contact ceases, the pain will also go away. Instead of getting up, personalizing it or attributing its cause to something external, just be with it, note it with 'choiceless' awareness.

It is possible to transcend pain by observing the beginning, the middle and the end of pain. At the beginning one may persist with moderate kinds of pain, but as one advances in the practice it is possible to resist more acute forms of pain. It is impossible to have a day without pain, or to have a session of sitting meditation without bodily pains.

All *arahants* became enlightened after experiencing great suffering and pain. Really, pain is an element for our investigation that leads one towards enlightenment. That is why the Buddha has placed *Vedanānupassanā* (contemplation of feelings) after *Kāyānupassanā* in the *Satipaṭṭhāna sutta.* By 'choicelessly' observing pain, we separate *taṇhā,* the desire to reject the pain from the pain, thus, gaining a distance from the pain. Feelings arise because of the external base, the internal base and the mind, with 'choiceless' awareness, we can mindfully separate the feeling from the automatic reaction.

In order to transcend feelings completely in the practice, we must progress towards a mind free from sensory consciousness during meditation, where there is no arising of sensory contact that gives rise to sensory experience. When we gradually meet the formless and inconspicuous breath during meditation, at least momentarily, we reach a primordial form of our existence, a state of equilibrium, in which we transcend any "arising" caused by our enslavement to an illusory "self". When we

seemingly experience the cessation of sensory contact, we see a cessation of the gross manifestation of extreme positive and negative feelings. With uninterrupted mindfulness on equanimity experienced in this neutral state of mind, we progress towards enlightenment.

Selected reading

Bodhi, Bhikkhu, tr. The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the *Samyutta Nikaya*, Boston: Wisdom Publications 2000. (Especially the chapter on the six sense bases, pages 1133-1259).

Glossary

Some of these definitions come from Venerable Nyanatiloka's 'Buddhist Dictionary' (4th Ed, Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1980).

Adhivacanasamphassa: (lit. 'verbal impression') the ability to describe the characteristics (*lingha*), the signs (*nimitta*), the modes (*ākāra*) and the exponents (*uddesa*) of a sense impingement.

Ānāpānasati: 'mindfulness on in-and-out breathing', is one of the 40 subjects of meditation taught by the Buddha.

Āpātagata: come within the avenue (of the senses), come within range, perceivable, within the sphere of perception, within the field of perception.

Khanda: The five 'groups (of existence)' or 'groups of clinging' (*upādānakkhandha*); alternative renderings: aggregates, categories of clinging objects. These are the five aspects in which the Buddha has summed up all the physical and mental phenomena of existence and which appear to the ignorant person as his/her ego, or personality: the corporeality (or materiality) group (*rūpakkhandha*); the feeling group (*vedanākkhandha*); the perception group (*saññākkhandha*); the mental formation group (*saṅkhārakkhandha*); the consciousness group (*viññānakkhandha*).

Nāma: (lit. 'name and form'): 'mind-and-body', mentality and corporeality or materiality. It is the fourth link in dependent arising/origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*) where it is conditioned by consciousness and on its part is the condition for the consciousness and the six fold sense-base.

Paṭiccasamuppāda: 'dependent origination or arising', is the doctrine of conditionality of all physical and mental phenomena.

Paṭighasamphassa: 'resistance impression' arising from the initial sense impingement.

Rūpa: is the materiality/ form group (*khanda*), which includes all physical phenomena. It is made up of the 4 elements (*dhātu*) – earth, water, fire and air. It includes all the objects of the senses (sights, sounds, smells, tastes and tangibles) (i.e. derived from materiality), as well as the sense faculties (eyes, ears, nose, tongue and body).

Samsāra: 'round of rebirth', lit. 'perpetual wandering', is a name by which is designated the continual process of ever again and again being born, growing old, suffering and dying.

Vinaya: rules of discipline for monks (*bhikkhus*) and nuns (*bhikkhunis*) laid down by the Buddha.