



Role of Feeling (Vedanā) in Dependent Origination (Paṭicca-Samuppāda)

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ABSTRACT:

The Buddhist doctrine of Dependent Origination (Paṭicca-Samuppāda) elucidates the interconnectedness and interdependence of phenomena, offering profound insights into the nature of existence and the cessation of suffering. Central to this doctrine is the concept of Vedanā, or feeling, which plays a pivotal role in the cycle of conditioned arising. This paper explores the multifaceted role of Vedanā within Dependent Origination, shedding light on its significance in the perpetuation of samsaric existence and its potential for liberation.

Vedanā, as the second link in the chain of Dependent Origination, arises in response to sensory contact and encompasses the spectrum of pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral sensations. It serves as the impetus for craving (taṇhā), driving the cycle of rebirth and suffering. Through an analysis of Buddhist scriptures and commentaries, this paper elucidates how Vedanā conditions the mind to react with desire or aversion, perpetuating the cycle of craving and clinging (upādāna). Furthermore, this paper examines the transformative potential of Vedanā in the context of liberation from suffering. By cultivating mindfulness and insight into feeling, practitioners can develop equanimity and wisdom, disrupting the habitual patterns of reactivity and craving. Through the practice of meditation and contemplation, individuals can observe Vedanā as impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self (anicca, dukkha, anattā), thus unraveling the chains of Dependent Origination and attaining liberation (nibbāna).

Keywords: Dependent Origination (Paṭicca-samuppāda), Feeling (Vedanā), Craving (Tanha), Suffering (Dukkha), Karmic.

Introduction

The concept of Paṭicca-smuppāda, explored in various suttas of the Majjhimanikāya, is encapsulated notably in the Mahātaṇhāsāṅkhaya Sutta (the Great Discourse on the Destruction of Craving). Initially, the sutta presents the twelve-member Paṭicca-smuppāda formula without hierarchical emphasis on any particular link. However, the latter part of the discourse accentuates the significance of vedanā (feelings) in a soteriological context. The subsequent passage delineates a specific reaction to vedanā, illustrating its pivotal role in perpetuating the cycle of suffering inherent in Paṭicca-smuppāda. This emphasis underscores the intricate interplay between perception, reaction, and the perpetuation of suffering within Buddhist teachings.

The Buddha discovered it as a natural law and as a fundamental truth. It has been existing forever, whether or not the Lord Buddha teaches. This Paṭicca-smuppāda vibhanga Sutta appears in the Nidānavagga Pāli in Samyutta Nikāya. The Dependent Origination (Paṭiccasamuppāda) is composed of twelve factors or links; Avijjā, Sankhāra, Vinnāna, Nāma- rūpa, Saḷāyatana, Phassa, Vedanā, Taṇhā, Upādāna, Bhava, Jīti, and Jarā-Maraṇa.

Through experience it can thus be confirmed that the ever-revolving round of Dependent Origination (Paṭicca-smuppāda) can be stopped at the point of Feeling, and that there is no inherent necessity that Feeling is followed by Craving. Here we encounter Feeling as a key factor on the path of liberation, and, therefore the Contemplation of Feeling has, in Buddhist tradition, always been highly regarded as an effective aid on that path¹

Dependent Origination (Paṭicca-smuppāda) is a cornerstone in Buddhist philosophy, delineating the intricate web of causality underpinning human suffering and liberation. At the heart of this profound teaching lies the concept of feeling (Vedanā), a fundamental aspect of subjective experience with far-reaching implications in the cycle of existence. In this paper, I embark on a journey to unravel the nexus between feeling and Dependent Origination, delving into its philosophical depths and practical applications. Drawing upon primary Buddhist texts and contemporary scholarship, our analysis seeks to illuminate the pivotal role of feeling as a catalyst within the chain of causation described by Dependent Origination. Through a comprehensive examination of the nature, types, and significance of feeling in Buddhist thought, I aim to elucidate its profound influence on subsequent mental states²

¹ Thera Nyanaponika, *Contemplation of Feeling*, Kandy, Buddhist Publication Society, 1983, p.2.

² Evarupa pi kho me Aggivessanauppanna sukha vedana cittam na pariyadaya til thati. Literally: Thus, Aggivessana, my mind was standing not having been overpowered by the pleasurable Vedana previously arisen (M. i.,247).

and its contribution to the perpetuation of suffering or the attainment of liberation. Vedanā itself is devoid of the connotation that many have read into the paṭiccasamuppāda; vedanapaccaya tanhā does not imply that Vedanā is a sufficient condition for the arising of (craving), but simply that it is a necessary condition. For example, when narrating his experience before he attained enlightenment, the Buddha mentioned to Aggivessana that while dwelling in jhānic ecstasy, he was not affected by the pleasurable Vedanā that characterize such states, and was not, therefore, generating craving.

1. Explanation of Vedanā in the twelve-link chain

The paṭicca-samuppāda is an important concept in the Nikāyas. In one of the *suttas* of the Majjhimanikāya it is equated with the *dhamma* (the teaching of the Buddha) itself: He who sees the paṭicca-samuppāda sees the *dhamma*, he who sees the *dhamma* sees the paṭicca-samuppāda.³

This is the practical aspect of Dhamma discovered by Siddhattha Gotama, the realisation that made him a Buddha, and that he in turn revealed to the world by the doctrine of paṭiccasamuppāda.

Dependent Origination stands as a cornerstone of Buddhist philosophy, comprising twelve interconnected factors elucidating the cyclical nature of existence and the roots of suffering. This framework elucidates the emergence and cessation of both physical and mental phenomena, asserting their dependence on preceding causes and conditions. It offers insights into the mechanism of samsara, the cycle of birth and death, and the arising and cessation of suffering. The twelve factors of Dependent Origination are: Ignorance (*avijjā*), formations (*sankhara*), consciousness (*vinnana*), name and form (*nama-rupa*), six sense bases (*salayatana*), contact (*phassa*), feeling (*vedana*), craving (*tanha*), clinging (*upadana*), becoming (*bhava*), birth (*jati*) and ageing, death (*jara-marana* etc.). Each factor conditions the next while being conditioned by the preceding one, demonstrating the intricate web of causation. Feeling, arising from contact, occupies a pivotal position in this chain, giving rise to subsequent factors such as craving and clinging due to unwise reactions. Consequently, feeling plays a fundamental role in perpetuating suffering and the cycle of existence. However, by skillfully responding to feeling with wisdom, individuals can disrupt this chain of causation and prevent the emergence of craving and clinging. Thus, understanding and skillful engagement with feeling offer a pathway to liberation from suffering and the cycle of birth and death in accordance with Buddhist teachings.

Within the twelve-link chain of Dependent Origination (*Paṭicca-samuppāda*), the role of Vedanā, or feeling, holds a central position. This pivotal concept elucidates the nature of subjective experience and its profound impact on the perpetuation of cyclic existence or the attainment of liberation in Buddhist philosophy. In this paper, I embark on an exploration of Vedanā within the context of the twelve-link chain, aiming to provide a comprehensive explanation of its significance and implications. Drawing upon foundational Buddhist teachings and contemporary scholarly interpretations, our analysis delves into the nature and functions of Vedanā as it unfolds within the sequence of Dependent Origination. By examining the nuances of Vedanā, including its types, origins, and effects.

Through actual experience it can thus be confirmed that the ever revolving round of Dependent Origination (*Paṭicca-smuppāda*) can be stopped at the point of Feeling, and that there is no inherent necessity that Feeling is followed by Craving. Here we encounter Feeling as a key factor on the path of liberation⁴

1. Feeling (Vedanā) as cause for craving and clinging

In the paṭicca-samuppāda framework, the antecedent to vedanā within the sequence of occurrences is contact (*phassa*). This is delineated as a purely sensory occurrence transpiring when a sense organ, its corresponding object, and the related consciousness converge; for instance, the eye, a visible object, and eye-consciousness. The confluence of these three elements precipitates the emergence of vedanā. Hence, it becomes evident that vedanā transcends mere sensory experiences, representing a progression in the continuum, typically followed by the emergence of desire (*tanhā*), and subsequently, grasping and identification (*upādāna*). It is precisely at the juncture between vedanā and tanhā where the chain of dependent origination of suffering is most vulnerable and warrants disruption. This signifies that breaking the chain of suffering hinges on addressing this particular link between vedanā and tanhā.

Phassa-paccayā vedanā Vedanā-paccayā tanhā.⁵

Dependent on contact, sensation arises. Dependent on sensation, craving arises.

The origin of craving and suffering lies within our own sensations, not external stimuli. To overcome these, we must confront our inner sensations directly. This practical approach is essential for liberation from suffering, emphasizing the necessity of addressing our inner reality to attain freedom from craving and suffering.

The Buddha's discovery, that the real cause of tanhā lies in vedanā is an unparalleled gift to humanity. With this revelation, he provided us with the key to unlock the door of liberation within ourselves. While others proclaimed "salayatana paccaya tanhā," attributing tanhā to sense objects, the Buddha disclosed "Vedanā-paccayā tanhā," indicating that defilements arise at the level of vedanā and in response to it. Understanding this crucial connection between feeling and craving is paramount in any endeavor to eradicate tanhā and attain liberation.

³ Yo paṭicca-samuppādaū passati so dhammaū passati, yo dhammaū passati so paṭicca-samuppādaū passati. MN I 191

⁴ Thera Nyanaponika, *Contemplation of Feeling*, Kandy, Buddhist Publication Society, 1983, p.2.

⁵ Mahāvagga (Vinaya Piṭaka)

To exemplify this concept: Imagine encountering a stunning flower; if it brings joy, it elicits a pleasant sensation (Vedana). However, if desire or craving (Tanha) arises, it leads to clinging or grasping (Upadana). This marks the initiation of the Patīccasamuppāda cycle. Importantly, the cycle doesn't terminate here. With Upadana comes Kammabhava, inevitably resulting in Jati, or rebirth. This sequential progression illustrates the continuum of Patīccasamuppāda's workings, depicting the interplay between actions and consequences in perpetuating the cycle of existence.

Central to this understanding is the recognition of Vedanā's profound impact on the arising of craving (taṇhā) and subsequent clinging, perpetuating the cycle of samsara. In this paper, I delve into the intricate interplay between Vedanā, craving, and clinging, aiming to elucidate the mechanisms through which feeling influences the human condition.

I explore the nature of Vedanā, its various manifestations, and its immediate effects on the mind and body. By examining the relationship between Vedanā and craving

This passage explicitly states that Vedanā is a condition for craving, and that if no Vedanā is found, craving cannot arise. But it does not state that Vedanā is the only causal factor involved in the production of craving. The fact that craving cannot be produced without the presence of a Vedanā does not imply that craving is necessarily produced when a Vedanā is present. As Kallupahana noted: While it is true, and this is the position held by the Buddha, that pleasant sensations could give rise to craving and lust, and unpleasant sensations (dukkha Vedanā) can be the cause of aversion and hatred (dosa), the causal relation is not a one-to-one relation.⁶

Stcherbatsky supports this view by saying that the "pratīyasamutpada can hardly be called causation in the sense in which it is usually understood. It really means dependently co-ordinated origination or dependent existence. According to it every momentary entity springs into existence in co-ordination with other moments. Its formula is 'asmin salī idam bhavati' there being this, there Furthermore, I investigate how craving, in turn, leads to clinging, as individuals grasp onto objects, ideas, or identities in a futile attempt to find lasting fulfillment amidst the impermanent nature of existence. Through this exploration, I aim to shed light on the profound psychological and existential implications of Vedanā, offering insights into the roots of human suffering and the path to liberation.

Ultimately, I endeavor to contribute to a deeper understanding of the transformative potential inherent in recognizing and working with Vedanā, offering a pathway towards liberation from the cycle of craving and clinging. I hope to illuminate the fundamental dynamics of human existence and the pursuit of spiritual awakening in the context of Buddhist philosophy.

Evidence stating that vedana necessarily leads to craving. All that is said is:

"With sensation as condition, there is craving. This, Ananda, should be understood in this way. If there were no sensation at all, of any kind, anywhere—Le., no sensation arising from eye contact, no sensation arising from ear-contact, no sensation arising from nose-contact, no sensation arising from tongue contact, no sensation arising from body-contact, and no sensation arising of mind-contact—then, no sensation would be present; with the cessation of sensation, would craving be discerned?" "Not, bhante." "Therefore, Ananda, sensation is the cause, source, origin and condition for craving"⁷

2. The Role of Feelings in the Cycle of Karmic (Samsara)

In Buddhist philosophy, the concept of Vedanā feeling, plays a pivotal role not only in shaping immediate subjective experiences but also in influencing the broader trajectory of one's karmic journey. Central to this understanding is the notion that Vedanā serves as a mechanism through which individuals encounter the consequences of their past actions, known as karmic retribution. In this paper, I delve into the profound interconnection between Vedanā and the experiencing of karmic retribution, exploring how feeling serves as a conduit for the fruition of past deeds.

appears that! According to this, there could be neither causa materialis, nor causa efficiens. An entity is not really produced, it is simply co-ordinated" (The Conception of Buddhist Nirvana , p. 9).⁷

The Anguttaranikaya⁸ defines kamma as intention (cetana aham, bhikkhave, kammam vadami) as it is intention that is translated into action through body, speech and mind (cetayitva kammam karoti kayena vacaya manasa). Sankappa is another word for intention and it is noteworthy that intentions and thoughts are said to converge in sensations, feelings.⁹

⁶ Kalupahana, *The Principles of Buddhist Psychology*, p. 46. Th. Stcherbatsky supports this view by saying that the "pratīyasamutpada can hardly be called causation in the sense in which it is usually understood. It really means dependently co-ordinated origination or dependent existence. According to it every momentary entity springs into existence in co-ordination with other moments. Its formula is 'asmin salī idam bhavati' there being this, there appears that! According to this, there could be neither causa materialis, nor causa efficiens. An entity is not really produced, it is simply co-ordinated" (The Conception of Buddhist Nirvana , p. 9).

⁷ Vedanāpaccayā tanhā ti' iti kho pan' etam vuttam, tad ānanda iminā p'etam pariyāyena veditabbam yathā vedanāpaccayā tanhā. Vedanā va hi Ananda nābhavissa sabbena sabbam sabbatthā sabbam kassaci kimhici, seyyathidam cakkhu-samphassajā vedanā, sota-samphassajā vedanā, ghāna-samphassajā vedanā, jivhā-samphassajā vedanā, kāya-samphassajā vedanā, mano-samphassajā vedanā, sabbaso vedanāya asati vedanā-nirodhā api nu kho tanhā pannayethāti? No h'etam bhante'. 'Tasma ih'Ananda (sic) es'eva hetu etam nidanam esa samudayo esa paccayo tanhayo, yadidam vedana'" (D. ii, 58). A similar passage is repeated for each of the twelve links.

⁸ Anguttara Nikaya PTS 3.415 [VRI 2.6.63]

⁹ Sankappavitakka vedanasamosarana. Anguttara Nikaya PTS 4.385 [VRI 3.9.14]

Furthermore, we investigate the role of Vedanā in shaping the individual's response to karmic retribution, including the potential for generating wholesome or unwholesome karma based on how feelings are perceived and responded to. By understanding the relationship between Vedanā and karmic retribution, we aim to shed light on the mechanisms through which individuals navigate the consequences of their actions and cultivate the conditions for future well-being and spiritual growth.

According to the Nidanasamyutta,¹⁰ the entire body is a physical manifestation of ancient kamma. It says-'The body is neither yours nor anybody else's; it is the appearance of former kamma, compounded, willed and made sensitive (nayam kayo tumhakam na pi annesam, puranam idam kammam abhisankhatam abhisancetayitam vedaniyam datthabbam)

Ultimately, our exploration of Vedanā and the experiencing of karmic retribution offers insights into the profound interplay between subjective experience and ethical conduct in the context of Buddhist philosophy. By elucidating the role of feeling in shaping the trajectory of one's karmic journey, I hope to provide a deeper understanding of the transformative potential inherent in cultivating mindfulness and ethical awareness in everyday life.

Vedanā, commonly translated as "feelings," extends beyond mere sensations according to conventional understanding. The Buddha emphasized its complex nature, indicating it can be analyzed in diverse ways, both superficially and profoundly. While conventionally six types of vedanā are acknowledged, closer scrutiny reveals nine distinct classifications. These encompass dukha vēdanā, originating from past negative karma, sukha vēdanā, resulting from positive past karma, and upekkha vēdanā, which represents neutral sensations, like feeling the wind on your skin. Additionally, humans contribute three more categories, collectively termed "samphassa ja vēdanā." These arise from the initial experiences of sukha, dukha, and neutral vedanā through the five senses. Dōmanassa vedanā or āmisa dukha vedanā surfaces when dukha vedanā is present, resulting in distressing thoughts and heightened suffering. Conversely, sōmanassa

vedanā or āmisa sukha vedanā emerges with sukha vedanā, often involving contemplation on pleasure and strategies for its future recreation.

Kamma gets expiated by giving rise to vipaka.¹¹ Vipaka is but the experience of appropriate pleasant or painful sensations (so tattha dukkha tippa katuka vedana vedeti etc.). There are different types of kamma which have to be experienced in different spheres.¹² There are kamma which have to be experienced in a state of woe (nirayavedaniyam), in the animal kingdom (tiracchanayonivedaniyam), in the peta world (pettivisayavedaniyam), in the human world (manussalokavedaniyam), and the celestial world (devalokavedaniyam). But if in the process of experiencing vipaka, that is, resultant pleasant or painful sensations, one reacts with greed, hatred or delusion, one produces more and more kamma which gets transformed into sentient matter which in turn generates more and more resultant sensations. Thus a vicious circle gets established. This is the cyclic process of samsara.

Samsara, often depicted as the wheel of existence, symbolizes the relentless cycle of birth, death, and rebirth experienced by sentient beings. Rooted in the fundamental Buddhist principle of impermanence (anicca), suffering (dukkha), and non-self (anatta), Samsara represents the universal struggle to find lasting satisfaction amidst the transient nature of phenomena. Central to this struggle is the role of feelings, which serve as the primary mode through which individuals engage with the world and interpret their experiences. Investigation begins by examining the concept of feelings in Buddhist philosophy, tracing its origins in foundational texts and elucidating its multifaceted nature. I explore how feelings are classified into pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral categories, each carrying profound implications for the individual's subjective experience and karmic trajectory. Moreover, we delve into the teachings of Dependent Origination (Paticca-samuppāda), which illuminate the causal relationship between feelings and the perpetuation of suffering within the cycle of birth and death.

The process of destroying kamma is explained more lucidly in the following verses of the Dvayatanupassana Sutta¹³

Sukham va yadi va dukkham, adukkhamasukham saha; ajjhanta ca bahiddha ca, yam kinci atthi veditam. Etam dukkhanti natvana, mosadhammam palokinam; phussa phussa vayam passam, evam tattha vijanati; vedananam khaya bhikkhu, nicchato parinibbuto ti.

As per the passage, the Buddha comprehends the consequences and future impacts of embracing speculative views. It effectively demonstrates that these divergent paths ultimately lead individuals back to the cycle of samsara. Only one route leads out of this cycle, as illustrated in the allegory, necessitating circumambulation of the Tree of Sensations to access it. This emphasizes the significance of understanding and addressing inner sensations as a pivotal step toward liberation from samsara. Thus, the Buddha advocates for transcending speculative views and delving into the depths of inner experience as the path out of the perpetual cycle of suffering and rebirth. The Mahanidana Sutta and the Brahmajala Sutta, as shown above, make it quite clear that the comprehension of the sensations plays a leading role in the realisation of deliverance according to the Buddha's teachings. 'Once the three sensations are comprehended (tisu vedanasu parinnatesu), a noble disciple has nothing further to do.'¹⁴

It's important to emphasize that when the Buddha discusses feeling, he's addressing its nature rather than simply its presence. Regardless of whether we experience happiness, suffering, or a neutral state, it's not solely attributed to past karma, even extending to past lives. Instead, the occurrence of any feeling stems from a combination of past karma and current circumstances.

¹⁰ Samyutta Nikaya PTS 2.65 [VRI 1.2.37]

¹¹ So...na tava kalam karoti yava na tam papakammam vyantihoti. Majjhima Nikaya 3.183 [VRI 3.267], PTS; Anguttara Nikaya PTS 1. 141 [VRI 1. 3. 36]

¹² Anguttara Nikaya PTS 3. 415 [VRI 2. 6. 63]

¹³ Suttanipata PTS 738-739 [VRI 743]

¹⁴ Samyutta Nikaya PTS 2.99 [VRI 1.2.63]

Consider a television set as an analogy. Its acquisition, akin to the presence of feeling, reflects past actions or karma. However, the specific channel displaying happiness, suffering, or neutrality isn't determined by remote actions, aside from the initial choice of turning on the TV and selecting a channel. The content isn't dictated by past-life karma.

Likewise, according to the Buddha's teachings, the existence of feeling in our present life is influenced by past karma. Yet, whether we experience happiness, suffering, or neutrality isn't exclusively shaped by past-life karma. The intricate interplay of past actions and present conditions shape the broad spectrum of feelings we encounter, underscoring the dynamic nature of karma and existence.

Furthermore, our exploration extends to the transformative potential inherent in understanding and working with feelings within the context of Samsara. Through the practice of mindfulness and emotional regulation, individuals can cultivate a deeper awareness of their feelings and liberate themselves from the grips of suffering. By recognizing the impermanent and conditioned nature of feelings, practitioners can transcend the cycle of craving (*tanha*) and clinging (*upadana*) that perpetuates the cycle of Samsara, ultimately attaining liberation (*nibbana*).

Conclusion

Dependent Origination (*Paticca-Samuppada*) is a cornerstone of Buddhist thought, outlining the chain of causes leading to suffering (*dukkha*). Within this chain, feeling (*vedanā*) occupies a critical position, acting as a potential pivot point between suffering and liberation.

Pleasant sensations naturally trigger a desire to grasp hold of the experience. Conversely, unpleasant feelings breed aversion. This craving and aversion, collectively termed *taṇhā*, propel the cycle of suffering forward. However, *vedanā* itself is not inherently problematic. It's our reaction to it – clinging or pushing away – that fuels the fires of discontent.

The Buddha recognized this pivotal role of *vedanā*. By cultivating mindfulness of feeling (*vedananupassana*), I can observe sensations arise and pass away without getting swept up in the emotional current. I can acknowledge a pleasant sensation without clinging, and observe an unpleasant one without aversion. This mindful observation weakens the hold of *taṇhā*, potentially interrupting the chain of suffering at this crucial juncture.

Therefore, *vedanā* is not simply a link in the chain of suffering, but a potential point of intervention. Through mindful awareness, I can learn to experience feelings without succumbing to their dictates. This mindful approach is the key to breaking free from the cycle of craving and aversion, leading ultimately to the liberation from suffering.

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