

DHAMMA HADAYA with Prof. Ravi Koggalage

TOPIC: VEDANĀ

(CŪLA VEDALLA SUTTA - MN 44 - CHAPTER 21)

“If one who is ignorant at first later realises it and treads the path with mindfulness, he is like one moon that illuminates the world after escaping from the dark clouds”. With that little quote from the Dhammapada I would like to start today’s discussion. Today we will take the component vedanā of the pañcupādānakkhandha in this programme and discuss vedanā in detail.

We have talked about rūpa extensively and now it's time to talk about other factors like vedanā in the pañcupādānakkhandha. Rūpa, vedanā, saññā, saṅkhāra and viññāṇa. Vedanā is described in a few sutta’s and one such important sutta is the Cūlavedalla sutta in the Majjima Nikaya. It is a famous sutta with questions and answers between Visāka Upāsaka and Dhammadinnā Arahāt Therani. The fact is that they were former husband and wife and they parted to practice the Dhamma. When they meet again, Visāka Upāsaka wanted to know how far Arahāt Dhammadinnā had developed in the path. He didn’t know that Dhammadinnā is an Arahāt and he wanted to check.

He was in the 3rd stage - an Anāgāmī. That is why this is very important because he started questioning from the beginning just to check whether she was in the first stage a Sotapatti. If we remember these two facts, that Visāka is an Angami and Dhammadinnā an Arahant. The questions were directed from the very beginning. Upto the Anāgāmī level he could ask questions about the path, but beyond that he was not sure. This sutta is very famous because of the question of sakkāya. He asked her - sakkāya, sakkāya - what is sakkāya? Dhammadinnā answered that it is the pañcupādānakkhandhā - rūpa, vedanā , saññā, saṅkhāra and viññāṇa . In another section of the same sutta he asks about vedanā - what is vedanā? And we are going to discuss about vedanā today.

Q: Sir, where do you find this conversation between the former husband and wife who are Āryans now?

A: It's in the Cūlavedalla Sutta in the Majjima Nikaya. It is a very important sutta. I think it's in the first book of the Majjima Nikaya. The first question asked was what is vedanā ? She answered by saying that there are three types of vedanā . We have previously discussed these three - that is sukha vedanā , dukkha vedanā and adukkhamasukha. It's actually adukkhamasukhā . In pali the two words are connected. So it is adukkhamasukhā - meaning that it does not belong to the dukkha side or the sukha side - neither dukkha nor sukha. Sometime we refer to this as upekkha but it's not real upekkha. Its adukkhamasukhā which means it does not belong to both extremes. So there is sukha vedanā , dukkha vedanā and adukkhamasukhā vedanā .

There were a series of questions asked by Visāka Upāsaka. Then he asked, why do you call this sukha vedanā? What is sukha in sukha vedanā and what is dukkha in sukha vedanā ? These are two very interesting questions. First he asks what is sukha vedanā and the answer was it is a kind of a pleasant feeling. That is sukha. If it is unpleasant that is dukkha and if it is neither sukha or dukkha then it is adukkhamasukhā vedanā . Then next he asks - what is sukha in sukha vedanā.

Q: Which means what is pleasant in pleasant feelings?

A: Yes. And also what is unpleasant or dukkha in sukha vedanā .

Q: What is dukkha in sukha vedanā is what is unpleasant in these so called pleasant feelings?

A: Yes. The next question is about dukkha vedanā . What is dukkha in dukkha vedanā and what is sukha in dukkha vedanā . And the third question was - what is sukha in adukkhamasukhā vedanā and what is dukkha in adukkhamasukhā vedanā .

The answers were in sukha vedanā – when it is ṭhiti - it is sukha. Ṭhiti is if it is existing. When sukha vedanā is there you feel sukha. When it is ceasing or going away that is the dukkha of sukha vedanā . This is understandable. When you have pleasant feelings and if it lasts for a while, then it is sukha. If it passes away or ceases, then you get an unpleasant feeling or sadness because you lose that pleasant feeling. Both sukha and dukkha are there in sukha vedanā . If it is there you are happy, otherwise you are sad. That is sukha and dukkha in sukha vedanā or the pleasant feeling.

Next is what is dukkha in dukkha vedanā and what is sukha in dukkha vedanā . If dukkha vedanā is there, then it is dukkha. If it changes it is kind of sukha. For example if you have a sickness, it's dukkha vedanā and when you are cured it is sukha.

Q: Which means that when the sickness gets cured it is sukha in dukkha vedanā ?

A: Yes. Because dukkha is no longer there.

Q: But isn't it sukha vedanā itself then?

A: You can't say that because there are three types of vedanā . The fact is, if dukkha is there it is dukkha. When dukkha is no longer there, then it's a kind of happiness. For example if you are having a severe headache, then it is dukkha. Now you are not having that headache, then it's a relief, a pleasant feeling. Non-existent dukkha vedanā is again kind of pleasant. That this is dukkha in dukkha vedanā and sukha in dukkha vedanā . These two are a bit easy to understand.

The third one is - what is sukha in adukkhamasukhā vedanā and what is dukkha in adukkhamasukhā vedanā . This is not that easy to understand. I will explain this later after discussing the next questions which are very important.

What is anusaya in sukha vedanā and anusaya in dukkha vedanā ? Anusaya can be explained as defilements, but it's in the sleeping stage. It has not yet arisen. Like rāgānusaya. It is there but not coming out, dormant. For example if we take anger, there is a possibility of getting angry - that is the anusaya. But right now we are not angry. But that doesn't mean that we won't get angry, because of the anusaya defilements. It is like the sleeping stage of our defilements. It can be rāgā, dosa or moha.

Q: Is it that the potential to come out is there?

A: Yes. The potential of defilements. His question was; what is anusaya in sukha vedanā ? That is rāgānusaya. When you have pleasant feelings, there is a possibility of getting attached and that is known as rāgānusaya.

The next question was what is the anusaya in dukkha vedanā ? That is paṭighānusaya. Paṭigha can be taken as a feeling of dislike. It can arise like anger. It is a feeling of aversion. The next question was what is the anusaya in adukkhamasukhā vedanā ? And the answer was avijjā - not knowing what the reality is.

Sometimes it is translated as ignorance but the meaning is 'not knowing what the reality is'. That is avijjā avijjānusaya. Sometimes it is also explained as not knowing the four noble truths. Avijjā is not knowing what the reality is. Avijjānusaya is present at the puthujjana level of adukkhamasukhā vedanā . That is why this is not called upekka vedanā , even though it is not in the two extremes like sukha vedanā and dukkha vedanā . Since it is not in the extremes we might think - well, if I'm not attached and not angry, then it is ok - but it is important to know that still avijjā is present - not knowing what is going on. Due to that, one can have moha or delusion.

Q: But what is the sukha in adukkhamasukhā vedanā ? What is the dukka? Were these questioned raised by Visāka?

A: Yes. The answers are there but the understanding is at a higher level - at the jhāna and maggapala levels you will understand that.

Q: So is the discussion between the two of us is at a surface level?

Ravi: Yes - initially it is at surface level but it is directing towards Nibbana. That is why this is so important. In sukhavedanā there is rāgānusaya, in dukkha vedanā there is paṭighānusaya, and in adukkhamasukhā vedanā there is avijjānusaya. There is an important fact - these three anusaya's are also known as roots of akusala - akusala kamma and kusala kamma - good deeds and bad deeds. These three are the roots of akusala kamma. If we have rāgānusaya the kamma generated arising because of this anusaya is an akusala - lobha or rāgā. In dukkha vedanā also if the anusaya is paṭigha, the result would be getting angry and reacting accordingly. Again it's going to be an akusala kamma. In adukkhamasukhā also since avijjā is present (moha or delusion), and if you do something with a deluded mind again it's akusala kamma.

Alobha, adosa, amoha are the roots of good kamma or kusala kamma. There is big danger involved in this because in our last moment, just before our death we get a feeling (feelings are of three kinds) of sukha vedanā , dukkha vedanā or addukkhamasukhā vedanā . What is the normal tendency? If we get sukha vedanā we get attached because of rāgānusaya and we create wrong thoughts or bad thoughts. That is akusala because of rāgānusaya. If we get dukkha vedanā – very often we might get dukkha vedanā just before death - like physical pains. So if you get dukkha vedanā it is paṭighānusaya and again the thoughts created are going to be bad kamma - akusala thoughts. So we know the danger and the risk is there of going to duggati - the sathara apaya and not sugathi because to go to sugathi you will need kusala kamma as the last thought. If we get sukha vedanā or dukkha vedanā the tendency is - if it is sukhavedanā the anusaya is rāgānusaya leading to akusala kamma, if it is dukkha vedanā it is paṭighānusaya again leading to akusala kamma and even if it is somewhere in the middle adukkhamasukhā still the tendency is there since there is avijjā – moha - it leads to mohamula sith. Again it's akusala kamma.

Q: Sir, at the moment of death if you get a sukha vedanā – supposing you become happy of some great kusala kamma that you performed, of course that is attachment and though it is not leading you to Nibbana will it be enough at least to be born in sugathi, in a deva loka?

A: That is what we need to find out. According to this sutta, this is what Arahant Dhammadinna has mentioned and that is the truth. If you do not listen to the Dhamma, understand and practice it, the normal tendency is to go towards duggati. When you hear this Dhamma you will realise how accurate Buddha was in giving that simile of taking some soil in his nail and comparing it to the soil in the entire earth and asking which is greater. He took this simile to explain that those born in sugathi, to be born

again in sugathi, the probability is like the amount of the soil on the finger nail compared to the soil in the whole earth. All other beings will be going in the direction of duggati.

This is very bad news but normally we don't want to believe that because everyone expects to go to sugathi in the next life. But this is what the Buddha taught. When considering this vedanā factor, we can see how true this is, unless we are in the practice and understand the real Dhamma.

This is another reason why we should not waste this valuable time we got in this kshana sampatti. That is being born as a human and also having the chance of hearing the Dhamma. That is kshana sampatti. These two incidents occurring together are very rare. That is why they are known as kshana sampatti and we have been wasting that kshana sampatti. This is the time to think back - how much time have I wasted and how much is remaining of this kshana sampatti.

Coming back to our question on vedanā , now I will give the answers to – in adukkhamasukhā vedanā what is sukha and what is dukka. Sukha is mentioned as ñāṇasukhā which means if you know, then that is sukha. Aññādukkhā is dukkha. Generally we all fall into this category of aññāṇa. That is what Lord Buddha has mentioned. Those who are going in this sansara, they all have aññāṇa. They do not have the correct understanding or right view about the true nature of existence. In adukkhamasukhā vedanā , not knowing is the dukkha and knowing is the sukha. That's how Arahat Dhammadinnā explained this. To summarize again - not knowing is avijjā causing moha or delusion. So if you are deluded about this, the result is dukka. If we know - vijjā - that is the opposite of avijjā, then you are safe.

There are three anusayas in each of these vedanā . Sukha vedanā has rāgānusaya, dukkha vedanā has paṭighānusaya and adukkhamasukhā vedanā - that is somewhere in the middle - will have avijjānusaya.

Next there are a series of very interesting questions. These are very thought provoking questions and that is why you have to keep in mind that the person who is asking the questions is an Anāgāmī person. That's why he can direct such questions. It might be frightening to know that these three types of vedanā - sukha, dukkha or adukkhamasukhā - if we get one of these at the dying moment, the tendency is to go downwards towards duggati. Why - because of rāgānusaya, paṭighānusaya and avijjānusaya. So Visāka has directed the next question may be to double check that. He is asking if rāgānusaya is essentially there in every sukha vedanā ? He wants to check if there is an escape. The next question is - does paṭighānusaya exist in every dukkha vedanā ? Similarly does avijjānusaya exist in every adukkhamasukhā vedanā ? The answer given is no. Not all sukha vedanā has rāgānusaya. Not all dukkha vedanā has paṭighānusaya and not all adukkhamasukhā vedanā has avijjānusaya. So there is a possibility of changing that.

The next set of questions and answers will help one to understand the exceptions. Arahanth Dhammadinnā explains; in some of the sukha vedanā rāgānusaya is not there. For example in the first jhāna - that is vivicceva kāmehi vivicca akusalehi dhammehi - you achieve the state of first jhāna.

Q: Can you please explain that.

A: Vivicceva kāmehi - without kama, without attachment to the five senses and the sensory objects. Eye/rūpa, ear/sounds, nose/smells, tongue/taste and body/feeling. If you are not attached to these, then it is vivicceva kāmehi vivicca akusalehi - not in akusala dhamma. That means without rāgānusaya you are entering the first jhāna state. Jhāna's are the levels of samādhi - there are eight levels. If you enter the first jhāna, that is a type of sukha vedanā . You are experiencing sukha vedanā in the jhānas. In that sukha

vedanā there is no rāgānusaya because you enter into the jhana by giving up your sensual pleasures - vivicceva kāmehi. That is one example of sukha vedanā where you do not have rāgānusaya.

Then on the dukkha side, it is a little bit tricky. If you are in the path leading to Nibbana - in the lokuttara path for a Sotāpatti or Sakadāgāmi person for example - this person might when hearing or seeing an Arahant think - I'm trying so hard, when would I become an Arahant. This is a kind of dukkha vedanā because that person has not achieved that stage yet. But this dukkha vedanā does not have paṭighānusaya because you are not angry with those who have already achieved this stage. This is one example of dukkha vedanā where you don't have paṭighānusaya. It is not so rigid - that is why we have the ability to escape dugati and the possibility of going to higher levels. In adukkhamasukhā vedanā there will be situations where you will not have avijjānusaya. We will discuss that later.

Upto now the questions are all at a worldly level. In the next set of questions Visāka Upāsaka is using the pali term patibhāga - which means the other half or the opposite half of something. Bhāga is half and pati is opposite. First he is asking what is the patibhāga of sukha vedanā and the answer was dukkha vedanā . The next question was what is the patibhāga of dukkha vedanā and the answer was sukha vedanā . And the third question was what is the patibhāga of adukkhamasukhā vedanā . There the answer was avijjā. This is a bit deep because this is leading to the lokuttara side. So the patibhāga of sukha vedanā is dukkha vedanā . The patibhāga of dukkha vedanā is sukha vedanā and the patibhāga of adukkhamasukhā vedanā is avijjā.

The next question is what is the patibhāga of avijjā. Now remember Visāka Upāsaka is at an Anāgāmī level. The patibhāga of avijjā is vijjā - the opposite of avijjā. Then again he is asking what is the patibhāga of vijjā. There is another pali term called vimukthi. Patibhāga of vijjā is vimutthi. It is something like freedom or escape. Then he again asks what is the patibhāga of vimutthi? That is Nibbana. This is leading to Nibbana. Then he asks another question - what is the patibhāga of Nibbana? Then Arahant Dhammadinnā says you have gone too far, this is the end of questions.

Visāka Upāsaka is Anāgāmī but he is asking something about Arahant hood or Nibbana.

Q: Is that why Arahant Dhammadinnā says he has gone too far? At the worldly level people might think she didn't know the answer.

A: Yes. There can be two purposes for asking these questions. The questions are directed to test if she is an Arahant. If she is not an Arahant, she might say something irrelevant. That is one way of understanding. The second reason may be that because he is only Anāgāmī and not an Arahant, just for his knowledge he might have asked that question, because he has not experienced upto that level. He is either seeking for knowledge or just to double check.

However, these answers are leading towards Nibbana and that is the important point. The patibhāga of sukha vedanā is dukkha and patibhāga of dukkha vedanā is sukha. That is what taṇhā is actually doing at the worldly level. If we get dukkha vedanā we see only the sukha vedanā side to get rid of the dukkha vedanā . If we have sukha vedanā , we think that the opposite of sukha vedanā is dukkha vedanā at the worldly level. For example if you are hungry you have dukkha vedanā and then we see only the opposite. If we eat something we get sukha vedanā . We don't see what's in the middle. If you get a headache you see only the opposite side. This is because of our taṇhā or craving at the putujjana level. It is showing only the other extreme. To get rid of this dukkha we see the opposite side. That is why at the worldly level we collect money, do jobs, collect all sorts of worldly things just thinking that we are in dukkha because we

don't have these things. So you see the other side only. At the worldly level we want to be happy. But we see only one side, one extreme. We think that if we get all these material things, then only we will be happy. That is the worldly level. That is due to our taṇhā. It shows only the opposite side - that's the patibhāga.

The patibhāga of sukha vedanā is dukkha vedanā and the patibhāga of dukkha vedanā is sukha vedanā . If you are in any of these extremes you are unable to see the truth or realise the path leading to Nibbana. You will not even get a sign of it. That is why if we have very strong kāmaccanda and vyāpāda - attachment and anger - first we have to suppress it. That's the importance of developing samādhi. When you are in those nīvaraṇas very strongly, you won't be able to see the truth and realise the path leading to Nibbana, because you are jumping from one extreme to another. From sukha vedanā to dukkha vedanā and then from dukkha vedanā to sukha vedanā . You won't see the middle. In samādhi when you suppress these gradually, then you arrive somewhere in the middle - adukkhamasukhā vedanā. But still the problem is the avijjānusaya. Even if you develop samādhi, still you will not realise Nibbana or any other maggapala because of avijjā.

With avijjānusaya moha is present, even though we are not too attached or too angry. Sometimes you might think I'm not so attached, not distracted or angry, therefore I'm ok. But still according to the Dhamma, avijjā is present. But if you are at that level, you have the ability to see that still avijjā is there. When you hear the Dhamma and contemplate on the Dhamma, there is a possibility of seeing that still avijjā is there. When you see avijjā, you notice that the opposite of this is also there. You have the ability to think ' well, if I'm deluded, then there must be the truth that is still unknown to me'. You see the patibhāga of avijjā which is vijjā. That is how one would enter the path. So there is sammādiṭṭhi - removing wrong views and this leads to vijjā. Avijjā is delusion and vijjā is the ability to see the truth. Then you are in the path and if you further progress, then the result would be vimutthi and Nibbana. That's why I mentioned that this discussion can be a door opener towards Nibbana.

Knowing about; the three types of vedanā - sukha vedanā , dukkha vedanā and adukkhamasukhā vedanā, the anusaya of sukha vedanā is rāgānusaya, anusaya of dukkha vedanā is paṭighānusaya and the anusaya of adukkhamasukhā vedanā is avijjānusaya, then the patibhāga of sukha is dukka, patibhāga of dukkha is sukha, the patibhāga of adukkhamasukhā is avijjā, the patibhāga of avijjā is vijjā, the patibhāga of vijjā is vimutthi and the patibhāga of vimutthi is Nibbana and that is what this sutta explains.

It is very important to know the Dhamma so that one can get an idea about how to enter the path using vedanā . This is a door opener to Nibbana. That is why it is really important to know about vedanā and investigate about it according to the Dhamma. Almost everyone knows that there are three types of vedanā - sukha vedanā , dukkha vedanā and adukkhamasukhā vedanā . But if we investigate the deep Dhamma involved in vedanā - what is the anusaya in each type of vedanā - in sukha vedanā it is rāgānusaya, in dukkha vedanā it is paṭighānusaya and in adukkhamasukhā vedanā it is avijjānusaya.

There is also a wrong belief about anicca these days.

Q: It is a popular discussion nowadays whether it is anicca or anitya.

Q: We have discussed this. They are two terms in different languages Pali and Sanskrit. In Pali it is anicca and in Sanskrit it is anitya. One different explanation given is that the opposite of icca is anicca. Icca is what you want. The argument is if you have a dukka vedanā - for example if you are having a sickness and when you get cured, that change is anicca. Then isn't it kind of sukha? Because you are getting rid of

dukkha vedanā . The answer is in this Sutta. The same questions were raised by Visāka Upāsaka - what is the sukha involved in sukha vedanā and what is the dukkha involved in sukha vedanā ? Thiti sukha - sukha vedanā if it is there, you feel pleasant. If it has ceased, then you feel sad. So both are involved in sukha vedanā . Similarly both are involved in dukkha vedanā . When dukkha vedanā exists you feel sad and when it passes away, then you feel pleasant. Both are involved in dukkha vedanā as I have explained and both are also involved in adukkhamasukhā vedanā . Generally people will not realise that because it's deep - ñāṇasukhā sukha and aññāṇadukkhā dukkhā. If one investigates the Dhamma answers could be found for such wrong beliefs. The answers are there if one uses the wisdom to investigate.

Therawan Saranai.