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VATTHŪPAMA SUTTA, the "discourse on the simile of the cloth", is the seventh discourse in the *Majjhima Nikāya* (M. I, 36-40). Altogether three Chinese parallels to this discourse are extant (T. I, 575a-576a; T. I, 843c-844b; T. II, 573c-575a).<sup>1</sup> The final part of the *Vatthūpama Sutta*, which is concerned with ritual bathing in a river, has additional counterparts in another two Chinese discourses (T. II, 321a-b, T. II, 408b-c).

The *Vatthūpama Sutta* begins by illustrating how the presence of mental defilements in the mind will lead to an unhappy destination with the example of trying to dye a dirty cloth. To attempt to do so is bound to result in the cloth not taking the colour properly. The discourse continues by listing a set of sixteen mental defilements, *upakkilesa*, whose removal leads over to the development of firm confidence in the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Saṅgha. Next the *Vatthūpama Sutta* depicts aloofness from the attraction of food and then turns to the practice of the four divine abodes, *brahmavihāra*. These in turn are followed by a succinct insight contemplation that leads to final liberation.

At this point a Brahmin intervened, asking the Buddha about purification by bathing in sacred rivers. The *Ekottarika Āgama* version provides additional information about this Brahmin, narrating that he had been quite convinced of his own purity when compared to the Buddha, as the food he took was quite simple, whereas the Buddha sometimes partook of quite succulent and rich food (T. II, 573c5). The *Ekottarika Āgama* discourse reports that it was after the Buddha had become aware of the Brahmin's train of thought that he delivered the present discourse.

In reply to the Brahmin's inquiry about purification by bathing in sacred rivers, according to the D. *Vatthūpama Sutta* and its Chinese parallel the Buddha explained that bathing in rivers considered to be sacred will not lead to purification. Instead, to purify oneself requires observing moral conduct.<sup>2</sup>

The simile of the cloth, which provides the title for the *Vatthūpama Sutta*, has at times been understood to stand for the existence in early Buddhism of the notion of an originally pure mind. Yet, a close inspection of the simile does not support such an interpretation, as the imagery of the clean cloth that takes dye well illustrates the conditions for rebirth in a happy destination. This falls short of what early Buddhism reckons to be real purity, which will result in transcending any type or rebirth.

Another passage sometimes quoted in support of an originally pure mind in the early discourses is a reference in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* to the luminous mind, *pabhassara citta*, which is defiled by adventitious defilements, *āgantukehi upakkilesehi upakkiliṭṭham* (A. I, 10). Other occurrences of the *pabhassara citta*, however, make it clear that this term refers only to a concentrated state of mind, not to an originally pure mind (S. V, 92; A. I, 257; A. III, 16; see also KILESA). Thus, similar to the imagery of the clean cloth in the *Vatthūpama Sutta*, the *pabhassara citta* is only concerned with a relative type of purity.

The idea of a return to an original purity could be found in relation to the development of deeper states of concentration. According to Buddhist cosmology, when the world-system goes through a period of contraction beings are reborn in the *Ābhassarā* realm (D. I, 17; D. III, 84), from which they eventually depart to be reborn on earth once the world-system has re-expanded. The *Ābhassarā* realm is the cosmological counterpart to the attainment of the second *jhāna*. Hence one who in the human realm succeeds in attaining this level of concentration could indeed be reckoned to be returning to an original purity of the mind, a degree of purity experienced a long time ago when living in the *Ābhassarā* realm during a time when this world-system had contracted.

Yet, the mental purity achieved with the second *jhāna* is only an interim step in the process of mental development envisaged in early Buddhism, which covers considerably more refined and profound states of concentration than the second *jhāna* and, more important than any level of concentration, the development of liberating insight. From an early Buddhist perspective, it is only with such liberating insight that true purity has been achieved. Such liberating insight requires the removal of ignorance, not a reversal to an original purity. In fact, according

to the discourses a beginning point of the faring on in *samsāra* under the influence of ignorance can not be found (S. II, 178; S. III, 149; A. V, 113). This leaves little scope for speaking of a mind that is originally pure in the true sense of the term. The task to reach real purity, which is the central theme of the *Vatthūpama Sutta*, is thus not to revert to some original condition, but rather to gradually purify the mind from the beginningless influence of defilements and ignorance until the purity of total liberation from bondage has been accomplished.

#### Anālayo

#### References

- 1 *T.* stands for the Taishō edition.
- 2 A criticism of the belief in purification through bathing in sacred rivers can also be found in the verses of *bhikkhunī* Puṇṇikā, who points out that if such practices were able to purify, fishes and other animals living in such rivers should all go straight to heaven, *Thīg.* V241.

VEDANĀ, "feeling" or "sensation", is the second of the five aggregates and the seventh link in the *paṭicca samuppāda* series, the link that leads to the arising of craving. Its role in these two contexts reflects the importance of *vedanā* in the early Buddhist analysis of reality. In fact, according to a dictum found in several discourses, all phenomena converge on feeling, *vedanāsamāraṇā sabbe dhammā* (A. IV, 339; A. V, 107; cf. also A. IV, 385, which makes the same statement for thoughts and intentions, *saṅkappa-vitakkā*). Hence an appraisal of *vedanā* and its implications is certainly a desideratum for an understanding of early Buddhism in general and of the path to liberation in particular. For this reason, the theme of *vedanā* will be treated in two successive articles. While the present article focuses on the topic of *vedanā* from the perspective of its nature and types, a subsequent entry on VEDANĀNUPASSANĀ takes up *vedanā* from the perspective of insight, delineating the main aspects of *vedanā* that need to be understood during actual practice of the path to liberation.

The term *vedanā* can be derived from the root  $\sqrt{\text{vid}}$ , whose range of meaning covers both "to feel" and "to

know". *Vedanā* can thus be understood to represent the affective aspect of the process of knowing, the 'how' of experiencing, so to say. Though due to its affective role *vedanā* has a strong conditioning impact on emotions, *vedanā* does not include emotion in its range of meaning, which would perhaps find its closest Pāli counterpart in *citta*. *Vedanā*, however, just refers to feelings, one of the building blocks of such complex phenomena as emotions. As such, *vedanā* stands in an intimate relationship with the cognitive type of input provided through *saññā* "perception", since what one feels, that one perceives, *yaṃ vedeti taṃ saññānāti* (M. I, 293). According to the standard definition given in the discourses, feeling 'feels' in the sense that it feels such affective tones as pleasure, displeasure and hedonic neutrality, *sukha, dukkha, adukkhamasukha* (S. III, 86).

The basic distinction between pleasant, unpleasant and neutral feelings can be expanded further by combining this triad with each of the six senses, by distinguishing between feelings that are related to the household life and those that are related to renunciation, and by taking into account whether feelings are past, present or future. In this way, a total count of one-hundred-and-eight types of feelings can be obtained (S. IV, 232). Such different modes of analysis are, however, merely complementary perspectives on the phenomenon feeling, and none of them should be grasped dogmatically as the only right way of reckoning feelings (M. I, 398).

In addition to analysing feelings into different types, the discourses illustrate the nature of feeling with a range of similes. One simile indicates that the different types of feelings are like winds in the sky, which come from different directions and can at times be dusty, hot or cold, mild or strong (S. IV, 218). This imagery illustrates the somewhat accidental character of feelings, whose nature is to manifest in ways that are mostly out of the control of the one who experiences them. This simile highlights that, just as it is meaningless to contend with the vicissitudes of the weather, similarly the arising of unwanted feelings is best born with patience. Of a similar import is another simile that compares feelings to various types of visitors that come to a guesthouse from any of the four directions (S. IV, 219). Feelings are just like such visitors, they come and go, hence no need to become agitated and obsessed with the particular way in which a feeling might manifest at present.

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