Handout for the Worldly Winds Course - September 2020

Pair 1: Pleasure and Pain

Course Overview

The Eight Worldly Winds is a list of four pairs of ways we tend to experience events that lead to clinging or resistance: pleasure and pain, gain and loss, praise and blame, and fame and ill-repute (or high/low status). These four months we will be exploring some of the fundamental Buddhist teachings about to find freedom amid life’s ups and downs.

Pleasure and Pain

The first pair of worldly winds/conditions we will study and practice with is Pleasure and Pain; meaning on one end of the spectrum we have pleasure and the other end of the spectrum we have pain. Of course, there is nothing inherently bad or good about either ends of the spectrum, rather it is how we react to pain or pleasure that is the issue. When we experience pleasure, we have a tendency to want more, crave more, and when we experience pain, we have a tendency to push away and become aversive to the painful situation. Although most of the time, we are not able to control our outside circumstances, we do have a choice in how we respond to what comes our way. How to do this is a skill and muscle we can develop through practice.

The Buddhist Teaching on Vedana or Feeling Tone as it applies to Pleasure and Pain

"Feeling" (Pali: vedana) is the bare sensation noted as pleasant, unpleasant (painful) and neutral (indifferent). The emotions and mental proliferations that arise from the basic feeling tone, often add preferences and intensity to our experience. Below is an excerpt from a sutta that may help in clarifying the difference between the bare feeling itself (vedana) versus the emotions and mental impressions.

The Discourse-grouping on Feelings (Vedana-Samyutta)

translated from the Pali, by Nyanaponika Thera

Paragraph 6

**THE DART**

"An untaught worldling, O monks, experiences pleasant feelings, he experiences painful feelings and he experiences neutral feelings. A well-taught noble disciple likewise experiences pleasant, painful and neutral feelings. Now what is the distinction, the diversity, the difference that exists herein between a well-taught noble disciple and an untaught worldling?

"When an untaught worldling is touched by a painful (bodily) feeling, he worries and grieves, he laments, beats his breast, weeps and is distraught. He thus experiences two kinds of feelings, a bodily and a mental feeling. It is as if a man were pierced by a dart and, following the first piercing, he is hit by a second dart. So that person will experience feelings caused by two darts. It is similar with an untaught worldling: when touched by a painful (bodily) feeling, he worries and grieves, he laments, beats his breast, weeps and is distraught. So he experiences two kinds of feeling: a bodily and a mental feeling.

"Having been touched by that painful feeling, he resists (and resents) it. Then in him who so resists (and resents) that painful feeling, an underlying tendency of resistance against that painful feeling comes to underlie (his mind). Under the impact of that painful feeling he then proceeds to enjoy sensual happiness. And why does he do so? An untaught worldling, O monks, does not know of any other escape from painful feelings except the enjoyment of sensual happiness. Then in him who enjoys sensual happiness, an underlying tendency to lust for pleasant feelings comes to underlie (his mind). He does not know, according to facts, the arising and ending of these feelings, nor the gratification, the danger and the escape, connected with these feelings. In him who lacks that knowledge, an underlying tendency to ignorance as to neutral feelings comes to underlie (his mind). When he experiences a pleasant feeling, a painful feeling or a neutral feeling, he feels it as one fettered by it. Such a one, O monks, is called an untaught worldling who is fettered by birth, by old age, by death, by sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair. He is fettered by suffering, this I declare.

Impermanence

The truth of impermanence is also a useful teaching for this pair of winds (as well as the others). We all have experienced the satisfaction of getting what we want; a relationship, a good job, a pleasant walk in the woods, a peaceful meditation, and soon enough or eventually, things change, and the pleasant experience changes into an unpleasant experience. The relationship didn’t work out, the good job wasn’t as interesting and enjoyable as you initially thought, you took a wrong turn when walking in the woods and now you are lost scared and upset, your peaceful meditation was interrupted by a stabbing back pain and the list goes on. Ajahn Sucitto speaks to the truth of impermanence as it applies to pleasant and unpleasant in the below quote:

“…even when we are living in a controlled environment where we can be clean and adequately fed and sheltered, things don’t stay comfortable or interesting for long. This isn’t just because situations always change so radically, but also because of the changeable nature of feelings and perceptions — through which ‘interesting’ or ‘comfortable’ becomes ‘tedious.’ In a situation that is fairly agreeable, we take things for granted, get bored, feel that we’re wasting our time, and so on. Just staying with things as they are, in a relatively neutral context, is a major Dhamma practice. I’ve seen it myself in monasteries where requisites are provided for free and you’re living with people who keep precepts and are committed to Awakening — but ‘so-and-so’s chanting is unbearable ... and the Dhamma talk is so boring ... and I’ve got a great idea for a building project — if only those others would agree with me ...’ and so on.”

“The mind always finds something to get irritated about or fascinated by; it always finds something to need, worry about and sorrow over. This is because the mind receives input in terms of perceptions and feelings that register experience as pleasant or unpleasant — which is natural enough. But then an undeveloped mind adds mental activities and programs of craving, aversion and self-interest on top of that. These are the latent proliferating tendencies (anusaya) that are embedded in the mind’s awareness and that take form as the mind rises into its activities. With these, our heart-capacity and vision shrink. We lose touch with the good fortune we have and of how much worse it could be; we forget and lose empathy for the misfortune of others; and we edit out all the ugly, smelly, rough and tedious aspects of our lives.”

\* The Above is an excerpt From: Ajahn Sucitto. “Parami, Ways to Cross Life's Floods.” iBooks.

Reflections:

1. How much time and energy am I spending attempting to ensure I experience pleasure and avoid pain?
2. What are the opportunity costs of being preoccupied with trying to ensure I experience more and more pleasure and less and less pain?
3. What are my behavioral patterns regarding tolerating discomfort? How do I typically respond and/or react? When there is resistance, can I see how resistance adds more suffering to the experience?
4. What are my behavioral patterns regarding pleasurable experiences? How do I typically respond and/or react? When there is clinging and craving, can I see how these add more suffering to the experience?

Practices for this month

Write down your answers to the below questions. Simple notes are enough for you to refer to. We’ll be sharing what we discovered with others in small groups in our next class.

1. At various points during the day, notice if your experience feels more Pleasurable or Painful (agreeable or disagreeable) This is a very powerful step: to recognize.

2. What are the conditions in which the pleasure or pain arose?

3. How does the pleasure or pain feel in the body?

4. What are the emotions associated with the experience of pleasure or pain?

5. What thoughts are being believed, what stories are you telling yourself?

6. What is your relationship to this experience of pleasure or pain?

7. How is your personal conditioning, your personal filters, impacting your experience of pleasure or pain?

Optional practice: Memorization

Choose a sutta passage (or part of a sutta passage) to memorize that you find particularly useful relative to this first pair of winds; Pleasure and Pain. This is a wonderful way to more deeply contemplate a teaching, it’s meaning, and how it applies to you.

Example 1:

Pleasure and Pain

Gain and Loss

Praise and Blame

Fame and Disrepute

Come and go like the wind,

To be at peace

Rest like a great tree

in the midst of them all.

Example 2:

Sn 2.4 PTS: [Sn 258-269](https://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sltp/Sn_utf8.html%23v.258)

Maha-mangala Sutta: Protection

translated from the Pali by

Dr. R.L. Soni

Excerpt is second to the last paragraph:

Though touched by worldly circumstances,

Never his mind is wavering,

Sorrowless, stainless and secure:

This, the Highest Blessing.