

Lesson 5

by Bro James Ong (30 minutes)

CONTEMPLATION OF FEELINGS

Part 2

5.1 Introduction

Welcome back. This is the fifth lesson of Satipatthana Meditation Discourse. Last week, I have explained what is: pleasant, painful and neutral feelings which are the 3 basic types of feelings taught by the Buddha in the Section of Contemplation of Feelings. Further, I have explained the pleasant feeling that is connected to sensual things and pleasant feeling that is connected with spiritual things.

Today I will continue with the remaining part of the Section on painful feelings and equanimity feelings connected to sensual and spiritual things.

5.2 Painful feelings connected with sensual things

The Buddha continues: *“when experiencing a painful feeling connected with sensual things he knows”*

What is this painful feeling connected to sensual things?

In this world which we live in, we have so much worldly things, sensual things, belongings, ambitions, longings for things which we cannot have. Those objects that come into contact with our senses which, we dislike produce pain. For example: meeting with unpleasant or disagreeable persons, growing old, being sick, decaying, dying, being separated from loved ones or precious belongings or even being fearful thinking of unpleasant things that might happen to us or loved ones. These are some of the experiences of painful feelings connected to sensual things that are sorrowful, unprofitable and do not lead to spiritual growth.

The Buddha says he knows, the painful feeling connected with sensual things. So the meditator must know such feelings. One should let go of painful feelings and how to let go? A meditator notes the painful or unpleasant worldly feeling til it fades away.

But if you are unaware of it, the painful sensual feelings stay on for long, long time.

I was in India long ago and I stayed in one Indian temple for a few days. There was one lady who looked about 50 years old, sat in a corner crying. After a long while I went

pass that corner and she was still there, crying. So I asked the caretaker of the temple why was she crying? He said her wedding ring was stolen. She looked so pitiful crying for long, so I offered to buy one and give her back but he said she does not want any other. She recognised that only one, which was her wedding ring. This went on for a few days.

I feel sorry for her and tried to talk to her but she refused to talk to me.

I carried on with my journey to other places. I found out from a friend after some time, that she died shortly from a broken heart. Painful it is to have feelings that are hard to bear – she could not bear the painful feelings and so the mind just comes to a full stop. She has no more ‘will’ to live so she just died...all because of a ring.

Now a meditator would not do that. A meditator would just watch that feeling, see its arising and passing away and would not die of a broken heart. Painful feelings would become weaker and weaker and then disappear.

Clinging to disagreeable feeling causes pain. One could spend a great part of life in suffering if he or she does not release that feeling. One would feel so sad and unhappy all the time, and most times don’t even know why. Once dissatisfied, they just blame other persons because he does not understand what this feeling is, and could not see the nature of feelings.

5.3 Painful feelings connected with spiritual things

Coming to painful feelings connected with spiritual things, the Buddha said: “*when experiencing a painful feeling connected with spiritual thing he knows*”.

What is this spiritual painful feeling?

Spiritual pain means painful feelings that arise in the process of spiritual development. For example, in an intensive retreat a meditator has to wake up very early in the morning. One has to endure the heaviness and drowsiness from lack of sleep or other discomfort as one is deprived of his or her comfortable bed or when one has to share the room with someone who snores all night or someone who wants to have strong fan or no fan and so one has to bear the heat element that is connected to the heat or cold. One may experience pain due to stomach upset from unsuitable food. In sitting for a long duration one would also experience a lot of pain such as aches, itchiness, numbness, stiffness, hardness, body stress and various types of bodily pain such like burning pain, twisting pain, pulling pain etc. Some even find it very painful to abstain from talking. So there is a variety of painful feelings connected to our spiritual endeavours.

Spiritual pain leads to non-pain while the worldly sensual pain leads to more pain. That is the big difference between the 2 of types of pain and one must understand clearly this difference.

One should continue to cultivate mindfulness and knowing – to see the nature of this mind and body, the feeling that arise within so that we are not so attached to the feelings. When the mind is detached from the painful feelings, and with mindfulness, one would be able to observe the arising and disappearing of that painful feeling as an object.

In daily life we normally just scratch the itch away. But in meditation we learn to observe the nature of feelings. By staying still, and not moving we can experience the various intensity of feeling arising and disappearing.

When the mind is trained in such way, then whenever one encounters painful feelings the trained mind is able to stay balanced, and take note of the painful feelings as merely one of the meditation objects so that, the mind will not be affected or be dragged into dissatisfaction, anger, frustration, etc.

5.4 Neutral feelings connected with sensual things

Moving onto neutral feelings – neutral feelings are those which are neither pleasant or unpleasant. We have a lot of neutral feelings throughout the day and sometimes we complaint of boredom especially if one has a lot of routines for example, one goes to the office, work, come back home, then bath, eat, when tired – drop to sleep. Next day, the same thing repeats. Another common example is housewife. Some feel bored by the repeated uninteresting routine of cooking, washing, ironing or cleaning.

These are examples of worldly equanimity feelings. Some people divert their attention to pleasant activities so that they would not fall into depression, dissatisfaction, anger, frustration, etc. But as a meditator, feeling is an object of meditation. Therefore we do not need to divert from these feelings towards other pleasurable activities to overcome the equanimity feelings.

Instead the meditator should take the equanimity feeling as an object of mindfulness, noting the arising and disappearing of the equanimity feelings. In that way the strength and momentum of that equanimity loses its intensity and will fade away.

In this manner, we are going directly to the object, dealing with it at its root and overcoming it by way of mindfulness.

In this way, the neutral feelings when arises would not grip the mind. Otherwise the neutral feelings that have gripped the mind could make the person restless and disturbed.

5.5 Neutral feelings connected with spiritual things

Now what about spiritual neutral feelings? These are neutral feelings that are wholesome which are opposite of the neutral feelings connected to sensual things as explained before.

- (a) One could have neutral feelings when performing wholesome actions like giving, services, etc.

Example one may just give a dollar to a beggar along the street with neutral feelings. One may be cleaning up the temple or visit the old folks in welfare home with neutral feeling.

Another example, one would bring to the mind the intention to keep his precepts with neutral feelings every morning. The precepts abstinence could also arise with neutral feelings. In other words, the meditator should recognise the neutral feelings that are wholesome.

- (b) There are also wholesome spiritual feelings that are highly developed in the 5th Jhana or mental absorption. When the developed mind has gone beyond the pleasant and painful, it stays on the neutral feeling at its apex with stillness and peacefulness. These equanimity feelings are lofty and wholesome.
- (c) One could also experience neutral feelings in observing the rising and falling of the abdomen or even in the walking meditation – in the lifting, pushing or putting movements. One could also experience neutral feeling arises with the noting of sound, smell or taste or noting any external objects with neutral feelings.

Neutral feelings that are connected with spiritual things do not lead to unwholesomeness like boredom and restlessness because it is connected to the wholesome mental states such as mental balance, mindfulness, tranquillity and peacefulness.

5.6 Practising internally

And the Buddha continues: *“Thus, he lives practising, internally, feeling-contemplation in feelings”*

This means the meditator contemplates on one’s internal feelings that arise. The more we look into feelings internally, the more we understand the nature of feelings that come and go which is not controlled by anyone. They arise due to certain conditions.

The more we understand the nature of feelings, the more we are able to let go of those feelings that are unprofitable which cause a lot of emotional pain.

The more mindful we are of feelings the better we are at managing our emotions.

Therefore, we should take note and let go of negative feelings so that we have more room for pleasant feelings to arise and have a happier life.

5.7 Practising externally

The Buddha continues: *or practising externally, feeling-contemplation in feelings, or practising, internally and externally, feeling-contemplation in feelings, or he lives contemplating the arising of feelings or he lives contemplating the passing away of feelings or he lives contemplating the arising and passing away of feelings or the mindfulness that there is only this feeling that is clearly established in him.*”

This means, the meditator not only contemplates on own feeling that arise but also contemplates feelings that are external as well. In practising so, the meditator also becomes sensitive to external feelings. He becomes more mindful and thoughtful of whatever he says or does, so that it is not harmful or hurtful to oneself or others.

Practising external feeling-contemplation is especially useful when you living with your spouse or family. Since these people are always near, quarrels come about for many reasons perhaps because of different ideas, different perceptions or because one of them is in a bad mood and is unaware of feeling or fail to see its nature.

In practising external feeling-contemplation, one should note them as just merely external feelings. Such external feelings too are of the same nature that is it arise and it would pass away.

With mindfulness we are prevented from being affected by the feelings of others. If not, when others are angry it makes us angry, when others are depressed it makes us depressed because we are sucked into external feelings. It becomes contagious.

By frequently noting external feelings, the meditator is unaffected by them and he can maintain this balance of mind and peacefulness.

In other words, one should practise contemplating one’s own feelings and also, external feelings – see and understand the nature of feeling that, just as internally, being conditioned – it arise and will cease also in the same way – external feelings being conditioned it arises and passes away, and not somebody but just feelings – until such knowledge is clearly established in the meditator.

5.8 Conclusion

So in ending the Section on Contemplation of Feelings: what are the feelings that need to be cultivated and maintained? Those feelings that are the spiritual feelings should be cultivated and maintained. Those sensual or worldly feelings that are causing more pain,

sadness, frustrations, lamentation, pain, grief and despair are the ones that must to be let go.

Only when one lets go of more of such negative feelings then one has room for more positive feelings. It is like having a lot of dirty water in your glass – there is no more room for clean water. But if one were to pour away the dirty water only then clean water could fill it up.

Now such positive feelings would include the painful spiritual feelings like the pain that a meditator would have to endure in the practice of meditation such as discomfort, itchiness and numbness. One should do not fear pain, one should continue to note it because this spiritual pain can be a good friend. It can be a suitable object to develop strong concentration and insight-wisdom.

I will end my talk here today and will continue with contemplation of mind in the next lesson. For now I will answer some common questions with regard to the practice of contemplation of feeling.

Question:

(1) *If I cannot see the rising and falling or feeling what should I do?*

Answer:

You can observe the touching points of the sitting posture such as the sensations where the feet touch the floor or each other, and locate 3 or 4 points which can be clearly perceived. You can also note the sitting posture itself that is the upright tension at the back. Try to experience the element of hardness, softness or heat element. Is it warm or hot? Or, sometimes there are vibrations on the leg area and buttock area.

Once you note an area for some time (probably 20 to 30 counts) and you still cannot perceive the object with the characteristic of change, then you move on to the next area and stay again for probably another 20 to 30 counts in the same way.

The second alternative is to mindfully stand up and proceed with walking meditation which is more obvious and gross.

Question:

(2) *How can we develop and maintain wholesome feelings?*

Answer:

By cultivating mindfulness we are able to maintain and develop wholesome feelings. In other words when we bring our mind to meditation, dana and sila or in assisting others in wholesome works we are more able to bring out wholesome spiritual feelings.

Question:

(3) *How do we let go of unwholesome feelings?*

Answer

If one habitually directs the mind to watch feelings as an object of meditation the meditator learns to recognise feelings including negative feelings. Once we are able to recognise negative feelings that are unwholesome, then one simply let go. How? By noting feelings as an object with detachment the feelings will then cease by itself when it is not held onto. It is like fire been put off when there is no more gas.

Question:

(4) *Must we learn to contemplate on feeling instead of just rising and falling?*

Answer:

Firstly feeling is an important object because we feel all the time. If we are not aware, we could prolong the negative feelings which produce emotional pain.

Secondly, one could also easily get lost in sensuous feeling if we are not trained to watch feelings.

Thirdly, feelings can be a very strong and gross object compared to rising and falling which is more subtle and sometimes undetectable.

In the absence of rising and falling, we must take the next object that is clear and prominent so that we can maintain mindfulness. Rising and falling is not the only object for mindfulness cultivation – it also involves the other 3 foundations: feelings, mind and dhamma which will be discussed later on.

Based on these 4 foundations of mindfulness, we build up the continuation of mindfulness that give rise to concentration and wisdom.