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## Vedanā Nānatta Suttā 1 &amp; 2

The Discourses on the Diversity of Feelings 1 &amp; 2 | S 14.4+5

Theme: From the sense-elements arise feelings

Translated &amp; annotated by Piya Tan ©2021

1 Sutta summaries and significance

## 1.1 THE 2 VEDANĀ NĀNATTA SUTTAS

**1.1.1** The term “**elements**” or “**sense-elements**” here refers to the 18 elements, that is, the 6 internal sense-faculties (the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind), the 6 external sense-objects (form, sound, smell, taste, touch and thoughts), and the 6 sense-consciousnesses. The suttas here call this “the diversity of elements” (*dhatu,nānatta*).

**The Vedanā Nānatta Sutta 1** (S 14.4) shows how dependent on the “diversity of **elements**”—that is, the “internal elements”: the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind—there arises the diversity of **contacts** (eye-contact, etc). “Contact” (*phassa*) refers to the conjunction of the sense-faculty, its sense-object and its sense-consciousness. [SD 58.8a]

The usual way the suttas (such as in **the Madhu,piṇḍika Sutta**, M 18) say this is:

“Dependent on the eye and form, eye-consciousness arises.

The meeting of the three is **contact**.”

(M 16,16/1:111), SD 6.14

**1.1.2 The Vedanā Nānatta Sutta 2** (S 14.5) shows that the sequence given in S 14.4 works only *one way*: dependent on the diversity of (internal) elements, there arises contact; not the other way around. None of these internal elements (the eye, etc) arises on account of *contact*; it is not because there is seeing that there is the eye, because of hearing there is the ear, and so on! [SD 58.8b]

1.1.3 The Dhātu Saṃyutta: an overview

**1.1.3.1** The key points of the suttas of the Dhātu Saṃyutta are given below:

S 2.3<sup>1</sup> Dhātu SaṃyuttaS 2.3.1 Nānatta Vagga

*The internal pentad (the sense-faculties)*

S 2.3.1.1	(S 14.1)	Dhātu Nānatta Sutta	The 18 elements (overview) <sup>2</sup> [SD 29.9]
S 2.3.1.2	(S 14.2)	Phassa Nānatta Sutta	The 6 kinds of sense-contacts
S 2.3.1.3	(S 14.3)	No,phassa Nānatta Sutta	The sense-faculties do not arise from sense-contact
S 2.3.1.4	(S 14.4)	Vedanā Nānatta Sutta 1	The 6 kinds of feelings
S 2.3.1.5	(S 14.5)	Vedanā Nānatta Sutta 2	The sense-faculties do not arise from feelings

<sup>1</sup> The reference, “S 2.3” here, refers to “Saṃyutta Nikāya, Vagga 2 (the Nidāna,vagga), Saṃyutta 3.” It should not be confused with the sutta reference: “Sa.gāthā,vagga 2, Devaputta Saṃyutta 3,” The Magha Sutta. The former, read “**Saṃyutta (saṃyutta) 2.3**,” is used only in reference to the Saṃyutta structure; the latter, read “**Saṃyutta sutta 2.3**,” is more commonly used.

<sup>2</sup> See also SD 10.16 (2.22.3).

*The external pentad (the sense-objects)*

S 2.3.1.6	(S 14.6)	Bāhira,dhatu Nānatta Sutta	The 6 sense-objects
S 2.3.1.7	(S 14.7)	Saññā Nānatta Sutta	Based on the elements arise perception, then thoughts, then contacts, then feelings, then desires, then passions, then quest [SD 17.5]
S 2.3.1.8	(S 14.8)	No,pariyesanā Nānatta Sutta	The sense-faculties do not arise from perception
S 2.3.1.9	(S 14.9)	Bāhira,phassa Nānatta Sutta	The elements lead to perceptions, to thoughts, to contacts, to feelings, to desires, to passions, to quests, to gains
S 2.3.1.10	(S 14.10)	No,bahira,phassa Nānatta Sutta	The cognitive process of S 14.9 cannot be inverted

**1.1.3.2** STUDY METHOD. Considering the interconnected arrangement of the suttas, the internal pentad (S 14.1-5) should, ideally, be studied *first*, as a set. Based on this understanding, we will have a better grasp of the external pentad (S 14.6-10) as a set. Once we see the natural connections amongst these sets and elements, we may go on to study the different Suttas here in connection with other suttas and teachings.

Of course, if we are drawn to study the 2 suttas of this chapter—**S 14.4+5**—we do so with the understanding that we are learning about **feelings**. In due course, we may go on to see how these 2 suttas connect with **the Dhātu,nānatta Sutta** (S 14.1), SD 29.9, or even **the Saññā,nānatta Sutta** (S 14.7), SD 17.5. Having completed our studies of them, we should then reflect how their teachings fit in cohesively in terms of the elements and other teachings.<sup>3</sup>

**1.1.4 Significance**

The broader significance of the teaching of these 2 suttas (indeed of all the suttas in the **Nānatta Vagga**) is found in the *kāma* verse, which runs thus:

1	<i>Saṅkappa,rāgo purisassa kāmo</i>	The thought of lust is a person's desire:
2	<i>n'ete<sup>4</sup> kāmā yāni citrāni loke</i>	there are no sensual pleasures in the wondrous <sup>5</sup> in the world.
3	<i>saṅkappa,rāgo purisassa kāmo</i>	The thought of lust is a person's desire.
4	<i>tiṭṭhanti citrāni tath'eva loke</i>	The wondrous in the world remains just as they are.
5	<i>ath'ettha dhīrā vinayanti chandan'ti</i>	So here <sup>6</sup> the wise remove desire (for them).

(A 6.63,3.4 ≈ S 1.34), S 103

- (1) How we think affects us: when we think of something as being permanent, pleasurable, self (we identify with it) or beautiful,<sup>7</sup> **desire** arises in us.
- (2) **The beautiful** (*citra*) in the world is just the way it is, an aesthetic reality.
- (3) It is our thought of desire that is projected into external objects.
- (4) The world remains just as it is despite what we think of it.
- (5) We may not be able to change the world out there, but we can adjust our **attitude** to be wholesome towards it.

<sup>3</sup> For a graphic summary of these elements and processes, see SD 17.5 (Table 2.1).

<sup>4</sup> S 103 *na te*.

<sup>5</sup> "Wondrous," *citra*, has a broad range of meanings: see (2.2.2.3).

<sup>6</sup> "So here the wise" (*ath'ettha dhīrā'ti atha etesu ārammaṇesu paṇḍitā chanda,rāgaṃ vinayanti*, "here then the wise removes lust and desire in the sense-objects," SA 1:63). In other words, "here" refers to our minds.

<sup>7</sup> On these 4 fundamentally wrong ways of perceiving things, see SD 17.4 (9.4).

## 1.2 CHINESE PARALLELS

The 2 suttas have Chinese parallels as follows: S 14.4 (SĀ 452) and S 14.5 (SĀ 453), but both have more materials than the Pali versions, and both the Chinese versions abridge the more familiar sections.

### 1.2.1 SĀ 452

**S 14.4** has a Chinese parallel, that is, **SĀ 452**. Besides these 3 differences, SĀ 452, in parts, follows the Pali closely. The Chinese version shows the following differences:

- (1) Where the Pali lists only the 6 internal sense-faculties [§4+6], SĀ 452 lists the 18 elements.
- (2) SĀ 452 adds the line—“dependent on the diversity of feelings, there arises the diversity of cravings”—immediately following §§5+6.
- (3) It has a longer but different conclusion which probably contains scribal errors [§7 n].

### 1.2.2 SĀ 453

**1.2.2.1 S 14.5** has a Chinese parallel, that is, **SĀ 453**.

**1.2.2.2** A major difference in SĀ 453 is its treatment of the 6-element passage on “**the eye**” [§5], which omits the word “diversity” but adds the lines beginning with “not dependent on ... ,” thus:

T99.2.116a28-b3

謂	This means:		
緣眼界生眼觸	Dependent on	eye-element arises	eye-contact;
非緣眼觸生眼界	<u>not dependent on eye-contact arises eye-element,</u>		
但緣眼界生眼觸。	but dependent on	eye-element arises	eye-contact.
緣眼觸生眼受	Dependent on	eye-contact arises	eye-feeling,
非緣眼受生眼觸	<u>not dependent on eye-feeling arises eye-contact,</u>		
但緣眼觸生眼受。	but dependent on	eye-contact arises	eye-feeling.
緣眼受生眼愛	Dependent on	eye-feeling arises	eye-craving,
非緣眼愛生眼受	<u>not dependent on eye-craving arises eye-feeling,</u>		
但緣眼受生眼愛。	but dependent on	eye-feeling arises	eye-craving.

The passages on the other 5 elements (the ear, nose, tongue, body and mind) are translated in the same way with the appropriate changes with regards to their respective components.

**1.2.2.3** Furthermore, SĀ 453 concludes differently, as follows:

T99.2.116b7-13

是故比丘。	Therefore, bhikshus,	
非緣種種愛生種種受。	not dependent on the diversity of cravings arises	the diversity of feelings,
非緣種種受生種種觸。	not dependent on the diversity of feelings arises	the diversity of contacts,
非緣種種觸生種種界。	not dependent on the diversity of contacts arises	the diversity of elements,
但緣種種界。生種種觸。	But dependent on diversity of elements, arises	the diversity of contacts,
緣種種觸。生種種受。	dependent on diversity of contacts, arises	the diversity of feelings,
緣種種受。生種種愛。	dependent on diversity of feelings, arises	the diversity of cravings.

是名比丘。當善分別種種界。

Thus, one who is called a bhikshu should wisely discern the diversity of elements.

佛說是經已。 The Buddha thus spoke the sutra.  
諸比丘聞佛所說。歡喜奉行。 The bhikshus having heard the Buddha, joyfully practised accordingly.

## 2 Sutta significance

### 2.1 THE DHĀTU SAṂYUTTA

**2.1.1 The Nānatta Vagga**, the subchapter on “the diversity” of the elements, is the 1<sup>st</sup> section of **the Dhātu Saṁyutta**, the collection on the elements, the 3<sup>rd</sup> chapter (S 2.3) of **the Nidāna, vagga** (the 2<sup>nd</sup> book of the Saṁyutta). The Nānatta Vagga is divided into 2 pentads (*pañcaka*): an “internal pentad,” on the sense-faculties, and an “external pentad,” on the sense-objects.<sup>8</sup>

#### 2.1.2 The internal senses

**2.1.2.1** The Nānatta Vagga’s 1<sup>st</sup> sutta, also the 1<sup>st</sup> of the Dhātu Saṁyutta—**the Dhātu, nānatta Sutta** (S 14.1)—actually belongs to neither pentad [2.1.1], since, by way of introducing the study, it merely lists the 18 elements (the 6 internal sense-faculties, the 6 external sense-objects and the 6 sense-consciousnesses).<sup>9</sup> The actual “**internal**” series, on the sense-faculties, shows successive mental functions. It starts with **the Phassa, nānatta Sutta** (S 14.2) and **the No, phassa, nānatta Sutta** (S 14.3), on contact. The former states that contact arises dependent on the various elements (sense-faculty + sense-object + sense-consciousness). The latter states that the diversity of elements does *not* arise dependent on the diversity of contact. The sequence of conditions and effect follow a fixed order which cannot be inverted.

**2.1.2.2** The next pair of suttas—**the Vedanā Nānatta Sutta 1** (S 14.4) and **the Vedanā Nānatta Sutta 2** (S 14.5)—follow on with feelings. **S 14.4** says that the diversity of elements (sense-faculty + sense-object + sense-consciousness) conditions the rise of the diversity of contacts (eye-contact, etc), which, in turn, conditions the rise of the diversity of feelings (based on the eye, etc). **S 14.5** states that the diversity of elements does *not* arise dependent on feelings: it is the *feelings* that arise dependent on the contacts.

The importance of these 2 suttas is that we **feel** (pleasure, displeasure, neither) on account of sense-contact (seeing, hearing, etc); we don’t see, hear, etc, on account of feeling. This is a fixed sequence of the cognitive process. Our body (the 5 physical senses), in itself, is not the source of how we feel, how we react, to our experiences. This reaction to pleasure and displeasure, and non-action towards neutral feeling, arises in our minds.

**2.1.3** In the “**external**” pentad, the same method is applied to the mental functions relating more specifically to the sense-objects. The chain here is more complex, and the internal relationships need to be explained. The commentarial explanation (SA 2:131) is technical and tries to resolve the apparent irregularities with patterns of relationship traditionally seen as standard in commentarial times. As such, these explanations need not be accepted wholesale as reflecting the early Buddhist teachings.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> For a summary table of the diversity of external elements, see SD 17.5 (Table 2.1).

<sup>9</sup> S 14.1/2:140 (SD 29.9).

<sup>10</sup> See **Saññā Nānatta S** (S 14.7), SD 17.5. For a correlation of the 5 aggregates, the 6 bases, 18 elements and their 4 ultimate realities (according to Abhidhamma), see Abhs:BRS 2<sup>nd</sup> ed 2009:288 Table 7.4.

## SD 58.8a

## Vedanā Nānatta Sutta 1

## The 1st Discourse on the Diversity of Feelings

Ce **Vedanā,nānatta Sutta** The Discourse on the Diversity of Feelings  
 [S 2.3.1.4 = Saṃyutta 2, Nidānavagga 3, Dhātu Saṃyutta 1, Nānatta Vagga 4]  
 S 14.4/2:141 f

- 1 (The Blessed One was) dwelling at Sāvattihī.  
 2 “Bhikkhus,  
 dependent on the diversity of elements *dhātu,nānatta*  
 arises the diversity of contacts;  
 dependent on the diversity of contacts *phassa,nānatta*  
 arises the diversity of feelings.<sup>11</sup> *vedanā,nānatta*
- 3 And what, bhikkhus, is **the diversity of elements**?<sup>12</sup> [142]  
 4 (1) The eye-element; *cakkhu,dhātu*  
 (2) the ear-element; *sota,dhātu*  
 (3) the nose-element; *ghāna,dhātu*  
 (4) the tongue-element; *jivhā,dhātu*  
 (5) the body-element; *kāya,dhātu*  
 (6) the mind-element. *mano,dhātu*  
 This is called the diversity of elements.
- 5 And how is it, bhikkhus,  
 that dependent on the diversity of elements,  
 arises the diversity of contacts;  
 that dependent on the diversity of *contacts,*  
 arises the diversity of feelings?<sup>13</sup>
- 6 Bhikkhus,  
 dependent on **the eye element,** arises eye-contact;  
 dependent on *eye-contact,* arises **feeling** born of eye-contact.<sup>14</sup>  
 Dependent on **the ear-element,** arises ear-contact;  
 dependent on *ear-contact,* arises **feeling** born of ear-contact.  
 Dependent on **nose-element,** arises nose-contact.  
 dependent on *nose-contact,* arises **feeling** born of nose-contact.  
 Dependent on **the tongue-element** arises tongue-contact;  
 dependent on *tongue-contact,* arises **feeling** born of tongue-contact.  
 Dependent on **the body element,** arises body-contact;  
 dependent on *body-contact,* arises **feeling** born of body-contact.

<sup>11</sup> Foll this para, the Chin adds 緣種種受 生種種愛 “dependent on the diversity of feelings, there arises the diversity of cravings” (SĀ 452/T99.2.116a7-8). On the list of textual differences, see (1.2.1).

<sup>12</sup> Foll this, SĀ 452 lists the 18 elements (abbrev: T99.2.116a8-9) (as in **Dhātu Nānatta S**, S 14.1, SD 29.9).

<sup>13</sup> Foll this para, SĀ 452 adds: 緣種種受 生種種愛 (as above) (SĀ 452/T99.2.116a10-11).

<sup>14</sup> *Cakkhu,dhātuṃ bhikkhave paṭicca uppajjati cakkhu,samphasso cakkhu,samphassaṃ paṭicca uppajjati cakkhu,-samphassa,jā vedanā.*



- 4** And how is it, bhikshus,  
 that dependent on the diversity of elements  
 that dependent on the diversity of contacts  
 that *not* dependent on *the diversity of feelings*  
 that *not* dependent on *the diversity of contacts*
- arises the diversity of contacts;  
 arises the diversity of feelings;<sup>20</sup>  
 arises *the diversity of contacts*;  
 arises *the diversity of elements*?
- 5** (1) Dependent on **the eye-element** there arises  
 dependent on **eye-contact** there arises  
*Not* dependent on *feeling* born of eye-contact  
*not* dependent on *eye-contact*
- eye-contact;  
feeling born of eye-contact.  
arises eye-contact; [143]  
arises the eye-element.
- 6** (2) Dependent on **the ear-element** there arises  
 dependent on **ear-contact** there arises  
*Not* dependent on *feeling* born of ear-contact  
*not* dependent on *ear-contact*
- ear-contact;  
feeling born of ear-contact.  
arises ear-contact;  
arises the ear-element.
- 7** (3) Dependent on **the nose-element** there arises  
 dependent on **nose-contact** there arises  
*Not* dependent on *feeling* born of nose-contact  
*not* dependent on *nose-contact*
- nose-contact;  
feeling born of nose-contact.  
arises nose-contact;  
arises the nose-element.
- 8** (4) Dependent on **the tongue-element** there arises  
 dependent on **tongue-contact** there arises  
*Not* dependent on *feeling* born of tongue-contact  
*not* dependent on *tongue-contact*
- tongue-contact;  
feeling born of tongue-contact.  
arises tongue-contact;  
arises the tongue-element.
- 9** (5) Dependent on **the body-element** there arises  
 dependent on **body-contact** there arises  
*Not* dependent on *feeling* born of body-contact  
*not* dependent on *body-contact*
- body-contact;  
feeling born of body-contact.  
arises body-contact;  
arises the body-element.
- 10** (6) Dependent on **the mind-element** there arises  
 dependent on **mind-contact** there arises  
*Not* dependent on *feeling* born of mind-contact  
*not* dependent on *mind-contact*
- mind-contact;  
feeling born of mind-contact.  
arises mind-contact;  
arises the mind-element.
- 11** It is in this way, bhikshus,  
 that dependent on the diversity of elements  
 dependent of the diversity of contacts  
*Not* dependent on *the diversity of feelings*,  
*not* dependent on *the diversity of contacts*,
- there arises the diversity of contacts;  
 there arises the diversity of feelings;  
 there arises *the diversity of contact*;  
 there arises *the diversity of elements*.<sup>21</sup>

— evaṃ —

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<sup>20</sup> Immediately after this, SĀ 453 inserts 緣種種受 生種種愛 “dependent on the diversity of feelings, there arises the diversity of cravings” (SĀ 453/T99.2.116a28).

<sup>21</sup> SĀ 453 has a longer and different closing: see (1.2.2.3).