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(Vedanā) Anicca Sutta

The (Feeling) Discourse on Impermanence | S 36.9
 Theme: Feelings (pleasant, unpleasant, neutral) are impermanent
 Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2020

1 Sutta summary and significance**1.1 SUTTA SUMMARY****1.1.1 FEELINGS**

The **(Vedanā) Anicca Sutta** (S 36.9) is a short discourse on **feelings**, of which there are **3 kinds**—pleasant, unpleasant and neutral—and that they are conditioned and impermanent. In this study, we will examine the role of feelings in **the perceptual process** [1.2], and a brief comparison of it with western psychological ideas on **feelings** [3].

1.1.2 EXPERIENCE

Simply put, our **experience** is whatever we **feel** and how we react to it. The Buddha teaches us how to see all this *as it really is*. thus:

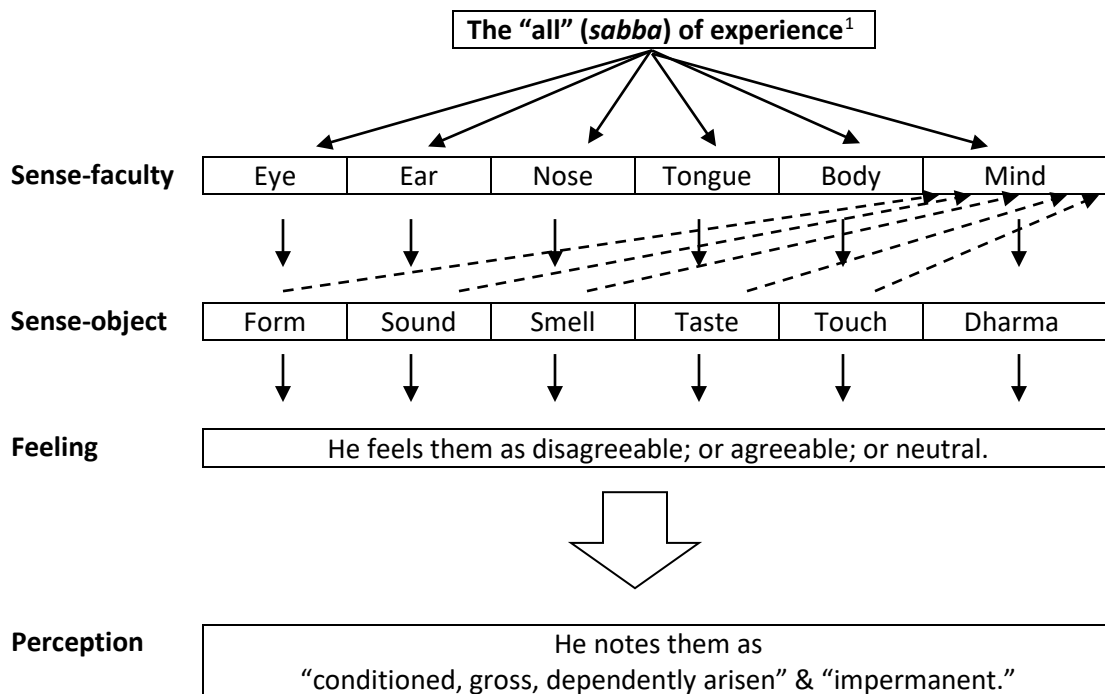


Table 1.1.2. The nature of experience and its wise reflection²

¹ See **Sabba S** (S 35.23), SD 7.1.

² This table recurs in SD 17.13 as **Table 3a**, where see for further details.

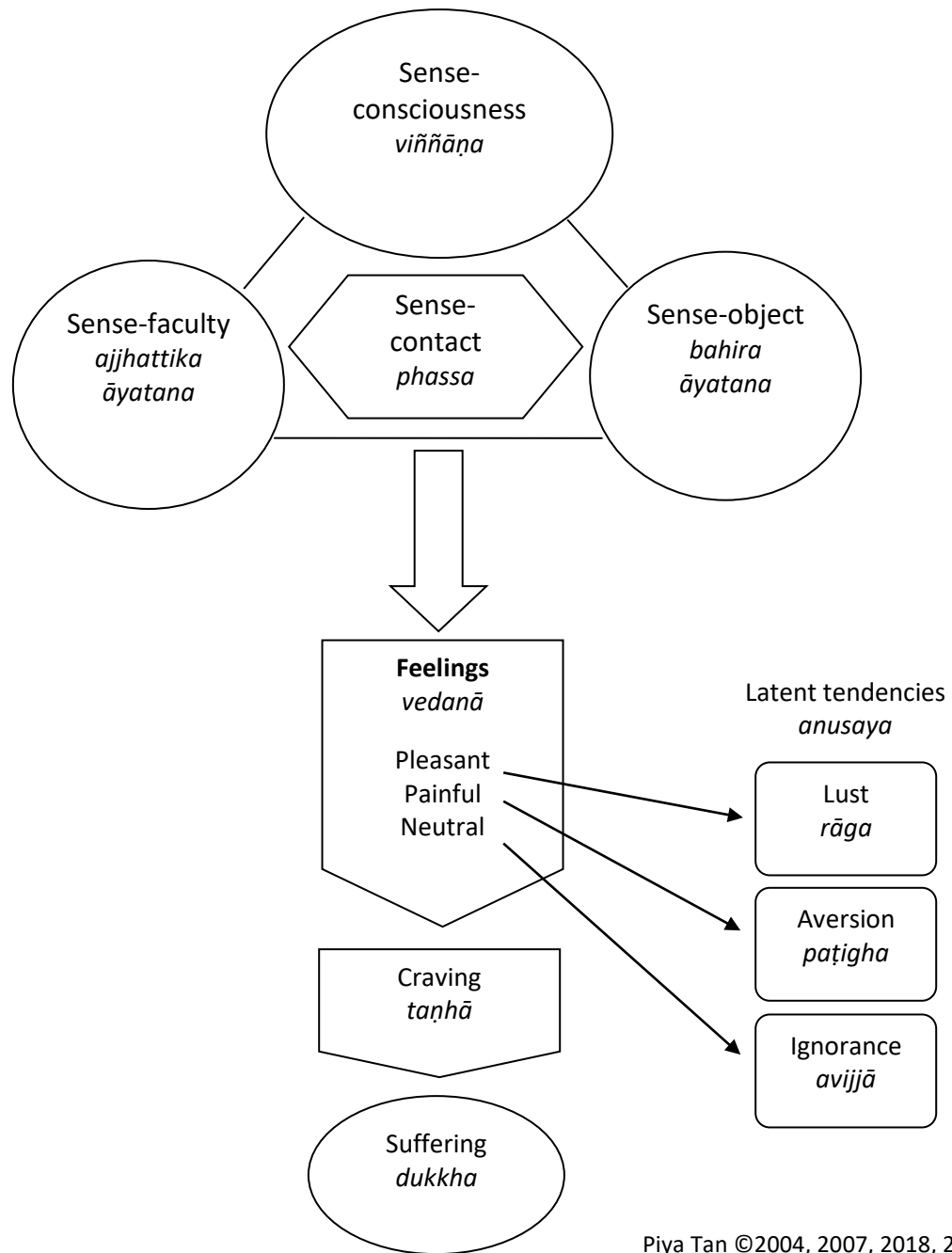


Table 1.2.2 The feeling cycle. The experience triangle and the arising of suffering. For details on how feelings arise, see preceding **Table 1.1.2.**

1.2 SUTTA SIGNIFICANCE

1.2.1 The nature of feelings

1.2.1.1 In Early Buddhism, **feeling** (*vedanā*) is more than mere “bare awareness” or “sensing without knowing,” since it has some specific content: pleasure, pain, neutral feeling.³ Moreover, feeling is a necessary, but not a sufficient condition, for the arising of craving (the following link in the dependent arising cycle).⁴ Furthermore, **the Kiṭāgiri Sutta** (M 70) speaks of 2 kinds of feelings: those of the householder (that conduce to unwholesome states), and those of the renunciant (that conduce to wholesome states).⁵ Hence, feelings not only have emotive and affective tones, but also ethical and psychological significance.

1.2.1.2 Clearly then, in early Buddhism, **feeling** is distinct from emotion (*saṅkhārā*); the former often arouses or influences the latter in significant ways. Feeling (*vedanā*), then, in psychological terms, functions **cognitively**: it works as both knowing and feeling (as we commonly understand). This is clear from its etymology: *vedanā* comes from **VVID**, to know.

Its active verb is *vedeti*, “to feel, sense”; the passive verb, *vediyati*, “to be felt, sensed, experienced,” but often functions like *vedeti*, and are often used interchangeably (as synonyms) in the suttas. Its causative form, ***paṭisaṃvedeti***, is formed thus: *paṭi*, “against, contrasting” + *saṃ*, “together, comprehensively” + **VVID** + causative infix *-y-* + verbal ending. Its byform is *paṭisaṃvediyati*. Both mean “to feel, experience.”⁶

Interestingly, from **VVID**, “to know,” we also get the verb *vindati*, “to know, to find.” From this, we get the noun, *vijjā*, “knowledge” (whose sense ranges from the mundane to the supramundane). Its Sanskrit forms are *vidyā* and *veda*, both meaning “knowledge.” All this goes to show that in early Buddhist psychology, what we today understand as feeling and knowing are closely intertwined.⁷

1.2.2 “All states converge in feeling” (*vedanā samosaraṇā sabbe dhammā*)

1.2.2.1 This famous statement on the key role of feeling in our perceptual process is found in **the Kim Mūlaka Sutta** (A 8.83), **the (Navaka) Samiddhi Sutta** (A 9.14) and **the Bhagavā Mūlaka Sutta** (A 10.58).⁸ How the word is formed is very interesting: ***samosaraṇa***⁹ comes from *sam* (“together”) + *osaraṇa* (from *osarati*, “to visit, resort to; go into, enter; approach, draw near; assemble; descend upon, assail”; from *ava* (“down”) + *√SR*, to flow). Hence, it has 2 integral senses: (1) of assembling or converging, and (2) of flowing or acting together. This flow and eddy of the perceptual process is the intermingling currents, that is, the “**all**” (*sabba*) of our sensual being: sense-faculty and sense-object—as stated in **the Sabba Sutta** (S 35.23).¹⁰

1.2.2.2 Feeling, according to the Buddha, plays a key role in our perceptual process: whatever we, as unawakened beings, perceive is rooted in **feeling**—pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral—we act and react, having evaluated our experience of a sense-object. This “experience of a sense-object” is perception, whose cycle is depicted in “the perceptual cycle” [SD 17.4, Table 8.1.2]. While the perceptual cycle high-

³ See SD 3.7 (6.2).

⁴ On necessary and sufficient conditions, see SD 5.11 (5).

⁵ M 70,6-7/1:475. See Boisvert 1995:74-76 for the Sutta passage with Comy.

⁶ Further on *vedeti* and *paṭisaṃvedeti*, see SD 56.22 (2.4.2).

⁷ For a modern psychological def of feeling, see *APA College Dictionary of Psychology*, 2009:150.

⁸ A 8.83/4:338 (SD 32.10); A 9.14/4:385 f (SD 57.20a); A 10.58/5:106 f (SD 57.20b). For comparative table, see SD 57.20b (Table 1.3).

⁹ D 1:237, 2:61; S 3:156, 5:42 f, 91; A 3:364.

¹⁰ S 35.23/4:15 (SD 7.1).

lights the proliferation of thoughts (*papañca*), **the feeling cycle** [Table 1.2.2] shows how feelings lead and fuel the whole process.

1.2.2.3 At this point, we can see that the sense-contact triangle of **Table 1.2.2** is an “inner loop” or inner working that feeds **feelings**. When we run after pleasant objects, we feed lust; when we reject unpleasant objects, fearing pain, we feed aversion; when we ignore what we see as “boring” or of no profit to us, we feed ignorance. In all this we are motivated by **craving** (along with ignorance). Now that we are caught in the feeling loop goaded by ignorance and craving, we are caught with the burden of suffering.¹¹

2 Related suttas

The following texts bear the title, **Vedanā Sutta**, the discourse on feeling, or related to it:

2.1 Vedanā, nānatta Sutta 1 (S 14.4/2:141)

On how diversity of feelings arise because of the diversity in elements (*dhātu*).

2.2 Vedanā, nānatta Sutta 2 (S 14.5/2:142)

Diversity of feelings arises because of the diversity in elements, not the other way around.

2.3 (Rāhula) Vedanā Sutta (S 18.5/2:247)

Feeling that is born of sense-contact is not abiding but fleeting.

2.4 (Vedanā) Anicca Sutta (S 36.9), SD 57.25

The 3 kinds of feelings are impermanent.

2.5 (Jambu, khādaka) Vedanā Sutta¹² (S 38.7/4:255), SD 75.22(7)

The wanderer Jambu, khādaka asks Sāriputta about feelings. He explains the 3 kinds of feelings, and that the noble eightfold path is the way to fully comprehend them.

2.6 (Magga) Vedanā Sutta 1 (S 45.29/5:21)

The noble eightfold path should be cultivated to fully understand the 3 kinds of feelings.

2.7 (Magga) Vedanā Sutta 2 (S 45.169/5:57)

The noble eightfold path should be cultivated to fully understand, clearly comprehend, destroy, and abandon the 3 kinds of feelings.

2.8 (Satipaṭṭhāna) Vedanā Sutta (S 47.49//5:189)

The 4 focuses of mindfulness should be cultivated to fully understand the 3 kinds of feelings.

3 A psychology of feeling: an overview

3.0 This is a brief Buddhist evaluation of what modern psychology knows or thinks about **feeling**. To date, there is neither a unified nor official psychological definition of “feeling.” The discussion here is based on definitions of the headwords listed below from the APA¹³ *College Dictionary of Psychology* (2009) and 2 articles from the *Encyclopedia of Psychology and Religion* (2010): Jo Nash’s entry on “Affect” and John Ryan Haule’s entry on “Feeling.”¹⁴ Neither these articles nor the views expressed below are definitive of how modern psychology views the topics as defined and discussed below. This is simply an

¹¹ Further on feelings: **Dhātu Vibhaṅga S** (M 140,23-24), SD 4.1.7; **Vedanā**, SD 17.3. For details on the perceptual process, see SD 17.4 (8). On the formations (emotions) process, see SD 17.6 (4), esp Table 4.

¹² Also called Vedanā Pañha Sutta.

¹³ APA = American Psychological Association, <https://www.apa.org/about>.

¹⁴ (Eds) David A Leeming, Kathryn Madden, Stanton Marlan. **Encyclopedia of Psychology and Religion**, with 15 figs and 2 tables. By: Springer, 2010.

attempt to give us some idea of the trajectories of modern psychology and early Buddhism regarding feeling, affect and emotion, where they intersect, parallel and diverge.

3.1 FEELING: A BRIEF COMPARATIVE STUDY OF IT IN WESTERN PSYCHOLOGY AND EARLY BUDDHISM¹⁵

3.1.1 Feeling and the senses

3.1.1.1 While the APA defines **feeling** broadly as “a self-contained phenomenal experience,” *The Encyclopedia of Psychology and Religion*, states narrowly that it is “the conscious registration of an emotion or affect.” Modern psychology generally sees feelings as subjective, evaluation and independent of the sensory faculties (the physical senses), thoughts or stimuli evoking them. Psychology, in other words, sees feelings and the senses as separate and unconnected.

3.1.1.2 Early Buddhism sees feeling as arising from the conjunction of the sense-faculty (such as the eye), the external sense-object (such as a visible form), and the appropriate attention (eg, eye-consciousness), which entails contact (sense-stimuli, such as seeing). Where there is *sense-contact*, there arises feeling based on that faculty. Clearly then, early Buddhism sees feeling as meetings and interplay of the senses, the stimuli and the mind.¹⁶

According to early Buddhism, the physical senses cannot function by themselves, but always rooted in the mind, with the mind itself existing as a “6th” sense, often independent of the physical senses, since it is able to replay or rather conjure up sensual images on the mental level. In other words, the mind or thoughts are directly involved with the sensing process from which feeling arises.

3.1.1.3 Affective **evaluation** is a vital process in the sense-based process of feeling. Western psychology, like early Buddhism, seems to accept that feeling is evaluated or established as something attractive or disgusting. However, while Buddhism speaks of “neutral” feeling—“neither pleasant nor painful”—as the 3rd kind of feeling, psychology has no such idea.

This difference in the classification of feelings is probably due to the fact that psychology sees feeling in purely affective terms [3.2], but in early Buddhism, feeling is a key mental process that can be either cognitive (knowing) or conative (willing), or both, especially for unawakened “worldlings” (*puthujjana*). Basically, in early Buddhist terms, **cognition** is *ideally* a passive inward learning, a direct seeing into true reality, and **conation** is an *active* outward projecting of what we like (lust, *lobha*), dislike (hate, *dosa*) or are deluded (*moha*) about. [3.2.1.1]

3.1.2 Key functions of feeling

3.1.2.1 We have noted above on the Buddha’s teaching that “**All states converge in feeling**” (*vedanā samosaraṇā sabbe dhammā*) [1.2.2]. It highlights the key role of feeling in our perceptual process. How the perceptual process fits into our whole being is depicted in **Table 3.3.2**, where the perceptual process is a subcycle involving stages 1-4 (consciousness, contact, feeling and perception): consciousness, feeling and perception are mental aggregates.

The consciousness aggregate works here as part of *the sense-faculty—sense-object—sense-consciousness* “triangle of experience,” resulting in contact (*phassa*), that is, sense-impression, sense-stimulus or, simply, sensing. We sense “the world”—the “all” [1.2.2.1]—by feeling it: “**it**” here refers to our uncon-

¹⁵ It is helpful to begin by reading on the defs of “feel” (v) and “feeling” (n): SD 56.22 (2.3).

¹⁶ Described in some detail in SD 56.22 (2.4.1) “Contact.”

scious notion of something *permanent, attractive and essential* expressed in our feelings to the sense-objects.

3.1.2.2 When we **reflexively** evaluate how we like an object, how we dislike it, we are also ignoring what we see as neither attractive nor disgusting. Two key facts must be highlighted here. The first is the meaning of reflexive (and implicitly, its adverb, too). The APA *Dictionary of Psychology* (2nd ed 2015) defines “**reflex**” as “any of a number of automatic, unlearned, relatively fixed responses to stimuli that do not require conscious effort and that often involve a faster response than might be possible if a conscious evaluation of the input were required. An example is the pupillary reflex.”

The early Buddhist idea of “**reflex**”¹⁷ encompasses a broad range of both conscious (*sa,cittaka, deliberate*)¹⁸ and unconscious (*acittaka, undeliberated*) very rapid reactions to an external stimulus that is karmically potent. Karmically, we act with intention (*cetanā*)—especially with greed, hate or delusion—whether we are aware of it or not. In other words, it is possible to act with immoral intent habitually, that is, even before we can “think” about it.

When a hunter or a soldier *habitually* kills, he is so used to it that it becomes “second nature,” but killing and other immoral acts are always rooted in either lust (greed), hate or delusion (especially the last). It is for this reason, we need moral training (*sīla sikkhā*) to counter and remove our unwholesome habits already ingrained in us by past conditionings.

3.1.2.3 Secondly, we need to better understand what an “object” or the anticipatory “it”¹⁹ is. Psychologically (in the Buddhist sense), the “object,” although said to be “external” (*bahir’āyatana*), simply acknowledges there is an external reality, which is “neutral”; but more importantly, it is external in the sense that it is projected by us onto that external reality.²⁰ It’s like looking at the Mona Lisa through tinted glasses and thinking that is what *it*²¹ really is!

This 5-century old portrait, 30” tall by 21” wide, now hanging in the Louvre, Paris, was once more brightly coloured than it is today. It was covered with a varnish, probably applied in the 16th century, perhaps to protect it from the moisture of the baths in which it hung at Fontainebleau. This varnish has darkened and turned the painting slightly greenish. But it is this varnish that gives the work the best means of authenticating it.

“One can imitate or copy a painting to perfection,” says Jean-Pierre Cuzin (the Curator of Painting at the Louvre), “but the craquelure—all the tiny cracks in the painting’s varnish which are documented very clearly in the photographs—cannot be recreated artificially. There was no doubt that this painting was the original by Da Vinci.”²²

From these facts themselves, we must deduce that we are *not* truly looking at the *real* Mona Lisa but a *varnished* version! We are indeed seeing through tinted varnish at “it”—but there is really no *it*!

¹⁷ This is one of the contextual senses of “reflex-perception,” which is absent in the formless dhyanas: **Ariya Pariyesanā S** (M 26,38), SD 1.11.

¹⁸ On *sa,cittaka* and *acittaka*, see SD 7.9 (2.1) ↑SD 57.25 (3.1.2.2).

¹⁹ See *Oxford Dictionary of English Grammar*, 2nd ed, 2014: “it” for its various forms. For a formal, technical analysis, see, eg, *Fowler’s A Dictionary of Modern English Usage* (ed D Crystal), 2009: 301-303.

²⁰ Further on this important point, see **Nibbedhika (Pariyāya) S** (A 6.63,3 esp verse), SD 6.11.

²¹ Note that by this “it” (an anticipatory), we are led to assume that there is an “original” Mona Lisa, painted by Leonardo da Vinci, painted between c1503-c1517.

²² https://www.pbs.org/treasuresoftheworld/mona_lisa/mlevel_2/mlevel2_authenticity.html.

3.2 AFFECT

3.2.1 Psychological definitions of affect

3.2.1.1 Historically, western psychology may be said to be still struggling with what **feeling** really is and how it figures in their field. We have already noted the difficulty that psychology has had with “feeling” [3.1]. Perhaps, the experts thought that the simplicity of the word, *feeling*, reflects neither depth nor dimension, merely a mundane pedestrian routine. Hence, the preference for **affect**, a broad term used more or less interchangeably with other words such as feeling, mood, emotion, etc.

At one point, affect was considered to be one of the 3 “mental functions” along with cognition and conation (or volition).²³ Later, the English psychologist, Edward B Titchener (1867-1927), used it as a label for the pleasant/disgusting dimension of feeling. Contemporary usage is, however, very loose and qualifiers are common.²⁴ [3.2.2.1]

3.2.1.2 *The APA Dictionary of Psychology* (2015) defines **affect** as “any experience of feeling or emotion, ranging from suffering to elation, from the simplest to the most complex sensations of feeling, and from the most normal to the most pathological emotional reactions. *The APA College Dictionary of Psychology* (2009) adds that affect is “any feeling or emotion, which may be irreflexive or reflexive. Irreflexive affect is the direct experience in consciousness of a particular emotional state (as in a person’s feeling of elation upon receiving good news). Reflexive affect occurs when a person makes his or her feelings objects of scrutiny (as when a person wonders why he or she does not feel particularly elated upon receiving good news).” [3.2.2.2]

3.2.1.3 *The Encyclopedia of Psychology and Religion* (2010) in its article on “Affect” says that it is “used in psychology to denote the broad field of emotional and mood based experience of the human subject” (2010:14). It involves embodied, visceral (“gut”) perception that is intuitive, is object relational,²⁵ and may generate cognition or be generated by it, or even be precognitive (instinctual) or transcognitive (integrative),²⁶ mediating experiences at both unconscious and conscious levels. It is, in fact, an important mediator of all religious and spiritual²⁷ experiences. From this explanation, we may surmise, for our purpose here, that **affect**, psychologically, is a blanket term for feeling and emotion [3.3].

In psychoanalytic terms,²⁸ affect works in our complex biofeedback system to sustain homeostasis (inner and outer harmony). Our interest and adoption of a religious or spiritual practice is understood as moved by our human need to optimize positive affect and minimize negative affect to achieve physical,

²³ On the western psychological trilogy of “cognition, affect and conation,” see SD 56.22 (2.2.2).

²⁴ A S Reber, *The Penguin Dictionary of Psychology*, 1985: affect.

²⁵ “The emotional bonds between oneself and another. Typically expressed in the sense of one’s capacity to love or care for another as balanced against interest in and love for the self.” (Reber, *Penguin Dictionary of Psychology*, 1985: object relations.

²⁶ By “transcognitive,” I understand as breaking down the I-Thou, subject-object dichotomy, directly experiencing the object, “feeling” it fully. See eg Graeme Sullivan, “Artistic thinking as transcognitive practice: A reconciliation of the process-product dichotomy.” *Visual Arts Research* 27,1 2001:2-12.

²⁷ Here, “religious” refers to a practice or quest where the object (such as rituals, membership) is the goal, while “spiritual” focuses on the quest itself or personal, direct, experience of the goal. See Hill et al, “Definition of religion and spirituality,” in (eds) D B Larson et al, *Scientific Research on Spirituality and Health: A consensus report*, Bethesda, MD: National Institute for Healthcare Research, 1998:14-30.

²⁸ Such as in the “affect theory” of Silvan Tomkins: *Affect, Imagery And Consciousness* vol 1 The positive effects, 1962; vol 2 The negative effects, 1963, vol 3 The negative effects; anger and fear, 1991; vol 4 Cognition: Duplication and transformation, 1992; NY: Springer.

mental and social well-being. To this end, consciously or unconsciously (mostly the latter), we have the need to identify with a positive “**image**” of a parent or authority figure, who exhibits positive affects, such as love, joy, patience, acceptance, and so on.

Motivated by such an image, we go on to adopt practices and habits that enable us to replicate the positive or admired qualities of that image. When this is properly done, such a person, with a developed ability to regulate his own affective states, will be able to create within himself a “mental space” that enhances happiness and well being. Ideally, this is the way it should work.²⁹ [3.2.2.3]

3.2.2 Buddhist aspects of affect

3.2.2.1 From the start, **feeling** (*vedanā*) is a key component in early Buddhist psychology. Although translated as feeling (to evoke its pervasive significance in human perception and being), it has a much broader compass than viewed in western psychology [3.2.1.1]. It covers physical “sensations” but entails what we understand as “faculties” (*āyatana*); in other words, it implies the respective “sense-consciousnesses.”

Early Buddhism speaks basically of **3 kinds of feeling**: the pleasant, the unpleasant and the neutral. The idea of these varieties of feelings is *not* that the pleasant is desirable, the unpleasant is not, and the one that is “neither pleasant nor unpleasant” to be avoided. Rather, it should be well understood that all feelings are conditioned, and, as such, *impermanent, unsatisfactory, nonself*. This is a spiritual exercise called the “**perception of impermanence**” (*anicca,saññā*), which is sufficient to bring us to the path of awakening as streamwinners in this life itself.³⁰

3.2.2.2 Psychologically, feeling is the 2nd of **the 5 aggregates** (*pañca-k,khandha*) [3.3.2.2]. It is a physiological function of the body, that is, of the 5 physical senses and the mind; hence, we have eye-based feeling, ear-based feeling, etc. Mind-based feeling is unique in the sense that it is not sense-based, but is a mental reflex evoked from past experiences, that is, it is memory-based, and as such a mental construct.

According to Buddhist psychology, it is neither the sense-object nor the attendant feeling (even a pleasant one) that gives us real joy. We habitually see whatever feeling that arises as being “mind-made” and “conditioned”; hence, *impermanent, unsatisfactory, nonself*.³¹ Such a reflection properly done, brings us inner peace, from which stable and profound joy arises. This further reinforces our practice and brightens daily life.

3.2.2.3 Western psychology seems to see **religious feelings** (or experience) as directed towards an external agent (especially God or some holy figure) or person (a religious founder, priest, preacher, monastic or guru) [3.2.1.3]. The Buddha deprecates such emotional *dependence*, and encourages us to practise self-reliance, that is, self-effort (mindfulness and meditation), self-understanding (wisdom) and self-liberation (awakening). From the moment we reach the path of awakening, we gain **emotional independence**: we do not identify with any “image,” not even our own body; we have no need of any external support (such as rituals and vows); we have no doubt about self-liberation.³²

²⁹ See Jo Nash, “Affect,” (ed) D A Leeming et al, *Encyclopedia of Psychology and Religion*, 2010:14-16.

³⁰ See (**Anicca**) **Cakkhu S** (S 25.1), SD 16.7.

³¹ These are the 3 characteristics: SD 1.2 (2); SD 18.2 (2.2).

³² See **Emotional independence**, SD 40a.8.

3.3 EMOTION

3.3.1 What are emotions?³³

3.3.1.1 Emotion, according to western psychology, is a complex reaction-pattern, involving experiential, behavioural and physiological elements, by which the individual attempts to deal with a personally significant event or situation, or in response to some significant external state or sense-stimulus. This significant state or event may be something of great beauty or joy, or of great truth or reality.

The specific quality of the emotion, such as fear, shame, guilt or remorse, is determined by the specific significance of the event. For example, when the significance involves a threat, *fear* is likely to follow; when the significance involves disapproval from others, *shame* is likely to follow. Hence, emotion typically involves **feeling**, but differs from *feeling* in having an overt or an implicit engagement with the world.³⁴

3.3.1.2 In early Buddhist psychology, emotion is best equated with *saṅkhārā*, often translated as “formations,”³⁵ in the sense that they are karmically potent states, in a wholesome or an unwholesome way, depending on our intention. Hence, we have “bodily karma” (*kaya,saṅkhārā*), “verbal karma” (*vacī,saṅkhārā*), and mental karma (*citta,saṅkhārā* or *mano,saṅkhārā*).³⁶ In this function, *saṅkhārā* also form the 2nd link of dependent arising (*paṭicca samuppāda*), when it arises conditioned by ignorance, and in turn conditions the arising of consciousness.³⁷ [3.3.2]

3.3.2 The formations (*saṅkhārā*) cycle

3.3.2.0 Feeling is only one of the 5 aggregates (*pañca-k,khandha*)—form, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness—but it profoundly influences the other mental aggregates (perception, formations and consciousness), and is, in turn, sustained by the other 4 aggregates, including form and its physical senses. How this occurs is represented in **the formations (*saṅkhārā*) cycle** [Table 3.3.2].

3.3.2.1 We are conscious beings; so let us begin the formations cycle with **(1) consciousness** (*viññāṇa*). Specifically, we are here working with “sense-awareness,” that is, sense-consciousness, each of the 6 sense-faculties—the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind—functioning on their own. How this occurs is shown in some detail in **Table 1.2.2**, where “sense-contact” (*phassa*) is the same as **(2) “contact”** or “sense-impingement” in Table 3.3.2.

The difference between these 2 diagrams is that in **Table 1.2.2** (the feeling cycle), the arising of feeling is represented synchronically (or proximally), that is, within the sense-faculty *in the same moment*, so to speak. **Table 3.3.2** (the formations cycle) depicts **(3) feeling** as giving rise to perception, which gives rise to **(4) formations**, and so on. This is represented diachronically (or distally), that is, over time, as part of a bigger process.³⁸

³³ As an intro, first see SD 56.22 (2.5).

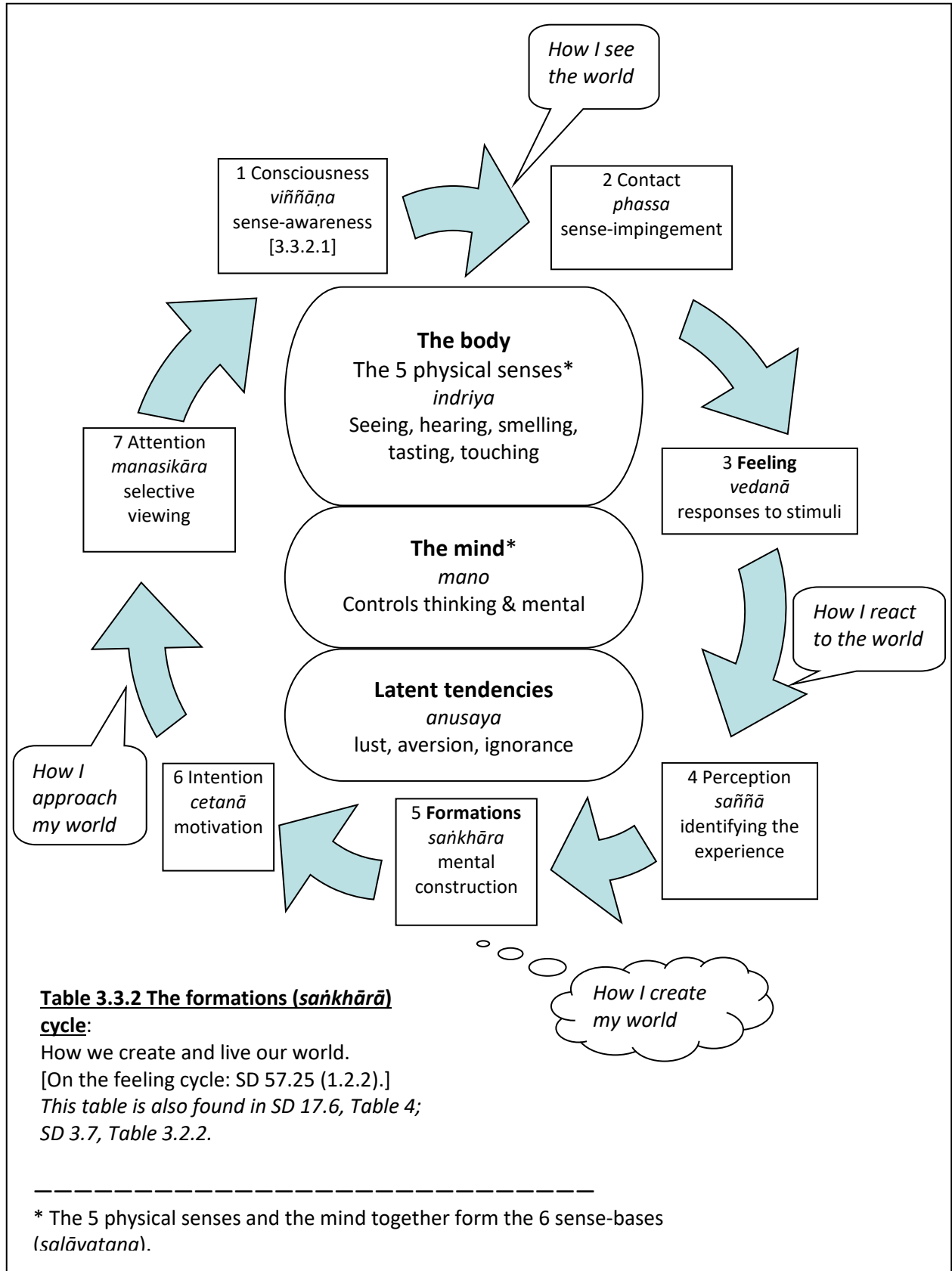
³⁴ Based on *APA College Dictionary of Psychology*, 2009: emotion.

³⁵ P D Premasiri, in his article on “Emotion” in *Ency Bsm* (1990, 5:57-64), gives an interestingly broader (perhaps too broad) Buddhist compass. *Saṅkhārā* refer to a key function of consciousness—that of karma forming—and this is what we should focus, not their contents.

³⁶ See SD 56.22 (2.5) Emotion.

³⁷ See **Dependent arising**, SD 5.16 (1.4, 4.1).

³⁸ For synchronic and diachronic applied to the 5 aggregates, see SD 3.7 (1.1).



3.3.2.2 Once we are conscious of a sense-object (a visual form, a sound, a smell, a taste, a touch or a thought), this is called **(2) “contact”** (*phassa*), the Buddhist term for “sensing” [3.3.2.1]. This means that we have directed our attention to a particular mental object, our mind’s image of an “external” object. It is called external (*bāhira* or *bahiddhā*) partly because we have been “stimulated” by an *external* object, but more so because, we have **projected** that image onto our mind’s monitor, so to speak. This is our very own, very private, limited, version of the reality out there. This is what we, as unawakened beings, work with, as a rule.

3.3.2.3 Take, for example, in a gathering of people, we don’t merely see people (manifestations of the 5 aggregates): we see “friends” (those we like), “enemies” (those we do not like) and “strangers” (those we do not know). When we spend just enough time, gazing at someone (even for microseconds), there is an internal mental commentary on how we feel about that person! This is our **preconscious** (which we keep secret),³⁹ our memory or profile of that person (or persons) based on our past experiences. This is our **(3) feeling(s)** (*vedanā*) about the person, whether we like him, dislike him, or should ignore him.

This is the weakest link in the cycle—when **feeling** arises but before we go on into perception—when we break the negative cycle (by, say, turning to the reflection on impermanence), or transform it into a wholesome cycle (by, say, cultivating lovingkindness).

3.3.2.4 Whether we like, dislike or don’t care about someone depends on our **(4) perception** of him. Temporally, this occurs *before* how we decide to react to that person. But, all this occurs so fast that we pay more attention to the reaction than to why we do so. We are not usually aware of this mental commentary, but simply let it influence our reactions. In other words, these are feedback, even instructions, from our **unconscious**, that is, the latent tendencies (*anusaya*), which are basically ancient conditionings of lust, dislike and ignorance.

From here, 1 of 2 psychological processes may occur in us:

- (1) we go on to create **karma** (by following the cycle [Table 3.3.2] until **(5) Formations**, and so on; or
- (2) we fall into a “**thinking**” (*vitakka*) loop and mentally proliferate (*papañceti*), as depicted in **the perception/proliferation cycle** [Table 8.1.2, SD 17.4].

3.3.2.5 How have these deep dark unconscious latent tendencies arisen? Each time we like someone or something, and react so, we feed or reinforce our latent tendency of **lust**; each time we dislike someone, we feed our latent tendency of hate (dislike); each time we ignore someone (through not knowing or boredom), we feed our ignorance. We have allowed the formations of karma—hence, we call them **(5) formations** (*saṅkhārā*).

These latent tendencies function on the preconscious level as **the 3 unwholesome roots** of greed (*lobha*), hate (*dosa*) and delusion (*moha*). These are the bad roots of motivation, creating bad karma. The good news is that when we understand this, we use our lovingkindness meditation to reduce, even remove, such reactive tendencies on a social level.

3.3.2.6 When it comes to **karma**, it never rains but pours. It’s like a hidden net: once we pull at its corner, the whole net comes out and overwhelms us. So, after **(5) formations**, we continue to labour with more **(6) intentions** (*cetanā*). At this stage—even if we are not caught in the mental proliferation rut [3.3.2.4]—we will be acting on some of our ideas. We will be on some kind of worldly quest running after some dream or vision.

³⁹ On the preconscious, see SD 17.8b esp (1.1.2; 2.2); SD 7.10 (3.3).

3.3.2.7 Our mind is focused but not on anything wholesome. Our **(7) attention** (*manasikāra*) will intensify on our **worldly quest**. We are driven outwardly into the world. Our senses are directed and primed for the worldly quest. So we are back to feeding our **(1) Consciousness** with the objects of our quest.⁴⁰

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(Vedanā) Anicca Sutta

The (Feeling) Discourse on Impermanence

S 36.9

1 Bhikshus, these **3 kinds of feelings** are impermanent, conditioned, dependently arisen, subject to destruction, subject to passing away, subject to fading away, subject to cessation.⁴¹

2 What are the 3?

Pleasant feeling, painful feeling, neither-painful-nor-pleasant-feeling.⁴²

3 These 3 kinds of feelings, bhikshus, are impermanent, conditioned, dependently arisen, subject to destruction, subject to passing away, subject to fading away, subject to cessation.

— evaṃ —

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⁴⁰ See SD 17.2 (1.3) Feeling and emotion.

⁴¹ *Tisso imā bhikkhave vedanā aniccā saṅkhatā paṭicca, samuppannā khaya, dhammā vaya, dhammā virāga, dhammā nirodha, dhammā.*

⁴² *Sukhā vedanā dukkhā vedanā adukkham-asukhā vedanā.*