Vedanā Nānatta Suttā 1 & 2
The Discourses on the Diversity of Feelings 1 & 2  |  S 14.4+5
Theme: From the sense-elements arise feelings
Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2021

1 Sutta summaries and significance

1.1 The 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 Saṁyutta: an overview

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

S 2.31 Dhātu Saṁyutta

S 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)2 [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

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

2 See also SD 10.16 (2.22.3).

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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.³

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 Saṅkappa, rāgo purisassa kāmo
2 n’ete kāma yāni citrāni loke
3 saṅkappa, rāgo purisassa kāmo
4 tiṭṭhanti citrāni tath’eva loke
5 ath’ettha dhīrā vinayanti chandan’ti

The thought of lust is a person’s desire:
there are no sensual pleasures in the wondrous in the world.
The thought of lust is a person’s desire.
The wondrous in the world remains just as they are.
So here⁶ 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,⁷ 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.

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³ For a graphic summary of these elements and processes, see SD 17.5 (Table 2.1).
⁴ S 103 na te.
⁵ “Wondrous,” citra, has a broad range of meanings: see (2.2.2.3).
⁶ “So here the wise” (ath’ettha dhīrā’ti atha etesu ārammanesu paṇḍitā chanda, rāgam vinayanti, “here then the wise removes lust and desire in the sense-objects,” SA 1:63). In other words, “here” refers to our minds.
⁷ 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

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締眼界生眼觸

not dependent on eye-contact arises eye-element,

非締眼觸生眼界

but dependent on

但締眼觸生眼觸

dependent on eye-contact arises eye-feeling,

非締眼触生眼受

not dependent on eye-feeling arises eye-contact,

但締眼触生眼受

but dependent on eye-feeling arises eye-craving,

締眼受生眼愛

dependent on eye-craving arises eye-feeling,

非締眼受生眼愛

not dependent on eye-craving arises eye-feeling,

但締眼受生眼愛

but dependent on eye-craving arises eye-feeling.

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,

非締種種愛生種種受。

not dependent on the diversity of cravings arises the diversity of feelings,

非締種種受生種種觸。

not dependent on the diversity of feelings arises the diversity of contacts,

但締種種觸生種種界。

But dependent on diversity of elements, arises the diversity of contacts,

締種種觸生種種受。

dependent on diversity of contacts, arises the diversity of feelings,

締種種受生種種愛。

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.
佛説是經已。 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 Saṁyutta

2.1.1 The Nānatta Vagga, the subchapter on “the diversity” of the elements, is the 1st section of the Dhātu Saṁyutta, the collection on the elements, the 3rd chapter (S 2.3) of the Nidāna vagga (the 2nd 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.

2.1.2 The internal senses

2.1.2.1 The Nānatta Vagga’s 1st sutta, also the 1st 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). 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.

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8 For a summary table of the diversity of external elements, see SD 17.5 (Table 2.1).
9 S 14.1/2:140 (SD 29.9).
10 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 2nd ed 2009:288 Table 7.4.

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S 2.3.1.4+5

Saṁyutta Nikāya 2, Nidānavagga 3, Dhātu Saṁyutta 1, Nānatta Vagga 4+5

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 = Saṁyutta 2, Nidānavagga 3, Dhātu Saṁyutta 1, Nānatta Vagga 4]

S 14.4/2:141 f

1 (The Blessed One was) dwelling at Sāvatthī.

2 “Bhikkhus,
dependent on the diversity of elements
arises the diversity of contacts;
dependent on the diversity of
arises the diversity of feelings.11

3 And what, bhikshus, is the diversity of elements?12 [142]

4 (1) The eye-element;
(2) the ear-element;
(3) the nose-element;
(4) the tongue-element;
(5) the body-element;
(6) the mind-element.
This is called the diversity of elements.

5 And how is it, bhikshus,
that dependent on the diversity of elements,
arises the diversity of contacts;
that dependent on the diversity of contacts,
arises the diversity of feelings?13

6 Bhikshus,
dependent on the eye element, arises
dependent on the ear-element, arises
dependent on the nose-element, arises
dependent on the tongue-element arises
dependent on the body element, arises

eye-contact;
feeling born of eye-contact.14
ear-contact;
feeling born of ear-contact.
nose-contact;
feeling born of nose-contact.
tongue-contact;
feeling born of tongue-contact.
body-contact;
feeling born of body-contact.

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11 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).
12 Foll this, SĀ 452 lists the 18 elements (abbrev: T99.2.116a8-9) (as in Dhātu Nānatta S, S 14.1, SD 29.9).
13 Foll this para, SĀ 452 adds: 緣種種受 生種種愛 (as above) (SĀ 452/T99.2.116a10-11).
14 Cakkhu, dhātuṁ bhikkhave paticcā upajjati cakkhu, samphasso cakkhu, samphassam paticcā upajjati cakkhu, -samphassa, jā vedanā.

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Dependent on **the mind-element**, arises mind-contact;
dependent on **mind-contact**, arises **feeling** born of mind-contact.\(^\text{15}\)

7 It is in this way, bhikshus,
that dependent on the diversity of elements,
arises the diversity of contacts;
that dependent on the diversity of contacts,
arises the diversity of feelings.”

— evaṁ —

**SD 58.8b**

**Vedanā Nānatta Sutta 2**

The 2\(^{nd}\) Discourse on the Diversity of Feelings

Ce No, vedanā, nānatta Sutta The Discourse on the Non-diversity of Feelings

[S 2.3.1.5 = Samyutta 2, Nidānavagga 3, Dhātu Samyutta 1, Nānatta Vagga 5]

S 14.5/2:142 f

1 At Sāvatthī.

2 “Bhikshus,
dependent on the diversity of elements,
arises the diversity of contacts;
dependent on the diversity of contacts,
arises the diversity of feelings.\(^\text{17}\)

2.2 Not dependent on the diversity of feelings, arises the diversity of contacts;
not dependent on the diversity of contacts, arises the diversity of elements.\(^\text{18}\)

3 And what, bhikshus, is the diversity of elements?\(^\text{19}\)

(1) The eye-element;
(2) the ear-element;
(3) the nose-element;
(4) the tongue-element;
(5) the body-element;
(6) the mind-element.

This is called the diversity of elements. \([§2.2\text{ }n]\)

\(^\text{15}\) SĀ 452 abbreviates these 2 lines and adds the same refrain on “craving” (as above): 綠意 *= 触生受生意 *= 触生愛 “dependent on the mind-element ... there arises feelings born of mind-contact. | ... there arise cravings born of mind-contact.” The last phrase is wrong (scribal error) and should read: “there arise cravings born of feeling.” The symbol *= peyyāla.

\(^\text{16}\) SĀ 452 gives a longer, different conclusion \([T99.2.116a14-21]. \[1.2.1\]

\(^\text{17}\) Foll this para (as in S 14.4), the Chin adds 綠種種受 生種種愛 “dependent on the diversity of feelings, there arises the diversity of cravings” \((SĀ 453/T99.2.116a24-25). \)Then, it lists the 18 elements.

\(^\text{18}\) SĀ 453 transposes these lines to immediately following §4 below. On the list of textual differences, see \((1.2.2.\) )

\(^\text{19}\) Foll this, SĀ 453 lists the 18 elements \((abbrev: T99.2.116a25-26)\) as in Dhātu Nānatta S, S 14.1, SD 29.9).

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4 And how is it, bhikshus, that dependent on the diversity of elements arises the diversity of contacts; that dependent on the diversity of contacts arises the diversity of feelings; \(^{20}\) that not dependent on the diversity of feelings arises the diversity of contacts; that not dependent on the diversity of contacts arises the diversity of elements?

5 (1) Dependent on the eye-element there arises eye-contact; Not dependent on feeling born of eye-contact not dependent on eye-contact

6 (2) Dependent on the ear-element there arises ear-contact; Not dependent on feeling born of ear-contact not dependent on ear-contact

7 (3) Dependent on the nose-element there arises nose-contact; Not dependent on feeling born of nose-contact not dependent on nose-contact

8 (4) Dependent on the tongue-element there arises tongue-contact; Not dependent on feeling born of tongue-contact not dependent on tongue-contact

9 (5) Dependent on the body-element there arises body-contact; Not dependent on feeling born of body-contact not dependent on body-contact

10 (6) Dependent on the mind-element there arises mind-contact; Not dependent on feeling born of mind-contact not dependent on mind-contact

11 It is in this way, bhikshus, that dependent on the diversity of elements there arises the diversity of contacts; dependent on the diversity of contacts there arises the diversity of feelings; \(^{20}\) dependent on the diversity of feelings there arises the diversity of contacts; dependent on the diversity of contacts there arises the diversity of elements.\(^{21}\)

— evaṁ —

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\(^{20}\) Immediately after this, SĀ 453 inserts “dependent on the diversity of feelings, there arises the diversity of cravings” (SĀ 453/T99.2.116a28).

\(^{21}\) SĀ 453 has a longer and different closing: see (1.2.2.3).