White Hall Meditation

The Second Arrow

Sallattha Sutta (SN 36:6)

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Introduction

A sutta or sutra in the Buddhist context is a discourse or sermon said to be delivered by the Buddha or delivered with his sanction. Many of the suttas have the common convention of the phrase, "Thus have I heard," certifying that the discourse was a first-person report by the Buddha's attendant, Ananda. Also, many of the suttas have a description of the setting noting where the Buddha was residing at the time, the audience, etc.

Ananda had a prodigious memory and the suttas were first put into writing in the Pali and Sanskrit languages after the Buddha's death when Ananda recited them at the first Buddhist council. These discourses are included in the Pali Canon otherwise known as the Tipitaka (the three baskets). The suttas are referenced by collection. For example, the Sallattha Sutta's reference is SN 36:6 (collection: Samyutta Nikaya, section 36, chapter 6). The website, Access to Insight (https://www.accesstoinsight.org/), contains many of the suttas.

Diagaku Rumme notes: "As the Buddha was about to die, Ananda asked him what he should rely on after his death, and the Buddha said, "Be a lamp onto yourself; make the dharma into a lamp rather than simply believing in my teachings." The reality that has come to be called the buddhadharma didn't belong to the Buddha, but rather belongs to all people who realize the dharma for themselves. It is only when we in the West realize this that we can begin to compose original sutras in our own languages, encouraging an ever-growing number of people to seek and realize the dharma."[i]

Here are some steps to studying a sutta:

1. Find a sutta on Access to Insight.org or another source such as In the Buddha's Words: An Anthology of Discourses from the Pali Canon (The Teachings of the Buddha) . Wisdom Publications.
2. Notice that there may be multiple translations. Thanissaro Bhikkhu or Bhikkhu Bodhi are good ones to start with.
3. Read the entire sutta
4. Read each paragraph and reflect on it. What is the Buddha trying to say?
5. After reflection, discern what the overall meaning and impact is to you.
6. Imagine that you are explaining the sutta to someone. What would you say?
7. If you have questions, feel free to contact a teacher.

We will read and discuss the Sallattha Sutta which is commonly referred to as the Second Arrow. Please note that the Buddha's teachings commonly used the male gender when referring to a person.

The Sallattha Sutta (my commentary in italics)

"Monks, an uninstructed run-of-the-mill person feels feelings of pleasure, feelings of pain, feelings of neither-pleasure-nor-pain. A well-instructed disciple of the noble ones also feels feelings of pleasure, feelings of pain, feelings of neither-pleasure-nor-pain. So what difference, what distinction, what distinguishing factor is there between the well-instructed disciple of the noble ones and the uninstructed run-of-the-mill person?"[ii]

The Buddha is addressing a group of monks and compares two persons, one who is not instructed in the teachings and one who is. The well-instructed disciple has studied and has realized the Four Principles of Suffering (The Four Noble Truths). He notes that both have the same feeling of pain, pleasure, or either pleasure nor pain. The Buddha asks what is the difference between the two persons?

"For us, lord, the teachings have the Blessed One as their root, their guide, & their arbitrator. It would be good if the Blessed One himself would explicate the meaning of this statement. Having heard it from the Blessed One, the monks will remember it."

"In that case, monks, listen & pay close attention. I will speak."

"As you say, lord," the monks responded to him.

The passages above where the monks are asking for Buddha to explain the teaching are included in many of the suttas.

The Blessed One said, "When touched with a feeling of pain, the uninstructed run-of-the-mill person sorrows, grieves, & laments, beats his breast, becomes distraught. So he feels two pains, physical & mental. Just as if they were to shoot a man with an arrow and, right afterward, were to shoot him with another one, so that he would feel the pains of two arrows, in the same way, when touched with a feeling of pain, the uninstructed run-of-the-mill person sorrows, grieves, & laments, beats his breast, becomes distraught. So he feels two pains, physical & mental.

The Buddha notes that when the uninstructed person feels physical pain, he becomes afflicted with mental anguish. The Buddha compares this to one who is shot with an arrow that causes physical pain and then shot with second arrow that causes mental pain. So this person is afflicted with two pains, physician and mental. The mental pain comes from the mind but since he doesn't know that, he reacts with great lamentation.

"As he is touched by that painful feeling, he is resistant. Any resistance-obsession with regard to that painful feeling obsesses him. Touched by that painful feeling, he delights in sensuality. Why is that? Because the uninstructed run-of-the-mill person does not discern any escape from painful feeling aside from sensuality. As he is delighting in sensuality, any passion-obsession with regard to that feeling of

pleasure obsesses him. He does not discern, as it has come to be, the origination, passing away, allure, drawback, or escape from that feeling. As he does not discern the origination, passing away, allure, drawback, or escape from that feeling, then any ignorance-obsession with regard to that feeling of neither-pleasure-nor-pain obsesses him.

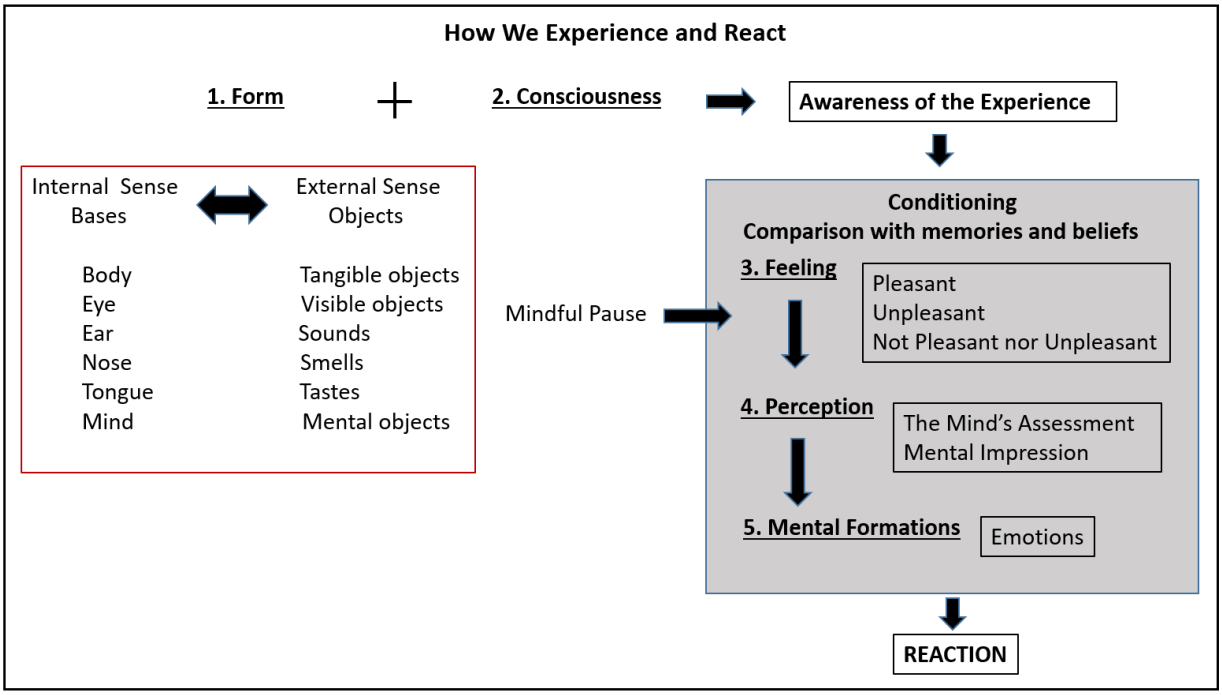
Once there is awareness of an experience such as physician pain, a feeling arises that is either pleasant, unpleasant, or neither pleasant nor unpleasant. This is a bodily sensation. In this case, the feeling is unpleasant and this person's perception is of mental pain. As this person feels this mental pain (the second arrow), he resists it, obsesses on it and seeks escape through sensual pleasure as a distraction from the pain. This is because he knows no other way to relieve the pain. Because he is uninstructed, he does not know that the nature of the second pain he is feeling: its origin, impermanence, attachment or other ways to deal with it. By resisting the pain and seeking sensual pleasure as an escape, he is getting no relief.

"Sensing a feeling of pleasure, he senses it as though joined with it. Sensing a feeling of pain, he senses it as though joined with it. Sensing a feeling of neither-pleasure-nor-pain, he senses it as though joined with it. This is called an uninstructed run-of-the-mill person joined with birth, aging, & death; with sorrows, lamentations, pains, distresses, & despairs. He is joined, I tell you, with suffering & stress.

This is a general teaching on feelings. The uninstructed person does not know the nature of feelings and so he remains attached to whatever he feels. Being attached to any feeling be it pleasant, unpleasant or neither pleasant nor unpleasent causes suffering.

"Now, the well-instructed disciple of the noble ones, when touched with a feeling of pain, does not sorrow, grieve, or lament, does not beat his breast or become distraught. So he feels one pain: physical, but not mental. Just as if they were to shoot a man with an arrow and, right afterward, did not shoot him with another one, so that he would feel the pain of only one arrow, in the same way, when touched with a feeling of pain, the well-instructed disciple of the noble ones does not sorrow, grieve, or lament, does not beat his breast or become distraught. He feels one pain: physical, but not mental.

The well-instructed person has wisdom in knowing and understanding Four Principles of Suffering. He knows suffering, the cause of suffering, the cessation of suffering and the path to follow. He knows that when experiencing the pain of first arrow, this is all that has occurred. In this way, he may have an unpleasant feeling, but this does not lead to mental pain. His perception is still one of physical pain. When an unpleasant feeling arises, the well instructed person knows ***to pause mindfully*** *to prevent the clinging and the perception of mental pain from arising. See below:*



The mindful pause can prevent misperceptions from arising. As Ruth King noted: "Simply stated, we perceive something through our senses. There is a sense organ and a sense object—eyes see, ears hear, nose smells, body feels, tongue tastes, and mind thinks. Once we perceive, we habitually jump to thoughts and feelings about what is being perceived. These thoughts and feelings, rooted in past experiences and conditioning, then influence the mood of our mind. When perception, thoughts, and feelings are repeated or imprinted through experiences, they solidify into view or belief. View then reinforces perception. This cycle becomes the way we experience and respond to the world."[iii]

"As he is touched by that painful feeling, he is not resistant. No resistance-obsession with regard to that painful feeling obsesses him. Touched by that painful feeling, he does not delight in sensuality. Why is that? Because the well-instructed disciple of the noble ones discerns an escape from painful feeling aside from sensuality. As he is not delighting in sensuality, no passion-obsession with regard to that feeling of pleasure obsesses him. He discerns, as it has come to be, the origination, passing away, allure, drawback, and escape from that feeling. As he discerns the origination, passing away, allure, drawback, and escape from that feeling, no ignorance-obsession with regard to that feeling of neither-pleasure-nor-pain obsesses him.

By not resisting the painful feeling, he does not attach to it. He stays with it rather than let the mind condition it and cause mental anguish.

"Sensing a feeling of pleasure, he senses it disjoined from it. Sensing a feeling of pain, he senses it disjoined from it. Sensing a feeling of neither-pleasure-nor-pain, he senses it disjoined from it. This is called a well-instructed disciple of the noble ones disjoined from birth, aging, & death; from sorrows, lamentations, pains, distresses, & despairs. He is disjoined, I tell you, from suffering & stress.

This is a general statement on feelings. As this well-instructed person becomes aware of the feelings of pleasure, pain, or neither pain nor pleasure, he doesn't hold on to them. He lets them go and does not suffer.

"This is the difference, this the distinction, this the distinguishing factor between the well-instructed disciple of the noble ones and the uninstructed run-of-the-mill person."

The discerning person, learned,
doesn't sense a (mental) feeling
of pleasure or pain:
This is the difference in skillfulness
between the sage
& the person run-of-the-mill.
For a learned person
who has fathomed the Dhamma,
clearly seeing this world & the next,
desirable things don't charm the mind,
undesirable ones bring no resistance.
His acceptance & rejection are scattered,
gone to their end,
do not exist.
Knowing the dustless, sorrowless state,
he discerns rightly,
has gone, beyond becoming,
to the Further Shore.

Translated by Thanissaro Bhikkhuattha
https://www.dhammatalks.org/suttas/SN/SN36_6.html

The moral of this discourse is pain is inevitable; suffering is optional.

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[i] What is a Sutra? By Diagaku Rumme https://www.lionsroar.com/what-is-a-sutra/

[ii] The Buddha is addressing a group of monks and compares two persons, one who is not instructed in the teachings and one who is. He notes that both have the same feels of pain, pleasure, or either pleasure nor pain. He asks what is the difference?

[iii] Ruth King Mindful of Race