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*Author:*

**Font Clos, Bernat**

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**What the Buddha Felt**

A Study of Vedanā in Early Buddhism

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# What the Buddha Felt:

## A Study of Vedanā in Early Buddhism

Bernat Font Clos

A dissertation submitted to the University of Bristol in accordance with the requirements for award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Arts, School of Humanities,  
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# Abstract

In this dissertation I explore the concept of *vedanā* ('feeling') in the early Buddhist texts, primarily those preserved in Pali. I argue that some recent attempts at understanding *vedanā* have relied too heavily on modern psychological models, leading to reductive views that exclude from it the emotions of happiness and sadness, misplacing the line that separates feelings from evaluations, and obscuring how *vedanā* makes sense fully in the context of Buddhist doctrine and ethics. I also defend that *pīti* (joy) is roughly synonymous with *somanassa* (happiness), and therefore can be treated as a feeling in the early discourses. This reveals a hedonic curve—going first to pleasant feelings, then to neutral ones—common across all major formulas and models of progress to awakening, suggesting that, from the affective-hedonic viewpoint of *vedanā*, the early Pali discourses present a consistent theory of liberation. I explore how these early texts use the motivational aspect of feelings to help practitioners advance towards liberation, by sublimating the natural turning away from the unpleasant into renunciation, and the natural pursuit of pleasure into seeking what is good and skilful. On this basis, they encourage practitioners to derive satisfaction from the disappearance of unskilful behaviours and mental factors, then to extend this capacity to access meditative states, and to delight in simplifying phenomenal experience even more. A consistent *vedanā* transformation underlies early Buddhist soteriology, which emerges as a form of refined hedonism.

To the memory of my grandfather, Josep Maria Font i Rius.

# Acknowledgements

I am incalculably grateful to my main supervisor, Rupert Gethin, who has taught me more than I can summarise about conducting research and approaching Buddhist texts. I am fully responsible for any shortcomings and unlearnt lessons due to my stubbornness. I thank him, Rita Langer, and my fellow students within the Arts Faculty for providing invaluable support through their warm humanity. I am also indebted to Benedetta Lomi, who helped me with queries about Chinese texts, and to Peter Harvey and Aleix Ruiz-Falqués, who at various times provided useful comments on points of my research. I thank my examiners, Maria Heim and Yael Shiri, for reading my dissertation so thoroughly and providing invaluable feedback and suggestions for improvement. I equally want to mention those who introduced me to Buddhist Studies and first taught me Pali: Nick Swann, Sarah Shaw and Richard Gombrich.

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Last but not least, I thank the Khyentse Foundation and the Robert H. N. Ho Family Foundation for funding my research.

## Author's Declaration

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the University's *Regulations and Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes* and that it has not been submitted for any other academic award. Except where indicated by specific reference in the text, the work is the candidate's own work. Work done in collaboration with, or with the assistance of, others, is indicated as such. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author.

SIGNED:

DATE: 20 July 2023

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# Introduction

## Overview

This dissertation explores the concept of *vedanā*—which I translate as ‘feeling’—in the early Pali Buddhist texts, primarily the four main *nikāyas*. My research is framed within an increased interest in this topic in the worlds of Buddhist Studies<sup>1</sup> and secular mindfulness,<sup>2</sup> and is also situated within a general ‘affective turn’ in Religious Studies.<sup>3</sup> This thesis argues that while the *suttas* point out a natural human tendency to turn away from the unpleasant and seek the pleasant, the path to liberation they propose does not combat this tendency, but is precisely built on it and uses it for the sake of liberation; that such a path is a form of refined hedonism, giving soteriological value to certain positive affects; that various models of that path share the same underlying hedonic curve, they proceed along a consistent affective-hedonic transformation; and that, according to these texts, one progresses to liberation by means of a hedonic training. This training consists in learning to find pleasure in absences—first, in the absence of unethical behaviours, thoughts and impulses, and then in the absence of elements of experience that do not have a negative moral valence but still involve subtle degrees of disturbance and unpleasantness.

The majority of existing scholarship on *vedanā* has focused on how it contributes to unawakened life, such as how it triggers craving and aversion and gives rise to clinging. Literature on *vedanā*’s role on the way to awakening has been restricted to analyses of the feelings present in *jhāna*, in more of an *accompanying* than *active contributor* role, and to how it can

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1 *The Definition, Practice, and Psychology of Vedanā: Knowing How It Feels*, ed. by John Peacock and Martine Batchelor (Routledge, 2019). This first appeared as *Contemporary Buddhism*, 19.1 (2018).

2 Mark Williams and others, ‘What Next After MBSR/MBCI? An Open Trial of an 8-Week Follow-on Program Exploring Mindfulness of Feeling Tone (Vedanā)’, *Mindfulness*, 13.8 (2022), 1931–44 <<https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-022-01929-0>>; Mark Williams and Danny Penman, *Deeper Mindfulness: The New Way to Rediscover Calm in a Chaotic World* (London: Piatkus, 2023).

3 *The Bloomsbury Research Handbook of Emotions in Classical Indian Philosophy*, ed. by Maria Heim and others (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021) <<https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350167803>>; Ariel Glucklich, *The Joy of Religion: Exploring the Nature of Pleasure in Spiritual Life* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020); Donovan O. Schaefer, *Religious Affects: Animality, Evolution, and Power* (Duke University Press, 2015), pp. 3–7 <<https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822374909>>.

lead to insight through observing its transient and conditioned nature. But scholars have not given that much attention, in a broad and systematic way, to the transformation of feeling in early Buddhist soteriology and the functions it ‘performs’ in it. Thus, after exploring the nature of *vedanā* and some ancient and modern debates about what belongs to it, I look at how progress to awakening *feels*, and how feeling is *used* in the service of that goal.

## Structure

The structure of my thesis and the order of its chapters reflects the genesis and evolution of my research, which took, as it often does, unexpected turns. Originally I set out with more of a broad direction than a well-defined destination. I wanted to join a scholarly conversation that seemed to be gathering steam, exemplified by a special issue of *Contemporary Buddhism* dedicated to *vedanā*<sup>4</sup> and later published as a monograph.<sup>5</sup> The main topics of that conversation became the material for chapters one and two, namely, how to understand *vedanā* as a category, how it relates to modern psychological categories, and where the boundaries are between what is a *vedanā*, an emotion, a mood, or an evaluation. I was also intrigued by an article where Tse-Fu Kuan points out how, while many scholars consider *pīti* is not a *vedanā*, this stance follows Theravāda exegesis alone, whereas other abhidharma systems *did* consider *pīti* a *vedanā*. This became the topic of my third chapter.

In this way, the first half of my dissertation explores general questions and discussions concerning *vedanā* that I saw alive in contemporary scholarship and that first piqued my curiosity. It is made of three chapters united by the question of *which things belong to the category ‘vedanā’* in the *nikāya* literature. A summarised conclusion from this first half is that the category of *vedanā* is intimately tied with Buddhist ethics and soteriology in the very way it is constructed and used, and quite linked to value judgments. Approaching it from the perspective of modern psychological categories like emotion or from distinctions between feelings and evaluations may obscure this. Buddhist traditions themselves have grappled with the boundaries of *vedanā* and what it includes, and have not always agreed.

In the second half of my dissertation—chapters four and five—I more properly build an

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4 Skilton, 2018. See first footnote of this introduction.

5 Peacock and Batchelor, *The Definition, Practice, and Psychology of Vedanā: Knowing How It Feels*.

argument and make a coherent proposal that hopefully contributes to the field of Buddhist Studies. (Of course, I hope chapters one to three still add something to the scholarly conversation.) This second half follows questions that emerged during the research and even writing of the first half, and which I felt had been less explored than others. Those questions are: do the early discourses see *vedanā* as actively helping people become awakened, rather than merely accompanying the process? If so, how? What happens if we look at the early Buddhist path to awakening, in a broad sense and across multiple models of progress, from the viewpoint of *vedanā*? What does that progress look like—or rather, feel like? What picture of early Buddhism emerges? My research suggests that, far from a mainly rational exercise, the early discourses engage people’s emotional life and affective tendencies before—or at least ‘in addition to’—trying to counter them or jump to a stance of mindful equanimity: in these texts, the natural turning away from the unpleasant is sublimated into renunciation, and the natural pursuit of the pleasant nourishes the quest for what is good and skilful. I devote more time to the latter. I argue that looking at the early Buddhist path ‘through the feeling glass’ reveals it as a form of refined hedonism that gives *soteriological value* to certain positive affects or pleasures, and I claim that this is consistent across all major models of progress to awakening. In a sense, we could say that *wisdom is hedonic*.

In the second half of the thesis, I engage with and rely a lot on the scholarship of Ariel Glucklich. He has probably produced the most systematic and perhaps significant attempt to study religions’ complicated relationship with pleasure, and the role that pleasure plays in them. Still, his impressive monograph stands out for its breadth, not its detailed analysis of any one particular tradition—though he does touch quite a bit on Indian religion. I attempt to enrich his picture in the case of (early Indian) Buddhism, continuing his task and adopting his heuristic device of three evolutionary types of pleasure: novelty, mastery and play. Building on several scholars’ work on feelings in *jhāna*, notably Bucknell, Harvey, Arbel and again Kuan, and bringing in Glucklich typology of pleasures, allows me to suggest yet another answer to the Bucknell’s ‘central question in Buddhist meditation theory’: *What is the first jhāna?* That answer is to regard the first *jhāna* as the transition between mastery and play pleasures, for mastery pleasure is related to that which has a negative moral valence, such as the five hindrances, and play pleasure is not—the subsequent elements that fall away in *jhāna*, like thought, have no intrinsic moral valence. This addresses a difference that the *nikāya* literature

*chooses* to make between the pleasant feelings of each *jhāna*, particularly those of the first and second: they arise *from* specific and different disappearances.

Glucklich's typology of pleasures also lets me see what is common across various models of progress to awakening and make sense of it, fulfilling my wish to go beyond just the *jhāna* model and widen the focus to include other formulas which, to me, describe the same soteriological progression. In this I am following—and expanding on—Gethin's observation, followed by Arbel, that there is a parallelism between *jhāna* and awakening factors. Thus, I attempt a more comprehensive exercise by trying to see progress to liberation, in a general way rather than one confined to a single model, from the perspective of *vedanā*. This matters for debates on *samatha* and *vipassanā*, on there being various paths to awakening, and on the role of *jhāna*. For my findings suggest that, from the affective-hedonic angle of *vedanā*, the early *suttas* propose a consistent theory of liberation—a point of debate among Buddhist scholars.

In assessing the soteriological value of spiritual pleasure, I question some scholarly views on the limitations of *jhāna* presented in the early texts, how those limitations should be understood in the context of the soteriology presented there, and how much emphasis we should put on them in our studies of those texts. By that I mean that, when the *suttas* discuss *jhāna*, they sing its praises while acknowledging some drawbacks, instead of highlighting its drawbacks while acknowledging it can also contribute or complement the path, and scholarly accounts of the *suttas* should reflect that emphasis. Specifically, I disagree with how Anālayo reads certain passages as conveying the dangers of deep *samādhi*. I also problematise interpreting the Brahmajāla Sutta as questioning or capping the soteriological value of spiritual pleasant feelings. Instead, I regard it as countering the association between pleasant feelings and final liberation. Thus, I see many of these passages as *precisely affirming* that spiritual pleasure, be it in the *jhāna* model or others, is *liberating* rather than only a feature of being liberated.

## Methodological aspects

The title of my dissertation is an obvious reference to Walpola Rāhula's *What the Buddha Taught*<sup>6</sup> and Richard Gombrich's *What the Buddha Thought*.<sup>7</sup> Beyond this playful tribute to the

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6 Walpola Rāhula, *What the Buddha Taught* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1997).

7 Richard F. Gombrich, *What the Buddha Thought* (London: Equinox Publishing, 2009).

scholarly tradition, I do not purport to continue their approaches. I do, however, follow a preference of Gombrich<sup>8</sup> and, instead of detailing all my methodology here, at the start, I discuss methodological points as they become relevant throughout the thesis. Nevertheless, I must give a general outline of my approach as well as its limitations.

I frequently use the expressions ‘early Buddhism’ or ‘early discourses’. Here I must be clear that my focus is the Pali *suttas*—this should be borne in mind when reading those expressions. I have systematically surveyed the four main *nikāyas* for discussions on *vedanā*, not just in the sense of instances of the category label ‘*vedanā*’, in a generic way, but also in the sense of discussions on what feels good (*sukha*, *somanassa*, *pīti*), what feels bad (*dukkha*, *domanassa*), and what feels neutral (*adukkhamasukha*, *upekkha*). I have also looked at the *Khuddaka Nikāya*, although given the heterogenous nature of that collection, I have omitted the sections usually considered late, or whose age or canonical status is harder to assess, such as the *Vimānavatthu*, *Petavatthu*, *Jātakas*, *Niddesa*, *Apadāna*, *Buddhavaṃsa* and *Cariyāpiṭaka*.<sup>9</sup> On the whole, I make fewer references to the *Khuddaka Nikāya*. Throughout the thesis, I do consult translated discourses from other textual lineages and existing comparative studies, but these serve as counterpoints that highlight either differences or synchronicities on specific points. While on occasion the expression ‘early discourses’ will refer to more than the Pali texts, this dissertation is not a systematic study of all the early Buddhist texts—from all transmission lineages—on the topic of *vedanā*. Its focus is primarily the Pali *suttas*, and secondarily, later Pali literature that interprets them, like *abhidhamma* works and the traditional commentaries and sub-commentaries.

I treat later Pali literature that comments on the discourses in a similar way I treat scholars, but just ancient ones. The very name ‘*abhidhamma*’, ‘about the *dhamma*’ (*abhi dhamme*), makes it clear this was a self-aware ‘second order exercise’,<sup>10</sup> and as such it presupposes a corpus that it interprets, comments on, expands upon, etc. And regardless of the antiquity of the

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8 Gombrich, *What the Buddha Thought*, p. 4.

9 K. R. Norman, *Pāli Literature: Including the Canonical Literature in Prakrit and Sanskrit of All the Hīnayāna Schools of Buddhism*, Vol. VII Fasc. 2 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1983), pp. 70–95.

10 Margaret Cone, *A dictionary of Pāli. Pt. 2: G - n* (Bristol: Pali Text Society, 2010), p. 198; Rupert Gettin, ‘Abhidhamma: Theravāda Thought in Relation to Sarvāstivāda Thought’, in *Routledge Handbook of Theravāda Buddhism*, ed. by Stephen C. Berkwitz and Ashley Thompson (London: Routledge, 2022), pp. 227–42 (p. 227); Norman, *Pāli Literature*, p. 97; Oskar von Hinüber, *A Handbook of Pāli Literature*, Indian Philology and South Asian Studies, v. 2 (Berlin ; New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1996), p. 64.

commentaries, it is undisputed they form a different body of texts than the discourses, if only by the mere fact they were preserved separately. In defining how I treat these sources, I am choosing to not confine myself to reading the *suttas* exclusively through the lens of the commentaries, which to me could conflate different layers of Buddhist thought, but I also state that ignoring them would be akin to disregarding the work of contemporary scholars on the *suttas*—essentially another form of commentary or ‘discussion of the meaning’ (*atthakathā*)—and it would continue an attitude of arrogance and disrespect for tradition not exempt from colonial undertones.<sup>11</sup> Buddhaghosa’s *Visuddhimagga* is also quite central among this later literature, given the impact it has had on Pali Buddhism, and it is particularly interesting to see not only where there seems to be a different view than in the *nikāyas*, but also, or even more, where he develops themes that are rather implicit in the discourses. I have consulted sub-commentaries when the commentary did not seem to clarify a *sutta*, or opened more questions than it answered—questions relevant to the specific point under discussion.

Scholarly opinion about what the early Buddhist texts are and how they came about can be simplified into two factions: those who hold they were fixed texts quite from the beginning, possibly spoken by the historical Buddha, which can be stratified as well as compared in order to arrive at a sort of original;<sup>12</sup> and those who allow more flexibility in their composition through improvisation, variation and playing with formulas.<sup>13</sup> Feeling closer to the latter position, I see the early texts as the tradition’s first attempt at understanding itself—at least

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11 A pitfall of this attitude has been recently pointed out in Bhikkhu Anālayo, ‘Clearing the Path Continues: Notes on Nāṇavīra Thera’s “Notes on Dhamma”’, *Journal of Buddhist Studies*, XVIII (2021), 97–118.

12 Alexander Wynne, ‘The Oral Transmission of Early Buddhist Literature’, *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, 27.1 (2004), 97–128; Mark Allon, ‘Early Buddhist Texts: Their Composition and Transmission’, *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, 2022, 523–56 <<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10781-021-09499-6>>; Bhikkhu Sujato and Bhikkhu Brahmāli, ‘The Authenticity of the Early Buddhist Texts’, *Journal of the Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies*, 5 (2015), Supplement to the Journal; Bhikkhu Anālayo, *A Comparative Study of the Majjhima-Nikāya* (Taipei: Dharma Drum Publishing, 2011), p. xxvi; Bhikkhu Anālayo, ‘“Visions of the Buddha”: A Critical Reply’, *Journal of Buddhist Studies*, XVIII, 1–36 (p. 12).

13 L. S. Cousins, ‘Pāli Oral Literature’, in *Buddhist Studies: Ancient and Modern*, ed. by P. Denwood and A. Piatigorsky (London: Curzon Press, 1983), pp. 1–11; Rupert Gethin, ‘The Mātikās: Memorization, Mindfulness, and the List’, in *In the Mirror of Memory: Reflections on Mindfulness and Remembrance in Indian and Tibetan Buddhism*, ed. by Janet Gyatso (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), pp. 149–72 (p. 156 ff); Gabriel Ellis, ‘Early Buddhism and Its Relation to Brahmanism: A Comparative and Doctrinal Investigation’ (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Warsaw, 2021); Eviatar Shulman, ‘The Play of Formulas in the Early Buddhist Discourses’, *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, 2021, 557–80 <<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10781-021-09491-0>>; Eviatar Shulman, ‘Clarifying and Advancing the Play of Formulas: A Response to Bhikkhu Anālayo’, *International Journal of Buddhist Thought and Culture*, 33.2 (2023), 257–89 <<https://doi.org/10.16893/IJBTC.2023.06.33.2.257>>. Nathan McGovern, ‘Protestant Presuppositions and the Study of the Early Buddhist Oral Tradition’, *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, 42 (2019), 449–91.

that we can access. Even admitting to the considerable care and dedication of the very first Buddhists, the process of remembering what the Buddha taught is also invariably a creative process. Brains do not retrieve information: they reconstruct and recreate it. Critiques of the more flexible model of early Buddhist orality seem to me, a former professional jazz musician, little informed about how improvisation works. Rather than an unfiltered free-flow, improvisation often consists in combining previously learnt blocks and motifs—called ‘riffs’ or ‘licks’—following an internalised harmonic grammar. This is not far from what we see in the discourses.

Therefore, more than the historicity of these texts, I am interested in the core ideas they convey. These are found crystallised in various formulas, as well as in less codified ways. The former likely reflects the early ‘editorial’ generation, whether or not it conforms to what the historical Buddha said or how he said it. Something that appears in a few discourses but has not coagulated into a codified formula is harder to assess. But when an *idea* appears both in stock formulas and in non-codified expressions, we can more safely consider it was central to the first generations of Buddhists. I apply an intertextual approach that treats similar or overlapping formulas as different versions of the same basic idea, different fingers pointing to the same moon, identifying what is shared instead of treating those formulas as referring to clearly distinct phenomena. Examples of this approach are taking different definitions of (*sammā*) *samādhi* as compatible and complementary; or treating *jhāna*, the awakening factors, the sequence of mindfulness of breathing and the gladness formula as likely pointing to a common experiential referent—I greatly expand on this at the beginning of the fifth chapter. I do not pretend that this approach can explain the totality of the earliest phase of Buddhist thought, nor that it explains away other ideas also found there. What it does, though, is identify themes and ideas that must have been widely accepted enough to say they characterize early Buddhism, at least according to the Pali texts—or, alternatively, debates and unresolved questions that characterize it as well.

Some notes on language. I use Pali terminology throughout, except when discussing Sanskrit texts. I do not follow a consistent habit of keeping all technical terms, and all titles of discourses, either always in Pali or always translated. However, in the way I alternate between those, I have tried to make sure the reader knows what I refer to. I have opted to naturalise

English plurals of Pali words, as in ‘*jhānas*’, for reasons of simplicity, readability and aesthetics—it makes no sense to write the Pali plural ‘*jhānāmi*’ in an English text, and ‘*jhāna-s*’ is just ugly. Lastly, at times I use the singular gender-neutral pronoun ‘they’,<sup>14</sup> based on how the early texts use the term ‘*bhikkhu*’ inclusively.<sup>15</sup> Let me now summarise the thesis’ five chapters and the scholarship with which they are in dialogue.

## Chapters summary

Chapter one, ‘What is *vedanā*?’, surveys the diversity of ways in which the early texts present *vedanā* or feeling, it applies a distinction between primary and secondary *vedanā* first introduced by Tse-fu Kuan, and then it looks at modern scholarship on the topic. I suggest that some scholars have focused on *vedanā*’s role as a trigger—of perceptions, attitudes, behaviours—and not given the same attention to how it results from and accompanies these too. Several authors featured in the issue of Contemporary Buddhism mentioned earlier exclude happiness and sadness, or emotion in general, from *vedanā*, and either sideline or forget secondary *vedanā*. I argue this slightly reductive and stems from misusing the modern concept of ‘emotion’ to understand early Buddhist maps of experience and their categories. Instead, I suggest to see these maps (and *vedanā*) through the lens of Buddhist soteriological ethics, and I defend that *vedanā* comprises some of the things contemporary psychology calls emotions.

In chapter two, ‘On feeling and evaluating’, I explore canonical usages of *sukha* (pleasure) and *dukkha* (pain) that, according to Steven Collins and Anālayo, lie outside the boundaries of *vedanā*. I claim this is at odds with both the discourses and traditional exegesis, which place that boundary elsewhere. This brings us to the evaluative nature of feelings and their dependence on perception (*saññā*). Premasiri, Somaratne, and Collins already introduced the idea that the terms *sukha* and *dukkha* are used to convey value. What I add is that these usages are still an extension of their felt counterpart. This foregrounds a key aspect of the early Buddhist training that has received little attention: that the *nikāyas* describe practitioners as learning to experience the neutral as a subtle pleasure. With this, the theme of refined hedonism is

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14 ‘A Brief History of Singular “They”’, *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2018 <<https://public.oed.com/blog/a-brief-history-of-singular-they/>> [accessed 15 July 2023].

15 Alice Collett and Bhikkhu Anālayo, ‘Bhikkhave and Bhikkhu as Gender-Inclusive Terminology in Early Buddhist Texts’, *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, 21 (2014), 760–97.

already introduced, as well as Buddhism’s use of the motivational aspect of *vedanā*—to turn away from what feels bad and seek what feels good—in service of liberation.

Chapter three, ‘Joy, a disputed citizen of Feelingtown’, is probably the most comparative in nature of all the thesis. It traces abhidharma perspectives on whether joy (*pīti*) belongs to the bundle of feelings (*vedanākkhandha*) or conditioning forces (*sankhārakkhandha*). Then, it looks back to the discourses in order to get a clearer picture of what joy is there, finding that carnal and spiritual joy (*sāmisā/nirāmisā pīti*) seem virtually synonymous with domestic and renunciant happiness (*gehasita/nekhammasita somanassa*) respectively, and happiness (*somanassa*) is undoubtedly a *vedanā*. Therefore, I defend that we have grounds to read joy in the discourses as belonging to the bundle of feelings, as Kuan and Buswell intuited, and Sarvāstivādins and Yogācārins did. Yet scholars like Peter Harvey and Lance Cousins have relied on the Theravādin view alone: that joy is a *sankhāra*, not a *vedanā*—I suggest this view could have arisen due to (re)interpreting *jhāna* factors when sensory awareness is off the table. But ‘category politics’ aside, even Buddhaghosa’s descriptions of *pīti* and *somanassa* are virtually identical. To take those equivalences seriously reveals how various early Buddhist practices have basically the same outcome in affective-hedonic terms, including how insight gives rise to positive affect. Overreliance on the Theravāda interpretation can obscure this a little, and I think it also leads the forementioned scholars to overlook how the concept of *pīti* evolves in Pali literature, going from something more mental to something more physical and associated with intensity, and from something related to a mental act of reviewing to something more associated with anticipation. These views are sometimes projected back onto the discourses.

I zoom out in chapter four, ‘Indian religion through the feeling glass’. There I explore how Jainism, Ājīvakism and the Brahmanical traditions relate to pain and pleasure in the context of religious goals and practice—albeit with a limited use of their sources and much more reliance on Buddhist texts. Set against this context, early Buddhists stand out as quantitative hedonists who propose pleasure as a path to liberation. I must admit my use of sources results in a biased picture; or, put differently, it should be taken mainly as a picture of how Buddhists saw themselves as opposed to others, which is already informative. This chapter treats feelings as active contributors to spiritual progress, and it analyses the particular functions pleasant and painful feelings perform in that progress. I discover that, in affective-hedonic terms, early

Buddhism is closer to Brahmanism than to other non-Vedic ascetic movements, a continuity that has been underappreciated given a scholarly habit of depicting Buddhists and Brahmins as confronted, as observed by Joseph Walser. The affinity and influence between them also helps explain the terminology of *pīti*. In this chapter, I bring together the scholarship of Jaini, Bronkhorst, Dundas, Basham, Olivelle, Balcerowitz, and many others, but I focus quite precisely on the question of pleasure and pain, using the lens of Glucklich's work. I mainly disagree with Anālayo's insistence on the dangers of spiritual pleasure and deep *samādhi*, challenging some of his readings of certain texts.

Finally, chapter five, 'How does it feel to wake up?', identifies a shared hedonic curve underlying early Buddhist soteriology. As explained earlier, this is an expansion of the parallels observed by Rupert Gethin between *jhāna* and awakening factors, as well as correspondances that Bucknell and Kuan pointed out and I started to engage with in the third chapter. First, I explain the hedonic curve in detail through the various formulas and models that embody it: how it rises to more and more pleasure, how it mellows towards neutral feeling, and how before final liberation it goes back down to unpleasantness and up to pleasantness. I argue this curve includes a bodily dimension, despite certain reluctance about this from traditional exegesis. Given my reading of *pīti* as the feeling *somanassa*, I obviously depart from how Harvey or Cousins understand the feelings present in *jhāna*, and the crux of my interpretation is that I allow two *vedanās* per *jhāna*. After this, I look at the hedonic curve more diachronically, showing how the early Buddhist gradual path conforms to a pattern of hedonic *training*. This underappreciated dimension enriches our understanding of how, according to the Pali discourses, one enters *jhāna* and advances towards liberation—again, an advance I also look at from the viewpoint of the awakening factors, the gladness formula, mindfulness of breathing, and even certain elements of the eightfold path. I find that the cohesive element of this training is learning to find pleasure in absences: first, in the absence of unethical qualities; then, in the absence of ethical or ethically-neutral qualities.

# Chapter 1:

## What is *vedanā*?

In this chapter I present the notion of *vedanā* as it emerges from the early Buddhist texts. After a brief introductory analysis, I survey all the different ways the early texts classify and present *vedanā*. Then, in the last section I look at how Buddhist scholars have conceptualised it and how they have used the modern category of ‘emotion’ to that end. I conclude that scholars have often taken a reductive view of *vedanā*, influenced by modern psychological maps of the inner life and scientific approaches, whereas *vedanā* makes sense fully in the context of Buddhist ethics and soteriology. I contend that more complex emotional experiences like feeling happy or depressed are, from the perspective of the early texts, *vedanā* as well, and that by recognising this we gain a better understanding of the roles and dynamics of *vedanā* in early Buddhism, as I hope the rest of this dissertation demonstrates.

### Introducing feeling

The simplest way to explain the Buddhist concept of *vedanā*, often translated as ‘feeling’, is to say that it concerns the pleasure and pain of lived experience. Just as temperature is a spectrum going from hot to cold, with a fuzzy mild zone in the middle, so *vedanā* is a spectrum going from pleasant to painful, with a fuzzy neutral zone in the middle. *Vedanā* refers to how experience feels good or pleasant, feels bad or unpleasant or painful, or feels neutral. At its simplest, it can be conveyed by the emojis of a smiley face, a sad face, and a face with a flat mouth. The early Buddhist discourses explain it like this:

Mendicants, why do you say ‘feeling’? It feels, therefore it is called ‘feeling’. And what does it feel? It feels pleasure, it feels pain, and it feels neither pleasure nor pain.<sup>1</sup>

Here are some examples of *vedanā*: the pleasant feeling of unheralded winter sunshine

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<sup>1</sup> SN iii 86: *kiñ ca bhikkhave vedanaṃ vadetha? vedayati ti kho bhikkhave tasmā vedanā ti vuccati. kiñ ca vedayati? sukham pi vedayati, dukkham pi vedayati, adukkhamasukham pi vedayati.*

caressing your cheek, the unpleasant feeling of hearing someone sing out of tune, feeling happy because of a compliment you have received, or feeling down when the thought ‘You are a failure’ pops out of nowhere. Neutral feeling seems harder to grasp, but in fact it is a very familiar—though unacknowledged—companion. Seeing these very words right now probably feels neutral: these black squiggles clustering together against a white background are neither a pleasant nor an unpleasant sight.

Buddhism treats feeling as an ever-present dimension of human experience. We may normally think of feeling as something above a certain threshold of intensity, but the Buddhist tradition does not: feeling is the whole spectrum. Any time we would say that we ‘feel nothing’ is in fact an instance of neutral feeling. This is comparable to how we may only consciously register the temperature of something we touch when it is quite warm or cold, but not at room temperature—and yet everything is at *some* temperature. Similarly, there is always a *vedanā* connected to our sensory and mental experiences. But before going any further, let me throw in a discouraging note from the *Mahāvedalla Sutta* (MN 43):

Feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*) and awareness (*viññāna*) are mixed, not separate; and you cannot completely pull them apart in order to tell the difference between them.<sup>2</sup>

This early Buddhist discourse appears to warn us that attempts to define *vedanā* in the abstract are at best an approximation, and—I would add—are only to a limited extent relevant or even necessary. In practice, one cannot isolate this dimension of experience. The clear lines we draw conceptually will be less clear in actual experience. Because of this reason, the navigational definition provided above will suffice. It is most fruitful to think of *vedanā* in terms of what it allows us to see, not what *it* is. It is hardly meaningful to spend much time pondering what temperature or *vedanā* are in themselves, for they are simply a door to what actually matters: the hot, the cold, and the lukewarm; the pleasant, the painful, and the neutral.

In this spirit, I first look at how the early discourses speak about *vedanā*, and only afterwards attempt to define or conceive of *vedanā* in a way that follows from the raw data, bringing in the work of different scholars and of the Buddhist exegetical tradition. For now the central

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<sup>2</sup> MN i 293: *yā c’ āvuso vedanā yā ca saññā yañ ca viññānaṃ ime dhammā saṃsatthā no visaṃsatthā. na ca labbhā imesaṃ dhammānaṃ vinibbhujitvā vinibbhujitvā nānākaraṇaṃ paññāpetuṃ.*

question that will guide us along the canonical fields is ‘What do the early discourses talk about when they talk about *vedanā*?’

The early discourses speak of feeling (*vedanā*) in various ways and use multiple models. Within these various analyses, we can discern three principles, parameters or variables that are often used: hedonic tone, origin, and ethics. Hedonic tone is what gives us the various segments of the spectrum: the positive—*sukha* (pleasant), *somanassa* (happy)—the negative—*dukkha* (painful, unpleasant), *domanassa* (unhappy, sad)—and the central bit of the spectrum—*adukkhamasukha* (neutral, indifferent, literally ‘neither painful nor pleasant’), *upekkhā* (equanimous).<sup>3</sup> The expressions ‘hedonic tone’ and ‘hedonic valence’, using the ancient Greek word for pleasure, *hēdonē* (ἡδονή), have found currency in modern psychological discourse. Some have used it as a translation of *vedanā* generally,<sup>4</sup> but I will be restricting it to the particular sense specified here, and whenever I need to stress this dimension of feeling.

The principle of ‘origin’ concerns the ‘input source’. This gives us models such as six types of feelings based on the sense fields, which in Buddhism are the five physical senses plus the mind—visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile and mental—or two types of feelings—bodily (*kāyika*) and mental (*cetasika*).<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, all feelings are a mental phenomenon, even though they involve the body.<sup>6</sup> As Sue Hamilton notes, ‘descriptions of what feelings are emphasise the way they arise’.<sup>7</sup> The early discourses reflect this by stressing that feeling depends on ‘contact’ and is born from it. ‘Contact’ (*phassa*) is a technical term describing the meeting of a sense stimulus, a sense organ, and the awareness that arises upon that encounter. Thus, the eye and sights give rise to visual awareness; these three together are called visual contact,<sup>8</sup> and

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3 I use ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ in the way one might speak of positive and negative affect.

4 See Akincano M. Weber, ‘Hedonic Hotspots, Hedonic Potholes: *Vedanā* Revisited’, *Contemporary Buddhism*, 19.1 (2018), 7–30 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/14639947.2018.1443417>>.

5 Reat sees these as two aspects of every feeling (Noble Ross Reat, ‘Some Fundamental Concepts of Buddhist Psychology’, *Religion*, 17.1 (1987), 15–28 (p. 23) <[https://doi.org/10.1016/0048-721X\(87\)90080-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/0048-721X(87)90080-7)>), an interpretation critiqued by Hamilton. Instead, she hypothesises that bodily refers to the tactile sense alone, while all others fall into the mental. But she admits some sources would not confirm this, so perhaps she leaves it open (Sue Hamilton, *Identity and Experience: The Constitution of the Human Being According to Early Buddhism* (London: Luzac Oriental, 1996), p. 44).

6 Rupert Gethin, *Buddhist Maps of the Mind and Body: A Study of Buddhist Thought in the Theravāda, Sarvāstivāda and Yōgācāra Abhidharma*, (forthcoming); Bhikkhu Anālayo, *From Craving to Liberation - Excursions into the Thought-World of the Pāli Discourses (I)* (New York: Buddhist Association of the United States, 2009), p. 81.

7 Hamilton, *Identity and Experience*, p. 46.

8 The Buddhist tradition disagreed on whether contact is merely a name for that threefold correlation or a thing of its own emerging from it. The former position, which I am implicitly taking here, was held by the Sautrāntikas and the early Pāli exegetes in the *Nettipakaraṇa*. Later Theravādins and Sarvāstivādins argued for the latter

then arises a feeling that, despite being a mental phenomenon, is ‘born of visual contact’ (*chakkhusamphassajā vedanā*). The same, of course, applies to the other senses.<sup>9</sup> To illustrate how intimately feeling depends on contact, the discourses offer the simile of fire sticks: fire sticks produce heat when rubbed against each other, but as soon as they stop touching the heat ceases.<sup>10</sup>

Lastly, the ethical principle looks at how feelings relate to what Buddhism deems skilful (*kusala*) and unskilful (*akusala*), also translated as wholesome and unwholesome.<sup>11</sup> This involves whether feelings are connected to greed, aversion, or ignorance—the so-called three fires or unskilful roots, more recently called ‘reactivity’—or not. Those that are it calls ‘carnal’ (*sāmisa*) or ‘domestic’ (*gehasita*), and those that are not it calls ‘spiritual’ (*nirāmisa*) or ‘renunciant’ (*nekkhammasita*).<sup>12</sup> Ethical distinctions of feeling are also concerned with whether the subject conceives of experience as transient and subject to change or not. In following chapters I look at these ethical distinctions of feeling in more detail, but this is enough for the purposes of presentation.

These are then three main principles or variables in which the texts analyse feeling: hedonic tone, origin, and ethics. Some models use one of these principles alone, others two, and others combine all three. We can think of them as axes, determining feelings’ location in a three-dimensional chart. Thus, I use these three principles as a heuristic device to help us understand the elements at play in each of the models of feeling we find in the discourses, without any pretense that they cover the entirety of those elements, only the most frequent variables.

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interpretation. The discussion is recounted at Y. Karunadasa, *The Theravāda Abhidhamma: Its Inquiry into the Nature of Conditioned Reality*, HKU: CBS Publication Series (Hong Kong: Centre of Buddhist Studies, The University of Hong Kong, 2010), p. 125 ff.

9 See, for example, the *Madhupīṇḍika Sutta*—MN 18 at MN i 108.

10 SN ii 97, SN iv 215, SN v 212, MN iii 242.

11 L. S. Cousins, ‘Good or Skillful? Kusala in Canon and Commentary’, *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, 3 (1996), 136–64; Gethin, *Buddhist Maps*.

12 There is ambiguity in whether *nekkhamma* should be understood as ‘renunciation’ or ‘desirelessness’. Given how in this context it is juxtaposed with a term referring to house (*geha*), ‘renunciation’ seems more appropriate; but the dual meaning need not be excluded. See Rupert Gethin, *The Buddhist Path to Awakening*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oneworld, 2001), p. 192.

## The varieties of felt experience

It is time to let the early texts speak. We will take as a guide the Discourse on the Hundred and Eight (*Aṭṭhasata Sutta*, SN 36.22), which is a table of contents listing the several ways in which the Buddha explained feeling. Such claim, at least, is how the text begins.<sup>13</sup> The number a hundred and eight does not seem coincidental, but is rather an auspicious number with quite a lot of symbolism. For example, the popular Pali chant of recollecting the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha, consists of a hundred and eight syllables.<sup>14</sup> The list of a hundred and eight feelings appears in three other places, two of which narrate a discussion over how many feelings there are.<sup>15</sup> With a parallel in Chinese, fragments extant in Sanskrit, and a Sanskrit commentary preserved in Tibetan translation,<sup>16</sup> this is no doubt an important teaching.

In the Pali texts, the discussion involves the mendicant Udāyī and the carpenter Pañcakaṅga. Udāyī says there are three kinds of feeling—pleasant, painful, and neutral—but Pañcakaṅga argues there are only two—pleasant and painful—because the neutral is in fact a refined and peaceful pleasure.<sup>17</sup> The Buddha settles the argument by pointing out he has presented feeling in myriad ways: two feelings as well as three feelings, but also five, six, eighteen, thirty-six, and a hundred and eight feelings. To these, the Chinese and Tibetan versions add three more: one, four, and innumerable feelings. We can call this the ‘*bahurvedanīya* spirit’, after one of the Pali discourses presenting this teaching, for the word *bahurvedanīya* means ‘many things to be felt’, or more idiomatically, ‘many feelings’. Any theory of *vedanā* should embody such a spirit if it is to remain loyal to the purported teachings of the Buddha, instead of resembling Udāyī or Pañcakaṅga. These texts that narrate their disagreement perfectly answer our guiding question (What do the early discourses talk about when they talk about *vedanā*?) because they are, explicitly, a presentation of all the ways the Buddha is said to have spoken about it. However, beyond presenting the list they do not actually explain what the two feelings are, or

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13 SN iv 231: *aṭṭhasatapariyāyaṃ vo, bhikkhave, dhammapariyāyaṃ desessāmi*.

14 Steven Collins and Justin McDaniel, *Wisdom as a Way of Life: Theravāda Buddhism Reimagined* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020), p. 125.

15 The *Bahurvedanīya Sutta* (MN i 396), the *Pañcakaṅga Sutta* (SN iv 223), and the *Bhikkhu Sutta* (SN iv 228)—the latter does not feature the discussion.

16 Anālayo, *Comparative Majjhima*, pp. 335–38.

17 M i 396: *na kho bhante Udāyī tisso vedanā vuttā bhagavatā, dve vedanā vuttā bhagavatā: sukhā vedanā, dukkhā vedanā. yāyaṃ bhante adukkhamasukhā vedanā, santasmim esā pañāte sukhe vuttā bhagavatā ti*.

the three, etc. The Chinese and Tibetan versions do, but the Pali tradition has kept this explanation separately—in the *Atthasata Sutta*. For this reason, the Udāyī-Pañcakaṅga debate serves as context, and will be thoroughly analysed in the next chapter, but to explore the many kinds of feeling we will use the *Atthasata Sutta* and other fragments.

The *Atthasata Sutta* starts with a twofold analysis:

These are called the two feelings: bodily and mental.<sup>18</sup>

This would be the simplest analysis ‘by origin’.<sup>19</sup> Next comes the threefold analysis ‘by hedonic tone’:

These are called the three feelings: pleasant, painful, and neutral.<sup>20</sup>

One discourse claims these are mutually exclusive: a pleasant feeling is not painful, and so on.<sup>21</sup> But there is a tension here with the equally canonical view that a neutral feeling can also be a mild instance of another hedonic tone—we have just seen Pañcakaṅga defend this, with the Buddha’s approval.<sup>22</sup> These first two models use only one variable: origin and hedonic tone, respectively. A passage in the *Cūlavedalla Sutta* (MN 44) seems to connect them, suggesting that one model can include another:

Friend Visakha, anything that is experienced bodily or mentally as pleasant or agreeable is pleasant feeling. Anything that is experienced bodily or mentally as painful or disagreeable is painful feeling. Anything that is experienced bodily or mentally as neither agreeable nor disagreeable is neither-pleasant-nor-painful feeling.<sup>23</sup>

This paragraph defines feeling in a very informal and all-encompassing manner. This will become relevant later on when defining *vedanā* in general and asking whether certain emotions fit into it or not.

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18 SN iv 231: *kāyikā ca cetasikā ca, imā vuccanti bhikkhave dve vedanā.*

19 One should note that, however, these are not the two feelings that Pañcakaṅga defended! Those were pleasant and painful. Chapter 2 addresses this matter.

20 SN iv 232: *sukhā vedanā dukkhā vedanā adukkhamasukhā vedanā, imā vuccanti bhikkhave tisso vedanā.*

21 MN i 500: *yasmim Aggivessana samaye sukhaṃ vedanaṃ vedeti n’ eva tasmim samaye dukkhaṃ vedanaṃ vedeti na adukkhamasukhaṃ vedanaṃ vedeti, sukhaṃ y’ eva tasmim samaye vedanaṃ vedeti.*

22 I deal with this idea in the next chapter, and expand on it in the fifth. I believe this flexible perspective makes more sense of *vedanā* as a spectrum and has more explanatory power regarding the hedonic progression towards liberation.

23 MN i 302: *yaṃ kho, āvuso Visākha, kāyikaṃ vā cetasikaṃ vā sukhaṃ sātāṃ vedayitaṃ ayaṃ sukhaṃ vedanā. yaṃ kho, āvuso Visākha, kāyikaṃ vā cetasikaṃ vā dukkhaṃ asātāṃ vedayitaṃ ayaṃ dukkhā vedanā. yaṃ kho, āvuso Visākha, kāyikaṃ vā cetasikaṃ vā n’ eva sātāṃ nāsātāṃ vedayitaṃ ayaṃ adukkhamasukhā vedanā ti.*

Here it is fitting to make a brief excursion into the slightly further territory of the abhidharma. While the Sarvāstivāda abhidharma held that all senses can be pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral,<sup>24</sup> Theravādins developed things differently. The Dhammasaṅgāṇī gives neutral feeling for the senses of sight, sound, smell and taste,<sup>25</sup> but either pleasure or pain for the sense of touch.<sup>26</sup> As its commentary explains, the sense of touch is never neutral because it is a stronger and more direct sensory impact, whereas the other senses have a weaker impact and feel neutral.<sup>27</sup> It is then the mind that interprets experiences as either pleasant or unpleasant. The Sarvāstivāda position seems to align with the early texts in a more straightforward manner. See, for example, how the famous Discourse on Fire (*Āditta Sutta*, SN 35.28) says that ‘whatever pleasant, painful, and neutral feeling that arises dependent on visual contact is burning’ with the fires of greed, aversion, and delusion.<sup>28</sup> This passage acknowledges that visual feeling can have all three hedonic tones, and it is applied to feelings dependent on contact with the other physical senses and the mind. My aim is not to say that Theravādins went astray from the discourses, but to point out how they developed the idea of stronger and weaker impacts and notice how this affects feeling, for the hedonic spectrum has a relation to intensity—further chapters touch on this repeatedly.

The next classification we find in the *Atthasata Sutta* combines the principles of hedonic tone and origin to produce five ‘faculties’ (*indriya*): the faculty of pleasure (*sukhindriya*), the faculty of pain (*dukkhindriya*), the faculty of happiness (*somanassindriya*), the faculty of unhappiness or sadness (*domanassindriya*), and the faculty of equanimity (*upekkhindriya*). It appears mostly in the *Indriya Saṃyutta*, as is logical. Rupert Gethin and Pe Maung Tin translate ‘(controlling) faculty’<sup>29</sup> given the connection to the Vedic god Indra, suggesting that things called *indriya* exert a certain power, influence, or control over a particular area, e.g. the physical senses, and

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24 Gethin, *Buddhist Maps*.

25 As indicated by Lance Cousins, neutral feeling will still ‘shade towards’ the pleasant when it results from skilful acts, and towards the unpleasant when it results from unskilful acts. See L. S. Cousins, ‘The Paṭṭhāna and the Development of the Theravādin Abhidhamma’, *Journal of the Pali Text Society*, 9 (1981), 22–46 (p. 31).

26 Dhs 431, 443, 556.

27 As 263. See also the discussions in C. A. F. Rhys Davids, *A Buddhist Manual of Psychological Ethics of the Fourth Century B.C. (Dhammasaṅgāṇī) (I)* (Royal Asiatic Society, 1900), p. lxiv, 117 n. 1; *A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma <Abhidhammattha Saṅgaha>* by Anuruddha, trans. by Bhikkhu Bodhi and Narāda, 4th edition (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 2016), p. 41 ff; Karunadasa, *The Theravāda Abhidhamma*, pp. 107–8.

28 SN iv 19: *yam p’ idaṃ cakkhusamphassapaccayā upphajjati vedayitaṃ sukhaṃ vā dukkhaṃ vā adukkhamasukhaṃ vā tam pi ādittaṃ. kena ādittaṃ? rāgagginā, dosagginā, mohagginā ādittaṃ.*

29 Gethin, *The Buddhist Path to Awakening*, p. 104ff; *The Expositor <Atthasālinī>* by Buddhaghosa, trans. by Pe Maung Tin, Translation Series, 8/9 (London: Pali Text Society, 1976).

the five spiritual qualities<sup>30</sup> to be cultivated. In this they follow the exegetical tradition.<sup>31</sup> At the same time, the PED suggests that the five faculties may amount to little more than our *capacity* to experience pleasantness, unpleasantness and neutrality.<sup>32</sup> The power this exerts, of course, is not contested.

This is how the five faculties are described in the *Indriya Saṃyutta*:

This is called the faculty of pleasure: bodily pleasure and comfort, the pleasant and agreeable feeling born from bodily contact. This is called the faculty of pain: bodily pain and discomfort, the painful and disagreeable feeling born from bodily contact. This is called the faculty of happiness: mental pleasure and comfort, the pleasant and agreeable feeling born from mental contact. This is called the faculty of unhappiness: mental pain and discomfort, the painful and disagreeable feeling born from mental contact. This is the faculty of equanimity: neither agreeable nor disagreeable feeling, whether bodily or mental.<sup>33</sup>

As in the quote from the *Cūlavēdalla Sutta* above, this is very all-encompassing. It also suggests correspondences between classifications of feeling, such as that the faculty of happiness, for example, is ‘agreeable feeling born from mental contact’. This is more explicit later:

The faculties of pleasure and happiness should be seen as pleasant *vedanā*. The faculties of pain and unhappiness should be seen as painful *vedanā*. The faculty of equanimity should be seen as neither-pleasant-nor-painful *vedanā*.<sup>34</sup>

The five faculties split the pleasant and the painful hedonic tones into bodily and mental. Thus, in this model the words *sukha* and *dukkha* refer only to bodily feelings. I will render them as pleasure and pain, respectively. In terms of mental feelings, the pleasant is called *somanassa*, which I will translate as happiness, and the painful or unpleasant is called *domanassa*, for which

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30 These are faith (*saddhā*), energy or courage (*virīya*), mindfulness (*sati*), collectedness (*samādhi*) and wisdom (*paññā*) (SN v 193). To avoid confusion, I will refer to this fivefold set of *indriya* as the ‘spiritual qualities’, and reserve ‘faculties’ for the set that concerns us here.

31 Karunadasa, *The Theravāda Abhidhamma*, p. 216.

32 Thomas Williams Rhys Davids and W. Stede, *The Pali Text Society’s Pali-English Dictionary* (Luzac, 1966), p. 331.

33 SN v 209: *katamañ ca bhikkhave sukhindriyaṃ? yaṃ kho bhikkhave kāyikaṃ sukhaṃ kāyikaṃ sātāṃ kāyasamphassaṃ sukhaṃ sātāṃ vedayitaṃ, idaṃ vuccati bhikkhave sukhindriyaṃ. katamañ ca bhikkhave dukkhindriyaṃ? yaṃ kho bhikkhave kāyikaṃ dukkhaṃ, kāyikaṃ asātāṃ kāyasamphassaṃ dukkhaṃ asātāṃ vedayitaṃ, idaṃ vuccati bhikkhave dukkhindriyaṃ. katamañ ca bhikkhave somanassindriyaṃ? yaṃ kho bhikkhave cetasikaṃ sukhaṃ cetasikaṃ sātāṃ manasamphassaṃ sukhaṃ sātāṃ vedayitaṃ, idaṃ vuccati bhikkhave somanassindriyaṃ. katamañ ca bhikkhave domanassindriyaṃ? yaṃ kho bhikkhave cetasikaṃ dukkhaṃ, cetasikaṃ asātāṃ manasamphassaṃ dukkhaṃ asātāṃ vedayitaṃ, idaṃ vuccati bhikkhave domanassindriyaṃ. katamañ ca bhikkhave upekkhindriyaṃ? yaṃ kho bhikkhave kāyikaṃ vā cetasikaṃ vā n’ evasātāṃ nāsātāṃ vedayitaṃ, idaṃ vuccati bhikkhave upekkhindriyaṃ.*

34 SN v 209: *tatra bhikkhave yañ ca sukhindriyaṃ yañ ca somanassindriyaṃ sukhā sā vedanā dattḥabbā. tatra bhikkhave yañ ca dukkhindriyaṃ yañ ca domanassindriyaṃ dukkhā sā vedanā dattḥabbā. tatra bhikkhave yadidaṃ upekkhindriyaṃ adukkhamasukhā sā vedanā dattḥabbā.*

I reserve the terms unhappiness and sadness. Therefore, if a text or passage has both pairs of terms, we may work from the assumption that it uses *sukha* and *dukkha* to mean bodily feelings, unless we have other reasons to question that. But if it uses only the threefold model, it may not always be clear whether *sukha* and *dukkha* refer to bodily or mental feelings, or to both.

For neutral feeling, however, there is only one faculty, that of equanimity (*upekkhindriya*). Why has neutral feeling not been split into bodily and mental? The early discourses do not provide an answer to this, but Vasubandhu offers the following reasoning:<sup>35</sup> while pleasant and painful mental feelings require a mental operation (*vikalpana*), the neutral does not, so it is felt in the same way as bodily neutral feeling; both are equally devoid of conceptuality and both arise spontaneously; for these reasons, only one faculty is recognised. Perhaps we could understand this in relation to the idea that some impacts are weak and therefore neutral, until the mind makes a decision about them. Another difference between this analysis and previous one is that the five terms that name the faculties appear as nouns,<sup>36</sup> whereas in the threefold model *sukha*, *dukkha*, and *adukkhamasukha* are used as adjectives—they take the feminine gender to agree with *vedanā*.<sup>37</sup>

The *Atthasata Sutta* continues with the six feelings discussed before, a classification by origin: feeling born of visual contact, feeling born of auditory contact, feeling born of olfactory contact, feeling born of gustatory contact, feeling born of tactile contact, and feeling born of mental contact. Eighteen discourses present *vedanā* in this way, again mostly from the *Samyutta Nikāya* (see Figure 1).

The next two categories in the *Atthasata Sutta* represent a change in complexity. First, continuing with the ascending progression, the principles of hedonic tone and origin (in its sixfold formulation) are combined into eighteen feelings called *upavicāra*, a term translators render in various ways. I will use ‘rumination’.

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35 Louis de La Vallée Poussin, *L'Abhidharmakośa de Vasubandhu*, 6 vols (Brussels: Institut Belge des Hautes Études Chinoises, 1923), p. 115ff.

36 Margaret Cone glosses *domanassa* as both a neuter noun and an adjective, and places *domanassindriya* under the entry as adjective, although she translates the compound as a genitive *tappurisa*: ‘the sensation faculty of dejection; unhappiness’. It is not clear how she understands *domanassa* as an adjective here. See Cone, *G - n*, p. 442.

37 A digital search of a phrase like ‘*sukhāya vedanāya*’ in the canon will suffice to show this. See also the discussion in Peter Harvey, ‘The Four Ariya-Saccas as “True Realities for the Spiritually Ennobled”: The Painful, Its Origin, Its Cessation, and the Way Going to This -- Rather than “noble Truths” Concerning This’, *Buddhist Studies Review*, 26.2 (2009), 197–227 (pp. 217–20) <<https://doi.org/10.1558/bsrv.v26i2.197>>.

These are called the eighteen feelings: six ruminations with happiness, six ruminations with unhappiness, and six ruminations with equanimity.<sup>38</sup>

The noun *upavicāra* refers to ‘ranging over (mentally)’.<sup>39</sup> So does the verb form *upavicarati*, which features as well in a discourse that explains this type of feeling.<sup>40</sup> Their close relative *vicarati* means to move about, to wander.<sup>41</sup> Whence to ponder, to meditate upon, or to ruminate. It may be a warranted association or perhaps just a coincidence that cattle, so common in canonical imagery, ruminate-*upavicarati* in both senses: they chew things over, and they range about.

Sue Hamilton has interpreted this otherwise, as ‘ways (presumably according to the senses) of paying attention to (*upavicāra*) joy, grief and indifference’,<sup>42</sup> which is how she translates *somanassa*, *domanassa*, and *upekkhā*, respectively. Her reading differs in two respects: the meaning of the term *upavicāra*, and the interpretation of the whole sentence. Given how she translates the term, she seems to read it through the technical sense that the exegetical tradition ascribes to the compound *vitakkavicāra* in the context of *jhāna*.<sup>43</sup> How justified is this? It is difficult to completely rule out meditation as a context for a teaching. Yet some of these *upavicāra* are linked to unhappiness, which cannot be associated with *jhāna*.<sup>44</sup> Therefore, even if to this day scholars discuss what *vitakkavicāra* means in *jhāna*,<sup>45</sup> the rendering ‘paying attention’ does not seem the most appropriate here—something more specific seems to be meant.

In the Analysis of the Elements (*Dhātuvibhaṅga Sutta*, MN 140), Bhikkhu Sujato translates

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38 SN iv 232: *cha somanassupavicārā cha domanassupavicārā cha upekkhupavicārā, ima vuccanti bhikkhave aṭṭhārasā vedanā.*

39 Margaret Cone, *A dictionary of Pāli. Pt. 1: A - kh* (Oxford: Pali Text Society, 2001), p. 472. She also gives ‘preoccupation’ and ‘occupies oneself with’.

40 M iii 239.

41 Rhys Davids and Stede, p. 615.

42 Hamilton, *Identity and Experience*, p. 44.

43 L. S. Cousins, ‘Buddhist Jhāna: Its Nature and Attainment According to the Pali Sources’, *Religion*, 3.2 (1973), 115–31 (p. 122) <[https://doi.org/10.1016/0048-721X\(73\)90003-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/0048-721X(73)90003-1)>; Paul J. Griffiths, ‘Buddhist Jhāna: A Form-Critical Study’, *Religion*, 13.1 (1983), 55–68 (p. 59) <[https://doi.org/10.1016/0048-721X\(83\)90005-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/0048-721X(83)90005-2)>.

44 AN iii 207.

45 Three examples from 2019: Bhikkhu Anālayo, ‘The Role of Mindfulness in the Cultivation of Absorption’, *Mindfulness*, 10.11 (2019), 2341–51 (p. 2345) <<https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-019-01206-7>>; Roderick S. Bucknell, ‘What Is the First Jhāna? The Central Question in Buddhist Meditation Theory’, in *Engaging Asia: Essays on Laos and beyond in Honour of Martin Stuart-Fox*, ed. by Desley Goldston (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2019), pp. 392–415; Rupert Gethin, ‘The Jhānas in the Buddhist Path to Liberation: The Theravāda Perspective’, in *Meditación Y Contemplación: Caminos Hacia La Paz (Budismo Theravada Y Mística Teresiana): Meditation and Contemplation: Pathways to Peace (Theravada Buddhism and Teresian Mysticism)*, ed. by Francisco Javier Sancho (Burgos: Grupo Editorial Fonte, 2019), pp. 177–206 (p. 187).

*upavicāra* as ‘preoccupation’, and Bhikkhu Bodhi as ‘mental exploration’.<sup>46</sup> Bodhi thus represents a middle ground between Sujato and Hamilton, since ‘mental exploration’ can be read both discursively and non-discursively. Now, addressing the whole sentence, for Hamilton the object of one’s *upavicāra* is the happiness, unhappiness, or equanimity; these are, to use her understanding, what one pays attention *to*. But the text (MN 140) says something different:

On seeing a form with the eye, one ruminates about a form that causes happiness, one ruminates about a form that causes unhappiness, one ruminates about a form that causes equanimity.<sup>47</sup>

The direct object of *upavicāra* is rather a sensory object or idea that then becomes the basis of a certain feeling.<sup>48</sup> According to the commentary on the *Atthasata Sutta*, the happiness, unhappiness, and equanimity is what accompanies the rumination,<sup>49</sup> pointing to how it feels to ruminate about a particular stimulus. Thus, U Thittila translates ‘to examine with mental pleasure’, etc.<sup>50</sup> Gathering all this, I treat *upavicāra* as some form of discursive activity *about* something that *feeds into* happiness, unhappiness, or neutrality. This model adds a layer not seen explicitly in previous models: discursive activity. That such discursive activity is approached as a form of *vedanā* is also supported by how, in *The Analysis of the Elements*, the ruminations take the logical place of *vedanā*, immediately following contact (*phassa*).<sup>51</sup>

So we could ask: do the eighteen feelings *directly* or *actually* describe feelings? Or do they rather describe forms of thinking? The discourses are perfectly capable of saying ‘rumination-induced feelings’, but they do not: they say ‘feeling-inducing ruminations’. Is this significant? Not too much, but a little. On the one hand this follows the habit of not defining *vedanā* in the abstract or in isolation, but often, as Sue Hamilton remarked, by its process of arising—by origin. In this case the origin is more complex, as it starts with a sensory or mental impression and then involves discursiveness, another mental layer. On the other hand, it seems to stress

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46 Bhikkhu Bodhi, ‘Dhātuvibhaṅgasutta’, *SuttaCentral* <<https://suttacentral.net/mn140/en/bodhi>> [accessed 15 July 2023]; Bhikkhu Sujato, ‘Dhātuvibhaṅgasutta’, *SuttaCentral* <<https://suttacentral.net/mn140/en/sujato>> [accessed 15 July 2023].

47 MN iii 239: *cakkhunā rūpaṃ disvā somanassatthānīyaṃ rūpaṃ upavicarati, domanassatthānīyaṃ rūpaṃ upavicarati, upekkhātthānīyaṃ rūpaṃ upavicarati.*

48 This is clearly the appropriate meaning of -tthānīya for these compounds, as in Cone, *G - n*, p. 259.

49 Spk iii 82: *aṭṭhārasake chasu iṭṭhārammaṇesu somanassena saha upavicaranti ti somanassūpavicārā. Sesadvaye pi eseva nayo. iti ayam desanā vicārasena āgatā, taṃsāmpayuttānaṃ pana somanassādīnaṃ vasena idha aṭṭhārasa vedanā vedītabbā.*

50 *The Book of Analysis (Vibhaṅga): The Second Book of the Abhidhamma Piṭaka*, trans. by U Thittila, Pali Text Society Translation Series, 39 (Oxford: Pali Text Society, 2002), p. 492 (Vibh 381).

51 The ruminations appear in the same position in the *Salāyatanavibhaṅga Sutta* at MN iii 216. More often, the six elements in these kinds of progressions are the six senses, as in the *Vedanānānatta Sutta* (SN ii 141).

that another type of feeling is the ruminating itself about this and that. To mull over my coming weekend may feel quite nice, it may depress me, or it may feel rather neutral, depending on many factors. Of course, nowhere are thinking and feeling equated as one and the same thing, even if the discursive activity of *upavicāra* is here flexibly accepted as a form of *vedanā*.<sup>52</sup> Let us remember the *Mahāvedalla Sutta*'s remark<sup>53</sup>—perhaps descriptions of feeling cannot avoid reflecting how mixed it is with other mental functions.

The eighteen-fold classification is interesting for two related reasons, linked to our guiding question. One, because it shows that ‘when the early discourses talk about *vedanā*’ they do not obsess over the type of stuff they discuss—as in a body sensation, a thought, or even a mood, as we will see shortly. This is in keeping with the *bahuvedanīya* spirit. And two, because it describes feelings that result *from* rumination, not *in* rumination. The eighteen include within *vedanā* the *outcome*—and accompanying feeling—of thinking activity. These two points will matter below when addressing recent scholarship on the topic.

If this kind of feeling does not arise simply upon sensory contact, neither does the next one our guiding text presents us: the thirty-six feelings.

These are called the thirty-six feelings: six domestic happinesses and six renunciant happinesses, six domestic unhappinesses and six renunciant unhappinesses, six domestic equanimities and six renunciant equanimities.<sup>54</sup>

So far this is the first analysis to engage the ethical variable, and it does so in addition to hedonic tone and origin. The ethical variable here is the distinction between domestic (*gehasita*) and renunciant (*nekkhammasita*)—or, in Chinese texts, those related to attachment or dispassion.<sup>55</sup> For details as to what those feelings consist of, we need to peek into the other one discourse that discusses them, the Analysis of the Six Spheres (*Salāyatanavibhaṅga Sutta*, MN 137).<sup>56</sup> This text calls the thirty-six feelings *sattapadā*, which translators render variously:

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52 Jayarava Attwood's view would make sense of this too, for it sees the boundaries between these different phenomena more blurred in early Buddhism. See Jayarava Attwood, ‘Defining Vedanā: Through the Looking Glass’, *Contemporary Buddhism*, 19.1 (2018), 31–46 (p. 33) <<https://doi.org/10.1080/14639947.2018.1450959>>.

53 MN i 293: *yā c' āvuso vedanā yā ca saññā yañ ca viññāṇaṃ ime dhammā saṃsaṭṭhā no visamsaṭṭhā. na ca labbhā imesaṃ dhammānaṃ vinibbhujitvā vinibbhujitvā nānākaraṇaṃ paññāpetum.*

54 SN iv 232: *cha gehasitāni somanassāni, cha nekkhammasitāni somanassāni, cha gehasitāni domanassāni, cha nekkhammasitāni domanassāni, cha gehasitā upekkhā, cha nekkhammasitā upekkhā; imā vuccanti, bhikkhave, chattiṃsa vedanā.*

55 Bhikkhu Anālayo, *Perspectives on Satipaṭṭhāna* (Cambridge: Windhorse Publications, 2013), p. 130.

56 The commentary to the *Aṭṭhasata Sutta* also cites the *Salāyatanavibhaṅga Sutta*.

‘modes for creatures’ (Horner<sup>57</sup>), ‘positions of beings’ (Bodhi<sup>58</sup> and Sujato<sup>59</sup>), and ‘states to which beings are attached’ (Thanissaro,<sup>60</sup> who later changed ‘states’ to ‘emotions’<sup>61</sup>). Margaret Cone gives, among others, ‘(metaphysical or spiritual) condition, state’.<sup>62</sup> From all these emerges the impression of a state or situation that affects people, something dwelt in. The Analysis of the Six Spheres describes domestic happiness like this:

Happiness arises when you consider it a gain to obtain forms known by the eye that are desired, pleasing, connected to worldly matter; or when you recall those previously obtained that have gone, ceased, changed.<sup>63</sup>

The text repeats the same for sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations and ideas—hence the sixfold nature. My domestic happiness derives from my having nice experiences or from remembering them. If, instead, I do not succeed in having nice experiences, or I remember their lack in the past, what will arise in me will be domestic unhappiness.

These feelings are not a restatement of the sixfold classification according to the senses, but sit on particular conceptions and ways of thinking: as Mathieu Boisvert and Tse-fu Kuan point out, they depend more heavily on the activity of *saññā*.<sup>64</sup> Moreover, the following explanation will show they all arise from mental contact, which is also in conformity with the *Vibhaṅga*.<sup>65</sup> Instead of a mere pleasant sight, like a Mediterranean coastline, the happy feeling described here arises from considering it (*samanuṇassatī*) a gain to see it, or from remembering the trip we took there in 2012. In turn, a domestic unhappy feeling does not come from an ugly landscape but is rather the pain of not seeing that beloved coastline now and considering it a loss, or the

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57 *The Collection of The Middle Length Sayings: Majjhima-Nikāya.*, ed. by Isaline B. Horner, 3 vols (London: Pali Text Society, 1977), III, p. 263.

58 *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, trans. by Bhikkhu Bodhi and Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2009), p. 1067.

59 Bhikkhu Sujato, ‘Saḷāyatanaṅgasutta’, *SuttaCentral* <<https://suttacentral.net/mn137/en/sujato>> [accessed 15 July 2023].

60 Thānissaro, ‘Salayatana-Vibhaṅga Sutta: An Analysis of the Six Sense-Media’, *Access to Insight* <<https://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.137.than.html>> [accessed 15 July 2023].

61 Thānissaro, ‘MN 137 Saḷāyatana-Vibhaṅga Sutta | An Analysis of the Six Sense-Media’, *Dhamma Talks* <<https://www.dhammadata.org/suttas/MN/MN137.html>> [accessed 15 July 2023].

62 Margaret Cone, *A dictionary of Pāli. Pt. 3: P - bh* (Bristol: Pali Text Society, 2020), p. 185.

63 MN iii 217: *cakkhuvīññeyyānaṃ rūpānaṃ iṭṭhānaṃ kantānaṃ manāpānaṃ manoranānaṃ lokāmisapaṭisaṃyuttānaṃ paṭilābhaṃ vā paṭilābhato samanupassato pubbe vā paṭiladdhapubbaṃ atītaṃ niruddhaṃ vipariṇataṃ samanussarato uppajjati somanassaṃ.*

64 Mathieu Boisvert, *The Five Aggregates: Understanding Theravāda Psychology and Soteriology* (Waterloo, Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1995), p. 76; Tse-Fu Kuan, *Mindfulness in Early Buddhism: New Approaches through Psychology and Textual Analysis of Pāli, Chinese, and Sanskrit Sources*, Routledge Critical Studies in Buddhism Series (London ; New York: Routledge, 2008), p. 26.

65 Vibh 382.

pain of remembering that in 2020 we had to cancel our holiday there because of the coronavirus outbreak. As in the previous classification, at least some of these feelings require active thinking, either about the present or the past. We can also see how these feelings depend on perceptions like ‘desired’ or ‘pleasing’.

Domestic equanimity breaks the pattern. Instead of having to do with obtaining or not obtaining anything, it refers to an unawakened person who experiences an equanimous feeling in relation to any sense object. Here is how the *Salāyatanavibhaṅga Sutta* explains it:

On seeing a form with the eye, equanimity arises in a foolish, confused and untrained ordinary person, who has not conquered their limitations and the fruits of actions, and who does not see the drawbacks. Such an equanimity does not go beyond forms, and so it is called domestic equanimity.<sup>66</sup>

The mention of drawbacks reminds us of the Discourse on the Arrow (*Salla Sutta*, SN 36.6), which explains how, for the unawakened, neutral feelings are underlain by the tendency to not understand their arising, passing away, gratification, *drawback*, and emancipation.<sup>67</sup> Equanimity is unlike domestic happiness and unhappiness because those depend on notions of gain and loss, and with such perceptions a neutral feeling would hardly arise; but it resembles them in that all three belong to the untrained person.

What about renunciant feelings? Whether they be happiness, unhappiness, or equanimity, renunciant feelings rely on seeing the transient, unstable nature of phenomena, so they relate to what Buddhism calls insight. They all begin with the same passage:

When you know the transiency of forms, their change, fading, and ceasing, you truly see with perfect wisdom that both before and now all forms are transient, unsatisfactory, and subject to change.<sup>68</sup>

In the first case, this is followed by ‘and happiness arises’ (*uppañjati somanassam*). The commentary compares such happiness to a king contemplating his wealth, an image evoking

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66 MN iii 219: *cakkhunā rūpaṃ disvā uppañjati upekkhā bālassa mūlhasa puthujjanassa anodhijjanassa avipākajjanassa anādinavadassāvino assutavato puthujjanassa. yā evarūpā upekkhā, rūpaṃ sā nātivattati. tasmā sā upekkhā gehasitā ti vuccati.*

67 SN iv 208: *tassa tassa vedanānaṃ samudayaṃ ca atthaṅgamaṃ ca assādaṃ ca ādīnavaṃ ca nissaraṇaṃ ca yathābhūtaṃ appajānato, yo adukkhamasukhāya vedanāya avijjāmusayo, so anuseti.*

68 MN iii 217-219: *rūpaṇaṃ tv’ eva aniccatam viditvā vipariṇāmaṃ avirāgaṃ virodhaṃ, pubbe c’ eva rūpā etarahi ca sabbe te rūpā aniccā dukkhā vipariṇāmadhammā ti evametam yathābhūtaṃ sammappaññāya passato.* The passage on renunciant unhappiness has *disvā* instead of *passato*.

great satisfaction and relishing.<sup>69</sup> Moreover, the commentary brings attention to verses 373-374 of the Dhammapada, which explain how such wise contemplation pours forth as joy (*pīti*) and gladness (*pāmojja*). In a nutshell: insight feels good.

In the second case, the passage above is followed by ‘and you establish a yearning for the greatest liberations’:

‘When will I enter and dwell in those spheres in which the noble ones enter and dwell now?’ As you establish such a yearning for the greatest liberations, unhappiness arises conditioned by it.<sup>70</sup>

The feeling of insight into impermanence, thus, may be rather bittersweet. While those who experience renunciant feelings have a certain level of wisdom, they have not yet reached liberation—which is how the commentary understands the ‘greatest liberations’ (*anuttarā vimokkhā*).<sup>71</sup> Therefore, the ‘noble ones’ in the context of the quote above must refer to awakened beings rather than the other three types of noble persons: stream-enterers, once-returners, and non-returners.

In the third case, the same insight arouses equanimity (*upējati upekkhā*). We can gather from this that, according to the early discourses, insight can be accompanied by feelings of any hedonic tone, logically of a mental origin. Insight may feel good, it may give rise to sad feelings, or one may rest in equanimity. I take this up again in the last chapter when analysing the shared hedonic curve underlying early Buddhist soteriology.

At this juncture we must note that the list of a hundred and eight feelings excludes an important analysis of feeling, encountered throughout the discourses, that also engages the ethical principle: carnal and spiritual feelings—*sāmisā* and *nirāmisā*, respectively. Often the model speaks of pleasure (*sukha*), joy (*pīti*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*) of the carnal and the spiritual kinds.<sup>72</sup> Carnal and spiritual pain (*sāmisā dukkha* and *nirāmisā dukkha*) do not seem to play an actual role in the discourses beyond being listed rather mechanically in just a few places, and they are never defined. For the sake of clarity, exploring how these relate to domestic and renunciant feelings will have to wait until the third chapter. For now, let me just

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69 Ps v 23.

70 MN iii 218: *anuttāresu vimokkhesu pihaṃ upatthāpeti: ‘kudāssu nāmāhaṃ tadāyatanam upasampajja viharissāmi yadariyā etarahi āyatanam upasampajja viharantī ti iti anuttāresu vimokkhesu pihaṃ upatthāpayato upējati pihaṃ paccayā domanassaṃ.*

71 Ps v 23.

72 See the *Nirāmisā Sutta* (SN 36.31, at SN iv 235) and chapter 3.

anticipate my conclusions. We can pair domestic happiness with carnal pleasure and joy, and domestic equanimity with carnal equanimity. We can likewise connect renunciant happiness with spiritual pleasure and joy, and renunciant equanimity with spiritual equanimity. Sadly, domestic and renunciant unhappiness find no dance partner.<sup>73</sup>

The last classification is just the thirty-six feelings in each of the three times: past, future, and present<sup>74</sup>—hence a hundred and eight. Since domestic feelings include the results of thinking *about* the past, these hundred and eight must refer to the feelings themselves happening in the past, present, or future. To all this, the Chinese parallel (SĀ 485)<sup>75</sup> and Tibetan commentary add three other analyses.<sup>76</sup> They begin with the one type of feeling: painful (*dukkha*). In the end, all feelings are *dukkha* because of their transiency.<sup>77</sup> This is a case of ‘evaluative *vedanā*’. Anālayo has argued that ‘In this statement, however, *dukkha* does not refer to a type of feeling’<sup>78</sup> despite the fact it is literally called the one type of feeling in a discourse about the many types of feeling. But this is a bigger question that I will tackle in the next chapter. The parallels also feature a fourfold model of feeling that anticipates how abhidharma will classify types of consciousness: feelings attached to the planes of sense-desire, of form, of the formless, and feelings unattached. Finally, these texts end with ‘innumerable feelings’. SĀ 485 explains it as feelings ‘with regard to this and that’, while the Tibetan text quotes: ‘Here whatever is felt is called and comes to be reckoned as feeling tone’.<sup>79</sup> This recognises the open nature of these analyses, in the same way Rupert Gethin has discussed the abhidharma lists of *dhammas* as open.<sup>80</sup>

Thus far, this is the initial analysis of how the discourses classify and present *vedanā*. Figure 1

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73 For another account connecting these two ethical classifications, see Keren Arbel, *Early Buddhist Meditation: The Four Jhānas as the Actualization of Insight*, Routledge Critical Studies in Buddhism (New York: Routledge, 2017), p. 128ff.

74 SN iv 232: *atītā chattiṃsa vedanā, anāgatā chattiṃsa vedanā, paccuppannā chattiṃsa vedanā; imā vuccanti, bhikkhave, aṭṭhasataṃ vedanā*.

75 At T ii 123c21.

76 Mun-keat Choong, *The Fundamental Teachings of Early Buddhism: A Comparative Study Based on the Sutra-Anga Portion of the Pali Samyutta-Nikaya and the Chinese Samyukta-Agama* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2000), p. 113; Anālayo, *Comparative Majjhima*, p. 336.

77 SN iv 216.

78 Anālayo, *Comparative Majjhima*, p. 337.

79 Bhikkhunī Dhammadinnā, ‘Discourses on Feeling Tones (*Vedanā*) Quoted in Śamathadeva’s *Abhidharmakośopāyikā-Ṭīkā*’, *Indian International Journal of Buddhist Studies*, 20, 2019, 159–84 (p. 177).

80 Rupert Gethin, ‘Body, Mind and Sleepiness: On the Abhidharma Understanding of *Styāna* and *Middha*’, *Journal of the International College for Postgraduate Buddhist Studies*, XXI (2017), 254–216 (pp. 125, 145–47); see also Dhammadinnā, p. 177.

shows a table of where those presentations occur in the four main *nikāyas*.<sup>81</sup> The *Samyutta Nikāya* wins by far, probably due to its many repetitions, and the three hedonic tones are the most popular presentation of feeling. However, one should note that of the approximately eighty occurrences at the intersection of those two, forty-nine consist in one analytical formula incessantly applied in the *Salāyatana Samyutta*'s repetitions. It is also worth mentioning that the five faculties seem basically a product of the *Samyutta*, with only one occurrence outside of it; and that the *Aṅguttara* not only has the least occurrences, but nearly all are of the three hedonic tones.

In terms of doctrinal formulas, feeling is the second of the bundles of clinging (*upādānakkhandha*), the second way of establishing mindfulness (*satipaṭṭhāna*), and it appears between contact (*phassa*) and craving (*taṇhā*) in dependent arising (*paṭiccasamuppāda*). The standard twelve-link chain has *vedanā* again under the 'name' part of name-and-form (*nāmarūpa*). Being a bundle of clinging and part of *nāma* tells us feeling is a key element of our experiential apparatus, which always has this affective-hedonic dimension. Feeling is only absent in a deep meditative state devoid of phenomenal experience, called the 'cessation of perception and feeling' (*saññāvedayitanirodha*).

Accordingly, all main surviving abhidharma systems consider feeling a universal dharma, that is, present in all types of consciousness.<sup>82</sup> In that literature, it appears that the fivefold exposition of feeling gained prominence, and distinct abhidharmic analyses were applied to feeling. Buddhaghosa first distinguishes feeling into skilful (*kusala*), unskilful (*akusala*) and indeterminate (*avyākata*), as it relates to the four types of consciousness,<sup>83</sup> then ends presenting the five faculties.<sup>84</sup> Occasionally, analyses from different principles were combined to arrive at other lists of seven or nine feelings, for example.<sup>85</sup>

To finish this section, let me introduce a distinction that is not explicit in the early texts but

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81 The table does not register all occurrences of the term *vedanā*, but of the templates here discussed. Given the enormity of the textual body, a few may have escaped me, but all those instances where feeling is explicitly presented should definitely be registered.

82 Gethin, *Buddhist Maps*, chap. 4.

83 The early discourses do not at all emphasise feeling as relating to the four types of consciousness, but as we have seen we do find in the Chinese canon a fourfold model of *vedanā* that corresponds exactly to this (SĀ 485 at T ii 123c21).

84 Vism 456 (XIV 125-128).

85 Vibh 15-28. See U Thittila, pp. 20–33.

nevertheless provides a useful framework in some contexts: the analysis into primary and secondary feelings. It is inspired by the famous image of the two arrows (*Salla Sutta*, SN 36.6),<sup>86</sup> Tse-fu Kuan's interpretation of it,<sup>87</sup> and the thirty-six feelings.

Primary *vedanā* is the affective-hedonic quality that accompanies an experience irrespective of one's disposition towards it. Secondary *vedanā* involves perceptions (*saññā*), the underlying tendencies (*anusaya*) to lust, resistance or ignorance, or other mental activities like thinking. Primary feeling depends almost always on sensory contact (*paṭigha samphassa*) through any of the five physical senses,<sup>88</sup> and secondary feeling arises with conceptual contact (*adhivacana samphassa*) through the mind organ.<sup>89</sup> This is not to say that sensory feeling is unmediated by the mind's activities. Still, in the early discourses we can distinguish how secondary *vedanā* sits on a more complex experience—we can think of it as the *vedanā* of (gross) mental activity, often based on another feeling.<sup>90</sup> This is captured in the Discourse on the Arrow (*Salla Sutta*, SN 36.6). In that text, to experience a painful *sensory* feeling is likened to being hit by an arrow, and to experience the *mental* pain associated with whining and having aversion towards the painful sensory feeling is compared to being hit yet again by a second arrow. The first arrow is bodily and unavoidable, it reaches awakened beings too, whereas the second *builds* on the first, it is mental and optional. Only untrained, ordinary people (*puṭhujjana*) feel the second arrow.<sup>91</sup>

The arrows of this famous discourse target painful experience only, and it might be better to restrict the simile to that. Yet the concept of primary and secondary feelings is not confined to the arrow simile: it encompasses the pleasant and neutral as well. The ruminations and the thirty-six feelings seen above are all examples of secondary feelings: they are the feelings of our attitudes and dispositions, of what we often do with primary feelings.

Let us apply this etic analysis to canonical, emic presentations of feeling. We find primary *vedanā* in bodily and mental feelings, and in all five faculties. Secondary *vedanā* is found in

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86 SN iv 207.

87 Kuan, *Mindfulness in Early Buddhism*, pp. 25–28.

88 There is a possibility of primary mental feelings, like the memory of a bad smell, but this plays very little role in the discourses.

89 A good explanation and diagram of these can be found in Reat, pp. 24–26.

90 I define it as a feeling based on *another* feeling, rather than on a *primary* feeling, to avoid a proliferation into tertiary feelings, and so on.

91 David J. Kalupahana, *Principles of Buddhist Psychology* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1987), p. 44; Rune E. A. Johansson, *The Psychology of Nirvana* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1969), p. 25.

mental feelings; in the faculties of happiness, unhappiness, and the mental half of equanimity; in the eighteen ruminations; and in the thirty-six feelings (domestic and renunciant). Figure 2 shows the process of secondary feelings in the case of a pleasant primary feeling. There we can see that awakened beings cannot have secondary pain, but can still have secondary feelings of pleasant and neutral hedonic tones.

## Do Buddhists have emotions?

As explored up until this point, *vedanā* is the experience of pleasure, pain, or neutrality that arises with sensory experience and with mental activity such as ideas, discursive thought, other feelings, and perceptions—both wise and unwise. I now switch to a different guiding question: What do scholars talk about when they talk about *vedanā*? I centre the discussion around how they have conceptualised *vedanā* through the modern category of emotion. This approach has limitations and can distort our picture of *vedanā* in the discourses. At times it has led scholars to exclude from *vedanā* items that I believe originally belonged there, and it has narrowed rather than enhanced their conception of *vedanā*. More broadly, I problematise to what extent ‘emotion’ is a useful category to understand early Buddhist soteriology. More care can be brought to this essentially cross-cultural dialogue.

The study of emotions in Buddhism poses a number of difficulties. First, Buddhism has no native category that corresponds to emotion and is clearly distinguished from other phenomena.<sup>92</sup> Secondly, the modern concept of emotion is not well defined to begin with. And thirdly, it has a particular history in the Western tradition that needs to be taken into account. Thus, attempts to speak of emotions in early Buddhism use a concept foreign to that thought-world and a bit unclear in itself.

It is understandable and perhaps inevitable that scholars engage with *vedanā* through the lens of contemporary categories—I myself use ‘affect’ in this dissertation, and that is not a native

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92 Paul Ekman and others, ‘Buddhist and Psychological Perspectives on Emotions and Well-Being’, *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 14.2 (2005), 59–63 (p. 59) <<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0963-7214.2005.00335.x>>; Georges Dreyfus, ‘Is Compassion An Emotion? A Cross-Cultural Exploration of Mental Typologies’, in *Visions of Compassion: Western Scientists and Tibetan Buddhists Examine Human Nature*, ed. by Richard J. Davidson and Anne Harrington (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 31–45 (p. 42) <<https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195130430.003.0003>>; Attwood, ‘Defining Vedanā’, p. 33; among others.

Buddhist concept either. So, to be clear, I do not object wholesale to using the language of emotion to talk about *vedanā*. It can be appropriate and helpful at times, but it also has downsides that need to be considered. One thing I am specifically concerned with is how the category ‘emotion’ has been used as a criterion to *determine whether* something is or is not a *vedanā*, and how the language of emotion can sometimes obscure the way early Buddhist texts think about the inner life. By contrast, I find the language of ‘affect’ more flexible and less charged, but I neither equate the notion of affect with *vedanā* in a simplistic way, nor use this notion to determine whether any phenomena the *suttas* speak about is a *vedanā* or not. My main use of this term is in the expressions ‘positive affect’ or ‘negative affect’ as a way to speak of pleasant or unpleasant *vedanā*, precisely because these are quite broad expressions that do not narrow our view of *vedanā*. I come back to this towards the end of the present chapter.

During one of his famous conferences with scientists and scholars, the Dalai Lama had to request an explanation for the term ‘emotion’, since there is no Tibetan equivalent.<sup>93</sup> Unfortunately, we cannot have conferences with early Buddhists. Even if we could, though, that would not guarantee much, for various theories of emotion exist and almost every scholar of Buddhism uses a different one. This influences where they locate emotions in the Buddhist landscape. To do that locating, they often use two maps: the ‘five bundles of clinging’ (*pañc’ upādānakkhandhā*)—form (*rūpa*), feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), conditioning forces (*saṅkhārā*) and awareness (*viññāṇa*)—and the ‘four ways of establishing mindfulness’ (*cattāro satipaṭṭhānā*)—body (*kāya*), feeling (*vedanā*), mind (*citta*), and *dhammā*.<sup>94</sup>

In *An Introduction to Buddhist Psychology*, Padmasiri De Silva describes emotion or affect as a ‘felt tendency towards an object judged suitable, or away from an object judged unsuitable’, which involves ‘dispositions to act by way of approach or withdrawal’.<sup>95</sup> He describes *vedanā* as the affective, *saññā* and *viññāṇa* as the cognitive, and *saṅkhāra* as the conative. In this last domain is where he, Nyanaponika Thera and Sue Hamilton see a strongest connection to emotion<sup>96</sup>—

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93 Daniel J. Goleman, ‘Destructive Emotions’, in *Buddhist Thought and Applied Psychological Research: Transcending the Boundaries*, ed. by D. K. Nauriyal, Michael S. Drummond, and Y. B. Lal, Routledge Critical Studies in Buddhism (London; New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 341–74 (p. 342).

94 Given the complexity of this term, I prefer to leave it untranslated, for choosing a translation here would take a stance and require a detour that would distract me from the actual object of this study.

95 Padmasiri De Silva, *An Introduction to Buddhist Psychology*, Library of Philosophy and Religion (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1979), pp. 18, 40.

96 Thera Nyanaponika, *Contemplation of Feelings. The Discourse-Grouping on the Feelings (Vedanā-Saṃyutta)*, Wheel Publication, 303–304 (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1983), p. 6; Hamilton, *Identity and Experience*, p. 46.

and Anālayo and Johansson do so with *citta*.<sup>97</sup> They of course recognise that the five bundles always collaborate, and De Silva has seen emotion as that very interplay.<sup>98</sup> Thus, they emphasise not confusing *vedanā* and emotion. Nyanaponika writes:

[Feeling] is distinguished from emotion, a more complex phenomenon which arises from the basic feeling, but adds to it various overlays of an evaluative, volitional and cognitive character. (...) The specific factors operative in emotion belong to the aggregate of mental formations (*saṅkhāra-kkhandha*), the fourth aggregate. (...) Because feeling is associated with emotional factors, the two tend to be confused, but on close analysis they are seen to be distinct.<sup>99</sup>

Anālayo expresses a very similar view:

While *vedanā* has a strong conditioning impact on emotions, *vedanā* does not include emotion in its range of meanings. In the thought world of the early discourses, the concept of ‘emotion’ would perhaps find its closest Pāli counterpart in *citta*. In contrast, *vedanā* simply refers to feelings as one of the building blocks of such complex phenomena as emotions.<sup>100</sup>

By contrast, another group of scholars speaks of emotion when addressing the bundle of *vedanā*. Edwina Pio, while subscribing to the same definition of emotion presented above, puts emotions under the heading of *vedanā*, and mentions examples such as grief, anger, fear, pride, and love. *Vedanā* is for her the key to understanding emotion in early Buddhism.<sup>101</sup> David J. Kalupahana likewise sees emotion in *vedanā*. Influenced by William James’ view of emotion as ‘bodily changes that follow directly the perception of the object’, he claims that the Buddha offered a ‘sensationalist view’ of emotion just like James, which Kalupahana ascribes to the close connection of *vedanā* with contact.<sup>102</sup> In presenting Vasubandhu’s ideas, Aruna Haldar compares mental *vedanā* to emotions or ‘prolonged states of emotional disposition’.<sup>103</sup> Mathieu Boisvert’s treatment recognises *vedanā* as encompassing emotion but also physical sensations.<sup>104</sup> And Maria Heim has written that *vedanā* is the ‘bare reaction to a stimulus’ and thus narrower

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97 Rune E. A. Johansson, *The Dynamic Psychology of Early Buddhism* (London: Curzon Press, 1979), p. 161; Anālayo, *From Craving to Liberation*, p. 77.

98 Padmasiri De Silva, *Emotions and The Body in Buddhist Contemplative Practice and Mindfulness-Based Therapy* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2017), p. 15.

99 Nyanaponika, p. 6. His perspective is followed by Padmasiri De Silva, ‘Thinking and Feeling: A Buddhist Perspective’, *Sophia*, 50.2 (2011), 253 (p. 256) <<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11841-011-0248-2>>.

100 Anālayo, *From Craving to Liberation*, p. 77.

101 Edwina Pio, *Buddhist Psychology: A Modern Perspective* (New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1988), pp. 8–11.

102 Kalupahana, *Principles of Buddhist Psychology*, p. 45ff.

103 Aruna Haldar, *Some Psychological Aspects of Early Buddhist Philosophy Based on Abhidharmakośa of Vasubandhu*, The Asiatic Society Monograph Series, 25 (Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1981), pp. 32–33.

104 Boisvert, p. 4.

than emotion, since many emotions would fall outside of it,<sup>105</sup> but that at other times it seems to *also* make space for that which we would call emotion in addition to what we might call sensation.<sup>106</sup> Among the metacategories employed by Buddhist phenomenology, Heim states,

[*vedanā*] may lie closest to what is referred to by the modern English term emotion. *Vedanā*, reasonably rendered *feeling*, in many contexts suggests something a bit more rudimentary than emotion ... in other contexts, it can also include phenomena we would consider emotions and phenomena adjacent to them.<sup>107</sup>

We seem to have two broad tendencies among scholars: some are quite happy to either identify or see an overlap between *vedanā* and emotion, or more generally, to talk about emotion when addressing *vedanā*, whereas others seem more reluctant to do that and want to stress how, while related, emotion and *vedanā* are two different things. To my judgement, the most nuanced and accurate views are those of Maria Heim, quoted above, and Tse-Fu Kuan. Kuan claims that ‘what modern psychology calls emotions falls into the categories of feeling (*vedanā*) and volitional formations (*saṅkhārā*)’, and he identifies secondary *vedanā* as emotions<sup>108</sup> —as does Heim.<sup>109</sup> The theories on which Kuan draws are cognitive labelling theory, according to which emotion is a physiological arousal accompanied by a certain cognition, and Wundt’s three-dimensional model of affect.<sup>110</sup>

Kuan’s claim could be taken to mean two things: either that emotions are the sum of *vedanā* and *saṅkhāra*, or that they are distributed between those two domains. In terms of the early discourses, I think the latter is correct.<sup>111</sup> It is tempting to interpret that they are a sum; after all, the *Salla Sutta* makes the second arrow dependent on the underlying tendencies, which would belong to the *saṅkhārakkhandha*. But if we followed this logic, should we not present the pleasant feeling of eating Oreos as the sum of *phassa* (contact) and *vedanā*, and so on? This is

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105 Maria Heim, ‘Buddhism’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Emotion*, ed. by John Corrigan (Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 20 <<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195170214.003.0002>>.

106 Maria Heim, ‘Some Analyses of Feeling’, in *The Bloomsbury Research Handbook of Classical Indian Emotions*, ed. by Maria Heim, Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad, and Roy Tzohar (London: Bloomsbury, 2021), pp. 87–106 (p. 92).

107 Heim, ‘Some Analyses of Feeling’, p. 87.

108 I disagree with Kuan in one respect. He writes that secondary feeling (emotion) leads to the underlying tendencies, and thus emotion bridges *vedanā* and *saṅkhāra*. The *Salla Sutta* rather says that painful feeling is underlied by a tendency to resistance. I believe this applies to primary feeling, which is why an untrained person experiences the secondary one, whereas a noble one does not reject the first feeling and therefore does not feel a second one.

109 Heim, ‘Some Analyses of Feeling’, p. 93.

110 Kuan, *Mindfulness in Early Buddhism*, pp. 25–28.

111 I believe I am agreeing with Kuan here, although his treatment is a bit unclear on this point.

unnecessary—and uncanonical, as I will argue in a few paragraphs. Shwe Zan Aung thinks along Kuan’s lines in his introductory essay to the *Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha*, stating that *vedanā* includes the emotions of joy and grief. Later on, however, he retracts himself saying that *vedanā* ‘covers only the hedonic aspect of feeling and emotion’.<sup>112</sup> I find Aung’s first position closer to the discourses, as I go on to explain.

I prefer the second interpretation of Kuan’s claim: that some emotions fall into *vedanā* and some others into *sankhāra*. That the bundle of *sankhāra* includes emotions is uncontroversial, but as we are seeing it is highly contested whether *vedanā* does. Anālayo, Peacock, Padmasiri De Silva and others have insisted that *vedanā* and emotions should not be confused, even that the former *excludes* the latter.<sup>113</sup> Such a view features widely in a recent monograph on the topic.<sup>114</sup> Still, among those who agree with this, some use the adjective ‘affective’ to describe *vedanā*,<sup>115</sup> while others criticise that choice for misleadingly inviting emotion back into the party.<sup>116</sup> The sort of ‘building block’ approach conditions these scholars and Rune Johansson to reject that *vedanā* contains emotions, seeing *vedanā* as one crucial ingredient in the more elaborate dish of an emotion.<sup>117</sup> This perspective is surely true in many instances, but it also implies *vedanā* is never an emotion *by itself*, in contrast to the view I am taking following Kuan and Heim, and which I think does more justice to the way the *suttas* think.

The canonical survey in the previous section present us with an overall different *way of thinking*. Without questioning that the category ‘*vedanā*’ as a whole cannot be equated with the category ‘emotion’, they show that to exclude emotions from *vedanā* altogether is also incorrect from the perspective of the early discourses. The *Cūlavedalla Sutta* says: ‘anything that is experienced physically or mentally as painful or disagreeable is painful feeling (*dukkhavedanā*)’,<sup>118</sup> and the faculty of unhappiness is defined as ‘mental pain and discomfort, the painful and disagreeable

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112 *Compendium of Philosophy <Abhidhammattha Saṅgaha>* by Anuruddha, trans. by Shwe Zan Aung (London: Pali Text Society, 1910), pp. 14, 233.

113 Anālayo, *From Craving to Liberation*, p. 77; Padmasiri De Silva, ‘Thinking and Feeling’, p. 256; John Peacock, ‘Vedanā , Ethics and Character: A Prolegomena’, *Contemporary Buddhism*, 19.1 (2018), 160–84 (p. 181) <<https://doi.org/10.1080/14639947.2018.1455605>> note 3; Bodhi and Narāda, p. 117. Boisvert mentions emotion when introducing *vedanā* but never returns to the issue later on—Boisvert, p. 4.

114 Peacock and Batchelor, *The Definition, Practice, and Psychology of Vedanā: Knowing How It Feels*.

115 Hamilton, *Identity and Experience*, p. 46; Padmasiri De Silva, *An Introduction to Buddhist Psychology*, pp. 18, 42; Anālayo, *From Craving to Liberation*, p. 77.

116 Weber, p. 9.

117 Johansson, *The Dynamic Psychology of Early Buddhism*, p. 88; Peacock, p. 164.

118 MN i 302: *yaṃ kho, āvuso viśākha, kāyikaṃ vā cetasikaṃ vā dukkhaṃ asātaṃ vedayitaṃ, ayaṃ dukkhā vedanā*.

feeling born from mental contact'.<sup>119</sup> Why would this exclude emotional pain? I find it hard to imagine the man hit by the arrow, dramatically described as wailing and beating his breast, grieving and confused, and not think of it as an emotion—and the text calls *that* the second *vedanā*.<sup>120</sup> With the thirty-six *vedanās* we have seen the happiness of going on a trip to the coast or the sadness of having to cancel it—clearly emotions as well. As a last example, the *Kaṭṭhōpama Sutta* instructs practitioners to understand ‘I am in a state of unhappiness’ whenever that is the case,<sup>121</sup> in a style reminiscent of the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*. A state of unhappiness appears to describe at least a mood, and this discourse clearly speaks of *vedanā*: it uses the fivefold model of feeling as faculties, it stresses the dependency of those states on contact, and the title refers to the simile of fire-sticks, which illustrates *vedanā* across the Pali canon.<sup>122</sup>

My point is not so much that the examples above fit a particular understanding of emotion as a category that I wish to put forward, but that they describe certain *items* (i.e. happiness, sadness, and similars) that anyone, including theorists and the Buddhist scholars discussed, would file under the modern ‘emotion’. In short: some items under ‘emotion’ are also items under ‘*vedanā*’. In claiming *vedanā* excludes emotions, scholars are either not engaging with those examples or denying that they describe such items as happiness or sadness. Thus, one can reject the overlap between *vedanā* and emotion either by arguing that no examples of *vedanā* whatsoever are emotions, or by rejecting that emotion-looking examples are ‘actually’ *vedanā*. I have dealt with the first and found it hard to defend: some texts call *vedanā* things we clearly label as emotions today. The second would involve imposing onto the texts certain judgements and conceptual templates that would justify interpreting away what a discourse literally says, as follows.

If we take the examples above, from the building block approach it would be easy to claim that those examples portray more complex experiences, involving *vedanā* but not reducible to it, having other factors besides *vedanā*—and that would be correct: both the second arrow or domestic happiness, for example, are clearly ‘a more complex phenomenon which arises from

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119 SN v 210: *yam kho, bhikkhave, cetasikaṃ dukkhaṃ, cetasikaṃ asātaṃ, manosamphassaṃ dukkhaṃ asātaṃ vedayitaṃ, idaṃ vuccati, bhikkhave, domanassindriyaṃ.*

120 SN iv 207.

121 SN v 212: *so dummanova samāno dummanosmī ti pajānāti.*

122 SN ii 97, SN iv 215, SN v 212, MN iii 242.

the basic feeling, but adds to it various overlays of an evaluative, volitional and cognitive character’, to use Nyanaponika’s words.<sup>123</sup> The crucial observation, however, is that this does not stop the early discourses from calling these things *vedanā*. They do! The eighteen ruminations, the thirty-six feelings, the dramatic second arrow, all involve much more than just *vedanā* and yet are *themselves* called *vedanā*. This is what we must make sense of. These are Kuan’s ‘secondary feelings’ and Heim’s ‘higher-order emotions’ that she rightly includes within the Pali term ‘*vedanā*’.<sup>124</sup> Phenomena are not disqualified as *vedanā* merely for involving other elements. Their complexity is not the kind of criterion that makes the *suttas* take them out of the *vedanā* basket. Instead, it seems that when the hedonic aspect dominates a certain experience, the discourses call it *vedanā* as a whole; or when they want to emphasise its hedonic aspect.

To counter my claim that some items under emotions are also items under *vedanā* requires different arguments. One would need to back them up with discourses that show what *other* class of phenomena those emotions belong to. Also, if *somanassa* and *domanassa* do not correspond to the emotions of happiness and sadness, then what other Pali terms do? As far as I have gathered, none of the scholars mentioned provide evidence of this kind. Moreover, one would have to make sense of how *tshor myong*, the Tibetan neologism created for emotion, is derived from the Tibetan word for *vedanā*: *tshor ba*.<sup>125</sup> Or how one of the most common terms to describe emotions in Sanskrit and Bengali is *anubhāva*,<sup>126</sup> which is used by Buddhist exegetical literature to explain *vedanā*.<sup>127</sup> While these examples come from later or popular contexts, and would not constitute enough evidence on their own, they would be hard to understand if Buddhist cultures had always located all emotions elsewhere.

Definitions that exclude emotion from *vedanā* leave secondary *vedanā* out of the picture, they

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123 Nyanaponika, p. 6. He separates ‘feeling’ and ‘emotion’ in a way where the latter includes ‘desire and love, aversion and hate, anxiety and fear’ (p. 8), but happiness and sadness are not mentioned. While he rightly points out the emotional reactions that may follow feelings but are distinct from feelings (pp. 11-12), he does not seem to acknowledge that some phenomena that can accompany or follow these reactions—again, the second dart and the thirty-six *feelings*—are things we would *also* call emotions.

124 As Maria Heim has written: ‘Feeling in these ways is the bigger category and includes the “second dart,” and thus encompasses phenomena we would call emotions.’—Heim, ‘Some Analyses of Feeling’, p. 93.

125 Dreyfus, ‘Is Compassion An Emotion?’, p. 31.

126 June McDaniel, ‘Emotion in Bengali Religious Thought’, in *Emotions in Asian Thought: A Dialogue in Comparative Philosophy*, ed. by Joel Marks and Roger T. Ames (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1995), pp. 39–65 (p. 40).

127 Tin, p. 145.

sideline or forget it *as a vedanā*. Therefore, they are reductive. For Martine Batchelor, the tendency to include ‘tone’ when translating *vedanā* (‘feeling tone’ or ‘hedonic tone’) indicates that *vedanā* ‘is not a full blown feeling like the emotion of anger’.<sup>128</sup> But rather, it indicates something about the translators’ views. These would be challenged by Kuan’s observation and by my canonical survey, because sadness is definitely ‘a full blown feeling’, as in the dramatic second arrow. Translations featuring ‘tone’ seem devised in part to avoid confusing *vedanā* with emotion, which is often appropriate. But as a consequence they extirpate emotion from *vedanā* completely, which we have seen to be a mistake.

The category ‘emotion’ is an inappropriate lens through which to look at *vedanā*. It distorts seeing ‘what a phenomenology of affective or emotional life might look like without the central category of emotion’, as Maria Heim has put it.<sup>129</sup> A more appropriate lens is Buddhist ethics. Feeling not only triggers patterns that can be skilful or unskilful: it is also the outcome of those patterns. Some scholars have focused too much on the former, which can give the wrong impression of a reductive and simplistically linear picture. See, for example, this definition of *vedanā* by Sue Hamilton:

it is feeling in the sense of the early stages of what will become a more clearly understood experience, when I know, for example, that I am touching something, but I do not yet know what it is or how I might think about it or react to it.<sup>130</sup>

Some feelings would fit here, but others would be left out. Hamilton clarifies a few lines later how the bundle of *saññā* identifies what that ‘something’ in the quote is, but it is problematic to present *vedanā* and *saññā* in sequence. For they are simultaneous rather than sequential<sup>131</sup> and they are interdependent:<sup>132</sup> *saññā* conditions *vedanā* too.<sup>133</sup> So, *vedanā* is very much there when I know perfectly well what I am touching, how I think about it and react to it. In fact, I have shown examples of *vedanā* that depend precisely on how we conceive of something—the thirty six—or react to it—the second arrow.

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128 Martine Batchelor, ‘Vedanā or Feeling Tone: A Practical and Contemporary Meditative Exploration’, *Contemporary Buddhism*, 19.1 (2018), 54–68 (p. 56) <<https://doi.org/10.1080/14639947.2018.1442142>>.

129 Heim, ‘Some Analyses of Feeling’, p. 87.

130 Sue Hamilton, *Early Buddhism: A New Approach, the I of the Beholder*, Routledge Critical Studies in Buddhism (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 76.

131 Reat, p. 23; Rupert Gettin, ‘The Five Khandhas: Their Treatment in the Nikāyas and Early Abhidhamma’, *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, 14.1 (1986), 35–53 <<https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00165825>>.

132 Kalupahana, *Principles of Buddhist Psychology*, p. 34; Heim, ‘Some Analyses of Feeling’, p. 96.

133 SN v 12: *saññāpaccayāpi vedayitaṃ. chando ca avūpasanto hoti, vitakko ca avūpasanto hoti, saññā ca avūpasantā hoti, tappaccayāpi vedayitaṃ.*

Some scholarly perspectives rely a lot on how *vedanā* appears in the teaching of dependent arising (*paṭiccasamuppāda*). Despite there being various formulas of that doctrine,<sup>134</sup> all agree on a central trunk: contact conditions feeling, feeling conditions craving, craving conditions clinging, and all this ends up in suffering.<sup>135</sup> Thus, this doctrine spells out a central distinction between the reception of an experience and the reaction to it, and as such it is mostly concerned with primary feelings. (Note that, while some authors speak of *vedanā* as a reaction to a stimulus,<sup>136</sup> in this model it would belong to the reception of an experience. The reaction is to the way the experience *feels*, and thus refers to greed, aversion, ignorance, and so on.) Nevertheless, *vedanā* has a life outside of this doctrine, so we should be careful to not reduce it to the triggering element of the reactive chain.<sup>137</sup> In doing that, we would be losing sight of more complex experiences that the discourses also call *vedanā*, even if they belong to further stages down the chain—again, the second arrow, or the eighteen feelings that result *from* thinking activity. Batchelor exemplifies this over-reliance as well when she presents *vedanā* as inherently subtle and as a specific range within the spectrum of pleasantness and unpleasantness, rather than the spectrum itself.<sup>138</sup> But there is no reason to restrict *vedanā* to a set window of intensity—nor to one stage of the reactive process, however crucial that stage may be.

If we were to take the various feelings surveyed earlier and place them on the chain of dependent arising, all primary ones would be between contact and craving, whether physical or mental. But those that arise from gross mental activity should be placed later, perhaps branching out as emotional states. Alternatively, we can draw a loop whereby a perception, reaction, or mental state of any kind becomes itself an object for conceptual contact, kickstarting a new chain with its own feeling and subsequent reaction. In this respect, the view that *vedanā* is pre-conceptual and pre-cognitive<sup>139</sup> is likewise reductive, applicable only to a subset of feelings. Let us remember *vedanā* is an *ever-present* aspect of experience.

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134 For an exploration of this, see Roderick S. Bucknell, ‘Conditioned Arising Evolves: Variation and Change in Textual Accounts of the Paṭicca-Samuppāda Doctrine’, *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, 22.2 (1999), 311–42.

135 D ii 56: *phassapaccayā vedanā, vedanāpaccayā taṇhā, taṇhāpaccayā upādānaṃ, upādānapaccayā bhavo, bhavapaccayā jāti, jātipaccayā jarāmaraṇaṃ sokaparidevadukkhadomanassupāyāsā sambhavan ti.*

136 Heim, ‘Buddhism’, p. 20; Weber, p. 19.

137 This view is found, among others, in Christina Feldman and W. Kuyken, *Mindfulness: Ancient Wisdom Meets Modern Psychology* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2019), p. 82ff.

138 Batchelor, p. 56.

139 Peacock, p. 165.

To sum this up: *vedanā* triggers reactivity but also arises from it and accompanies it. When a pleasant feeling gives rise to craving (*taṇhā*) and clinging (*upādāna*), these can develop into domestic happiness—a *vedanā*. If the first pleasant feeling disappears, the same craving and clinging lead to domestic unhappiness—another *vedanā*.<sup>140</sup> (Again, these are things we call emotion.) To focus only on the first part and sideline feeling as the outcome of what we do with our experience misrepresents the early texts, where such a notion is at the core of a fundamental Buddhist doctrine: it is the second noble truth of the arising of *dukkha*, and it underlies the descriptions of the path, its stages, and its goal as feeling pleasant or neutral as a *result* of Buddhist practice.

In addressing scholarly views on *vedanā* I have identified a tendency to reduce what it can encompass. I have surveyed those views mostly through how they relate *vedanā* to emotion because the instrument we use to look into something defines what we find, and I believe that to look at Buddhist maps of the inner life through the instruments of our own models has risks, as inevitable as it may sometimes seem. Now I want to look briefly at the instrument itself, to examine underlying assumptions in using ‘emotion’ to understand early Buddhism. In this way I will complete what started when, at the beginning of this section, I wrote that the study of emotions in Buddhism poses a number of problems. We can boil these down to three: the premise that emotions are a natural kind, the expectation to find everything we call emotions under a single Buddhist category, and the more basic assumption that early Buddhist maps of experience are comparable to modern psychological ones.

First, emotion is a relatively modern concept whose definition has had quite the journey and is yet to reach consensus.<sup>141</sup> It is not a universal category or a ‘natural kind’, and philosopher Paul E. Griffiths argues further that the various emotions are not sufficiently similar to one another to form a single, coherent category for the purpose of scientific enquiry.<sup>142</sup> In other words, emotions are not of a single kind. Secondly, and related to that, just because we today have clustered certain inner phenomena under a single heading, and treat them as *one class* of

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140 This is based on connecting Dhammadinnā’s statement that pleasant feeling is painful when it changes (MN i 303: *sukhā kha, āvuso visākhā, vedanā t̥hītisukhā vipariṇāmadukkhā*) with the analysis in thirty-six feelings.

141 Thomas Dixon, “‘Emotion’: The History of a Keyword in Crisis”, *Emotion Review*, 4.4 (2012), 338–44 (pp. 340–43) <<https://doi.org/10.1177/1754073912445814>>.

142 Paul E. Griffiths, ‘Is Emotion a Natural Kind?’, in *Thinking about Feeling: Contemporary Philosophers on Emotions*, ed. by Robert C. Solomon, Series in Affective Science (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 389–417.

thing, we cannot expect other cultures or epochs to have done the same. It seems that when scholars look at Buddhist maps of experience, they expect to find emotions in one place, *either* ‘in here’ *or* ‘in there’—or perhaps as bigger provinces—but not scattered across the landscape: some emotions in this category and others in that one, as I have argued. In finding many, perhaps most, of today’s emotions in the bundle of *saṅkhārā* or in the contemplation of *citta*, it is tempting to think that *therefore* emotions do not belong to any other bundle or contemplation; but this is a flawed reasoning. Yet, if emotions are not of a single kind, it makes sense other thought systems like early Buddhism would have distributed them differently.

This brings us to the third and last point: the assumption that Buddhist maps are like modern psychological maps. This requires us to peek into the history of Western ideas. Thomas Dixon has shown that the 200-year-old category ‘emotion’ has displaced older and more precise typologies. Those typologies sat on different metaphysical and religious ideas, and psychology at that time was a form of theological discourse.<sup>143</sup> For it was Christianity that provided the categories for discussing the inner life, with its own aim in mind.<sup>144</sup> Thus, there were *passions* of the lower soul, which were to be tamed, and higher *affections* and *sentiments* to cultivate—with the will playing a lead role. ‘Many of the most influential theorists of “passions” and “affections” had been moral philosophers, clergymen, or both,’ writes Dixon.<sup>145</sup> In contrast, emotion emerges as a secular category with the birth of psychology as a scientific discipline. It no longer has moral or Christian overtones, it is a morally neutral and morally disengaged label—knowing that something is an emotion tells you nothing about its moral status.

Buddhist psychology may be closer to the Christian theological approach than to the secular scientific one, in the sense that it is inseparable from the goals and moral judgements of Buddhism—it is a soteriological psychology. As such, it parses inner life in a way that is useful for its salvific project; the categories it employs embody Buddhist doctrine; and it draws maps that are, in their design and structure, moral and soteriological. Still, Padmal de Silva has stated that Buddhist psychology is pre-scientific only in a chronological sense.<sup>146</sup> This glosses

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143 Thomas Dixon, *From Passions to Emotions: The Creation of a Secular Psychological Category* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 1–9.

144 Dixon, *From Passions to Emotions*, p. 21.

145 Dixon, ‘Emotion’, p. 342.

146 Padmal De Silva, ‘Buddhist Psychology: Some Basic Concepts and Applications’, in *The Authority of Experience: Essays on Buddhism and Psychology*, ed. by John Pickering, Curzon Studies in Asian Philosophy (London: Curzon Press, 1997), pp. 51–71.

over all the issues above and treats Buddhism as a science; but already the goal of Buddhist psychology, salvation, is not a scientific concept. De Silva performs a typical move of Buddhist modernism.<sup>147</sup>

Let us take as an example the four *satipatthānas*. The contemplation of mind (*cittānupassanā*) does not mention all emotions or possible mind states,<sup>148</sup> but only the presence or absence of the three unskillful roots (*akusala mūla*): greed, aversion, and delusion—the bedrock of Buddhist ethics.<sup>149</sup> Note that the last of these, delusion, has a stronger cognitive feel than do the other two, and we are less prone to see it as an emotion. Additionally, in this contemplation the meditator fathoms the depth of their mind’s collectedness (*samādhi*), which in the discourses is inseparable from questions of skillfulness. What is morally significant from the Buddhist perspective is whether one is motivated by the unskillful roots or not, not whether experiences feel good or bad. Thus, in order to see whether my mind is skillful or unskillful it helps to ask whether I feel greedy, but not whether I feel happy. This is why it makes sense that these items belong to different contemplations. Instead, to put them all together because they are ‘emotions’ would camouflage the essentially ethical nature of *cittānupassanā*. It would certainly be more practical for contemporary meditators, compared to having some emotions in one exercise and others in another; but the contemplation would have shifted from an ethical and soteriological enquiry to a morally neutral mood check. It would no longer reveal how aligned the meditator is with Buddhist values.

*Vedanā* does not possess an inherent moral valence. Pleasant, painful, and neutral feelings can trigger dispositions and behaviours that do have moral valence—and these form the basis of ethical distinctions within feeling. Likewise, feelings result from past skillful or unskillful behaviour, and in this sense *vedanā* functions as a moral indicator. But feeling by itself is neither moral nor immoral.<sup>150</sup> As we can see, it is *useful* for Buddhism to parse phenomena in this way,

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147 For the nature and problems of Buddhist modernist arguments, see Evan Thompson, *Why I Am Not a Buddhist* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2020); David L. McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

148 Against this, some contemporary literature claims it does, for example Feldman and Kuyken, pp. 84–85.

149 M i 59: *kathaṃ ca, bhikkhave, bhikkhu citte cittānupassī viharatī? idha, bhikkhave, bhikkhu sarāgaṃ vā cittaṃ ‘sarāgaṃ cittaṃ’ ti pajānāti, vītarāgaṃ vā cittaṃ ‘vītarāgaṃ cittaṃ’ ti pajānāti, sadosaṃ vā cittaṃ ‘sadosaṃ cittaṃ’ ti pajānāti, vītadosaṃ vā cittaṃ ‘vītadosaṃ cittaṃ’ ti pajānāti, samohaṃ vā cittaṃ ‘samohaṃ cittaṃ’ ti pajānāti, vītamohaṃ vā cittaṃ ‘vītamohaṃ cittaṃ’ ti pajānāti.*

150 John Peacock and Martine Batchelor, ‘Vedanā : What Is in a “Feeling?”’, *Contemporary Buddhism*, 19.1 (2018), 1–6 (p. 2) <<https://doi.org/10.1080/14639947.2018.1450966>>.

because in separating the unskilful from its trigger and its consequences, it can be targeted. Instead, to mix things with and without a moral valence into a single category would make less sense. The classification into *satipaṭṭhānas*, and the rationale for Buddhist categories more generally, relies on Buddhism’s soteriological ethics.

I have already alluded to how modern scholarship has focused on feeling as trigger and given less attention to feeling as result and accompanying quality, to the point that some reductive definitions leave out the latter two when, in fact, they are central to early Buddhism. The logic, which is Indian rather than Buddhist, is that actions of body, speech and mind, depending on their moral quality, will lead to *pleasant* or *painful* results.<sup>151</sup> This is the very first thing the Dhammapada says:

All things are preceded by mind, it is their chief, they are mind-made. If one speaks or acts with a corrupt mind, then suffering follows like a wheel follows the ox’s foot.

All things are preceded by mind, it is their chief, they are mind-made. If one speaks or acts with a purified mind, then happiness follows like a shadow that never goes away.<sup>152</sup>

When teaching Rāhula what deeds to carry out and not, the Buddha relies on this logic that the skilful leads to *sukha* and the unskilful to *dukkha*.<sup>153</sup> The *Nibbuta Sutta* (AN 3.55) also suggests that when the mind is affected by greed, hatred and delusion, mental pain and unhappiness will be experienced later or in the here and now—depending on how we interpret the passage.<sup>154</sup> Thus, the discourses wonder about the origin of the pleasure and pain we feel and generally understand this to be one’s actions (*kamma*), even though the Discourse to Sīvaka (*Sīvaka Sutta*, SN 36.21)<sup>155</sup> lists other factors like health or the environment. Specific answers aside, the concern itself shows a preoccupation with pleasure and pain ‘as results’—note that the *Sīvaka Sutta* belongs to the *Vedanā Saṃyutta*.

While the model of the bundles (*khandha*) presents human experience analytically rather than portraying an ethical *process*, it is nonetheless affected by the ethical concern of actions and

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151 A brief explanation from an abhidharma perspective, extending what is in the discourses, can be found in Gethin, *Buddhist Maps*, chap. 5.

152 DhP 1-2: *manopubbāṅgamā dhammā manoseṭṭhā manomayā, / manasā ce paduṭṭhena bhāsati vā karoti vā tato naṃ dukkham anveti cakkam va vahato padaṃ. // manopubbāṅgamā dhammā manoseṭṭhā manomayā, / manasā ce pasannena bhāsati vā karoti vā / tato naṃ sukham anveti chāyā va anapāyini.* (I have added the ‘ox’ from the commentary, DhP-a i 24.)

153 MN i 416.

154 AN i 159.

155 SN iv 230.

results just mentioned. Sue Hamilton has explored the bundle of *saṅkhārā* in depth,<sup>156</sup> showing its intimate connection to *karma* and ethics. *Saṅkhāra* is also a reference to ritual culture:<sup>157</sup> acts performed again and again in order to achieve a certain result. This bundle targets the actions (*kamma*) that then ripen in fruits (*vipāka*). As in the case of the *satipaṭṭhānas*, here too Buddhist ethics makes sense of separating how things feel from phenomena with moral valence, as Anālayo observes.<sup>158</sup> This basic logic persists in exegetical discussions of feeling. In the *Abhidharmasamuccaya*, after identifying experience as the characteristic of feeling, Asaṅga says that there is experience ‘when one feels the results of good or bad actions’.<sup>159</sup> In fact, for the Dārṣāntikas, apart from *vedanā* there is no retribution of deeds—*vipāka phala*.<sup>160</sup>

So, while the bundle of *saṅkhārā* certainly contains emotions, it would be problematic to identify the bundle itself with the category ‘emotion’. For unlike modern psychology’s models of the inner life, the Buddhist *khandhas* are affected by ethical and soteriological concerns that cannot put feeling happy and lustful in the same basket, because only the latter actually determines one’s future state. Or, another way to say this: early Buddhists conceptualised being happy or sad as sufficiently different from being lustful or angry to not belong to the same category—they are enriched forms of ‘this feels nice’ and ‘this feels bad’.<sup>161</sup>

We have seen *vedanā* is neither reducible to a substance—bodily sensation, mood, thought—nor to a particular intensity, duration, or stage in the development of inner experience. None of these things determine whether something is included in the lists of feelings or left out. Anything can be seen from the angle of the pleasure-pain spectrum. It is a way of knowing experience<sup>162</sup> I can apply to my lower back, to my sense of smell, to my thoughts, or to my

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156 Hamilton, *Identity and Experience*, pp. 70–75.

157 Gombrich, *What the Buddha Thought*, p. 141.

158 ‘Whereas perceptions and volitional formations relate directly to intention and are amenable to mental training, feelings and consciousness are more the result of the situation created by perception and volitional formations’—Bhikkhu Anālayo, *Satipaṭṭhāna Meditation: A Practice Guide*, Kindle edition (Cambridge: Windhorse publications, 2018), loc. 2109; see also Lily De Silva, ‘Vedanānupassanā: On the Management of Kamma’, *Sri Lanka Journal of the Humanities*, 14.1/1 (1988), 171–78 (p. 173 ff).

159 *Abhidharmasamuccaya: The Compendium of the Higher Teaching (Philosophy) by Asaṅga*, trans. by Sara Bon-Weibb and Walpola Rāhula (Fremont, California: Asian Humanities Press, 2001), p. 3. See also p. 124ff.

160 The Dharmaguptakas reject this, claiming there are other causes and effects of retribution. See Andre Bareau, *Les Sectes Bouddhiques Du Petit Véhicule* (Saigon: École Française d’Extrême-Orient, 1955), pp. 161, 198.

161 This passive aspect of *vedanā*, mentioned often and precisely in connection to *vedanā*’s imagery, is found in the abhidharmic treatment of the wheel of life, representing dependent arising. See Aung, pp. 262–63.

162 Maria Heim has suggested a similar idea of a Buddhist ‘modal approach’ to experience—see Heim, ‘Some Analyses of Feeling’, p. 88. Akiñcano Weber has spoken of ‘the pleasure/displeasure aspect in the act of knowing’—see Weber, p. 19. Dan Lusthaus explains *vedanā* as ‘pleasure-pain perceptuality’—see Dan Lusthaus,

(modern) emotions. A good example is when we speak of *well-being* and *ill-being*, or *positive* and *negative* affect. In those cases we are approaching inner life from a *vedanā* perspective. It seems the discourses do something similar: they consider something a *vedanā* when its affective-hedonic aspect is dominant—as with joy, happiness, sadness, grief—or to present them under a particular light for practical reasons relevant to its soteriological ethics—which explains the eighteen ruminations being *vedanā*, though this case is rather exceptional.

What I want to highlight as a conclusion is that in early Buddhism *vedanā* is a small unit of hedonic experience like an unpleasant sound, as is usually recognised, *and* also bigger and more complex units of experience like feeling happy or depressed. To include or foreground the latter, the term ‘affect’ may seem appropriate. Sonam Kachru argues:

The connection between *vedanā* and the disclosure of the world in terms of qualitative values that motivate and render intelligible our engagement with the world is one which contemporary (anglophone) philosophical uses of “affect” are well-poised to capture.

I would not want to equate *vedanā* and affect and commit the same mistake I have been pointing out in relation to emotion, i.e., to use a modern concept to determine whether something the *suttas* talk about is actually a *vedanā* or not. Still, I find the expressions ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ affect particularly fitting, and I will use them a lot in chapter four, precisely to de-emphasise whether I am speaking of smaller or bigger units of experience. This approach, which may seem less precise to some and therefore worse, has the advantage of allowing us to identify and apply *vedanā* themes and concerns to the general affective life of practitioners as they appear in the early Pali texts, such as the motivational aspect Kachru mentions, which is sometimes underappreciated.<sup>163</sup> But, most importantly, this chapter has emphasised secondary feelings *as vedanā*, something crucial because these are the feelings most relevant to early Buddhist soteriology: these are the feelings one can affect through practice.

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*Buddhist Phenomenology: A Philosophical Investigation of Yōgācāra Buddhism and the Ch'eng Wei-Shih Lun* (London; New York: Routledge Curzon, 2003), p. 163.

<sup>163</sup> In later chapters I refer to this motivational aspect as the ‘affective pull’ of *vedanā*.

## Chapter 2: On feeling and evaluating

The first chapter has suggested that the early discourses use *vedanā* more flexibly than some modern scholars. Continuing with this thread, this second chapter deals with the lines that delimit *vedanā* and what lies outside of them, through an analysis of the *Bahuvedanīya Sutta* (MN 59) and other texts. While a few canonical passages suggest that some instances of *sukha* and *dukkha* do not refer to feelings, I believe recent scholarship has misidentified some of those instances. Those examples scholars discuss look like—and in a way are—evaluative statements; but despite that, the commentaries do not banish them from *vedanā* land, and I will argue that neither do the discourses. In fact, a couple of texts even call them *vedanā*, and we may read this as indicative of how the early texts thought instead of explaining it away as an oddity. It seems the scholarly position I argue against mixes two different things: the paradox that lack of feeling is pleasant, on the one hand, and that the neutral is pleasant and all feelings are painful, on the other. The early texts and their commentaries treat only the former as a fully evaluative usage of what is otherwise a *vedanā* term. Instead, the latter are cases of perceiving one hedonic tone as another, they are secondary and evaluative feelings, and relate to Buddhism’s refined hedonism.

The intimate connection of *vedanā* and *saññā* is at the heart of this, with a sometimes fuzzy boundary between them, and this stresses two things: the difficulty to neatly separate the cognitive from the affective-hedonic, which the early texts very much acknowledge, and how most feelings have a strong evaluative component—only some cases make it more obvious. To keep these out of *vedanā* land, as some scholars do, belies how early Buddhists thought and what their relationship to conceptual categories and precision was. Moreover, this scholarly position obscures *vedanā*’s role in spiritual transformation, in which the Buddhist practitioner finds satisfaction in increasingly subtle meditative states through learning to conceive of (and *experience*) peaceful neutral feeling as a refined pleasure. Instead, acknowledging this allows us

to better understand texts like the *Bahuvedanīya Sutta* and the logic of their composition.

The discussion will proceed by hedonic tones: I will start with the scholarly arguments that certain usages of *sukha* are not *vedanā*, and afterwards address similar arguments regarding *dukkha*. The bulk of my reasoning regarding these ‘evaluative feelings’ happens in the section on *sukha*, but applies to *dukkha* as well. Throughout the chapter, but especially in the last section, I will also look at this material in terms of a rhetoric that appeals to the natural tendency to seek what feels good and avoid what feels bad in order to motivate practitioners and construct ethical discourse. For like other religious traditions, early Buddhism expresses value judgements in hedonic terms.

Before diving in to the material, I need to make a methodological reflection. Both this chapter and the next enquire into instances of feeling that are either ambiguous or disputed in some way, and try to determine their nature. I am thus faced with a fundamental problem, for I ask of the early discourses something they do not always provide: straightforward definitions and statements that put things into neat categories. This is rather the job of later systematic Buddhist thought. I must accept that on some occasions the early texts leave things unresolved, and in resorting to exegetical sources I do not want to just take their word and mix layers of Buddhist thought. However, it is generally possible to see if they amplify and clarify what the texts are trying to convey, or are taking it into a different direction. How? Let me offer a simile.

Imagine a tomato. People think of it as a vegetable, even though botanically it is a fruit—a berry, to be specific. But given how I use tomatoes and how I use strawberries in the kitchen, I am unlikely to group them together in my mind, no matter my botanical knowledge. (More curiously, tomatoes are *legally* vegetables in the US.)<sup>1</sup> Now, since the early discourses are only partially interested in botany, in order to grasp how they think of tomatoes I must check whether they use it in salads or in fruit platters. Imperfect analogy aside: I must emphasise how certain items *function* in the texts besides how they may (or may not) be defined and classified.

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<sup>1</sup> Caitlin Dewey, ‘Analysis | The Obscure Supreme Court Case That Decided Tomatoes Are Vegetables’, *Washington Post*, 24 November 2021 <<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2017/10/18/the-obscure-supreme-court-case-that-decided-tomatoes-are-vegetables/>> [accessed 15 July 2023].

## The paradox of sukha & refined hedonism

The Discourse on the Many Kinds of Feeling (*Bahuvedanīya Sutta*, MN 59) is probably the go-to example for the idea that not all pleasure (*sukha*) refers to pleasant feeling (*sukhā vedanā*), and scholars often cite it when discussing this topic.<sup>2</sup> But some have taken this as a generic idea and applied it more freely than does the original source, mixing what I will argue are two distinct ‘paradoxes’ around feeling. Chapter one already addressed the dismissal of happy and sad moods as *vedanā*, and here we will focus on dismissals based on the line between the cognitive and the affective. For example, Steven Collins writes that ‘it is possible to mark the distinction between *sukha* as pleasant feeling and as a broader evaluative term quite precisely’<sup>3</sup>—note that he sets these as mutually exclusive. Collins puts the line between the third and the fourth *jhānas*, based on two things: Buddhaghosa’s comment that the pleasure of the third *jhāna* is the highest one,<sup>4</sup> and that the fourth *jhāna* is characterised by neutral feeling but still called a form of *sukha*. However, in the *Bahuvedanīya Sutta* the Buddha says that there *is* a higher pleasure than the third *jhāna*—and the fourth, and so on until the unsurpassable state of cessation.<sup>5</sup> And though it may make sense to consider the third *jhāna* the highest pleasant feeling given how the fourth has neutral feeling, distinctions along the lines of ‘this is the highest *felt* pleasure but not the highest in *evaluative* terms’ are not part of the discourse’s logic. Even more: while Collins would consider the pleasure of the fourth *jhāna* an evaluative term, the *Mahāsaccaka Sutta* (MN 36)<sup>6</sup> calls it a ‘pleasant feeling’ (*sukhā vedanā*).

The commentary notes that ‘the neutral feeling from the fourth *jhāna* onwards is also called

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2 Anālayo, *From Craving to Liberation*, p. 110; Steven Collins, *Nirvana and Other Buddhist Felicities: Utopias of the Pali Imaginaire* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 209; P. D. Premasiri, ‘The Role of the Concept of Happiness in the Early Buddhist Ethical System’, *Sri Lanka Journal of the Humanities*, 7 (1981), 61–81 (p. 68 ff); Prayudh Payutto, *Buddhadhamma: The Laws of Nature and Their Benefits to Life*, trans. by Robin Philip Moore, 4th edn (Bangkok, Thailand: Buddhadhamma Foundation, 2017), p. 1048 <<https://buddhadhamma.github.io/>> [accessed 1 November 2021].

3 Collins, *Nirvana and Other Buddhist Felicities*, pp. 208–9.

4 Vism 163 (IV 174). In the *Nyāyānusāra*, Samghabhadra also says that the happiness of the third *jhāna* ‘excels all sensations’. Quoted in K. L. Dhammajoti, *Aspects of Meditative Praxis in Sarvāstivāda* (Hong Kong: The Buddha-Dharma Centre of Hong Kong, 2021), p. 74.

5 MN i 398. This superiority recurs in non-Pali texts as well; Bhikkhu Anālayo, ‘The First Absorption (Dhyāna) in Early Indian Buddhism: A Study of Source Material from the Madhyama-Āgama’, in *Hindu, Buddhist and Daoist Meditation: Cultural Histories* (Hermes Academic Publishing, 2014), pp. 69–90 (p. 88).

6 MN i 247: *sukhassa ca pahānā dukkhassa ca pahānā, pubbeva somanassadomanassānaṃ aithaṅgamā, adukkhamasukhaṃ upekkhāsatiṭṭhāpārisuddhiṃ catutthaṃ jhānaṃ upasampajja vihāsiṃ. evarūpāpi kho me, aggivessana, uppannā sukhā vedanā cittaṃ na pariyaḍāya tiṭṭhati.*

“pleasure” in the sense of peaceful and refined’,<sup>7</sup> but it is Collins’ assumption that this entails not being a *vedanā*. Throughout this section I will show that the discourses do not support this entailment. Nor does the commentary, which labels the pleasure of all *jhānas* and immaterial attainments as ‘felt pleasure’ (*vedayitasukha*), and only the pleasure of cessation as ‘unfelt pleasure’ (*avedayitasukha*). Still, Collins claims that ‘[o]rdinary sensual happiness, and the happiness engendered by meditation, are said to be matters of feeling, but only up until the third Meditation Level’, contradicting his own translation of the commentary, as follows: ‘happiness which is a matter of feeling (occurs) through the five strands of sense-pleasure and through the eight (Meditation Level) attainments’.<sup>8</sup> If he wants to disagree with the commentary, that is not made clear. My argument aligns with Prayudh Payutto,<sup>9</sup> who follows the commentarial view.

To delve into this matter we need to look in more detail at a few discourses, starting with the *Bahuedanīya Sutta*. We could think of this text as composed of three units or parts: the debate, the gradual abidings, and the paradox of *sukha*. In the first unit, the carpenter Pañcakaṅga argues, against Venerable Udāyī, that the Buddha has not spoken of three feelings but only two, because neutral feeling is in fact a peaceful and refined form of pleasure.<sup>10</sup> For Pañcakaṅga, then, there is only pleasant and painful—in a meditative context, as I believe the context shows.<sup>11</sup> On hearing about the dispute, the Buddha says that both presentations are valid and that he has explained feeling in multiple ways.<sup>12</sup>

Then, in the second unit, the Buddha presents a hierarchy of pleasures:<sup>13</sup> sensual pleasure (*kāmasukha*),<sup>14</sup> the four *jhānas*, the four immaterial attainments, and finally the state called the ‘cessation of perception and feeling’ (*saññāvedayitanirodha*). The elements after sensual pleasure are known as the nine gradual abidings (*anupubbavihāra*).<sup>15</sup> Of each of these elements except

7 Ps iii 115.

8 Collins, *Nirvana and Other Buddhist Felicities*, pp. 208, 210.

9 Payutto, p. 1048.

10 M i 396: *na kho bhante Udāyī tisso vedanā vuttā bhagavatā, dve vedanā vuttā bhagavatā: sukhā vedanā, dukkhā vedanā. yāyaṃ bhante adukkhamasukhā vedanā, santasmim̐ esā pañāte sukhe vuttā bhagavatā ti.*

11 There is no hint that Pañcakaṅga questions the existence of neutral feeling in general.

12 ‘what the Buddha’s endorsement approves of is the type of “presentation” (*pariyāya*) of feelings as twofold.’ Bhikkhu Anālayo, ‘What About Neutral Feelings?’, *Insight Journal*, 43 (2017), 1–10 (p. 3). I will come back to this in the next section.

13 In this context many would translate *sukha* as ‘happiness’. I maintain ‘pleasure’ both for consistency and to get closer to how early Buddhists thought and spoke about this. I expand on this later in this chapter.

14 *Kāmasukha* corresponds to *sāmisa sukha*, since both are defined as the five strands of sense desire.

15 These are presented in the *Anupubbavihāra Sutta* (AN 9.32 at AN iv 410).

the last, the Buddha tells Ānanda:

I do not approve of anyone who would say that this is the highest pleasure and happiness that beings experience. Why? Because there is another pleasure that is more excellent and refined than this one.<sup>16</sup>

Arrived at the state of cessation, the Buddha anticipates a possible criticism from other schools—this is the third part: how can one say that the cessation of perception *and feeling* is a type of pleasure?<sup>17</sup> Surely if nothing is felt, *sukha* does not apply. We may call this ‘the paradox of *sukha*’. He continues:

When speaking in this way, the wanderers of other schools should be answered: ‘Friends, the Buddha does not declare only pleasant feeling as pleasure; wherever pleasure is found, wherever, the Buddha declares it as pleasure.’<sup>18</sup>

We cannot know if this preventive defence attests to the memory of an actual accusation of incoherence by contemporary religious groups or not, but it shows an awareness that *vedanā* needs conceptual boundaries. Now, crucially, the point that pleasure (*sukha*) does not only refer to pleasant feeling (*sukhā vedanā*) is made concerning the state of cessation: no criticism or potential incoherence whatsoever is targeted at the meditative attainments from the fourth *jhāna* onwards which, despite having neutral feeling, are considered refined pleasures—that seems fine.

This discourse is duplicated in the *Vedanā Saṃyutta* as the *Pañcakaṅga Sutta* (SN 36.19)<sup>19</sup> and has a Chinese parallel (SĀ 485).<sup>20</sup> Fragments in Sanskrit and Tibetan also survive.<sup>21</sup> Anālayo, who has gathered differences between them,<sup>22</sup> notes that both the Chinese text and the Sanskrit fragment contain a twofold exposition of feeling—‘associated with sensuality’ and ‘aloof from sensuality’<sup>23</sup>—that helps transition from the first to the second part, whereas ‘in the two Pali

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16 MN i 398: *yo kho, ānanda, evaṃ vadēyya ‘etaṃparamaṃ sattā sukhaṃ somanassaṃ paṭisaṃvedentī’ ti, idamassa nānuijānāmi. taṃ kissa hetu? atthānanda, etamhā sukhā aññaṃ sukhaṃ abhikkantataraṇā ca paṇītatarāṇā ca.*

17 MN i 400: *thānaṃ kho paṇetaṃ, ānanda, vijjati yaṃ aññatitthiyā paribbājaka evaṃ vadēyyuṃ ‘saññāvedayitanirodhaṃ samaṇo gotamo āha; tañca sukhasmiṃ paññāpeti. tayidaṃ kiṃsu, tayidaṃ kathaṃsū’ ti?*

18 MN i 400: *evaṃ vādino, ānanda, aññatitthiyā paribbājaka evamassu vacanīyā ‘na kho, āvuso, bhagavā sukhaṃyeva vedanaṃ sandhāya sukhasmiṃ paññāpeti; api ca, āvuso, yattha yattha sukhaṃ upalabbhati yaṃ yaṃ taṃ taṃ tathāgato sukhasmiṃ paññāpeti’ ti.*

19 SN iv 223.

20 T ii 123c-124b

21 Dhammadinnā, pp. 173–78.

22 Anālayo, *Comparative Majjhima*, pp. 335–38; Choong, pp. 111–14.

23 These use the Chinese character for *kāma* (欲) and seem equivalent to *sāmisā* (食) and *nirāmisā* (無食) feelings.

versions this topic comes somewhat abruptly'.<sup>24</sup> While indeed this transition introduces the theme of meditative feelings, the two feelings that Pañcakaṅga defended were neither these nor bodily and mental, but pleasant and painful. But I believe that a transition is unnecessary: even in the Pali versions the second unit already follows naturally from the first, because it illustrates Pañcakaṅga's point by providing examples of neutral feelings treated as refined pleasures.<sup>25</sup>

At this juncture we can take a short detour and ask: is *vedanā* ever presented as twofold in terms of hedonic tone? In their explanatory guide to the *Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha*, U Rewata Dhamma and Bhikkhu Bodhi say it is,<sup>26</sup> while Anālayo remarks that 'the presentation by Pañcakaṅga of a twofold analysis of the hedonic tonality of feeling is unique in the early discourses'.<sup>27</sup> All authors have a point. To agree with the former two, indeed quite a few discourses omit neutral feeling in the following contexts: the views, speculations and questions of other schools about present experience having its origins in past actions, *karma*, and other cosmological issues;<sup>28</sup> the teaching of the eight worldly winds, two of which are the pair 'pleasure and pain';<sup>29</sup> and as feelings arising from sensory contact<sup>30</sup>—this last one, being closest to the usual Buddhist presentations, is where the absence of the neutral shocks the most. But, in general, it does not seem that the two feelings of the *Bahuvedanīya* have anything to do with the contexts just listed. And so, to agree with Anālayo, the present analysis also has something unique: the subsuming of neutral under pleasant.

The most relevant difference between versions of this text is that the Chinese and Sanskrit defend the paradox of *sukha* differently. They present four kinds of pleasure, which elsewhere in the Pali texts are the pleasures of renunciation (*nekkhammasukha*), of seclusion (*pavivekasukha*), of calm (*upasamasukha*) and of awakening (*sambodhisukha* or *sambodhasukha*).<sup>31</sup> The third of these, in Chinese, are the same characters used to argue that neutral feeling is a peaceful kind of

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24 Anālayo, *Comparative Majjhima*, p. 338.

25 As such, I do not see here the Buddha's 'implicit corrective' to Pañcakaṅga's view that Anālayo suggests. Rather, the discourse builds upon that view; it 'seems to tacitly concede the carpenter Pañcakaṅga's point' when speaking of the fourth *jhāna* as a refined pleasure, as observed in Weber, p. 14.

26 Bodhi and Narāda, p. 154.

27 Anālayo, 'What About Neutral Feelings?', p. 3.

28 SN ii 22, SN ii 37, Ud 69.

29 AN iv 157.

30 SN ii 23, SN iv 171.

31 Anālayo, *Comparative Majjhima*, p. 338, note 146. MN 66 and MN 139 speak of these as the pleasure to be cultivated and not feared, but relate them collectively to the *jhānas* (MN i 454, iii 233).

pleasure: 寂滅. Thus, this defense of the paradox of *sukha* links back to the initial debate. In contrast, the Pali seems more concerned with justifying the state of cessation than with Pañcakaṅga's peaceful pleasure; it emphasises pleasure as other than feeling altogether.<sup>32</sup>

That the various textual traditions explain the paradox of *sukha* differently could suggest that the early Buddhist awareness of this boundary issue predates a standard resolution of it, which was not formulated until a bit later. Whatever the case, all traditions seem able to use *sukha* in the sense of being good, worthy, to be pursued—this is, in an evaluative sense,<sup>33</sup> as Collins noted. But whether this is clearly separated from its felt dimension is a more complicated matter. The *Bahuvedanīya* and its commentary regard only the *sukha* of cessation as a pure evaluation and not as a feeling, whereas they locate the refined pleasure of neutral feeling in *vedanā* land. Pañcakaṅga points to this already with the idea of perceiving one hedonic tone as another. Elsewhere, the commentaries justify calling nirvana '*sukha*' because it is 'the cause of *sukha*'.<sup>34</sup> However, in this case *sukha* is not evaluative but a conceptual metonymy, in which the effect of a thing stands for the thing.

Next I will focus on two texts of the *Anguttara Nikāya* that complement the *Bahuvedanīya* and help us understand Pañcakaṅga: the Discourse on Nirvanic Pleasure (*Nibbānasukha Sutta*, AN 9.34)<sup>35</sup> and the Discourse to Tapussa (*Tapussa Sutta*, AN 9.41).<sup>36</sup> Like the *Bahuvedanīya*, both these texts use the gradual abidings.<sup>37</sup> While neither has a parallel, there are no reasons to think their perspective is exclusive to the Pali tradition. The key thing is these texts deal with refined hedonism, not with the paradox of *sukha* we have just seen. However, they show how

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32 Whether the Chinese-Sanskrit response actually addresses the paradox of *sukha* is also unclear. Is the pleasure of awakening applicable to the state of cessation or liberation after death? The commentary to the *Laṭṭhikopama Sutta* (MN 66) explains it as 'the pleasure for the sake of producing awakening reckoned as path' (Ps iii 171: *sambodhasukhan ti maggasaṅkhātassa sambodhassa nibbattanattāya sukhaṃ*).

33 Premasiri suggests they are called *sukha* in the sense of 'desirable', but conceives of this as non-evaluative since he understands 'evaluative' in a moral sense, which is not how I am using the term. See Premasiri, p. 74.

34 Cited in Collins, *Nirvana and Other Buddhist Felicities*, p. 208.

35 AN iv 414. I translate 'nirvanic pleasure' idiomatically, but the Pali is best read as 'nirvana is pleasure'.

36 AN iv 438.

37 It has been argued that this model is tied to Brahminic ideas that liberation happens at death, with the state of cessation anticipating such a liberation during life. Scholars have deemed this either a remnant of pre-canonical Buddhism or a later addition not traceable to the historical Buddha; see Alexander Wynne, *The Origin of Buddhist Meditation* (New York: Routledge, 2007), pp. 98, 103; Johannes Bronkhorst, *Buddhist Teaching in India* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2009), pp. 50–56; Johannes Bronkhorst, *The Two Traditions of Meditation in Ancient India*, 2nd edition (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1993), p. 79 ff. However, Anālayo considers the model fully integrated within mainstream early Buddhist discourse; see Bhikkhu Anālayo, *Early Buddhist Meditation Studies* (Barre Center for Buddhist Studies, 2017), pp. 49–62.

these two connect, how the mindset of refined hedonism devolves into the paradox of cessation being called a type of pleasure.

The Discourse on Nirvanic Pleasure opens, precisely, with the paradox of *sukha*: Sāriputta claims that nirvana is pleasure (or pleasant) and Udāyī retorts, baffled, that this cannot be the case since nothing is felt there. Sāriputta replies that when nothing is felt *that* is indeed pleasure (or pleasant).<sup>38</sup> Here Sāriputta spells out the argument that the Buddha did not provide: why liberation deserves the label *sukha*. Nirvana is *sukha* for the same reason that lack of feeling is *sukha*, namely, as a condition free from pain<sup>39</sup>—a privative idea with Epicurean parallels.<sup>40</sup> This equates liberation with cessation in one regard. At the same time, Sāriputta repeats his claim that nirvana is *sukha* after each of the nine gradual abidings, so the expression refers to gaining degrees of freedom as well.<sup>41</sup>

Sāriputta reasons as follows: the Buddha calls pain (*dukkha*) that which is an affliction (*ābādha*); in each meditative stage, the occurrence of elements from a previous stage would be an affliction for the meditator in the same way that pain would be an affliction for a happy person; it is in this way that one should understand nirvana to be *sukha*.<sup>42</sup> Here, *dukkha* is itself being redefined. But two features of Sāriputta’s reasoning need attention which are firmly within *vedanā* land. First, he uses Dhammadinnā’s logic that the painful is pleasant when it ceases (MN 44),<sup>43</sup> for here a certain state is called pleasure on account of the disappearance of something that is seen as a pain. Secondly, the argument is made by analogy with felt pain and happiness: each stage is, from the viewpoint of the next one, inferior and comparable to pain;

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38 AN iv 414: *etadeva khvettha āvuso sukhaṃ yadettha n’ atthi vedayitaṃ*.

39 Ps iii 115.

40 See, for example, John M. Cooper, *Pursuits of Wisdom: Six Ways of Life in Ancient Philosophy from Socrates to Plotinus* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), p. 232 ff. For an explanation of pleasure as a degree of *dukkha*, similar to how ‘feeling cold’ refers to a degree of heat, see Payutto, p. 75.

41 Commenting on this discourse, Rune Johansson says that the happiness of *nibbāna*, by which he may mean either the meditative states or final liberation, ‘is not called *vedanā*, because this normally leads to *tanhā* [sic]’. However, in itself *vedanā* does not necessarily activate desire. See Johansson, *The Psychology of Nirvana*, p. 26.

42 AN iv 415.

43 MN i 303: *dukkhā vedanā thitidukkhā vipariṇāmasukhā*. Anālayo has commented on this in the following way: ‘A change of pleasure is painful (or at least “unpleasant”) even when such a change only results in a neutral experience. Still such change will be experienced as unpleasant; it is not welcome. The same holds for painful feelings, where a change to a neutral hedonic tonality of experience will be pleasant’ (Anālayo, ‘What About Neutral Feelings?’, pp. 7–8.). Given how *vedanā* is the hedonic aspect of experience, what does it mean to say that something is ‘a neutral experience’ but is ‘experienced as unpleasant’? A neutral experience *is* something experienced as neutral. We could understand that hedonic temperature takes a dip into the unpleasant when going from pleasant to neutral, or see the hedonic spectrum as relative: a lowering of hedonic temperature is unpleasant because it is *more* unpleasant than earlier.

and from the viewpoint of the previous one, superior and comparable to pleasure. This uses *sukha* and *dukkha* to convey value, and yet Sāriputta draws on the natural preference of living things to seek what *feels* good and shun what *feels* bad in order to build this rhetoric of what is best and most worthy of pursuit—I will expand on this below.

Sāriputta’s teaching culminates with the state of cessation, which has left behind the pain that is *vedanā* itself and is thus pleasure in the same sense that final liberation is: not being born again, there is no feeling at all anymore. This connects to a passage appearing a few times in the discourses where someone who has achieved liberation, feeling the *vedanā* of death approaching, realises how upon death ‘all that is felt and not delighted in will become cool’.<sup>44</sup> According to Alexander Wynne, this ‘coolness’ more often describes a *living* awakened person,<sup>45</sup> but in both cases the image seems to describe the satisfaction of leaving pain behind for good.<sup>46</sup>

Another pertinent discourse has the Buddha converse with the ascetic Sakuludāyī, or Udāyī ‘Snakehead’.<sup>47</sup> He proposes that the way to a totally pleasant world (*ekantasukha loka*)<sup>48</sup> is ethical precepts<sup>49</sup> and austerities, but the Buddha retorts that in these one feels both pleasure and pain.<sup>50</sup> Instead, the way are the first, second and third *jhānas*. Snakehead thinks that the third *jhāna* must already be a totally pleasant world rather than the way towards it, but the Buddha explains that such a world is the fourth *jhāna*, beyond pleasure and pain. That the highest *sukha* is a state beyond *sukha* and *dukkha* is a new idea for Snakehead, as it was to the Udāyī(s) of the other two discourses.

44 SN iv 213: *jīvitapariyantikaṃ vedanaṃ vedayamāno jīvitapariyantikaṃ vedanaṃ vedayāmi’ti pajānāti. kāyassa bheda uddhaṃ jīvitapariyādānā idheva sabbavedayitāni anabhinanditāni sītibhavissanti’ti pajānāti ti.* Also at MN iii 245, SN v 319.

45 Wynne, *The Origin of Buddhist Meditation*, p. 80. For a critique of his interpretation, see Rupert Gethin, ‘What Upasīva Asked and How the Buddha Answered: On the Upasīvamāṇavapucchā and Its Commentaries’, in *Jhānaprasaṃsā. In Praise of Knowledge: Essays in Honour of E. G. Kahrs*, ed. by Alastair Gornall (Halle: Universitätsverlag Halle-Wittenberg, 2022), pp. 161–82 (p. 165 ff).

46 See also the thoughts on nirvana as object of desire in David Webster, *The Philosophy of Desire in the Buddhist Pali Canon*, Routledge Critical Studies in Buddhism (London & New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 94.

47 His nickname refers to a fish commonly eaten in North India; see S. Dhammika, *Nature and the Environment in Early Buddhism* (Singapore: Buddha Dhamma Mandala Society, 2015), p. 158.

48 Cone, *A - kh*, p. 528.

49 Only the first four of the usual five are mentioned.

50 MN ii 36: *‘taṃ kim maññasi, Udāyi? yasmim samaye pāṇātipātāṃ pahāya pāṇātipātā paṭivirato hoti ... yasmim samaye aññatarāṃ*

*tapogunaṃ samādāya vattati, ekantasukhī vā tasmim samaye attā hoti sukhadukkhī vā?’ ti. ‘sukkhadukkhī, bhante.’ ‘taṃ kim maññasi, Udāyi? api nu kho vokiṇṇasukhadukkhāṃ paṭipadaṃ āgamma ekantasukhassa lokassa sacchikiriya hoti?’ ti. ‘acchidaṃ Bhagavā kathaṃ. acchidaṃ Sugato kathan’ ti.*

On this topic, who are all these Udāyīs? Is it a coincidence that they always end up in discussions on the same teaching? The commentaries identify the Udāyī of the *Bahuvedanīya* as Paṇḍita Udāyī, the son of a brahmin from Kapilavatthu,<sup>51</sup> and that of the *Nibbānasukha Sutta* as Lāḷudāyī Thera,<sup>52</sup> but it seems reasonable to think that these could be one and the same character.<sup>53</sup> Whether Snakehead is the same Udāyī as well is less clear, because in the *Cūḷasakuludāyī Sutta* (MN 79) his disciples dissuade him from becoming a follower of the Buddha.<sup>54</sup> Still, he could have followed through with his intention without this being recorded, and in fact his own teacher Vekhanassa ended up converting.<sup>55</sup> In any case, it is remarkable that the three discussions revolve around virtually the same theme—and to these we will later add the *Latukikopama Sutta* (MN 66).<sup>56</sup> Perhaps these passages originate in one single teaching episode to someone called Udāyī that later split into multiple discourses. We cannot prove this, but the coincidences are striking and the portrait is consistent: here is someone with little personal experience of advanced meditation states, unfamiliar with refined spiritual pleasure.

We can now move on to the Discourse to Tapussa (AN 9.41). The lay man Tapussa marvels at how young mendicants in the Buddha’s community are so determined about renunciation, which feels like such an uphill climb for lay people who enjoy sense pleasures. When Ānanda recounts this to the Buddha, he seems sympathetic to Tapussa’s struggle:

It is just like this, Ānanda, just like this. Before my awakening, when I was only an aspirant to awakening, I too thought: ‘Good is renunciation! Good is seclusion!’ Yet, with regards to renunciation, my mind did not spring forward, it was not pleased, settled and freed as when seeing ‘this is peaceful’.<sup>57</sup>

From this answer we infer that Tapussa acknowledges the virtue in renunciation (‘I too thought...’), but something more is needed: to find satisfaction, comfort or confidence in that

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51 Ps iii 114. See Udāyī Thera in G. P Malalasekera, *Dictionary of Pāli Proper Names* (London: Pali Text Society, 1937), I, p. 375.

52 Mp ii 344. See G. P Malalasekera, *Dictionary of Pāli Proper Names* (London: Pali Text Society, 1938), II, p. 776.

53 A digital version of Malalasekera’s dictionary identifies them as the same person, as it glosses Lāḷudāyī instead of Mahā Udāyī under Udāyī Thera—it seems to be a mistake. This version can be found, among other places, at [www.palikanon.com](http://www.palikanon.com) and the Digital Pali Reader (accessed 30th June 2021).

54 MN ii 29.

55 Malalasekera, II, pp. 914–15.

56 MN i 447.

57 AN iv 439: *evametaṃ, ānanda, evametaṃ, ānanda. mayham pi kho, ānanda, pubbeva sambodhā anabhisambuddhassa bodhisattasseva sato etadahosi, ‘sādhu nekkhammaṃ, sādhu paviveko’ti. tassa mayhaṃ, ānanda, nekkhamme cittaṃ na pakkhandati naḥpasīdati na santiṭṭhati na vimuccati etaṃ santaṃ ti passato.* The PTS edition has *paviveko*, a typing error for *paviveko*.

state.<sup>58</sup> This, the text goes on to say, requires reflecting on the dangers of sense pleasures and experiencing the benefits of renunciation for oneself;<sup>59</sup> it is not enough to bow to the idea that it is a good thing (*sādhu nekkhammaṃ*). This resembles a conversation between the Buddha and his lay cousin Mahānāma<sup>60</sup> where we read that sense pleasures still hold influence over Mahānāma because he has not experienced *jhānic* joy and pleasure (MN 14),<sup>61</sup> he has not personally known a better alternative to sense pleasures. The present Discourse to Tapussa contains a similar argument.

The Buddha offers Tapussa the same reasoning Sāriputta offered Udāyī in the *Nibbānasukha Sutta*: that in each meditative stage, the occurrence of elements from the previous one are an affliction comparable to a happy person feeling pain. In this case the argument also includes the mind not ‘springing forward’ to the higher stage until there has been enough reflection on the drawbacks of the lower stage and enough acquaintance with the higher one. The discourse repeats this formula for each meditative stage, from renunciation (which matures into the first *jhāna*) up to the cessation of perception and feeling.

Let us analyse the formula. It contains four verbs (*pakkhandati*, *pasīdati*, *santit̥ṭhāti*, *vimuccati*) and it also appears in other texts to describe progress along a set of meditation states.<sup>62</sup> But in the Discourse to Tapussa it is completed by the clause ‘seeing “this is peaceful”’ (*etaṃ santan ti passato*). Translators have rendered this in very divergent ways. I will contrast two. Bhikkhu Bodhi translates as follows: ‘Yet my mind did not launch out upon renunciation and become placid, settled, and liberated in it, though I saw it as peaceful.’ Later on, with confidence in

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58 The intimate connection between finding pleasure, becoming settled, calm, confident, etc. runs throughout the early discourses; it is the logic of *sukha* preceding *samādhi*. Therefore, I have translated ‘pleased’ and ‘settled’ in order to include the various shades of meaning. The PED gives the meaning of finding satisfaction both for *pakkhandati* (p. 381) and *pasīdati* (p. 447) when accompanied by a locative, whereas Margaret Cone only does so for *pasīdati* (vol. III, p. 396). In both dictionaries the current cluster of verbs is referred. *Pasīdati*’s connotation of ‘being pleased’ was also stressed in Edith Ludowik-Gyömrői, ‘Note on the Interpretation of “Pasīdati”’, *University of Ceylon Review*, 1943, 74–82 (p. 78).

59 AN iv 440: *so kho ahaṃ, ānanda, aparena samayena kāmesu ādīnavaṃ disvā taṃ bahulamakāsīṃ, nekkhamme ānisamsaṃ adhigamma tamāseviṃ. tassa mayhaṃ, ānanda, nekkhamme cittaṃ pakkhandati pasīdati santit̥ṭhāti vimuccati etaṃ santan ti passato*. I take *adhigacchati* as ‘personally attain’ rather than ‘understand’, given the accompanying verb *āsevati* (to practise, indulge in, frequent), and agreeing with the commentary (Mp iv 204: *adhigammā ti adhigantvā patvā sacchikatvā*).

60 See Arbel, *Early Buddhist Meditation*, p. 60; Eviatar Shulman, ‘Looking for Samatha and Vipassanā in the Early Suttas: What, Actually, Are the Texts?’, *The Indian International Journal of Buddhist Studies*, 20 (2019), 95–141 (pp. 131–32).

61 MN i 91.

62 For example, the short and long discourses on emptiness: MN 121 and 122, beginning at MN iii 104.

renunciation reached, the Buddha’s mind did become liberated in it, ‘since I saw it as peaceful’.<sup>63</sup> Bodhi interprets that the Buddha saw renunciation as peaceful both times, so it would seem that such seeing is independent from progress. However, he also makes it the cause of liberation the second time around, which begs the question of why that seeing was ineffective earlier. Bhikkhu Sujato takes the opposite view: ‘But my mind wasn’t eager for renunciation; it wasn’t confident, settled, and decided about it. I didn’t see it as peaceful.’ When confidence in renunciation is reached, he translates ‘I saw it as peaceful’.<sup>64</sup> Sujato takes the seeing as contributing to progress from one stage to the next.

Bodhi follows the commentary, which treats the clause as equivalent to the thought ‘Good is renunciation!’.<sup>65</sup> But *passati* (seeing) carries more weight than the expression *mayham etad ahoṣi* (‘it occurred to me’). For example, in the *Mahāhatthipadopama Sutta* (MN 28), the mind springs forward and becomes pleased, settled and freed by seeing how the five bundles of clinging are impermanent,<sup>66</sup> where seeing (*passati*) must denote insight and first-hand experience. Also, the similar expression ‘this is peaceful, this is refined’ (*etaṃ santam etaṃ paṇītam*) equally suggests personal experience, an actual abiding in meditative states—sometimes the *jhānas*—and spiritual development;<sup>67</sup> whereas the mere idea that renunciation is a good thing, as it occurred to Tapussa and the Buddha-to-be, does not. In fact, why would renunciation be so difficult for lay people if they truly saw it as such a peaceful thing?

It makes more sense that seeing a higher meditative state as peaceful goes with having had a taste of it and seeing lower states as worse, with drawbacks. Besides, the narrative logic of this text, where the meditator learns to find satisfaction in increasingly subtle and peaceful states, integrates Pañcakaṅga’s argument that the neutral is a peaceful type of pleasure. It seems more fitting to read that seeing “this is peaceful” helps the meditator move along the gradual abidings: it is a piece in the process of the mind becoming pleased and settled, and before this happens the meditator does *not* see the higher state as peaceful—which is partly why the mind

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63 *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha: A Complete Translation of the Anguttara Nikaya.*, trans. by Bhikkhu Bodhi (Somerville: Wisdom Publications, 2012), p. 1310.

64 Bhikkhu Sujato, ‘Tapussasutta’, *SuttaCentral* <<https://suttacentral.net/an9.41/en/sujato>> [accessed 15 July 2023].

65 Mp iv 204: *etaṃ santan ti passato ti sādhu nekkhamman ti parivittakkaṇavasena etaṃ nekkhammam santan ti passantassā pi.*

66 MN i 186: *so phasso anicco ti passati, vedanā aniccā ti passati, saññā aniccā ti passati, saṅkhārā aniccā ti passati, viññāṇam aniccan ti passati. tassa dhātārammaṇameva cittaṃ pakkhandaṭṭi pasīdati santiṭṭhati adhimuccati.* (This passage does not contain the clause ‘*etaṃ santan ti passato*’.)

67 MN i 436, MN ii 235, MN iii 300, AN i 133, AN iv 423.

does not trust that state yet. Therefore, Sujato’s translation is clearest about the meaning of this passage.

Regarding the syntax, Bodhi and the commentary take the subject of the clause to be first *bhikkhūnaṃ*, when Tapussa is praising the young monks, and later *mayhaṃ*, when the Buddha speaks. This creates the problem that in the first case *passato* should rather be plural.<sup>68</sup> Instead, *bhikkhūnaṃ* and *mayhaṃ* seem only to qualify *cittaṃ*, and the clause appears to be in apposition to the verbs. One option is to continue to take *passato* as a genitive: the inexperienced mind is not pleased and settled, *as it is when* it sees “this is peaceful” or *as the mind of one* seeing in such a way, whereas the experienced mind is. Another option is to take *passato* as the noun *passa*<sup>69</sup> in the ablative with the suffix *-to*, indicating with reference to what liberation occurs: it is due to the sight that ‘this is peaceful’ that the mind is liberated and settles on the higher meditative state.<sup>70</sup>

This formula carries a last puzzle. Bodhi argues that the verb *vimuccati* should in fact be *adhimuccati*, though he bows to the text and translates *vimuccati*: ‘become liberated’.<sup>71</sup> Indeed the transmission seems to have lacked some consistency, as two discourses contain this formula with *adhimuccati*<sup>72</sup> and a few more with *vimuccati*<sup>73</sup>—the difference is not significant. Still, Bodhi’s argument for preferring *adhimuccati* is that ‘in each case the bodhisatta is *vimuccati/adhimuccati* upon the attainment *before* he actually achieves it’,<sup>74</sup> but this is not so. For as we have seen, the process towards becoming *vimuccati/adhimuccati* includes personally experiencing that attainment. Moreover, *vimuccati* fits how these meditative states are called liberations—earlier, we saw Sāriputta call them *nibbāna*.

Together, all these texts convey how the Buddha’s followers progress through learning to appreciate subtle forms of pleasure and find satisfaction in them, so that from the new perspective lower states are comparable to disease or pain and even come to be experienced as unpleasant and unwanted. It is a game of replacing *vedanās*. For besides discursive reflection,

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68 See Bodhi, *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha*, p. 1832 note 1944.

69 Cone, *P - bh*, p. 399.

70 I am grateful to Aleix Ruiz-Falqués for suggesting this alternative.

71 Bodhi, *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha*, p. 1832 note 1943.

72 MN i 184, MN iii 104.

73 DN iii 207, DN iii 272, MN i 432, MN iii 109, AN iii 245, AN iv 228.

74 Bodhi, *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha*, p. 1832 note 1943.

this training also involves conceiving of a certain state as peaceful and conceiving of peace as refined pleasure. This important ingredient is, on the one hand, the natural fruit of maturing insight, and on the other, a perception one purposely cultivates.

Then again, Poṭṭhapāda, due to letting go of pain and pleasure, and due to happiness and unhappiness disappearing earlier, they enter and dwell in the fourth *jhāna*, which is neither-painful-nor-pleasant, purity of equanimity and mindfulness. Their previous subtle and real perception of equanimity and pleasure ceases. At that time they have a subtle and real perception of neither pain nor pleasure. In this way, because of training one perception arises and one perception ceases. This is the training.<sup>75</sup>

The meditator's conception or perception (*saññā*) of hedonic tones evolves and with it the hedonic tones themselves, since they cannot be divorced from *saññā*, especially secondary feelings. While the *Poṭṭhapāda Sutta* uses the feelings from the standard *jhāna* formula, the discourses explored above draw from the early Buddhist logic that *samādhi* is preceded by *sukha* in a natural and effortless process,<sup>76</sup> and apply it to settling into each meditative stage. Thus, as Anālayo has observed, pleasant feelings are not merely byproducts or signs of attaining a particular stage, but they lead into it.<sup>77</sup> Such *sukha* increasingly needs to derive from subtle perceptions.

This process both illuminates and is illuminated by another logic: Dhammadinnā's point that 'neither-pleasant-nor-painful feeling is pleasant when there is knowledge', found in the *Cūlavedalla Sutta* (MN 44).<sup>78</sup> There is a slight ambiguity on whether this refers either to noticing or ignoring the neutral, or to having insight into it or not.<sup>79</sup> A measure of both seems implicated. The sub-commentary confirms that, when known, neutral feeling is pleasant because of its subtlety, and relates this to knowing its characteristics as a *dhamma*; when neutral feeling is associated with knowledge, it appears as agreeable or has 'an agreeable mode' (*ittihākārā*).<sup>80</sup> Then it cites verse 374 of the Dhammapada, according to which insight into the

75 DN i 183: *puna caparaṃ, Poṭṭhapāda, bhikkhu sukhasa ca pahānā dukkhasa ca pahānā pubbeva somanassadomanassānaṃ atthaṅgamā adukkhamasukhaṃ upekkhāsatiṭṭhāpārisuddhiṃ catutthaṃ jhānaṃ upasampajja viharati. tassa yā purimā upekkhāsukhasukhumasaccasaññā, sā nirujjhati. adukkhamasukhasukhumasaccasaññā tasmīṃ samaye hoti, adukkhamasukhasukhumasaccasaññāyeva tasmīṃ samaye hoti. evaṃ pi sikkhā ekā saññā uppañjati, sikkhā ekā saññā nirujjhati. ayaṃ pi sikkhā ti.*

76 AN v 3.

77 Anālayo, *Early Buddhist Meditation Studies*, p. 134.

78 MN i 303: *adukkhamasukhā vedanā nānasukhā aññānadukkhā*. The commentary glosses: *adukkhamasukhāya vedanāya jānanabhāvo sukhaṃ, ajānanabhāvo dukkhaṃ ti* (Ps ii 368).

79 Anālayo, 'What About Neutral Feelings?', p. 7; Weber, pp. 14–15.

80 Ps-ṭ ii 286.

*khandhas* gives rise to joy (*pīti*) and gladness (*pāmojja*).<sup>81</sup> Thus, exegetical literature notes the wisdom dimension in this meditative process. It conforms to the early model of *samatha* and *vipassanā* yoked together, alternated and feeding into each other.<sup>82</sup>

We may consider that some meditative experiences are neutral from one perspective and pleasant from another. To draw from the logic explored just now: as mindfulness and insight mature, the neutral becomes pleasant; as the underlying tendency to ignorance (*avijjānusaya*) is given up, i.e. in the fourth *jhāna*,<sup>83</sup> then the feeling there, even if neither pleasant nor painful, is nonetheless pleasant at the same time. This was well spotted by Anagārika Govinda<sup>84</sup> in the *Mahāsaccaka Sutta* (MN 36):

Due to letting go of pain and pleasure, and due to happiness and unhappiness disappearing earlier, I entered and dwelt in the fourth *jhāna*, which is neither-painful-nor-pleasant, purity of equanimity and mindfulness. But such a pleasant feeling that arose did not overpower my mind and remain.<sup>85</sup>

This is the only discourse explicitly calling Pañcakaṅga's refined pleasure '*sukhā vedanā*',<sup>86</sup> which is applied even to the three knowledges of liberation and in conformity to the narratives explored in this section. We can see this process of becoming pleasant as the integration of a deliberate conception or contemplation which replaces the default perceptions of neutral feelings—or, alternatively, as the result of a heightened sensibility that sees a certain neutral feeling as a mild instance of pleasure, which earlier was not perceived.

If Rune Johansson observed how a feeling normally develops into a perception,<sup>87</sup> we could in turn say that a perception develops into a feeling. Just as the perception 'desirable' gives rise to

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81 Dhṛ 374: *yato yato sammāsati, khandhānaṃ udayabbayaṃ; / labhatī pītipāmojjaṃ, amataṃ taṃ vijānataṃ.*

82 Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism: Teachings, History and Practices*, Second Edition (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 326.

83 MN i 304: *idhāvuso visākha, bhikkhu sukhassa ca pahānā, dukkhassa ca pahānā, pubbeva somanassadomanassānaṃ atthaṅgamā, adukkhamasukhaṃ upekkhāsati pārisuddhiṃ catutthaṃ jhānaṃ upasampajja viharati. avijjaṃ tena pajahati, na tattha avijjānusayo anuseti ti*

84 Anagarika B. Govinda, *The Psychological Attitude of Early Buddhist Philosophy* (Allahabad: Allahabad Law Journal Press, 1936), p. 85.

85 MN i 247: *sukhassa ca pahānā dukkhassa ca pahānā pubbeva somanassadomanassānaṃ atthaṅgamā adukkhamasukhaṃ upekkhāsati pārisuddhiṃ catutthaṃ jhānaṃ upasampajja vihāsiṃ. evarūpāpi kho me, aggivessana, uppannā sukhā vedanā cittaṃ na pariyādāya tiṭṭhati.*

86 The precise expression including '*vedanā*' does not occur in parallel texts, which may still speak of *sukha*, e.g. DĀ 20 (T i 082a06). One could consider that the term *vedanā* happens here because it drags from the previous *jhānas* where it makes sense to speak of pleasant feeling. This is possible, but when taken together with the other arguments offered in this chapter, *sukhā vedanā* does not stand out as misplaced here and it makes sense it was not edited out. (The commentary to the *Mahāsaccaka Sutta* says nothing about this.)

87 Johansson, *The Dynamic Psychology of Early Buddhism*, p. 92.

domestic happiness and unhappiness (*gehasita somanassa* and *domanassa*), and the perception ‘changing and unsatisfactory’ gives rise to renunciant feelings of any hedonic tone,<sup>88</sup> so the perception ‘peaceful’ gives rise to this refined pleasure. Why? Because, in addition to the commentaries’ take reported above, the perception ‘peaceful’ is a reminder of forms of affliction that have been left behind, and conceiving of a meditative state as a change from *dukkha* makes it feel more pleasant in comparison, as in the experience of relief.

Thus, the Buddha did not only recommend perceiving the pleasant as painful and the neutral as impermanent,<sup>89</sup> as is more widely known, but also the neutral as pleasant. This explains the warning that one should not delight *even* in neutral feeling, that even then one is not yet freed.<sup>90</sup> Given how uninteresting neutral feelings are and given the natural tendency to ignore them, why would one ‘delight’ (*abhinandati*) in them to begin with? Because in certain parts of the training they *are* seen as pleasant and the mind finds satisfaction in them.<sup>91</sup> Other texts use this language of delighting and enjoying to refer to advanced meditation states like the *jhānas*.<sup>92</sup> Meditators train in that way of looking until it becomes embodied experience, helping them settle in that state and let go of the lower one. As Eviatar Shulman has observed:

The practitioner of Buddhist meditation, too, learns to apprehend ever more refined elements of his experience, which he interprets according to the way he has been guided by his tradition.<sup>93</sup>

Overall, the process described in this section illustrates Ariel Glucklich’s idea that religion is a hedonic training, which I take up again in the fifth chapter:<sup>94</sup> it aims to recondition where practitioners find pleasure and displeasure.

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88 MN iii 217-219.

89 For example, SN iv 207.

90 SN iv 205: *adukkhamasukhaṃ santaṃ, bhūripaññena desitaṃ, / tañ cāpi abhinandati, neva dukkhā pamuccati*. This short discourse begins by stating the underlying tendencies (*anusaya*) regarding each hedonic tone. In the verse section, the concern around pleasant and painful feelings continues to be their associated underlying tendency, but not in the case of neutral feelings, where it shifts to delight. The Chinese version of this discourse (SĀ 468) is less explicit on this point, and only speaks of seeing neutral feeling correctly; see Choong, p. 119.

91 Tilmann Vetter has observed that certain passages on *vedanā* refer specifically to meditative feelings, and I think this is very much the case with neutral feeling in particular. See Tilmann Vetter, *The ‘Khandha Passages’ in the Vinaya-piṭaka and the Four Main Nikāyas* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2000), pp. 22–23.

92 For example, M i 505: *rati, (abhi)ramati*.

93 Eviatar Shulman, *Rethinking the Buddha: Early Buddhist Philosophy as Meditative Perception* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 108 <<https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107477100>>. Shulman explores this idea, without applying to *vedanā* in particular, in chapters 3 and 4.

94 Glucklich, *The Joy of Religion*.

## Evaluative pleasure

Let us tie this back to where we started in the *Bahuvedanīya Sutta*. This discourse contains two different paradoxes around *vedanā*: that the neutral is pleasant and that lack of feeling is pleasant. Compared to the Pali, the Chinese and Sanskrit versions seem to better address the former as well as the narrative of the discourse as a whole. For Pañcakaṅga reasons that there is only pleasant and painful not because the absence of feeling is pleasant, which would not follow, but because *the neutral* is in fact pleasant as a form of peace. This is what the second part of the text deals with, positing increasingly refined and peaceful states that are perceived as pleasure. And, in the third part, the Chinese and Sanskrit versions mention again the pleasure of peacefulness. Now the logic and structure of this text make full sense.

How does all this relate to *vedanā*'s boundaries as a category? Pañcakaṅga reveals a particular perspective on feeling that has pragmatic value to pull one forward on the path and that deliberately plays with how perception (*saññā*) conditions feeling—especially secondary feelings. My crucial point is this: if Pañcakaṅga's usage of *sukha* here were not *vedanā* at all, it could not support his argument that *therefore* there are only two types of *vedanā*. If *sukha* were so clearly not a feeling there would be no debate, and Pañcakaṅga would rather be saying that there are three feelings and that the neutral is also *sukha* in a different sense; but it would not be subsumed under pleasant feeling, as it is in the *Bahuvedanīya*. There, this particular way of looking at experience *validates* the presentation of two feelings, which the Buddha approves. Pañcakaṅga's perspective, while perhaps a distinct usage of the term *sukha*, is not treated as apart from *vedanā* either: it still belongs to that same conceptual field. Against this background, the *Mahāsaccaka Sutta*'s remark that the fourth *jhāna* is a pleasant feeling does not look like such an isolated oddity.

Another example is the Discourse to Māgaṇḍiya (*Māgaṇḍiya Sutta*, MN 75),<sup>95</sup> which compares the ordinary person pursuing sense desires to a leper who obtains relief by burning their wounds. Because of misperception, fire (sense objects) feels pleasant to the leper rather than painful. This simile illustrates the idea that 'what others call pleasure noble ones call pain',<sup>96</sup> which may seem entirely evaluative at first sight. Yet the imagery evokes a felt experience and

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<sup>95</sup> The simile of the leper begins at M i 506.

<sup>96</sup> SN iv 127, Snp 767: *yaṃ pare sukhato āhu, tadariyā āhu dukkhato.*

also fits into domestic happiness, a secondary pleasant feeling depending on the perception ‘desirable’. The point is how a different perception, like that of the spiritually advanced, comes with a different feeling.

We can only make sense of Pañcakaṅga’s reasoning if we recognise the evaluative as an aspect of *vedanā*—but of *all vedanā*? The Theravāda exegetical tradition came to regard the overwhelming majority of feelings as secondary. It considered that all senses except touch feel neutral and what we mostly experience is in fact a mental feeling dependent on a discrimination—in other words, a secondary feeling dependent on a perception. Effectively, this moves Buddhists’ concern to secondary feelings alone, and it helps explain their malleability and how they change in the meditative processes we have just seen. On the other hand, we must remember that the early discourses assign all three hedonic tones to each of the six senses, as do the Sarvāstivādins. Regardless of whether one thinks that the Theravāda view departs from the discourses or agrees with and expands on them, what matters for Buddhist soteriology is how perception plays a part in conditioning (secondary) feelings.

Now, what kind of secondary feeling is refined pleasure? On the ethical axis, it certainly registers as a good, skilful, commendable feeling.<sup>97</sup> It seems to resemble renunciant happiness (*nekkhammasita somanassa*). The former depends on the perception ‘peaceful’ and the latter on the perception ‘changing and unsatisfactory’, but these are in fact two sides of the same coin. The sub-commentary to the *Cūlavedalla Sutta* mentioned in the previous section<sup>98</sup> would be in favour of equating these two feelings. Admittedly, this is a rather removed witness to the early discourses, but it does follow Dhammādinna’s logic of the neutral being pleasant when there is knowledge. For refined pleasure implies some wisdom in that it arises from truly seeing the drawbacks of lower states, which is reminiscent of renunciant happiness. In this sense, refined pleasure may be the counterpart of renunciant unhappiness, which emerges from insight into impermanence expressed as a yearning to achieve final liberation. But whether refined pleasure and renunciant happiness are exactly the same or not, what matters more is seeing how, according to the discourses, one advances through a process that involves cognitive and affective-hedonic changes in an interlinked fashion. As one understands something about the

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<sup>97</sup> I am using ‘skilful’ in a slightly informal way, but also in its connection to wisdom, according to Cousins, ‘Good or Skillful?’, p. 145.

<sup>98</sup> Ps-ṭ ii 286.

lower state—its drawbacks—it feels more unpleasant and less attractive, while the higher state, which at first may have seemed neutral and uninteresting, now feels like a more pleasant space to dwell in. Cognitive understanding affects feeling, and so ‘what others call pleasure noble ones call pain’.<sup>99</sup>

Treating neutral feeling as a subtle pleasure seems to conflict with the idea hedonic tones exclude each other.<sup>100</sup> It is understandable to conclude that refined pleasure is not a feeling. However, I have shown evidence that the early discourses consider it under ‘feeling’ and shown some of the logic in it. On top of this, if we remember hedonic tone is a spectrum, we should have no problem in seeing how a feeling closer to the centre of the spectrum is *more* neutral and *less intensely* pleasant, hence a *more subtle* pleasure—these are different names for the same hedonic temperature. At the same time, it is possible the early texts are pointing out how conceiving it in one way or the other slightly affects the feeling by emphasising its pleasant or neutral aspect. We could argue that in a collected mind that is soft (*mudu*) and workable (*kammaniya*),<sup>101</sup> able to choose how to perceive,<sup>102</sup> evaluative feelings could be describing how *the perception* ‘peaceful’ itself feels.<sup>103</sup> Thus, the fourth *jhāna* may in a certain way feel pleasant whenever that perception is being used to settle the mind into it, neutral the rest of the time, and likewise pleasant from without or retrospectively.<sup>104</sup>

We can also look at this with the help of cognitive linguistics. The perception and experiencing of one hedonic tone as another just fits Lakoff & Johnson’s definition of

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99 SN iv 127, Snp 767: *yaṃ pare sukhato āhu, tadariyā āhu dukkhato.*

100 MN i 500: *yasmim Aggivesana samaye sukhaṃ vedanaṃ vedeti n’ eva tasmim samaye dukkhaṃ vedanaṃ vedeti na adukkhamasukhaṃ vedanaṃ vedeti, sukhaṃ y’ eva tasmim samaye vedanaṃ vedeti.*

101 AN iii 17: *yato ca kho, bhikkhave, cittaṃ imehi pañcahi upakkilesehi vimuttaṃ hoti, taṃ hoti cittaṃ mudu ca kammaniyaṃ ca pabhassaraṇ ca na ca pabhaṅgu sammā samādhīyati āsavānaṃ khayāya.*

102 The *Mettāsahagata Sutta* (SN 46.54) explains how in *samādhi* one can choose to perceive the attractive and the unattractive as one wishes to (at SN v 119). This is also discussed in Kuan, *Mindfulness in Early Buddhism*, pp. 31–32; Bhikkhu Anālayo, ‘Relating Equanimity to Mindfulness’, *Mindfulness*, 12.11 (2021), 2635–44 (p. 2639) <<https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-021-01671-z>>.

103 Norman argued that *saññāvedayitanirodha* could also be understood as the cessation of the feeling of perceptions. But while this is interesting for the idea that perceptions have a feeling (of course of the secondary type), I am unaware Buddhist traditions understood the compound the way he suggests—K. R. Norman, *A Philological Approach to Buddhism: The Bukkyō Dendō Kyōkai Lectures 1994* (Lancaster: Pali Text Society, 1997), p. 31 note 49.

104 From a different context, Bennett Helm has also argued that evaluations are things felt, considering pleasure and pain as ‘felt evaluations’. His argument has coincidental points in common with mine here—that we cannot fully separate the evaluative from the felt—but also many differences with Buddhist models of experience. Bennett W. Helm, ‘Felt Evaluations: A Theory of Pleasure and Pain’, *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 39.1 (2002), 13–30.

metaphor: ‘The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another’.<sup>105</sup> To use their language, we could say that people in the times of early Buddhism lived by the conceptual metaphors GOOD IS PLEASANT and BAD IS PAINFUL. Conceptual metaphors structure not just how people talk but also how they think and how they understand and perceive their experience. We see just this in the paradoxical ‘pleasant neutral states’. The conceptual metaphors outlined lead to understanding ‘better’ states of being as *feeling* better, and ‘worse’ states of being as *feeling* worse. In fact, one of the conceptual metaphors cited by linguists is HAPPINESS IS A PLEASURABLE PHYSICAL SENSATION.<sup>106</sup> It seems as if the fourth *jhāna* that may be seen as pleasant in some moments and neutral in others constitutes what cognitive linguists call a ‘blended space’,<sup>107</sup> where various perspectives come together.

So far it is clear that neither the discourses nor the commentaries think of meditative refined *sukha* in a way that could be described as ‘an evaluative term *rather than* a feeling’, as if these two were mutually exclusive features. Chapter one argued that phenomena are not disqualified as *vedanā* merely for including other elements, and among them we find evaluations or perceptions. Only in feeling-devoid states is *sukha* merely evaluative or even rhetorical—what *is* good is described as *feeling* good. Thus, going back to Collins’ claim that we can distinguish ‘between *sukha* as pleasant feeling and as a broader evaluative term quite precisely’,<sup>108</sup> this is true regarding the cessation of perception and feeling (*saññāvedayitanirodha*) and nirvana, the only two explicit targets of non-*vedanā* *sukha* in the early discourses. But besides these two, many other examples would seriously defy Collins’ alleged precision. Let me draw this argument to a close by quoting the commentary to the *Bahuvedanīya Sutta* and reflecting on the continuity between felt and evaluative uses of the term ‘*sukha*’:

Here the neutral feeling from the fourth *jhāna* onwards is also called ‘pleasure’ in the sense of peaceful and refined. ... Cessation is classified as pleasure by way of unfelt pleasure. For [pleasure] arisen by way of the five senses and of the eight attainments is called felt pleasure. Cessation is

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105 George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), p. 5.

106 Others, reminiscent of *jhāna*, are happiness as being in heaven and as a fluid in a container. Seeing negative states as illness is also common, as in AN 9.34’s use of ‘affliction’ (*ābādha*) or in the parable of the leper. Zoltán Kövecses, *Metaphor and Emotion: Language, Culture, and Body in Human Feeling* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 224; Zoltán Kövecses and Réka Benczes, *Metaphor: A Practical Introduction*, 2nd ed (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 112 ff.

107 Kövecses and Benczes, p. 268 ff.

108 Collins, *Nirvana and Other Buddhist Felicities*, pp. 208–9.

called unfelt pleasure. Thus, be it felt pleasure or unfelt pleasure, it is classed as totally pleasant in the sense of pleasure reckoned as a condition free from pain.<sup>109</sup>

Differences notwithstanding, here the pleasures of the various *jhānas* and immaterial attainments have more in common than they do not, and we can even see a continuity between them and the unfelt pleasure of cessation and nirvana, since evaluative usages of *sukha* are an extension of their felt counterparts—so much so that the commentary on the Discourse to Vekhanasa (*Vekhanasa Sutta*, MN 80) interprets ‘the best sensual pleasure’ (*kāmaggasukha*) to mean *nibbāna*!<sup>110</sup>

Several discourses explored above draw on the natural push of *vedanā*, that is, the underlying tendencies (*anusaya*) and default judgements associated with it—if it feels good, it is good; if it feels bad, it is bad—to propose a set of values in line with Buddhist soteriology. Thus, what is valued is presented as feeling good, like higher meditative states, and whatever should be left behind is compared to felt pain.<sup>111</sup> The arguments fall back on *vedanā*, they are made by analogy to felt experience instead of, for example, appealing to a divine or moral imperative. They are hedonic arguments and so never really leave *vedanā* land. But beyond rhetorics, I have also argued these value judgements are considered to actually affect how people experience things hedonically.

Translators routinely render *sukha* as ‘happiness’ in the contexts I have been dealing with, rather than ‘pleasure’.<sup>112</sup> Without denying that words shift meaning depending on context, this translating habit may also exaggerate differences and distance us from the early Buddhists’ experience. Let me illustrate this. When I ask my British friends whether toes are fingers, they look baffled and answer with a rotund ‘no’. At most, some recognise that toes are *like* fingers in some respects, or that both are digits; but toes are not fingers. Instead, my fellow Catalans and Spaniards all answer ‘yes’, as in those languages we use the same word—we literally call toes

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109 Ps iii 115: *ettha ca catutthajjhānato paṭṭhāya adukkhamasukhā vedanā, sāpi santatṭhena paṇītatṭhena ca sukhanti vuttā. cha gehassitāni sukhanti vuttāni. nirodho avedayitasukhavasena sukhaṃ nāma jāto. pañcakāmaguṇavasena hi atṭhasamāpattivāsena ca uppannaṃ vedayitasukhaṃ nāma. nirodho avedayitasukhaṃ nāma. iti vedayitasukhaṃ vā hotu avedayitasukhaṃ vā, taṃ middukkhabhāvasaṅkhātēna sukhatṭhena ekantasukhameva jātam.*

110 Ps iii 277. Seen in Ian Astley, ‘Dairaku/Tairaku 大樂, Ch. Da Le, Sk.Mahāsukha, ‘great Bliss’’, ed. by Hubert Durt, *Hōbōgirin* (Paris and Tokyo: École Française d’Extrême-Orient, 1994), 931–46 (p. 936).

111 The theory of karma is a ‘delayed’ version of this: good actions lead to pleasant results, bad actions to unpleasant ones. See chapter 1.

112 Bodhi, *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha*, p. 1172; Anālayo, *Comparative Majjhima*, vol. 1 p. 338; Buddhaghosa, *Path of Purification (Visuddhimagga)*, trans. by Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli, 2010, p. 82 note 6; Aung, p. 277; Anālayo, *From Craving to Liberation*, p. 100 ff.

‘foot fingers’<sup>113</sup> and have the same word for the little finger and the little toe: *meñique*. The point is that, despite being able to make distinctions between those two sets of digits, having a single everyday word for both leads us to instinctively think of them as subtypes of the same thing, in contrast to native English speakers—we are all common speakers of a language, not anatomy experts.

I believe something like this happens in the early Buddhist texts. Despite using *sukha* in various senses and connotations, having a single word for them facilitates putting them all under the same umbrella. Employing different renderings camouflages all this, whereas retaining one consistent term for *sukha* possibly puts us closer to early Buddhists, helping us better understand how they may have heard the teachings. Moreover, we may be introducing foreign cultural sensibilities into the early texts by translating ‘happiness’ when *sukha* is spiritual or wholesome, but keeping ‘pleasure’ when it refers to the senses. Passages that contrast these two are contrasting two types of the same thing—*sukha*—and to do justice to this comparison we should equally keep the same term.

## All feelings are painful: another paradox?

Mirroring the case of *sukha*, Anālayo has argued that some usages of *dukkha* should not be considered *vedanā*,<sup>114</sup> while other scholars simply notice their evaluative nature and do not explicitly ask about their relationship to *vedanā* as a category.<sup>115</sup> I will show that those examples are comparable not to the paradox of *sukha* but to the perception of peaceful neutral feelings as pleasant, and that therefore early Buddhist thought did not exclude them from the concept of *vedanā*. Let us start with the *Rahogata Sutta* (SN 36.11), which reports a certain mendicant pondering, baffled:<sup>116</sup>

‘Now, venerable, when I was alone on retreat, this thought arose in my mind: the Buddha has spoken of three feelings—pleasant, painful and neutral. These are the three feelings he has spoken about. But he has also said that whatever is felt is included within the painful. With reference to

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113 Catalan: *dits del peu*; Spanish: *dedos del pie*.

114 Anālayo, *Comparative Majjhima*, p. 337.

115 Collins, *Nirvana and Other Buddhist Felicities*, p. 211; Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism*, p. 54; Frank J. Hoffman, *Rationality and Mind in Early Buddhism* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1987), pp. 29–33; G.A. Somaratne, ‘Felt and Reckoned: Twofold Dukkha in Early Buddhism’, *International Journal of Buddhist Thought and Culture*, 28.1 (2018), 109–36 <<https://doi.org/10.16893/IJBTC.2018.06.28.1.109>>.

116 In the Chinese parallel to this text, the mendicant is identified as Ānanda (SĀ 474 at T ii 121a19).

what did the Buddha say this?<sup>9</sup>

‘Yes, mendicant! I have spoken of three feelings—pleasant, painful and neutral. These are the three feelings I have spoken about. And I have also said that whatever is felt is included within the painful. I said this with reference to how conditioning factors are impermanent, of the nature to end, decay, fade away, cease and change—with reference to this I said that whatever is felt is included within the painful.’<sup>117</sup>

According to this presentation all feeling is (or belongs to) *dukkha*—all three hedonic tones. The discourse continues with an exposition of the gradual ceasing of conditioning factors (*anupubbasaṅkhārānaṃ nirodha*). Combined, these two elements parallel what we have encountered with pleasure in the previous pages, where the paradox of *sukha* invariably came accompanied by the gradual abidings. I will use this as the structure for the following discussion: first, and at some length, I will address this encompassing notion of *dukkha*, its evaluative nature and its status as *vedanā*; then, a brief assessment of the gradual abidings and their function in certain texts will help transition into the rhetoric of *dukkha* and its relationship to the rhetoric of *sukha*.

Claiming that all that is felt belongs to the painful is a case of evaluative *dukkha*. It is the obvious and necessary counterpart of Sāriputta’s assessment that it is indeed pleasant when nothing is felt.<sup>118</sup> The fragment above uses the locative *dukkhasmiṃ* in the same way that Pañcakaṅga used the locative *sukhe* when arguing that peaceful, neutral feeling belonged to the pleasant. As the Buddha explains, conditioning factors are transient, of the nature to change. Thus, evaluating all feelings as *dukkha* rests on their impermanence.

If the Buddha distinguishes two senses of *dukkha*, elsewhere Sāriputta makes a finer distinction into three: the pain of pain (*dukkhadukkhatā*), the pain of conditioning factors (*saṅkhāradukkhatā*), and the pain of change (*vipariṇāmadukkhatā*).<sup>119</sup> Here, the Buddha’s explanation of ‘the

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117 SN iv 216: “*idha mayhaṃ, bhante, rahogatassa paṭisallīnassa evaṃ cetaso parivātakko udapādi, ‘tisso vedanā vuttā bhagavatā. sukhā vedanā, dukkhā vedanā, adukkhamasukhā vedanā; imā tisso vedanā vuttā bhagavatā. vuttaṃ kho panetaṃ bhagavatā, ‘yaṃ kiñci vedayitaṃ taṃ dukkhasmiṃ’ ti. kiṃ nu kho etaṃ bhagavatā sandhāya bhāsitaṃ. ‘yaṃ kiñci vedayitaṃ taṃ dukkhasmiṃ’ ti.’” “sādhu sādhu, bhikkhu. tisso imā, bhikkhu, vedanā vuttā mayā. sukhā vedanā, dukkhā vedanā, adukkhamasukhā vedanā; imā tisso vedanā vuttā mayā. vuttaṃ kho panetaṃ, bhikkhu, mayā, ‘yaṃ kiñci vedayitaṃ, taṃ dukkhasmiṃ’ ti. taṃ kho panetaṃ, bhikkhu, mayā saṅkhārānaṃyeva aniccatāṃ sandhāya bhāsitaṃ ‘yaṃ kiñci vedayitaṃ taṃ dukkhasmiṃ’ ti. taṃ kho panetaṃ, bhikkhu, mayā saṅkhārānaṃyeva khayadhammataṃ ... pe ... vāyadhammataṃ ... pe ... virāgadhammataṃ ... pe ... nirodhadhammataṃ ... pe ... vipariṇāmadhammataṃ sandhāya bhāsitaṃ ‘yaṃ kiñci vedayitaṃ taṃ dukkhasmiṃ’ ti.”*

118 AN iv 414: *etadeva khvettha āvuso sukhaṃ yadettha n’ atthi vedayitaṃ.*

119 *Dukkhaṇḍa Sutta* (SN 38.14 at SN iv 259). These three are also found in Chinese texts, e.g. SĀ 147 at T ii 043b10.

impermanent and changing nature of conditioning factors’ has split into the latter two types of *dukkha*. This threefold analysis must reflect a very early stage in the systematisation of Buddhist teachings. The chapter where it is found, the *Jambukhādaka Saṃyutta*, consists of questions the wanderer Jambukhādaka poses to Sāriputta in an exegetical style, and the other two times this analysis appears in the early discourses<sup>120</sup> are proto-exegetical as well: these are the *Saṅgāti Sutta* (DN 33),<sup>121</sup> also taught by Sāriputta, and a pithy discourse entitled the *Dukkhatā Sutta* (SN 45.165),<sup>122</sup> whose speaker we do not know, but which is part of a series of very short discourses on threefold doctrines.

The three types of *dukkha* mirror the doctrine of the three characteristics (*tilakkhaṇa*) of *anicca* (impermanence), *dukkha* and *anattā* (not-self), the affirmative side of the latter being the conditioned nature of experience. The early discourses repeat again and again that whatever is impermanent is *dukkha*, not *sukha*,<sup>123</sup> where both terms are evaluative. Scholars Frank J. Hoffman and Peter Harvey have maintained that *dukkha* has both descriptive and evaluative components,<sup>124</sup> and Steven Collins was more precise and succinct when he wrote that:

the suffering of impermanence (for the most part), and the unsatisfactoriness of conditioning (wholly), are not descriptive but prescriptive, not depictions of lived experience but evaluations of it from a transcendentalist perspective<sup>125</sup>

This contrasts with Pahalawattage Don Premasiri, for whom *dukkha* is (1) neither an evaluation (2) nor an ontological fact, but rather (3) descriptive of a psychological fact of the unawakened mind.<sup>126</sup> Let me respond to these three points. Premasiri first defends that, since early Buddhism claims the truth of *dukkha* is something people can comprehend or be mistaken about, the discussion must be a matter of facts, not attitudes.<sup>127</sup> But this mixes emic and etic perspectives: surely the content of a proposition is not a fact by virtue of how convinced its proponents are about its truth—they always are, and will naturally call dissenting views

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120 Here I am excluding the later *Nettipakaraṇa* and *Peṭakopadesa*, where the three forms of *dukkha* appear a few times. On the dating of these works, see Norman, *Pāli Literature*, pp. 108–10; Hinüber, pp. 79–82.

121 DN iii 216.

122 SN v 56.

123 See, for example, the *Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta* (SN 22.59 at SN iii 68): ‘*yaṃ paṇāmiccaṃ dukkhaṃ vā taṃ sukhaṃ vā’ ti? ‘dukkhaṃ, bhante’.*

124 Hoffman, pp. 29–33; Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism*, p. 54.

125 Collins, *Nirvana and Other Buddhist Felicities*, p. 211.

126 Premasiri, p. 65.

127 Premasiri, pp. 62–64.

‘misperceptions’.<sup>128</sup> Thus, this argument fails to refute that the truth of *dukkha* is evaluative or ‘attitudinal’.<sup>129</sup> Secondly, Premasiri nevertheless does not see *dukkha* as an ontological fact about the world because then the ending of *dukkha* in this life would not be possible.<sup>130</sup> But I would argue that it is indeed impossible from the early Buddhist viewpoint, which is why the total eradication of *dukkha* requires liberation from cyclic existence altogether. I agree with Premasiri that *dukkha* is not an ontological fact, but not in the reason why, which is relevant for the next point as well. Thirdly: having rejected both these options, Premasiri proposes that ‘[t]he relationship between *anicca* and *dukkha* is a contingent psychological relationship’.<sup>131</sup> With this he reduces the issue to domestic unhappiness (*gehasita domanassa*)—to mentally suffer when things change. While this is no doubt a big part of it, if this were all, then one would need to explain why early Buddhism does not simply posit an extended awakened existence as its goal; how to account for changes that result in happiness; and why *arahants*, who are freed from domestic unhappiness, do not maintain that whatever is impermanent is *sukha* or *upekkhā*, but are precisely those who truly see that it is *dukkha*.<sup>132</sup> Premasiri writes:

In psychological terms, early Buddhism makes the judgment that the experience of life, when considered on the whole, in its unenlightened condition is *dukkha*. It appears that the basis of such a judgment is a hedonic criterion and not an evaluation. It is intended to be an empirically justifiable interpretation of human experience and not a mere expression of an attitude towards the facts of life.<sup>133</sup>

Premasiri rightly notes how early Buddhism sees its criterion as quantitative both regarding *dukkha* and regarding *sukha*, a theme that I take up again in chapter four. Yet from an outsider’s perspective, it also embodies a particular ‘attitude towards the facts of life’ we could call ascetic, renunciant, or to use Collins’ words, transcendentalist: there is an implicit value judgement of what is ‘worth it’ that may well be related to the direct experience of meditative bliss and how ordinary pleasures look in comparison. Thus, the relationship between *anicca*

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128 See the concept of (primary) doctrine as declarative in Paul J. Griffiths, *On Being Buddha: The Classical Doctrine of Buddhahood* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1994), p. 6.

129 The following perspective is more nuanced: ‘The claim about the ubiquity of suffering is thus (at least partially) an evaluative thesis that is supposed to be objectively true: ordinary human life is deeply unsatisfactory, whether or not worldlings perceive it as so.’ Roy W. Perrett, *An Introduction to Indian Philosophy* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2016), p. 35.

130 Premasiri, p. 64.

131 Premasiri, p. 65.

132 G. A. Somaratne proposes a similar view, whereby *vipariṇāmadukkhata* is not due to the impermanence of things but to our knowledge of that impermanence, which causes us anticipated mental suffering—Somaratne, pp. 22–23.

133 Premasiri, p. 67.

and *dukkha* is partly descriptive, as it is not false that change often brings suffering, and from that early Buddhism builds a quantitative argument; but from an etic perspective I follow Collins in considering it *mostly* evaluative: since changing experience is a mixture of pleasure and pain, considering it *dukkha* ‘on the whole’ cannot but be an evaluation, regardless of how justified it may be.

Since these authors do not directly ask how this evaluative *dukkha* fits into *vedanā*, it is easy to read them as assuming it simply does not. Is that not what the Buddha’s answer to the puzzled mendicant in the *Rahogata Sutta* implies? ...that everything is *dukkha* not in the sense of (painful) feeling? At first sight it seems so; but I believe this inserts assumptions that are not native to the early texts, as we saw with *sukha*, and exaggerates the gulf between these different usages. An inner logic interweaves the various senses of *dukkha*. If the pain of pain calls something *dukkha* in a ‘felt’ sense, the pain of impermanence does so in an ‘anticipatory’ sense, and the pain of conditioning factors in a ‘potential’ sense. While the latter two do not describe an experience that currently *feels* painful, they still point out how it *will* or always *can* involve felt pain, and are thus still logically tied to felt pain. This tie serves as a vehicle that transfers our natural motivation towards painful feeling—turning away from it—to ‘the impermanence of conditioning factors’, that is, life as a whole, showing how *dukkhā vedanā* is indispensable for early Buddhist soteriology.<sup>134</sup> As chapter four will elaborate,<sup>135</sup> we could see the Buddha’s claim that all feelings are painful not as a statement of fact, but an injunction to regard experiences under that particular light for the pragmatic purpose of inducing renunciation.

The case for evaluative *dukkha* being *vedanā* is clearer than with *sukha*, because no usage of *dukkha* is ever explicitly dismissed as ‘not a feeling’. Quite the opposite: the Chinese version of the *Bahuvedanīya* calls the encompassing *dukkha* we have discussed ‘the one feeling’:

Udāyin, what is my method of teaching according to which there is one [kind of] feeling tone? All that is felt is [included in] *dukkha*. Udāyin, this is my method of teaching according to which there is one [kind of] feeling tone.<sup>136</sup>

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134 ‘The growth of early Buddhism must be understood in the context of the existence of a number of different ‘renouncer’ groups who shared the view that ‘suffering’ in some sense characterizes human experience, and that the quest for happiness is thus only to be fulfilled by fleeing the world’, Rupert Gettin, *The Foundations of Buddhism* (Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 62.

135 Section ‘The Buddhist, the Bad and the Ugly’.

136 Dhammadinnā, p. 176.

Anālayo has disregarded this idea of the one feeling, commenting that ‘[i]n this statement, however, *dukkha* does not refer to a type of feeling, but rather stands for the unsatisfactory nature of conditioned phenomena, due to their impermanent nature’.<sup>137</sup> And yet the statement could hardly be more explicit. What that *dukkha* ‘stands for’ and that that is not *vedanā* are two different assertions: Anālayo makes an inference from the former to the latter without spelling it out, but the Chinese version of the *Bahuvedanīya* precisely contradicts him. Just like evaluating certain neutral feelings as *sukha* validated a twofold presentation of feeling, here evaluating all three hedonic tones as *dukkha* validates a onefold presentation of feeling. We should adjust our concept of *vedanā* in light of the evidence rather than explain away the evidence. Otherwise the reasoning becomes circular: it uses a preconceived idea of what *vedanā* means to dismiss a piece of evidence that defies that very idea.

How much weight should we give to this single instance of ‘the one feeling’? Not too much, perhaps, but enough to consider it seriously rather than dismiss it, enough to make us ponder that the concept of *vedanā* need have been large or flexible enough to allow for such an analysis to have been formulated and allowed instead of ironed out. We should also remember how the problem with the paradox of *sukha* was labelling a state utterly devoid of feeling as pleasant, and not perceiving one hedonic tone as another, i.e. the neutral as pleasant. In the case of *dukkha* only the latter happens, and so the problems *sukha* faced do not apply here—there is no ‘paradox of *dukkha*’ in the same strict sense.

As with *sukha*, we may reflect about the experiential referent of evaluative *dukkha*, or ponder whether it is a matter of rhetoric. We could argue that pleasant things are still pleasant despite being *dukkha*; but at the same time, to cultivate the perception of impermanence and *dukkha* in relation to anything does affect one’s experience of it: the hedonic tone of that object may shift, or the perception ‘impermanent’ itself may be felt as unpleasant, as Somaratne suggests.<sup>138</sup> It is like the leper who does not envy their former gratification strategy of wound-scratching, which made things worse in the long run,<sup>139</sup> or like someone who has just had too much pizza and for whom the thought of pizza now is anything but appetising—pizza is still pleasant, but at the same time it is not.

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137 Anālayo, *Comparative Majjhima*, vol. 1, p. 337.

138 Somaratne, p. 23. Curiously, Somaratne and Premasiri, in reducing evaluative *dukkha* to mental suffering, are closer to my position that it is a feeling.

139 *Māgandīya Sutta* (MN 75 at M i 506).

Having addressed this evaluative notion of *dukkha*, we move on to the other element of the *Rahogata Sutta* (SN 36.11): the gradual cessation of conditioning factors (*anupubbasaṅkhārānaṃ nirodha*). Let us take it from the last sentence where we left off:

... conditioning factors are impermanent, of the nature to end, decay, fade away, cease and change  
—with reference to this I said that whatever is felt is included within the painful.

But I have also explained the gradual cessation of conditioning factors. Speech ceases in someone who has attained the first *jhāna*. Thinking and reflection cease in someone who has attained the second *jhāna*. Joy ceases in someone who has attained the third *jhāna*. Breathing in and out ceases in someone who has attained the fourth *jhāna*. The perception of form ceases in someone who has attained the dimension of infinite space ... Perception and feeling cease in someone who has attained the cessation of perception and feeling. In a mendicant who has destroyed the defilements, lust, aversion and delusion cease.<sup>140</sup>

At first, this seems like an abrupt and gratuitous change of topic. Why would the text start talking about this after answering the question of everything felt being *dukkha*? The only apparent continuity is the word *saṅkhāra*: everything is *dukkha* due to the impermanence of *saṅkhāras* and there is also the gradual cessation of *saṅkhāras*. The latter is basically the gradual abidings seen from a different angle. All the texts dealing with evaluative *sukha* featured the gradual abidings, and here, so does a text dealing with evaluative *dukkha*—the progression of meditative states seems inseparable from this notion of evaluative feelings, from the malleability of feelings.

The structure of the *Rahogata Sutta* makes sense too in terms of a rhetoric of *dukkha*. If the rhetoric of *sukha* used our natural search for what feels good to make a point of what is worthy of pursuit, the rhetoric of *dukkha* uses our natural avoidance of what feels bad to make a point of what should be left behind. At times this is used to generate disenchantment or disgust (*nibbidā*)<sup>141</sup> for the sake of insight, or the pleasant is to be conceived as painful.<sup>142</sup> As seen in this chapter, this also seems meant to help abandon carnal pleasure and gain spiritual pleasure.

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140 SN iv 217: *yaṃ kiñci vedayitaṃ taṃ dukkhasmīn ti. atha kho pana, bhikkhu, mayā anupubbasaṅkhārānaṃ nirodho akkhāto. paṭhamaṃ jhānaṃ samāpannassa vācā niruddhā hoti. dutiyaṃ jhānaṃ samāpannassa vitakkavicārā niruddhā honti. tatiyaṃ jhānaṃ samāpannassa pīti niruddhā hoti. catutthaṃ jhānaṃ samāpannassa assāpassāsā niruddhā honti. ākāśānañcāyatanaṃ samāpannassa rūpasaññā niruddhā hoti. viññānañcāyatanaṃ samāpannassa ākāśānañcāyatanaññā niruddhā hoti. ākiñcaññāyatanaṃ samāpannassa viññānañcāyatanaññā niruddhā hoti. nevasaññānāsaññāyatanaṃ samāpannassa ākiñcaññāyatanaññā niruddhā hoti. saññāvedayitanirodhaṃ samāpannassa saññā ca vedanā ca niruddhā honti. khīṇāsavassa bhikkhuno rāgo niruddho hoti, doso niruddho hoti, moho niruddho hoti.*

141 For example, the famous *Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta* and the immediately following *Mahāli Sutta* (SN 22.59-60, beginning at SN iii 68).

142 *Daṭṭhabba Sutta* (SN 36.5 at SN iv 207).

The doctrine of anything experienced being *dukkha* tunnels in the same direction: conditioning factors (*sāṅkhārā*) are impermanent and thus *dukkha*, the aim is to be free from them, and that happens gradually as different conditioning factors cease in each meditative state. At the end of that progression, phenomenal experience itself ceases—*dukkha* ceases, cessation is pleasure—and liberation can be effected. As in the case of *sukha*, evaluative *dukkha* is an extension of its felt counterpart, it uses the natural tendencies regarding *vedanā* to illustrate a set of value judgements, it serves a particular soteriological discourse.<sup>143</sup>

## A rhetorical dance of pleasure and pain

Progress can be understood both by looking ahead at the next step and by looking behind at what has been overcome. Anything that needs to be achieved will later need to be left behind. Thus the two rhetorics, which may seem opposed in certain ways, cooperate in a dance that entices the practitioner away from certain experiences and towards others. Jonardon Ganeri remarks on the motivational aspect of *vedanā* alluded to at the end of the first chapter,<sup>144</sup> and which will become especially relevant in chapters four and five. Our responses to feelings are natural, a given, as expressed in the *sutta* notion of underlying tendency (*anusaya*) and in how the abhidharma says that pain shrinks its associated mental states while pleasure intensifies them.<sup>145</sup>

We saw this dance in how both Sāriputta and the Buddha presented the progression of meditative states by comparing the ascent to moving from pain to pleasure, from affliction to happiness. Since this is applied to each stage of the ascent, a stage that was previously explained as pleasure or happiness is subsequently to be perceived as pain. The rhetoric of *dukkha* helps to let go, the rhetoric of *sukha* helps to lead on. In addition, each rhetoric provides the necessary balance to the other, lest the practitioner became demotivated either in a sort of fatalist despair—lack of *sukha* rhetoric—or in a complacency or attachment to the pleasant stages of the path—lack of *dukkha* rhetoric. The case of neutral feeling is quite interesting: it is presented as pleasant indirectly, through its peacefulness, and the dimension of ‘neither

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143 A discussion in the AKB mentions an ‘instrumental’ usage of declaring something painful. See La Vallée Poussin, vol. IV, p. 132.

144 Jonardon Ganeri, *Attention, Not Self* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 92.

145 Vism 461 (XIV 128).

perception nor non-perception’ is considered the best possible attachment;<sup>146</sup> but then practitioners are instructed to regard it as *dukkha*, again indirectly, through contemplating its impermanence.

In short, these rhetorics conform to the generally gradual nature of the early Buddhist path, conveying that no intermediate stage is ever good enough while still being helpful as a stepping stone. As the Buddha said in the *Bahuvedanīya Sutta*: ‘I do not approve of anyone who would say that this is the highest pleasure and happiness that beings experience’.<sup>147</sup> Today we might understand this early Buddhist rhetorical dance as a skilful hijacking of our reward-based systems.<sup>148</sup>

The Simile of the Quail (*Latukikopama Sutta*, MN 66)<sup>149</sup> illustrates all this. Udāyī—him once again—praises how the Buddha’s restrictions around eating have helped the mendicants steer away from unskilful things that bring *dukkha* and towards what brings *sukha*. The Buddha takes this further into the inner realm: he commands giving up sense pleasures and cultivating *jhānic* pleasures, but then he points out how elements of the first three *jhānas* are disturbances, and that each of the gradual abidings is not enough—having achieved it, one should go beyond it.

All these progressions culminate in the state of cessation. Since in the end all phenomenal experience and all feelings are *dukkha*, the ending or absence of phenomenal experience and feeling must be *sukha*—the logic of both Dhammadinnā (MN 44) and Sāriputta (AN 9.34). Steven Collins mentions two ‘aporias’ of nirvana,<sup>150</sup> one of them being that there is happiness in it—what I have been calling the paradox of *sukha*. He explains it by way of imagery rather than systematic thought. I would like to suggest that it may (also) have to do with a broad religious discourse of motivation and goal pursuit, and with influence from the Brahminic tradition, as chapter four will argue.

To conclude: the texts explored in this chapter demonstrate that early Buddhists were able to

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146 MN 106 at MN ii 265; Paul Fuller, *The Notion of Ditthi in Theravāda Buddhism* (London; New York: Routledge Curzon, 2005), pp. 24–25.

147 MN i 398: *yo kho, ānanda, evaṃ vadeyya ‘etaṃparamaṃ sattā sukhaṃ somanassaṃ paṭisaṃvedentī’ ti, idamassa nānujānāmi.*

148 Judson A. Brewer, Jake H. Davis, and Joseph Goldstein, ‘Why Is It So Hard to Pay Attention, or Is It? Mindfulness, the Factors of Awakening and Reward-Based Learning’, *Mindfulness*, 4.1 (2013), 75–80 <<https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-012-0164-8>>; Bhikkhu Anālayo, ‘The Potential of Pleasant Feelings’, *Insight Journal*, 44 (2018), 1–10 (pp. 7–9).

149 MN i 447.

150 Collins, *Nirvana and Other Buddhist Felicities*, p. 201 ff, 212 ff.

think of evaluative and metaphorical forms of pain and pleasure under the rubric of *vedanā*, on occasion explicitly so; and a close reading of the *Bahuvedanīya Sutta* (MN 59) has shown that the paradox of cessation/nirvana being *sukha* is different from perceiving one hedonic tone as another—what I have called evaluative feelings—and that only the former was excluded from *vedanā*. Beyond accuracy, this matters for the same reason I established in the previous chapter: recognising secondary feelings as such deepens our understanding of important and particular roles of feeling in the early Buddhist path to awakening. A key aspect of it is switching from instinctive to deliberately cultivated perceptions of feelings, but in particular how the meditator comes to experience spiritual neutral feelings as a refined pleasure through perceiving them as peaceful, which has been less researched or emphasised than perceiving feelings as impermanent and *dukkha*. We have glimpsed how incipient attempts at distinguishing various usages of *sukha* or *dukkha*, canonical and exegetical, differ among themselves and with some modern scholarship. The *vedanā* domain includes rhetorics that use hedonic terms and arguments to put forth value judgements and motivate Buddhist practitioners, as in the following quote from the *Buddhavamsa*:

Just as there is pain, so there is certainly pleasure. Thus, as there is becoming, non-becoming is desirable.<sup>151</sup>

No matter the conceptual distinctions we may be able to draw: we argue by analogy as much as we think, understand ourselves and even feel by analogy too—through conceptual metaphors, as linguists would say. Our actual experience is much more mixed than neat categories can convey. Thus, we come full circle to the beginning of the first chapter:

Feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*) and awareness (*viññāna*) are mixed, not separate; and you cannot completely pull them apart in order to tell the difference between them.<sup>152</sup>

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151 Bv ii 2: *yathāpi dukkhe vijjante, sukhaṃ nāmapī vijjati / evaṃ bhave vijjamāne, vibhavo pi icchitabbako.*

152 MN i 293: *yā c’ āvuso vedanā yā ca saññā yañ ca viññānaṃ ime dhammā saṃsaṭṭhā no visamsaṭṭhā. na ca labbhā imesaṃ dhammānaṃ vinibbhujitvā vinibbhujitvā nānākaraṇaṃ paññāpetuṃ.*

## Chapter 3: Joy, a disputed citizen of Feelingtown

The *vedanā* section of the Discourse on Mindfulness of Breathing (*Ānāpānasati Sutta*, MN 118) begins by instructing the meditator to breathe in and out while feeling or experiencing ‘*pīti*’,<sup>1</sup> which I translate as ‘joy’. Yet later Buddhist thought became divided on whether *pīti* belongs to the bundle of feeling (*vedanākkhandha*) or to the bundle of conditioning factors (*saṅkhārakkhandha*). At first sight, this discrepancy seems to spotlight once again the difficulty in drawing neat boundaries to experiential phenomena, but in this chapter I suggest it more probably stems from how different traditions solved a scholastic problem. I then argue that the early discourses treat *pīti* as a *vedanā*—specifically, a secondary pleasant mental feeling, mostly skilful, and roughly equivalent to happiness (*somanassa*). I base this on texts that show *pīti* and *somanassa* as interchangeable, as replacing each other, and so possibly pointing to the same experience; and on how the analyses into domestic and renunciant (*gehasita/nekhammasita*) and carnal and spiritual (*sāmisā/nirāmisā*) seem equivalent as well.

As in the first chapter, I begin by getting to know first the canonical raw material on *pīti*, and then how ancient and modern scholarship have described its phenomenology. Following this, the second section looks at the exegetical issue of classifying *pīti* and suggests why abhidharma schools ended up with different views. Finally, in the third section, I assess arguments for reading *pīti* in the discourses as pleasant mental feeling. This chapter shares the hermeneutical problem of the previous one, namely, that I ask of the earliest literature a precision which is rather the job of later exegesis. So, allow me to recover the simile that summarises my approach: in order to find out whether the early texts think of tomatoes as a vegetable or a fruit, I must look at *how* they use them—whether in salads or in fruit platters.

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1 MN iii 82: *yasmim samaye, bhikkhave, bhikkhu pītipaṭisaṃvedī assasissāmī ti sikkhati, pītipaṭisaṃvedī passasissāmī ti sikkhati.*

## What is this thing called joy (*pīti*)?

I translate *pīti* as ‘joy’.<sup>2</sup> Also common is ‘rapture’,<sup>3</sup> and less so ‘delight’<sup>4</sup> or zest.<sup>5</sup> The PTS dictionary defines it as ‘emotion of joy, delight, zest, exuberance’;<sup>6</sup> Stefan Baums’ and Andrew Glass’ dictionary of Gāndhārī renders *prīdi* as ‘happiness’;<sup>7</sup> and for *pīti*, the Sanskrit dictionary of Monier-Williams has ‘any pleasurable sensation, pleasure, joy, gladness, satisfaction’, ‘joy at having done anything’, as well as friendly disposition, affection, love, and ‘joy or gratification personified’.<sup>8</sup>

So, what is this thing? Just once do the early discourses give us something like a definition. We find it in the Discourse on the Spiritual (*Nirāmisā Sutta*, SN 36.31) of the *Vedanā Saṃyutta*. This presents three types of joy: carnal, spiritual and beyond-spiritual. First, the text explains carnal joy (*sāmisā pīti*) as ‘the joy that arises conditioned by the five strands of sense desire’—that is, objects known by the physical senses that are desired, pleasing, and lovely. Building on the two previous chapters, we can already see how much this sounds like a secondary feeling dependent on a perception. Secondly, spiritual joy (*nirāmisā pīti*) is identified as the first and second *jhānas*. The third type, ‘beyond-spiritual’ joy (*nirāmisā nirāmisatarā pīti*), refers to ‘the joy that arises when a mendicant who has eliminated the intoxicants reviews their mind free from lust, aversion, and delusion’.<sup>9</sup> The equally single passage to offer a phenomenological

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2 Others who have translated ‘joy’: Bhikkhu Anālayo, ‘Meditation on the Breath: Mindfulness and Focused Attention’, *Mindfulness*, 10.8 (2019), 1684–91 <<https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-019-01169-9>>; *Sayings of the Buddha: A Selection of Suttas from the Pali Nikāyas*, ed. by Rupert Gethin, Oxford World’s Classics (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 28; *Dialogues of the Buddha*, ed. by Thomas Williams Rhys Davids, 4. ed. (Oxford: Pali Text Society, 2002), II, p. 84; Arbel, *Early Buddhist Meditation*; Cousins, ‘Buddhist Jhāna’, p. 121; Bareau, p. 175; Peter Harvey, ‘The Four Jhānas and Their Qualities in the Pali Tradition’, *Buddhist Studies Review*, 35.1–2 (2018), 3–27 (p. 6) <<https://doi.org/10.1558/bsrv.36750>>.

3 Tse-Fu Kuan, ‘Clarification on Feelings in Buddhist Dhyāna/Jhāna’, *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, 33.3 (2005), 285–319 <<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10781-004-7378-6>>; Bhikkhu Sujato, ‘The Fruits of the Ascetic Life’, in SuttaCentral, <https://suttacentral.net/dn2/en/sujato#75.1> [Accessed 11 October 2020]; Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu, ‘The Fruits of the Contemplative Life’, in Dhamma Talks, <https://www.dhammadatalks.org/suttas/DN/DN02.html> [Accessed 11 October 2020]; Johannes Bronkhorst, *Absorption: Two Studies of Human Nature* (Lausanne, 2009), p. 124; Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Saṃyutta Nikāya* (Wisdom Publications, 2005).

4 *The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya*, ed. by Maurice O’C Walshe, The Teachings of the Buddha (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995), p. 95.

5 Bodhi and Narāda; U Thittila, p. 335.

6 Rhys Davids and Stede, p. 462. In danger of psychoanalysing a dictionary, I find it interesting it feels the need to specify that *pīti* is a *saṅkhāra* and not a *vedanā*.

7 Available at <https://gandhari.org/dictionary> [Accessed: 13 November 2020].

8 Monier Monier-Williams, E Leumann, and C Cappeller, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (New Delhi: Munshiram Monoharlal, 1994), p. 711.

9 SN iv 235.

description of what joy feels like are these verses from elder Khitaka:

So light is my body  
Touched by great joy and pleasure.  
Like cotton shaken by the wind,  
So much my body floats.<sup>10</sup>

Since the discourses do not contain any more systematic definition of *pīti*, we need to look at where it appears in them and how it behaves. Joy shows up mostly, and almost invariably, in descriptions of progress towards awakening. Thus, in the early discourses we find joy in four formulaic places: in descriptions of *jhāna*, in the feeling section of mindfulness of breathing, as the fourth awakening factor (*pītisambojjhaṅga*), and in a sequence I call ‘the gladness formula’. We find joy as well in other anecdotal contexts, but we do not find it in *satipatthāna* instructions—except in one *satipatthāna* text featuring the gladness formula<sup>11</sup>—nor in general definitions of *vedanā*. In what follows, I look first at formulaic, then non-formulaic appearances of joy.

To begin with, *pīti* appears in the first and second *jhānas*. In the first, the pair ‘joy and pleasure’ (*pītisukha*) are said to be born of withdrawal (*viveka*) from the hindrances,<sup>12</sup> whereas in the second one they are born of collectedness (*samādhi*). All traditions coincide in these features.<sup>13</sup> Here is a stock passage for the first *jhāna*:

Quite withdrawn from sense desires, withdrawn from unskilful qualities, they enter and dwell in the first *jhāna*, which is the joy and pleasure born of withdrawal,<sup>14</sup> with thinking and reflection. They fill, drench and pervade their body with the joy and pleasure born of withdrawal, so that no part of the entire body is unpervaded with the joy and pleasure born of withdrawal.<sup>15</sup>

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10 Th 104.

11 SN v 156.

12 Roderick S. Bucknell, ‘Reinterpreting the Jhānas’, *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, 16.2 (1993), 375–409 (p. 379).

13 Bucknell, ‘What Is the First Jhāna?’, p. 394.

14 Often translators treat joy and pleasure (and thinking and reflection) as things that the first *jhāna* *has* or *is accompanied with*, rather than what it *consists of* or *is*. I take *pītisukhaṃ* as being in apposition with *paṭhamaṃ jhānaṃ*, the implication being that ‘first *jhāna*’ is a name for a particular kind of joy and pleasure that the formula describes. As Rāhula writes: ‘a *dhyāna* is merely a designation for the arising of a certain number of psycho-physical qualities in a given combination. There is nothing which can be taken as *dhyāna* apart from this combination of factors. (...) For the convenience of linguistic expression we generally say that such and such a *dhyāna* has so many factors, but in fact we should say that such and such a *dhyāna* is the combination of such and such factors.’ Walpola Rāhula, *Zen and the Taming of the Bull: Towards the Definition of Buddhist Thought* (London: Gordon Fraser, 1978), p. 105.

15 DN i 73: *so vivicc’ eva kāmehi, vivicca akusalehi dhammehi savitakkaṃ savicāraṃ vivekajaṃ pītisukhaṃ paṭhamaṃ jhānaṃ upasampajja viharati. so imameva kāyaṃ vivekajena pītisukhena abhisandeti parisandeti pariṇureti parippharati, nāssa kiñci sabbāvato kāyassa vivekajena pītisukhena apphutaṃ hoti.*

Secondly, we encounter joy in mindfulness of breathing. As explained in the *Ānāpānasati Sutta* (MN 118), this practice consists of sixteen steps evenly divided into four sections or ‘tetrads’, each corresponding to one of the four *satipatthānas*. Joy appears in step five, the first of the *vedanā* section, immediately followed by pleasure. This is also shared by different transmission lineages.<sup>16</sup> The meditator trains as follows:

‘I will breathe in experiencing joy’, ‘I will breathe out experiencing joy’, ‘I will breathe in experiencing pleasure’, ‘I will breathe out experiencing pleasure’.<sup>17</sup>

Thirdly, joy is the fourth of the seven awakening factors. Here are two passages describing it:

A: When a mendicant’s energy is activated, spiritual joy arises. On that occasion the awakening factor of joy is activated in the mendicant, they cultivate it, and it becomes fully developed in them.<sup>18</sup>

B: The awakening factor of joy is joy with thinking and reflection and joy without thinking and reflection.<sup>19</sup>

The *Aggi Sutta* (SN 46.53) explains how joy is an energising awakening factor: the meditator should cultivate it when their energy is low in order to add vitality. The *Aggi Sutta* compares this process to someone who wants a small fire to burn more vigorously, so they blow or toss in dry grass.<sup>20</sup> If instead their energy is too high and restless, they should cultivate other awakening factors that have a calming effect, just as one would sprinkle water and scatter dirt to put out a big fire.

The link between joy and fire imagery recurs in the *Subha Sutta* (MN 99),<sup>21</sup> where the Buddha asks the young brahmin Subha: What would be brighter, a fire that burns on fuel, or one which does not? Subha responds that, were it possible for a fire to burn without fuel, it would indeed be brighter. The simile illustrates carnal joy—a fire fueled by the five strands of sense desire (*kāmaguṇa*)—versus spiritual joy—a fire burning independent from that fuel. The text

16 See Bhikkhu Anālayo, ‘Mindfulness of Breathing in the Saṃyukta-Āgama’, *Buddhist Studies Review*, 2, 2007, 137–50 (p. 139) <<https://doi.org/10.1558/bsrv.v24i1.137>>.

17 MN iii 82: *pītipaṭisaṃvedī assasissāmī ti sikkhati, pītipaṭisaṃvedī passasissāmī ti sikkhati, sukhaṭisaṃvedī assasissāmī ti sikkhati, sukhaṭisaṃvedī passasissāmī ti sikkhati*.

18 SN v 68: *yasmim samaye, bhikkhave, bhikkhuno āradhaviṛiyassa uppajjati pīti nirāmisā, pītisambojjhaṅgo tasmim samaye bhikkhuno āradho hoti, pītisambojjhaṅgam tasmim samaye bhikkhu bhāveti, pītisambojjhaṅgo tasmim samaye bhikkhuno bhāvanāpāripūrim gacchati*. Also found at SN v 332, where it is addressed to Ananda.

19 SN v 111: *yada pi, bhikkhave, savitakkasavicārā pīti tada pi pītisambojjhaṅgo, yada pi avitakkaavicārā pīti tada pi pītisambojjhaṅgo. pītisambojjhaṅgo ti iti hidaṃ uddesaṃ gacchati. tadināpetaṃ pariyāyena dvayaṃ hoti*.

20 SN v 113.

21 MN ii 203.

identifies the latter as *jhānic* joy, as did the *Nirāmisā Sutta*. This is significant because, as passage A above shows, it is also spiritual joy that constitutes the awakening factor of joy. To identify this awakening factor with spiritual and therefore *jhānic* joy, as Arbel<sup>22</sup> has done based on an observation by Gethin,<sup>23</sup> finds further support in passage B above, which strongly suggests the first and second *jhānas*. While this has been questioned by Anālayo,<sup>24</sup> the texts are explicit. Here we have a lot of consistent internal cross-references, fingers pointing at the same moon—see figure 3.

The last of the formulaic places to house joy is ‘the gladness formula’:<sup>25</sup>

When one is glad, joy is born. When the mind is joyful, the body relaxes. With a relaxed body, one experiences pleasure. When one experiences pleasure, the mind becomes collected.<sup>26</sup>

Many things can set off this process: lack of remorse (*avippaṭisāra*) due to good conduct,<sup>27</sup> restraint of the senses (*indriya saṁvara*);<sup>28</sup> visceral attention (*yoniso manasikāra*),<sup>29</sup> dwelling vigilantly (*appamatta*) in solitude,<sup>30</sup> experiencing ‘the point of the teaching’<sup>31</sup> (*atthapaṭisaṁvedin*, *dhammapaṭisaṁvedin*),<sup>32</sup> meditation on rejoicing (*muditā*),<sup>33</sup> or the practice of the recollections (*anussati*).<sup>34</sup> This last example spells out the process:

Mahānāma, when a noble disciple recollects the Buddha, their mind is not seized by lust, aversion or delusion; but upright, concerned with the Buddha. When their mind is upright, a noble disciple

22 Arbel, *Early Buddhist Meditation*, p. 107.

23 Gethin, *The Buddhist Path to Awakening*, pp. 170–72.

24 Anālayo acknowledges *pītisaṁbojjhaṅga* refers to *nirāmisā pīti*, but consider this need not be *jhānic*—this will be tackled in more detail a few pages below. He also contests generally that *jhāna* is attained by cultivating the awakening factors despite the overlap shown here. See Bhikkhu Anālayo, *Satīpaṭṭhāna: The Direct Path to Realization* (Selangor: Buddhist Wisdom Centre, 2006), p. 234 note 17; Anālayo, *Early Buddhist Meditation Studies*, p. 133.

25 The gladness formula appears at: DN i 73, DN i 182, DN i 207, DN i 250, DN iii 242, DN iii 279, MN i 37, MN i 283, SN iv 78, SN iv 351, SN v 156, SN v 398, AN i 243, AN iii 21, AN iii 284, AN v 329, AN v 333. In some of these discourses it appears multiple times.

26 DN i 73: *paṁuditassa pīti jāyati, pītimanassa kāyo passambhati, passaddhakāyo sukhaṁ vedeti, sukhiṇo cittaṁ samādhīyati*.

27 AN v 1-7, AN v 311-17.

28 SN iv 78.

29 DN iii 288.

30 SN v 399.

31 The meaning here seems to be to experience the benefit or goal (*attha*) of the teaching (*dhamma*), the truth (*dhamma*) it points to, namely, a liberated mind—one without lust, aversion and delusion—which, according to AN iii 357, is visible here and now (*saṅḍitthiko*) by discerning whether those three forces are present in oneself or not.

32 DN iii 241 & 279, AN iii 22. Inspiration can arise from hearing, teaching, reciting or reflecting on the teachings, as well as by properly attending to a sign of collectedness (*samādhinimitta*).

33 AN i 243.

34 AN iii 285, AN v 329-34, SN i 203, Th 382. Most often these are the six recollections of the Buddha, the teaching, the community, one’s ethics, one’s generosity and the deities.

gets to experience the point of the teaching and gladness in relation to the teaching. When one is glad, joy is born...<sup>35</sup>

The conscious recognition that one's mind is skilful triggers this sequence—a key idea for the fifth chapter. We see the same thing in the Fruits of the Ascetic Life (*Sāmaññaphala Sutta*, DN 2) when the practitioner recognises that their mind is free from the five hindrances.<sup>36</sup> This trigger explains how joy is of a mental nature: 'when there is joy *in the mind*, the body relaxes.' This does not mean that joy cannot have a physical counterpart,<sup>37</sup> but that it is born of mental contact and the mental aspect is emphasised. The gladness formula describes a mind-body feedback loop of increasing calm and well-being, and I take *pīti* to be on the mental side and *sukha* on the bodily side. Some commentaries identify this *sukha* as both mental and bodily,<sup>38</sup> others as only mental,<sup>39</sup> but mostly they de-emphasise bodily experience by interpreting *kāya* in its sense of collection or group:<sup>40</sup> as the mental *khandhas* (*nāmakāya*)<sup>41</sup> or, in another context, as the 'body of in-breath and out-breath'.<sup>42</sup> This may respond to the exegetical idea that *jhāna* does not admit sensory awareness,<sup>43</sup> which I deal with in the next section. But I would apply the following philosophical razor: when a phenomenology of meditation says that a mental quality affects the body, the body just means the body.

The gladness formula, which appears in Chinese texts as well and may even be more emphasised there,<sup>44</sup> strengthens even further the cross-references we have seen. First, it is virtually identical to a segment of the awakening factors: joy → relaxation → collectedness. So much so that, in the presentation of this teaching Rupert Gettin termed 'the *bojjhaṅga* process

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35 AN iii 285: *yasmim, mahānāma, samaye ariyasāvako tathāgataṃ anussarati nevassa tasmim samaye rāgaparīyutthitaṃ cittaṃ hoti, na dosaparīyutthitaṃ cittaṃ hoti, na mohaparīyutthitaṃ cittaṃ hoti; ujugatamevassa tasmim samaye cittaṃ hoti tathāgataṃ ārabha. ujugatacitto kho pana, mahānāma, ariyasāvako labhati atthavedaṃ, labhati dhammavedaṃ, labhati dhammūpasamhitaṃ pāmojjaṃ. pamudītassa pīti jāyati ...*

36 DN i 73: *tass' ime pañca nīvarane pahīne attani samanupassato pāmojjaṃ jāyati, pamudītassa pīti jāyati, pītimanassa kāyo passambhati, passaddhakāyo sukhaṃ vedeti, sukhino cittaṃ samādhiyati. so vivicc' eva kāmehi, vivicca akusalehi dhammehi savitakkaṃ savicāraṃ vivekaṃ pītisukhaṃ paṭhamaṃ jhānaṃ upasampajja viharati.*

37 Indeed, in *jhāna* the meditator suffuses the body with both joy and pleasure, as seen in the stock *jhāna* formula above, see also Th 382. More on this in chapter 5.

38 Sv i 217: *sukhaṃ vedeti ti kāyikam pi cetasikam pi sukhaṃ vedayati.*

39 Ps i 174: *passaddhakāyo sukhan ti evaṃ vūpasantakāyadaratho cetasikaṃ sukhaṃ paṭisaṃvedeti.*

40 Cone, *A - kh*, p. 670.

41 Sv i 217: *pītimanassa kāyo passambhati ti pītisampayuttacittassa puggalassa nāmakāyo passambhati, vigatadaratho hoti.*

42 Spk i 187: *passaddhakāyo ti catutthajjhānena assāsapassāsakāyassa passaddhattā passaddhakāyo.*

43 Also to not suggest *jhāna* can be achieved by regularly stimulating the body. More on this in chapter 5.

44 Bhikkhu Sujato, *A History of Mindfulness: How Insight Worsted Tranquility in the Satipatthana Sutta*, Revised ed (Santipada, 2012), p. 321.

formula’,<sup>45</sup> pleasure pops up between relaxation<sup>46</sup> and collectedness and thus gets included in the unfolding of the awakening factors.<sup>47</sup> Secondly, the gladness formula is also the central segment of transcendental dependent arising (*lokuttara paṭiccasamuppāda*), also called the ‘spiral path’.<sup>48</sup> In that model, the usual, worldly (*lokiya*) chain of dependent arising is followed by faith (*saddhā*), which serves as a bridge to the gladness sequence. After this, the chain continues towards liberation.<sup>49</sup> To sum up: the gladness formula is where most models of progress to awakening overlap.<sup>50</sup>

Joy exists outside of standard formulas as well. I have only found two examples of carnal joy. The first is the *Lakkhaṇa Sutta*, which speaks of layman’s joy (*gihissa pīti*) when illustrating the prosperous life of a king who has many children.<sup>51</sup> The second is in the opening poem of the *Atthakavagga*, the *Kāma Sutta*, where it portrays the joy of succeeding at getting sense pleasures.<sup>52</sup> While neither of these use the term ‘carnal’ (*sāmisā*), they clearly match descriptions of carnal joy—and also of domestic happiness (*gehasita somanassa*), which is relevant for the third section of this chapter. More common are instances that refer to an ethical, skilful joy: *pīti* felt in an encounter with a Buddha<sup>53</sup> or the community of mendicants,<sup>54</sup> upon hearing the word

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45 Gethin, *The Buddhist Path to Awakening*, p. 168 ff.

46 This presentation mentions both bodily and mental relaxation (SN v 68), so regarding our previous discussion we could say that relaxation and pleasure at least *include* a bodily aspect. Still, the commentaries interpret them as tranquility of the *citta* and its *cetasikas*—see Gethin, *The Buddhist Path to Awakening*, p. 155.

47 E.g., SN v 68.

48 See Bhikkhu Bodhi, *Transcendental Dependent Arising*, The Wheel Publication, 277/278 (Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 1980) <[http://www.buddhanet.net/pdf\\_file/upanisa\\_sutta.pdf](http://www.buddhanet.net/pdf_file/upanisa_sutta.pdf)> [accessed 8 December 2021]; Jayarava Attwood, ‘The Spiral Path or Lokuttara Paṭicca-Samuppāda’, *Western Buddhist Review*, 6 (2013), 1–34; Dhivan Thomas Jones, ‘“Preconditions”: The Upanisā Sutta in Context’, *Journal of the Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies*, 17.0 (2019).

49 For a good survey of all the variants of this sequence, see Attwood, ‘The Spiral Path’, pp. 6–13.

50 Peter Harvey explains the gladness formula as ‘what later came to be called access (*upacāra*) concentration’ (Harvey, ‘The Four Jhānas’, pp. 3–4.), following the commentary to the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta*—Sv i 217. This view relies a lot on that particular context, where the process of the gladness formula is followed by the process of *jhāna*, a phenomenon exclusive to the *sīlakkhandha vagga* (DN 2, 9, 10 & 13). I argue that these two processes rather cover the same ground. Yet texts can only be sequential, they cannot say several things simultaneously, so if equivalent formulas meet in one text they will inevitably stand in succession, leading to interpretations like the one followed by Harvey. But I see no reason why the *jhāna* formula, instead of describing something happening *after* the gladness formula, in temporal succession, could not just be explaining it further. Lance Cousins, who takes the same view as Harvey, says the gladness formula is absent ‘in some (or all?) other recensions’ of this text, although he does not provide references—see L. S. Cousins, *Meditations of the Pali Tradition: Illuminating Buddhist Doctrine, History, and Practice*, ed. by Sarah Shaw (Boulder: Shambhala, 2022), p. 33.

51 DN iii 162.

52 Snp 772 (PTS p. 151): *kāmayamānassa, tassa ce taṃ samijjhati / addhā pītimano hoti, laddhā macco yadicchati.*

53 Snp 692, MN ii 45.

54 MN iii 258, SN i 71, SN i 126.

*sambuddha*,<sup>55</sup> in connection to faith directed at Gotama.<sup>56</sup>

Joy features in a number of compounds. We find ‘joy and happiness’ (*pīṭhisomanassa*), accompanied by other family members like ‘pleased’ (*attamana*) and ‘glad’ (*pamudita*):<sup>57</sup> ‘joy and happiness’ is what gods feel when listening to the praise of Sāriputta<sup>58</sup> and what a Koliyan man feels when reflecting on how the Buddha’s words helped his wife Suppavāsā give birth.<sup>59</sup> Another compound, ‘joy and gladness’ (*pīṭhipāmojja*), is what Channa feels when Ānanda reassures him of his capacity to understand the teachings.<sup>60</sup> More often it portrays a state of mind—possibly a meditative state—which arises on a number of occasions: when the practitioner recognises that the mind is skilful;<sup>61</sup> in a mind with faith, ethics, learning, generosity, and wisdom;<sup>62</sup> or when mindfully observing the bundles of clinging (*upādānakkhanda*) arise and pass away.<sup>63</sup> These contexts show the connection of the compound *pīṭhipāmojja* to the gladness formula, not only because it is made up of its first two elements, but because both can be triggered by the recognition of a skilful mind.

The examples above show a skilful, ethical *pīṭhi* which is not called *nirāmisā*, while at the same time it is certainly not *sāmisā*. I believe this is because many of them do not portray meditation, and carnal and spiritual tend to be contrasted in meditative settings. This has a relative significance. On the one hand, as future chapters will defend, it matters there is an affective-hedonic consistency to early Buddhist accounts of skilfulness and progress, regardless of whether those pleasant feelings are called spiritual or renunciant or neither. On the other hand, non-meditative *pīṭhi* is rather anecdotal and less central, so the fact it is not called ‘spiritual’ could suggest that, when it *is*, this has a more specific sense than simply being skilful. The joy and gladness (*pīṭhipāmojja*) that arise from observing transiency in the *khandhas* is a good example. Anālayo cites it to say that the joy awakening factor need not be *jhānic* joy,<sup>64</sup> for it can come from insight.<sup>65</sup> First, while this joy and gladness belongs to the path and is not carnal,

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55 Snp 1000.

56 Snp 1149.

57 DN ii 200, DN ii 220, Snp 517ff.

58 SN i 146.

59 Ud 16.

60 SN iii 134.

61 MN i 95, MN i 414, MN iii 293, AN iii 306, AN iv 320.

62 AN iii 181.

63 Dh 373-374.

64 Anālayo, *Satipaṭṭhāna*, p. 234 note 17.

65 Here Anālayo relies on a preconception that *jhāna* happens from and only from ‘*samatha* meditation’ and

and one could even see it as akin to the joy awakening factor, the commentary glosses it as ‘joy in the dharma, gladness in the dharma’ and never calls it ‘spiritual’.<sup>66</sup> But secondly and more importantly, whatever the ‘status’ of this joy and gladness is does not support Anālayo, because the awakening factor of joy is indeed called ‘spiritual’ and spiritual joy is *jhānic* joy.<sup>67</sup>

So, from the early discourses emerges a picture of *pīti* mostly as a positive quality, pleasant and mental. Essentially, *pīti* describes a religious sentiment, as it tends to arise through an encounter with a religious ideal, be it a person or a mind state. It is uplifting, closely related to other terms that describe happiness, and at the same time calm-inducing. We see this combination best in how the awakening factors place joy between energy (*virīya*) and relaxation (*passaddhī*). In both this model and the gladness formula joy flows into calm—because, say the commentaries, one has no distress when one is joyful.<sup>68</sup> And yet joy belongs to the energising group of awakening factors. This created interpretative difficulties for the Buddhist traditions, to which I briefly turn now.

I believe the discourses paint a picture of something more uplifting than agitating—let us remember Khitaka’s poetic reference to the lightness of cotton. However, the *Visuddhimagga* presents a gradation of joy in intensity and pervasiveness whose lowest of five levels already makes body hairs rise, albeit moderately, while the next one is compared to lightning flashes.<sup>69</sup> Lance Cousins observed that this presentation is not found—nor anticipated, I would add—in the discourses, and is exclusively Theravādin.<sup>70</sup> Compared to the canonical data gathered until this point, the Theravādin ‘five joys’ shade towards the excited side of the spectrum.

Perhaps under this influence, scholars say *pīti* is intrinsically or mainly intense, often in a comparison with *sukha*, which is viewed as calmer.<sup>71</sup> This difference in intensity is not explicit

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cannot be triggered by insight, a preconception Arbel challenges. Still, my two counterarguments are independent from this. See Arbel, *Early Buddhist Meditation*; Keren Arbel, ‘The Liberative Role of Jhānic Joy (Pīti) and Pleasure (Sukha) in the Early Buddhist Path to Awakening’, *Buddhist Studies Review*, 32.2 (2015), 179–206 <<https://doi.org/10.1558/bsrv.v32i2.28328>>.

66 Dhpa iv 110.

67 SN iv 235.

68 Sv i 217: *pīṭimanassa kāyo passambhatī ti pītisampayuttacittassa puggalassa nāmakāyo passambhati, vigatadaratho hoti.*

69 Vism 143 (IV 94-99).

70 Cousins, ‘Buddhist Jhāna’, p. 130, note 46—see pp. 120-22 for an overview of the commentarial view on pīti. The Sarvāstivādins also acknowledge a gradation in that they mention a joy in approaching the first *dhyāna* which is unlike that of *dhyāna*. See La Vallée Poussin, chap. VIII, p. 180, note 1 .

71 Herbert V. Guenther, *Philosophy and Psychology in the Abhidharma*, 2. rev. ed (Dehli: Motilal Banarsidass, 1974), p. 51ff; Bhikkhu Anālayo, ‘Understanding and Practicing the Ānāpānasati-Sutta’, in *Buddhist Foundations of Mindfulness*, ed. by Edo Shonin, William Van Gordon, and Nirbhay N. Singh (Cham: Springer International

in the *jhāna* formulas or in mindfulness of breathing, but we can see how the idea might come about: if joy leads to relaxation (*passaddhī*), joy must be more agitated than relaxation itself or whatever follows it, which in the gladness formula is *sukha*. One reason: therefore, *sukha* must be calmer. Cousins,<sup>72</sup> who takes this perspective himself, grounds it in two things: the expression *cetaso uppilāvita(tta)* or ‘mental excitement’, and the commentarial view that *pīti* is the delight at attaining the desired object while *sukha* is the experiencing of its flavour. But a difference in intensity does not follow from this commentarial distinction. As for ‘mental excitement’, the expression appears in three early texts, mostly referring to the elation that may arise from being praised.<sup>73</sup> The one time mental excitement explicitly refers to *pīti* and to a context of formal meditation is a passage from the *Brahmajāla Sutta* (DN 1), which discusses how each *jhāna* is coarse compared to the next:<sup>74</sup> the joyful mind (*pītigataṃ cetaso*) of the second *jhāna* is described as *uppilāvittatta*. Since this is a comparison in a meditative context we could be speaking of very subtle differences, which then get magnified. Moreover, that the passage calls out joy in particular rather than mentioning the second *jhāna* as a whole, and that joy falls away in the third *jhāna* while pleasure stays on, may lead to regarding the latter as calmer than the former—at least it must be more *capable* of calm, have more ‘quiet range’.

One last point contrasting canonical and exegetical material has to do with the mind-body relationship. The Theravādin ‘five joys’ are very bodily. Certainly in the *jhānas* the meditator feels *pīti* (and *sukha*) with the whole body,<sup>75</sup> though it arises from mental contact. This has led scholars like Peter Harvey to emphasise the physicality of *pīti* versus the mental nature of *sukha*.<sup>76</sup> Here we can identify a shift of emphasis in how joy is presented, since I would argue the early discourses actually stress the mental nature of *pīti*. We shift from speaking of joy as a mental brightening to a bodily energy that can be agitated. Thus, I find the term ‘uplifting’ quite fitting for the early conception of *pīti*—it even connects to literal meanings of *uppilavati*, to float or rise up.<sup>77</sup> Such uplift can of course get intense and shade into exhilaration, and

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Publishing, 2015), pp. 55–69 (p. 61) <[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-18591-0\\_4](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-18591-0_4)>; Cousins, ‘Buddhist Jhāna’, p. 122; Paul J. Griffiths, ‘Buddhist Jhāna: A Form-Critical Study’, p. 60; Harvey, ‘The Four Jhānas’, p. 7; Payutto, p. 1066.

72 Cousins, ‘Buddhist Jhāna’, pp. 120–22.

73 DN i 3, MN i 140, Ud 37. In these instances, it is connected to the terms *ānanda* and *somanassa*, certainly close to *pīti*, as I address later on in the dissertation. The expression also appears at Mil 183.

74 DN i 37: *yad eva tattha pītigataṃ cetaso uppilāvittattaṃ, etenetaṃ olārikaṃ akkhāyati*.

75 DN i 73.

76 Harvey, ‘The Four Jhānas’, p. 8.

77 Cone, *A - kh*, p. 497; Rhys Davids and Stede, p. 152.

Theravāda exegesis seems to have developed along those lines, associating joy mostly with the intense segment of the whole range. Thus, while such a view does not depart drastically from what we find in the discourses, its emphasis is not so evident in them either.

## You say vedanā, I say saṅkhāra

Let us move on more fully to how systematic Buddhist thought conceived of joy (*pīti*), beginning with the Theravādins. The *Dhammasaṅgaṇī* classifies joy in the bundle of conditioning factors (*saṅkhārakkhandha*),<sup>78</sup> as do the *Abhidhammattha Saṅgaha*<sup>79</sup> and, implicitly, the *Vibhaṅga*.<sup>80</sup> But Buddhaghosa defines joy as ‘the satisfaction of obtaining a desirable object’,<sup>81</sup> which hardly differs from the canonical definition of domestic happiness<sup>82</sup>—a feeling. He distinguishes *pīti* from *sukha* in the following way: a tired person in the desert would feel *pīti* upon seeing a pond, whereas *sukha* would be the satisfaction of actually drinking from it. How this distinction maps onto the early texts is unclear. Karunadasa clarifies the Theravāda position by explaining *pīti* as ‘a conative factor dissociated from any hedonic content’, though he still defines *pīti* as ‘zest or *pleasurable* interest’<sup>83</sup> (my emphasis). Not much seems to change by considering joy a *saṅkhāra*. But if I understand correctly, what characterises Theravādin *pīti* is an element of active delight or relishing rather than the mere experiencing (*anubhava*) as pertains to feeling. Yet, this concern seems to me distinctly abhidharmic and should be used to characterise that phase of Buddhist thought, whereas the early discourses do not set up categories based on this sort of criteria. In fact, the commentarial image for renunciant happiness—a *vedanā*—is a king contemplating his wealth, which conveys relishing anyway.<sup>84</sup> Such an image also fits *pīti* in the early texts better than the simile of the tired traveller spotting a pond, in that the latter suggests anticipation whereas the canonical examples seen so far do not. If anything, they suggest review. In short, why the Theravāda does not see *pīti* as a

78 Dhs 17.

79 Bodhi and Narāda, p. 57 (I 18-20).

80 Vibh 257 explains *pīti* as *pāmojja* and without mentioning feeling, which it does when explaining *sukha*.

81 Vism 145 (IV 100): *īṭhārammaṇapaṭilābhatuṭṭhi pīti (...) saṅkhārakkhandhasaṅgahitā pīti*.

82 ‘Happiness arises when you consider it a gain to obtain forms known by the eye that are desired, pleasing, connected to worldly matter; or when you recall those previously obtained that have gone, ceased, changed.’ (MN iii 217: *cakkhuvīññeyyānaṃ rūpānaṃ iṭṭhānaṃ kantānaṃ manāpānaṃ manoramānaṃ lokāmisapaṭisaṃyuttānaṃ paṭilābhaṃ vā paṭilābhato samanupassato pubbe vā paṭiladdhapubbaṃ atītaṃ niruddhaṃ vipariṇataṃ samanussarato uppajjati somanassaṃ*.)

83 Karunadasa, *The Theravāda Abhidhamma*, p. 113.

84 Ps v 22.

*vedanā* is a bit puzzling. It must be explained in some other way.

In contrast to the Theravādins, the Sarvāstivāda-Vaibhāṣika school considers joy (*prīti*) to be a *vedanā* and treats it as a synonym of happiness (*saumanasya*). Occasionally, they even have a *prītīndriya* instead of *somanassindriya*.<sup>85</sup> Their view is found in Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*.<sup>86</sup> The equation seems to be so self-evident for the Vaibhāṣika that they are shocked when questioned: 'What else would it [*prīti*] be?' (*kimanyat bhavatu*).<sup>87</sup> It is less clear what opinion Vasubandhu holds, or who is his interlocutor holding the view that joy is *not* pleasant mental feeling, if not an account of Theravādins. According to P'ou Kouang and Fa Bao, it is the Sthaviras.<sup>88</sup> Louis de la Vallée Poussin assigns to the Sautrāntikas.<sup>89</sup>

On their part, the Yogacārinś did not consider *prīti* a separate dharma, so they must have understood it as pleasant mental feeling (*saumanasya*)—are there other candidates? Yogacārinś thus agree with the Sarvāstivādins. Interestingly, in a passage of Asaṅga's *Abhidharmasamuccaya*, Pradhan's Sanskrit reconstruction has *saumanasya* while Walpola Rāhula argued that *prīti* suits the context best because it mentions *dhyāna*.<sup>90</sup> In a footnote, Rāhula comments that '*Prīti* is a member of *dhyāna* but not of [sic] *saumanasya*'. One could wonder if Rāhula was influenced by the Theravāda take on this. Lastly, the *Tattvasiddhi-sāstra*, whose school affiliation is disputed, names *prīti* as a dharma separate from *vedanā* like the Theravādins.<sup>91</sup>

In recounting the Buddhist debate on joy, the AKB may contain the clue as to why different schools put joy in different baskets. It could be that the various positions relate to each school's attempt to make sense of *jhāna/dhyāna*. All, except the Dārṣṭāntikas, need to interpret *dhyānic sukha* as not bodily, since they hold that sensory awareness does not happen in *dhyāna*.<sup>92</sup> Since *sukha* cannot mean bodily pleasant feeling, now two factors compete for the position of mental pleasant feeling—*sukha* and *prīti*—and only one can get the job. The Vaibhāṣikas give it to *prīti* and relocate *sukha* to the relaxation (*praśrabdhī*) department.<sup>93</sup> The other major view in the

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85 K. L. Dhammajoti, *Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma*, 4th ed., 2009, p. 96.

86 La Vallée Poussin, vol. II, p. 114; vol. V, pp. 147, 151.

87 AKB 440.14, La Vallée Poussin, vol. V, p. 159.

88 See footnote 3 in La Vallée Poussin.

89 La Vallée Poussin, vol. V, p. 159. This view is followed by Gethin, *The Buddhist Path to Awakening*, p. 155.

90 Bon-Weibb and Rāhula, p. 108.

91 Qian Lin, 'Mind in Dispute: The Section on Mind in Harivarman's \*Tattvasiddhi' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Washington, 2015), p. 82.

92 AKB 438.24, La Vallée Poussin, vol. V, p. 150 ff.

93 AKB 438.21-26.

AKB chooses *sukha* instead, and in their need to then reinterpret *prīti*, argue that it was not really qualified for the job: its *vedanā* degree was false. So the reason both this unidentified school and the Theravādins regard joy as a separate dharma could well be that they take *sukha* to mean *somanassa/saumanasya* in the *dhyānas*.<sup>94</sup> Vasubandhu spells this out: if *prīti* is other than *sukha*, then it must also be other than *saumanasya*.<sup>95</sup> Joy becomes the victim of the previous doctrinal commitment that sensory awareness does not happen in *dhyāna*. Lacking such a commitment, the Dārṣṭāntikas remain the only ones who take *dhyānic sukha* to be bodily.<sup>96</sup> Strangely, though, they argue that for the first three *dhyānas* there is no mental pleasure whatsoever, but only bodily pleasure. I wonder if this is why La Vallée Poussin sees them—often identified with the Sautrāntikas<sup>97</sup>—as holding that *prīti* is not *saumanasya*. Because, on the other hand, they could see it as *saumanasya* if they wanted to, whereas other schools *cannot* unless they shuffle other dharmas around.

To summarise, there were broadly two understandings of joy (*pīti*) among early Buddhist interpreters: those who thought of it as a *vedanā* (Sarvāstivāda-Vaibhāṣika, Yogācāra and possibly Dārṣṭāntika) and those who saw it as a *saṅkhāra* (Theravāda, unidentified school). It is a plausible hypothesis that their view stems from how they conceived of *jhāna/dhyāna*.

The status of joy has engaged minimal enthusiasm and scholars of early Buddhism tend to simply follow the Theravāda tradition,<sup>98</sup> and this has consequences. Keren Arbel argues that Buddhaghosa’s understanding of *pīti* as a *saṅkhāra* fits the early discourses given its mental nature.<sup>99</sup> But this is not enough justification, for it does not rule out mental feelings. In contrast, Tse-Fu Kuan agrees with the Sarvāstivādins (and others) that *pīti* should be classified as a feeling, and Robert Buswell suggests seeing it as a form of spiritual feeling (*nirāmisā vedanā*).<sup>100</sup> However, Kuan adds, the early discourses do not support the Sarvāstivāda view that

94 Vibh 257: *tattha katamaṃ sukhaṃ? yaṃ cetasikaṃ sātāṃ cetasikaṃ sukhaṃ cetosamphassajāṃ sātāṃ sukhaṃ vedayitāṃ cetosamphassajā sātā sukhā vedanā: idaṃ vuccatī sukhaṃ.*

95 AKB 440.14-16, La Vallée Poussin, vol. V, p. 159.

96 AKB 439.01-07, La Vallée Poussin, vol. V, p. 151 ff.

97 On the relationship between these two school names, see K. L. Dhammajoti, ‘The Contribution of Saṃghabhadra to Our Understanding of Abhidharma Doctrines’, in *Text, History, and Philosophy: Abhidharma across Buddhist Scholastic Traditions*, ed. by Bart Dessein and Weijen Teng, Brill’s Indological Library (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2016), I, 223–47 (pp. 230–33).

98 Bucknell, ‘Reinterpreting the Jhānas’, p. 381; Cousins, ‘Buddhist Jhāna’, p. 120ff; Guenther, pp. 51–57; Henepola Gunaratana, *A Critical Analysis of the Jhānas in Theravāda Buddhist Meditation* (Buddha Dharma Education Association, 1980), p. 82 <[http://www.buddhanet.net/pdf\\_file/scrnguna.pdf](http://www.buddhanet.net/pdf_file/scrnguna.pdf)> [accessed 13 December 2021].

99 Arbel, *Early Buddhist Meditation*, p. 59.

100 Kuan, ‘Clarification on Feelings’, p. 302; Robert E. Buswell, ‘The “Sensation of Doubt” in East Asian Zen

joy refers to the faculty of happiness (*somanassindriya*). Perhaps Kuan wants to be cautious here, but if joy is a feeling, can it be anything other than pleasant mental feeling? To use two analytic principles established at the beginning of this study: joy is clearly of a pleasant hedonic tone and, in terms of origin, mental—and is that not the definition of the pleasant feeling known as the faculty of happiness?

This is called the faculty of happiness: mental pleasure and comfort, the pleasant and agreeable feeling born from mental contact.<sup>101</sup>

Anything that is experienced bodily or mentally as pleasant or agreeable is pleasant feeling.<sup>102</sup>

Joy (*pīti*) falls within these definitions. Even if we understood it as a subtype of pleasant mental feeling, it functions similarly and inhabits similar spaces than does happiness (*somanassa*). In the following section, I continue where Kuan stopped and offer some arguments for why accepting at least a rough equivalence between *pīti* and *somanassa* makes more sense than not doing so, while supporting the thesis of *pīti* as *vedanā* more broadly.

## That Old Feeling

Earlier in this chapter I pointed out the resemblance between two types of positive affect. One is carnal joy (*sāmisā pīti*):

What are the five strands of sense desire? Forms known by the eye that are desired, pleasing, arousing ... tactile sensations known by the body that are desired, pleasing, arousing. These are the five strands of sense desire. Carnal joy is the joy that arises conditioned by the five strands of sense desire.<sup>103</sup>

The other is domestic happiness (*gehasita somanassa*):

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Buddhism and Some Parallels with Pāli Accounts of Meditation Practice', *Contemporary Buddhism*, 19.1 (2018), 69–82 (p. 78) <<https://doi.org/10.1080/14639947.2018.1443556>>; see also Karin Meyers, 'The Pleasant Way: The Dhyāna-s, Insight and the Path According to the Abhidharmakośa', *International Association of Buddhist Universities, 2nd Conference*, 2012, p. 275.

101 SN v 209: *katamañ ca bhikkhave somanassindriyaṃ? yaṃ kho bhikkhave cetasikaṃ sukhaṃ cetasikaṃ sātāṃ manosamphassaṃ sukhaṃ sātāṃ vedayitaṃ, idaṃ vuccati bhikkhave somanassindriyaṃ.*

102 MN i 302: *yaṃ kho, āvuso Visākha, kāyikaṃ vā cetasikaṃ vā sukhaṃ sātāṃ vedayitaṃ ayaṃ sukhaṃ vedanā.*

103 SN iv 235: *katamañ ca, bhikkhave, sāmisā pīti? pañca' ime, bhikkhave, kāmaguṇā. katame pañca? cakkhuviññeyyā rūpā itthā kantā manāpā piyarūpā kāmūpasamhitā rajanīyā ... pe ... kāyaviññeyyā phoṭṭhabbā itthā kantā manāpā piyarūpā kāmūpasamhitā rajanīyā. ime kho, bhikkhave, pañca kāmaguṇā. yā kho, bhikkhave, ime pañca kāmaguṇe paṭicca uppañjati pīti, ayaṃ vuccati, bhikkhave, sāmisā pīti.*

Happiness arises when you consider it a gain to obtain forms known by the eye that are desired, pleasing, connected to worldly matter; or when you recall those previously obtained that have gone, ceased, changed.<sup>104</sup>

The first passage goes through the five physical senses while the second adds the mind, but both use almost the same adjectives (*iṭṭha*, *kanta*, *manāpa*) to denote the objects' desirable and pleasing nature. I would argue they describe the same old pleasant feeling stemming from the valued acquisition or consumption of sense experience.<sup>105</sup> In other words, both 'domestic' and 'carnal' describe secondary feelings conditioned by an unskilful perception. A linguistic point hiding in the *Nirāmisā Sutta* supports this: joy, pleasure and equanimity are described using the phrase *ime pañca kāmagaṇe paṭicca uppajjati* ('conditioned by the five strands of sense desire there arises...'), which is also used for joy in the *Subhā Sutta* (MN 99).<sup>106</sup> I would argue that the language and structure of this phrase logically require a *vedanā*. In fact, all other thirteen occurrences of this phrase in the *suttas* are followed by a *vedanā*.<sup>107</sup>

The parallels continue on the sunny side of the street as well. In the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta*, right before practitioners realise that the hindrances are absent in them, setting off the gladness formula, the discourse compares the hindrances to being ill or in servitude, and abandoning them to recovering one's health or gaining freedom, among other similes.<sup>108</sup> It then relates how the healthy or freed person, thinking of their newfound desirable condition, would obtain gladness (*labhetha pāmojjaṃ*) and happiness (*adhigaccheyya somanassaṃ*). Like a trailer of the full movie that is about to screen, starring the gladness formula and the *jhānas*, this is a partly overlapping description where *somanassa* takes the place of *pīti* after *pāmojja*. Another example of *pīti* and *somanassa* as interchangeable is this: while *somanassa* of the renunciant type arises when seeing with wisdom that 'all forms are transient, unsatisfactory, and subject to change',<sup>109</sup>

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104 MN iii 217: *cakkhuvīññeyyānaṃ rūpānaṃ iṭṭhānaṃ kantānaṃ manāpānaṃ manoramānaṃ lokāmisapaṭisaṃyuttānaṃ paṭilābhaṃ vā paṭilābhato samanupassato pubbe vā paṭiladdhapubbaṃ atītaṃ niruddhaṃ vipariṇataṃ samanussarato uppajjati somanassaṃ*.

105 We have also encountered this feeling under the alternative name of 'layman's joy' (*gihissa pīti*, DN iii 162), a lexical midpoint between *gehasita somanassa* and *sāmisa pīti*. *Gihī*, layman or householder, is related to Sanskrit *gr̥ha* and Pali *geha* meaning house, from where we get *gehasita*. It is usually contrasted with *pabbajita*, ascetic, whereas *gehasita* pairs with *nekkhammasita*. See Cone, *G - n*, p. 53; Rhys Davids and Stede, p. 250.

106 MN ii 203.

107 MN i 85, MN i 92, MN i 398, MN i 454, MN ii 43, MN iii 233, SN iv 225, AN iv 415, plus the other occurrences in the *Nirāmisā Sutta* itself (SN iv 235).

108 The similes begin at D i 207.

109 MN iii 217: *rūpānaṃ to' eva aniccatam viditvā vipariṇānavirāgaṇirodhaṃ, pubbe c' eva rūpā etarahi ca sabbe te rūpā aniccā dukkhā vipariṇāmadhammā ti evametam yathābhūtaṃ sammappaññāya passato uppajjati somanassaṃ*.

in the Dhammapada this insight is connected to the arising of *pīti* and *pāmojja* instead of *somanassa*:

Because of thoroughly knowing  
the rise and fall of the bundles,  
they acquire joy and happiness  
—they know this as the deathless.<sup>110</sup>

The *Cūlavadda Sutta* (MN 44) further supports that the terminologies ‘carnal-spiritual’ and ‘domestic-renunciant’ themselves are quite equivalent and interchangeable. There, Dhammadinnā presents three ethical hedonic tones that are not underlain by the habitual tendencies (*ānusaṅga*) and should be cultivated. She identifies the ethical pleasant feeling as the first *jhāna*—spiritual joy. Then she explains the ethical unpleasant feeling using the paragraph of renunciant unhappiness:

‘When will I enter and dwell in those spheres in which the noble ones enter and dwell now?’ As you establish such a yearning for the greatest liberations, unhappiness arises conditioned by it.<sup>111</sup>

Here it is worth mentioning that the Theravāda abhidharma does not allow for unpleasant mental feeling in a skilful mind,<sup>112</sup> for it considers it always a sign of aversion (*dosa*). Yet this is precisely a feeling not underlain by the tendency to resistance (*paṭighānusaṅga*), which contributes to the goal and sits on a recognition of what is good and to be pursued.<sup>113</sup>

Lastly, Dhammadinnā’s ethical neutral feeling is the fourth *jhāna*—spiritual equanimity. As we can see, she switches back and forth smoothly from one terminology to the other, strongly suggesting that ‘spiritual’ and ‘renunciant’ are different names for the same idea, as scholars have already observed,<sup>114</sup> even if certain terms settled into particular contexts.<sup>115</sup> On the basis

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110 Dhṛ 374: *yato yato sammasati / khandhānaṃ udayabbayaṃ; / labhati pītipāmojjaṃ / amataṃ taṃ vijānataṃ.*

111 MN i 303-304: *kudāssu nāmāhaṃ tadāyatanaṃ upasampajja viharissāmi yadariyā etarahi āyatanaṃ upasampajja viharantī ti iti anuttāresu vimokkhesu pihaṃ upaṭṭhāpayato uppajjati piḥāppaccayā domanassaṃ.* The only difference with the passage at MN iii 218 is the odd spelling *piḥāppaccayā/piḥāppaccayā*.

112 Bodhi and Narāda, p. 80.

113 See Cousins, ‘Good or Skillful?’

114 Mathieu Boisvert, *The Five Aggregates: Understanding Theravāda Psychology and Soteriology* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1995), xvii, pp. 74–76; Anālayo, *Perspectives on Satipatthāna*, sec. VII.5; Anālayo, *From Craving to Liberation*, p. 84.

115 Keren Arbel has linked renunciant unhappiness to the second and third *jhānas*. However, as contended by Anālayo, this is a dubious claim. An argument he does not bring up is how the *Pīti Sutta* (at AN iii 207) says the joy of seclusion, i.e., the first *jhāna*, is devoid of pain and sadness connected to the skilful. See Bhikkhu Anālayo, ‘On the Supposedly Liberating Function of the First Absorption’, *Buddhist Studies Review*, 33.1–2 (2016), 271–80 (p. 276) <<https://doi.org/10.1558/bsrv.31649>>.

of this and the previous equation of carnal joy and domestic happiness, it is hardly a leap to consider that spiritual joy (*nirāmisā pīti*) corresponds to renunciant happiness (*nekkhammasita somanassa*). Perhaps the latter stresses the cognitive dimension and the former its felt aspect, its phenomenology, but last chapter suggested these are not very different anyway: we saw how insight into the nature and drawbacks of sense desire, something linked to renunciant happiness,<sup>116</sup> helps settle the mind into *jhāna*, which is a spiritual pleasant feeling not underlaid by the tendency to lust (*rāgānusaya*). In short, ‘domestic’ (*gehasita*) and ‘carnal’ (*sāmisa*) seem to be equivalent, just like ‘renunciant’ (*nekkhammasita*) and ‘spiritual’ (*nirāmisā*); and in both their ethical and unethical strands, it seems highly reasonable to consider that happiness (*somanassa*) and joy (*pīti*) inhabit the same ‘space’ and have the same experiential referent, or almost.

Indirectly, these correspondences back up that the early texts treat joy (*pīti*) as a feeling (*vedanā*). This is further suggested by two ‘variables’ of joy: the analysis into carnal and spiritual itself, and whether it is accompanied by thinking (*vitakka*) and reflection (*vicāra*). The latter is a subclassification of spiritual joy, which, as seen in the first section, means *jhānic*/awakening-factor joy. While some could argue this is a mark of collectedness (*samādhi*) in general,<sup>117</sup> to me it seems to qualify the felt, affective dimension of experience specifically. In Sakka’s Questions (*Sakkapañha Sutta*, DN 21), the Buddha sifts happiness (*somanassa*), unhappiness (*domanassa*) and equanimity (*upekkhā*) each into two piles: those types that should not be developed and those that should be. Among the latter, the Buddha declares that those without thinking and reflection are better.<sup>118</sup> Then the text moves on to other phenomena—some of them, like bodily and verbal conduct (*kāyasamācāra*, *vacīsamācāra*), quite identifiable with the bundle of *saṅkhāra*—but to none does it apply the distinction of ‘with or without thinking and reflection’.

Regarding the analysis into carnal and spiritual, as far as I know nowhere does the Pali canon apply it to other metacategories like *saññā* or *saṅkhāra*, but only to *vedanā*.<sup>119</sup> ‘Carnal’ and ‘spiritual’ show up, famously, under the contemplation of feelings (*vedanānupassanā*) in the

116 MN iii 217: *rūpānaṃ tv’ eva aniccataṃ viditvā vipariṇānavirāgaṇirodhaṃ, pubbe c’ eva rūpā etarahi ca sabbe te rūpā aniccā dukkhā vipariṇāmadhammā ti evametaṃ yathābhūtaṃ sammappaññāya passato uppañjati somanassaṃ.*

117 DN iii 219, SN iv 360, SN v 111, AN iv 299.

118 DN ii 278.

119 Morrison says other elements are applied the label *āmisa*. These are listed in AN i 92-94 as follows (in order): *dāna*, *yāga*, *cāga*, *pariccāga*, *bhoga*, *sambhoga*, *saṃvibhāga*, *saṅgaha*, *anuggaha*, *anukampā*, *santhāra*, *paṭisanthāra*, *esanā*, *pariyesanā*, *pariyetthi*, *pūjā*, *ātiṭheyya*, *iddhi*, *vuddhi*, *ratana*, *sannicaya*, *vepulla*. The contrasting label for those items, though, is *dhamma*, not *nirāmisā*. See Robert G. Morrison, ‘Two Cheers for Tanhā’, *Contemporary Buddhism*, 2.1 (2001), 99–116 (p. 107) <<https://doi.org/10.1080/14639940108573741>>.

*Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (MN 10),<sup>120</sup> as well as in two discourses of the *Vedanā Saṃyutta*.<sup>121</sup> The *Nirāmisā Sutta* (SN 36.31), which is one of them, offers two challenges—surmountable, as I will show. The first is an exception to what I have just claimed: it uses the ethical template not only on joy, pleasure and equanimity, but on liberation (*vimokkha*) too—and liberation is not a *vedanā*. We must note this is the single one occurrence in the whole of the early discourses of such an idea.<sup>122</sup> But beyond quantitative arguments, in the next several paragraphs I elaborate why this is not strong enough counterevidence to my claim.

The *Nirāmisā Sutta* explains that joy, pleasure, and equanimity are carnal when they derive from the five strands of sense desire, spiritual when in *jhāna*, and beyond-spiritual when they spring from the self-review of a liberated mind. The three are symmetrical. In contrast, carnal liberation (*sāmisā vimokkha*) is liberation connected to form, spiritual liberation (*nirāmisā vimokkha*) is connected to the formless, and beyond-spiritual liberation (*nirāmisā nirāmisātara vimokkha*) arises in the self-review of a liberated mind. As Bhikkhu Bodhi observes:

Having called the rapture, etc., of the *jhānas* spiritual (lit. «noncarnal») rapture, etc., it seems contradictory for the text to say that the form-sphere deliverance is carnal. Spk explains that form-sphere deliverance is called carnal because its object is a carnal form (*rūpāmisavasena' eva sāmisā nāma*).<sup>123</sup>

Following the commentary,<sup>124</sup> carnal liberation refers to the *jhānas* and spiritual liberation to the formless attainments. Thus, it makes sense to understand the carnal liberation of the *jhānas* as liberation *from* the carnal. With the *jhānas* identified as ‘the spiritual’, we continue the pattern and get spiritual liberation as liberation *from* the *jhānas*, namely, the formless attainments. We then expect beyond-spiritual liberation to be liberation *from* the formless attainments, and while what we find can be compatible with that (the commentaries do not explain), the text instead speaks of a liberation that arises upon the self-review of a liberated mind. The concept is slightly odd. Can one get even more awakened? ...by simply reviewing that one already is? Perhaps one could take this to describe the moment of insight that constitutes and effects liberation, when a meditator is in an advanced state; but I incline to

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120 MN i 59.

121 *Agāra Sutta* (SN iv 219) and *Nirāmisā Sutta* (SN v 235).

122 The next and only other canonical instance of it is in the *Paṭisambhidāmagga*, dating from the Common Era. See Hinüber, pp. 59–60.

123 Bodhi, *The Connected Discourse of the Buddha*, p. 1437.

124 Spk iii 85: *vimokkhavāre pana rūpapaṭisaṃyutto vimokkho attano ārammaṇabhūtena rūpāmisavaseneva sāmisā nāma, arūpapaṭisaṃyutto rūpāmisābhāvena nirāmisā nāmā ti*.

read it as a mind that is already liberated and reviews itself, since the other cases suggest review of a state one has already reached.

If we peek into the Chinese parallel to the *Nirāmisā Sutta* (SĀ 483), two main differences stand out. First, the Chinese text has mindfulness (念) instead of joy, which Choong Mun-keat considers a transmission error, I think correctly, and suggests reading joy instead.<sup>125</sup> Secondly, the Chinese text uses ‘beyond-spiritual’ differently, just to denote something superior to whatever it has deemed ‘spiritual’: if spiritual pleasure corresponds to the second *jhāna*, beyond-spiritual pleasure is the third; if spiritual equanimity means the third *jhāna*, beyond-spiritual equanimity means the fourth. As in the Pali version, carnal liberation is connected to form and spiritual liberation to the formless, but beyond-spiritual liberation differs again: it is the cessation of desire, hatred, and delusion.<sup>126</sup> The Chinese discourse lacks the notion of the self-review of a liberated mind.

Common to the Pali and Chinese versions is the symmetry between joy, pleasure and equanimity, and that liberation breaks this symmetry. As expected, liberation does not use the phrase *ime pañca kāmagaṇe paṭicca uppajjati* (‘conditioned by the five strands of sense desire there arises...’), which I argued must be followed by a feeling. It seems reasonable to consider that the terms carnal (*sāmisā*) and spiritual (*nirāmisā*) originally referred to feelings, since only once they designate other phenomena. But in correlating feelings with liberation states,<sup>127</sup> the terms extended to *vimokkha*, and in so doing its meaning had to adapt, with somewhat confusing results.

Let us remember the fourfold model of *vedanā* found in the Chinese and Tibetan counterparts to the Discourse on the Hundred and Eight (*Atthasata Sutta*, SN 36.22). Here is the relevant passage from the Tibetan text:

[There are feeling tones] connected with sensuality, [feeling tones] connected with materiality, [feeling tones] connected with the immaterial, [feeling tones] connected with the absence of the influxes. Udāyin, this is my method of teaching according to which there are four [kinds of] feeling

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125 Given how the text explains spiritual and beyond-spiritual mindfulness—joy—as the first and second *jhānas* respectively, given that the Pali counterpart has joy (*pīti*), and given that the idea of carnal and spiritual mindfulness is elsewhere unheard of, we can quite safely judge this a mistake. See Choong, p. 128.

126 Choong, p. 128.

127 With this I am not referring to the four stages of awakening, but to how the mind in these different meditative states resembles or even partakes of liberation. See Gethin, ‘The Jhānas’, pp. 180, 193ff.

tones.<sup>128</sup>

This works very well. It describes feelings associated with each degree of liberation—or in the sensual realm, lack thereof. We can see the problem faced by the *Nirāmisā Sutta*: there are four realms, feeling applies to all of them, but liberation only applies to three. If we want to use the labels of carnal, spiritual and beyond-spiritual with liberations, they will match differently than they do with feelings. The labels become inconsistent, as *carnal* liberation is characterised by *spiritual* feelings, and so on.<sup>129</sup> Figure 4 shows this on a table.

To wrap up: carnal and spiritual liberation (*vimokkha*) are a once-in-the-canon thing, the various transmission lineages understand them differently, and their occurrence only foregrounds the symmetry between *sukha* and *upekkhā* and *pīti*, whose arising from the five strands of sense desire strongly suggests *vedanā*. Therefore, the presence of liberation (*vimokkha*) in the *Nirāmisā Sutta* does not invalidate my argument that the use of carnal-spiritual terminology supports that the early texts treat joy (*pīti*) as a feeling (*vedanā*). Rather, it seems that wanting to correlate feelings with degrees of liberation led to an extension of that terminology, with inconsistent and confusing results.

The second challenge lies in how the *Nirāmisā Sutta* defines carnal pleasure (*sāmisā sukha*) as ‘the pleasure (*sukha*) and happiness (*somanassa*) that arise conditioned by the five strands of sense desire’. In including happiness within carnal pleasure, this passage suggests that carnal joy (*sāmisā pīti*) is something else.<sup>130</sup> It could also be acknowledging *pīti* as a subtype of pleasant mental feeling, distinguishable from the generic *somanassa*. But given how *sukha* sometimes means pleasant bodily feeling alone (as *sukhindriya*) and sometimes pleasant feeling generally (as *sukhā vedanā*, encompassing both *sukhindriya* and *somanassindriya*), it is not surprising to find both terms here. This may be due to reciter habits, since this description of the type of pleasure that should not be pursued is a stock passage that happens elsewhere in the canon without *pīti*

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128 Dhammadinnā, p. 176.

129 There are discrepancies between the Pali and Chinese versions—for example, according to the latter carnal liberation also contains beyond-spiritual feelings—but they both agree in not mentioning feelings connected with the formless. Since feelings are not the focus of those meditative states, this is not surprising. Nonetheless, feeling operates in them, namely, the equanimity of the fourth *jhāna*. See Anālayo, *Early Buddhist Meditation Studies*, p. 174 note 97.

130 SN v 237: *yā kho bhikkhave ime pañca kāmaguṇe paṭicca uppañjati pīti, ayaṃ vuccati bhikkhave sāmisā pīti ... yaṃ kho bhikkhave ime pañca kāmaguṇe paṭicca uppañjati sukhaṃ somanassaṃ, idaṃ vuccati bhikkhave sāmisā sukhaṃ.*

lurking around, as in the *Araṇavibhaṅga Sutta* (MN 139).<sup>131</sup> The compilers or reciters could have kept *somanassa* in a common, memorised formula although this very particular context did not need it. Curiously, the Chinese parallel to the *Araṇavibhaṅga Sutta* contains this formula with the characters for *pīti* (喜) and *sukha* (樂),<sup>132</sup> which is not strange considering the Sarvāstivāda leanings of the *Madhyama Āgama*.<sup>133</sup> In isolation, this second challenge could weaken my theory, but we need to take it together with all the previous evidence that points to the overlap (to say the least) between *pīti* and *somanassa* and between the terminologies ‘carnal-spiritual’ and ‘domestic-renunciant’.

Identifying *pīti* with *somanassa* has implications for the feelings present in *jhāna*, a can of worms to be opened in chapter five. But since it concerns a question we need to raise now, allow me to lift the lid ever so slightly for a second. This is how the formula for the fourth *jhāna* begins:

Due to letting go of pain (*dukkha*) and pleasure (*sukha*), and due to happiness and unhappiness (*somanassadomanassa*) disappearing earlier...<sup>134</sup>

Since earlier *jhānas* do not mention the elements ‘happiness’ and ‘unhappiness’, what these are and when they ceased intrigues scholars.<sup>135</sup> In collating different exegetical sources, Kuan has shown that in the *jhānas*, *pīti* and the *somanassindriya* appear and disappear in parallel,<sup>136</sup> which supports reading the ‘formerly ended happiness’ as the *pīti* of the first and second *jhānas*.<sup>137</sup> Yet the mystery remains as to why use different terminology inside the same set of formulas.

A specific usage of *pīti* for religious feelings, mirroring *ānanda* in Brahminical texts,<sup>138</sup> was spotted by Lance Cousins, and chapter four provides further insight into this connection. Cousins also suggested that ‘love’ might best suit *pīti*’s range of meanings, given how mystical

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131 MN iii 233.

132 T i 0702c04.

133 Bhikkhu Anālayo, ‘The “School Affiliation” of the Madhyama-Āgama’, in *Research on the Madhyama-Āgama*, ed. by Bhikkhuni Dhammadinnā (Taiwan: Dharma Drum Publishing Corporation, 2017), pp. 55–76.

134 DN i 75: *bhikkhu sukhassa ca pahānā dukkhassa ca pahānā, pubbeva somanassadomanassānaṃ ...*

135 For three examples: Arbel, *Early Buddhist Meditation*, p. 125; Harvey, ‘The Four Jhānas’, p. 10; Gunaratana, pp. 118–20.

136 Kuan, ‘Clarification on Feelings’, pp. 300–302; see especially Table 3.

137 Such is the reasoning of the Sarvāstivādins in AKB 440.17-22—see La Vallée Poussin, vol. V, p. 160. Seemingly influenced by Kuan, Anālayo interprets *somanassa* in the fourth *jhāna* formula as *pīti*, implicitly, when he translates it as joy and then says that ‘joy has been left behind when proceeding from the second to the third absorption’, Anālayo, ‘The Role of Mindfulness in the Cultivation of Absorption’, p. 2349.

138 Patrick Olivelle, *Language, Texts, and Society: Explorations in Ancient Indian Culture and Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 96–97 <<https://doi.org/10.7135/UPO9781843318859>> [accessed 10 February 2020].

traditions use the term.<sup>139</sup> While I find ‘love’ misleading, the connection to mysticism or spiritual practice is key. Instead, *somanassa* is used generically, when presenting models of *vedanā* and displaying all options, as in ‘things can feel *dukkha*, *sukha*, *domanassa*, *somanassa*, *upekkhā*...’ This generic usage could explain why, when paired with unhappiness (*domanassa*) in the fourth *jhāna*, and mirroring the pair ‘pleasure and pain’, the redactors of the canon went with *somanassa* instead of *pīti*, which lacks an obvious antonym.

Let me conclude: in this chapter I have argued it is plausible to read the discourses as treating joy (*pīti*) as a pleasant mental feeling. Here is the main evidence summarised: we find *pīti* in the *vedanā* contemplation of mindfulness of breathing and in the *Vedanā Saṃyutta*; we have *sukha*, *pīti*, and *upekkhā* as carnal and spiritual, which is *vedanā* language, as is the phrase ‘*ime pañca kāmagaṇe*...’ used to describe carnal *pīti*; *pīti* and *somanassa* are often associated and sometimes replace each other, both in their skilful and unskilful strands. Not only do *pīti* and *somanassa* clearly belong to the same close-knit family in the early texts, but even if they were not the same thing they would be twins—two very similar types of pleasant mental feeling, fitting specific contexts. All this is worth contrasting with gladness (*pāmojja*), another family member but about whom none of these lines could have been written, despite Theravādins equating it with *pīti*. Moreover, chapter one clarified a fundamental difference between *vedanā* and *saṅkhāra/citta* regarding ethics, and in this sense too *pīti* fits much better into *vedanā*: it has no inherent moral valence, but derives this from accompanying qualities and whence it arises, just like the feeling *sukha*.

Most exegetical schools saw *pīti* as *somanassa*, as I defend the discourses did too, and I have suggested that Theravādins classified it as a *saṅkhāra* to solve the problem of interpreting *jhāna* factors when sensory awareness is off the table. For besides labels nothing changes much: joy is still something that feels good, arises in a skilful mind, and so on. So why does all this discussion matter? First, it matters for its own sake: since I am studying what the early texts talk about when they talk about *vedanā*, if they talk about *pīti* I must say it. But secondly and more importantly, while the Theravādin classification of *pīti* as *saṅkhāra* may be inconsequential, *relying on it* is not. Scholarly reliance on the Theravādin account alone obscures how *pīti* belongs to the crucial conversation about the role of positive affect in

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139 Cousins, ‘Buddhist Jhāna’, p. 121ff.

spiritual practice which early Buddhism had with other sects, and it blocks the sight of a shared affective-hedonic place where most practices lead—the recollections, *satipaṭṭhāna* and the removal of the hindrances, cultivating the awakening factors, insight into the sensual realm and into impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, or the rise and fall of the *khandhas*. This forms the basis for my main arguments in chapter five, which culminates this dissertation.

## Chapter 4: Indian religion through the feeling glass

One role has been gaining prominence during this play: that of pleasant feelings or positive affect. Chapter one called attention to the neglected area of secondary feelings, with their dependence on perception (*saññā*). On that basis, chapter two introduced how early Buddhism proposes a training in perception that changes feelings, skilfully using the affective pull they exert on practitioners for the sake of spiritual progress. It illustrated this with speaking of and perceiving neutral feelings as a subtle pleasure. Then, when chapter three defended joy (*pīti*) as a secondary feeling roughly synonymous with happiness (*somanassa*), spiritual pleasant feelings arrived at the centre of the stage. Their centrality cuts across conceptual categories like calm (*samatha*) and insight (*vipassanā*): spiritual progress of whatever kind feels good, and in turn feeling good contributes to spiritual progress. Chapter five will continue to probe this.

I now zoom out to contemplate Buddhism against the religious landscape where it grew. Central to the self-identity of early Buddhists is that they proposed pleasure as a path to liberation. They regarded this as what set themselves apart. I assess such a perspective, maintained by Payutto,<sup>1</sup> by looking at how the various Indian religious movements of the time ascribed soteriological value to affects, positive and negative. By ‘soteriological value’ I mean a thing’s capacity to contribute to liberation, its performing a role or function towards that goal. With this perspective, I go against the habit of relegating feelings to a mere byproduct of religious practice and instead I centre them to see how *they contribute* to liberation. Thus, this chapter discusses the ethical axis of *vedanā*. My findings strongly suggest that spiritual pleasure as a *means* to liberation was not widespread in the spiritual marketplace of the Buddha’s day. The idea was running around, but it was early Buddhists who grabbed it and put it in their stall, with clear labels and a user’s manual.

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<sup>1</sup> ‘One reason why the birth of Buddhism was so revolutionary, allegedly causing an earthquake and excitement all the way up to the highest Brahma realms, is because it introduced this new perspective and way of life, that happiness can be reached by happiness’, Payutto, p. 1071.

As I anticipated in the introductory summary of chapters, I engage much more with Buddhist texts than with Jain or Upaniṣadic ones, and so my findings both simplify those other traditions and retain a Buddhist bias. This limitation, however, tells us Buddhists ‘self-identified’ as occupying a certain space within the religious arena of their time. Thus, some claims in this chapter should be taken with an awareness that they most faithfully portray how Buddhists saw themselves and others, and that more research into non-Buddhist sources would at least nuance what I say about the role of pain and pleasure in those soteriologies.

If you cut an orange horizontally or vertically, you get different takes on what an orange is or looks like.<sup>2</sup> Horizontally, you see a wheel of triangles; vertically, two crescents on either side of a white pole. When debating to what extent Buddhism continued or reacted against other religious movements, scholars have tended to cut the orange on the cognitive-doctrinal axis.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, general works on Indian philosophy touch on pleasure and pain at best obliquely, often while trying to grab for other doctrines, but not as a worthy topic in itself.<sup>4</sup> I believe we can gain something by cutting the orange on the affective-hedonic axis—the *vedanā* axis. Such a cut reveals an affinity between early Buddhism and Brahmanism which can otherwise be overlooked or downplayed. It also clarifies what early Buddhists were trying to get across, helping to better frame scholarly debates on early Buddhist meditation.

Before we get into this chapter proper, let me present a typology of pleasures I will be using. Ariel Glucklich<sup>5</sup> borrows it from evolutionary theory to clarify the complex relationship religions have with pleasure. I find it facilitates comparing various Indian traditions, aids our understanding of them, and simplifies the manifold ways early Buddhism classifies pleasures. This typology distinguishes three types of pleasure: novelty, mastery and play.

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2 I owe this image to Akiñcano Marc Weber.

3 Richard F. Gombrich, *How Buddhism Began*, 2nd edn (London - New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 31–48; Richard F. Gombrich, *Theravāda Buddhism: A Social History from Ancient Benares to Modern Colombo*, 2nd edn (New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2006), pp. 67–69; Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics: Foundations, Values and Issues* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 10–14; David J. Kalupahana, *A History of Buddhist Philosophy: Continuities and Discontinuities* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1992), pp. 3–21; Y. Karunadasa, *Early Buddhist Teachings: The Middle Position in Theory and Practice* (Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2018), chap. 2; Andrew Skilton, *A Concise History of Buddhism*, 2nd edn (Birmingham: Windhorse, 1997), chaps 3–4. In contrast, Bronkhorst gives more attention to negative affect in Indian asceticism in Johannes Bronkhorst, *Greater Magadha: Studies in the Culture of Early India* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2007), p. 15.

4 Erich Frauwallner, *History of Indian Philosophy* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1997), I; Perrett; Richard King, *Indian Philosophy: An Introduction to Hindu and Buddhist Thought* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999).

5 Glucklich, *The Joy of Religion*.

Novelty (also called ‘replenishment’)<sup>6</sup> pleasure arises from responding to an immediate stimulus; it comes through the senses, can be impulsive and fades quickly. The pleasures of food and sex are classic examples. Religions tend to shun novelty pleasure or regulate it. It corresponds to what early Buddhism calls *kāmasukha*, *sāmisā pīti/sukha* or *gehasita somanassa*. Mastery pleasure is ‘the satisfaction one gets from mastering the organism’s response’ to novelty pleasures,<sup>7</sup> through impulse control, skills training, etc. A crucial element of it is that one *learns* to enjoy certain achievements. As a socially integrative pleasure, religions praise mastery pleasure and promote religious forms of it like scriptural learning. In this category, the Pali texts speak of *anavajjasukha* (impeccable pleasure) and *abyāsekasukha* (purified pleasure).<sup>8</sup> Lastly, play pleasure is ‘untethered to immediate need but also free from the constraints of the cultural agendas that underlie mastery pleasure’. Glucklich links it mainly to altered states of consciousness, as in mysticism or meditation.<sup>9</sup> The label ‘play’ may confuse at first, but meditative states resemble games in that both constitute bounded, alternative realities which can be enjoyed and where the mind exhibits a great degree of cognitive flexibility. Play pleasure would correspond to *nirāmisā* (and *nirāmisā nirāmisatara*) *pīti/sukha*, *nekkhammasita somanassa*, and more refined (*pañītatara*) pleasures like *upekkhāsukha* and *upekkhā* conceived of as a subtle pleasure. In this regard we may, cautiously, include *nekkhammasitā* and *nirāmisā upekkhā*.

Kathryn A. Johnson has proposed to split play pleasure into the *frolicking* of games and religious festivals and the *spiritual* pleasure of mysticism.<sup>10</sup> I think this overlooks how religious celebration partly consists in sanctioned novelty pleasure, whereas Glucklich wants to say that play pleasure is of a different order altogether, not just that it arises in a playful context. Johnson also overlooks to what extent mysticism fits under the concept of play in religious studies, especially when we consider how Indian meditation is related to the internalising of

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6 Payutto offers a reflection that would justify these names from a Buddhist perspective: ‘If the experience [of gratification] becomes too prolonged, it becomes a form of endurance and the happiness transforms into suffering. Sense pleasure thus relies on a continual change and variation of sense objects, and for this reason the scriptures state that movement (*iriyāpatha*) conceals suffering.’—Payutto, p. 1120.

7 All references in this paragraph are from Glucklich, *The Joy of Religion*, pp. 9–10.

8 Dictionaries give the spelling *avyāseka*. See Rhys Davids and Stede, p. 85; Cone, *A - kh*, p. 694.

9 In general, I will avoid the terminology of ‘mysticism’ given its Christian and perennialist connotations. See Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Post-Colonial Theory, India and the Mystic East* (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 1999), chaps 1, 8; Ann Taves, *Religious Experience Reconsidered: A Building-Block Approach to the Study of Religion and Other Special Things* (Princeton, N.J.; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2011), pp. 3–8.

10 Kathryn A. Johnson, ‘The Varieties of Pleasure and Positive Emotions in Religious Experience’, *Religion, Brain & Behavior*, 11.2 (2021), 215–19 (p. 217 ff) <<https://doi.org/10.1080/2153599X.2021.1881602>>.

ritual and to myth,<sup>11</sup> which are ‘play’ components of religion.<sup>12</sup> This aside, the texts I discuss do not theorise frolicking pleasure. For all these reasons, I stick to Glucklich’s tripartite model. This also allows me to keep the terminology separate: I distinguish, on the one hand, native Buddhist items like spiritual pleasure and joy and, on the other, the wider etic concept of play pleasure.

So far in this thesis I have not asked where the concept ‘*vedanā*’ comes from. Preoccupation with what feels good or bad must have been around in Indian religion for quite a while, but it seems it gained prominence nearer the Buddha’s time. In Vedic literature, *vedana* (with a short ‘a’) appears but a handful of times and never next to words denoting hedonic tone. In fact, even the terms *sukha* and *dukkha* are uncommon there.<sup>13</sup> As scholars have noted, *vedanā* is an action noun made from the causative of the root  $\sqrt{\text{vid}}$ , thus: causing to know, making known, announcing, proclaiming.<sup>14</sup> In the *Mahābhārata* we find ‘*saṃvedana*’ (the act of perceiving or feeling, perception, sensation) and ‘*vedanā*’ as ‘pain, torture, agony’. Other than that, only ‘*pratisaṃvedin*’ (feeling, experiencing, being conscious of anything) is close to Buddhist usage<sup>15</sup>—while broad, it resembles the Buddhist explanations of *vedanā* as ‘*anubhava*’ (experiencing) seen in chapter one. Meanwhile, in non-Vedic traditions we find a pool of doctrines containing the dyad of pleasure and pain: the Ājīvika ‘six inevitables’,<sup>16</sup> the Buddhist ‘eight worldly winds’,<sup>17</sup> ascetic enquiries into the origins of pleasure and pain,<sup>18</sup> and the Jain concept of *vedanīya karma*, which refers to actions determining what we currently experience: *sātavedanīya* or *asātavedanīya*<sup>19</sup>—respectively, pleasant and unpleasant.<sup>20</sup>

11 The connection between the meditative and the mythical or cosmological realms has been explored in Rupert Gethin, ‘Cosmology and Meditation: From the Aggañña-Sutta to the Mahāyāna’, *History of Religions*, 36.3 (1997), 183–217; Rupert Gethin, ‘Mythology as Meditation: From the Mahāsudassana Sutta to the Sukhāvāṭīvyūha Sūtra’, *Journal of the Pali Text Society*, XXVIII (2006), 62–112.

12 Robert N. Bellah, *Religion in Human Evolution: From the Paleolithic to the Axial Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), pp. 91–95; André Droogers, *Play and Power in Religion: Collected Essays* (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, Inc., 2011), pp. 81, 105–7, 117–18, 348–49.

13 According to Paul Younger, in the *R̥g Veda* only *sukha* appears, qualifying chariot, i.e., a chariot that runs well, easily, or smoothly. In the *Brāhmanas* and *Āraṇyakas* semi-psychological usages start to appear, referring to experiences of the body. See Paul Younger, ‘The Concept of Duḥkha and the Indian Religious Tradition’, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 37.2 (1969), 141–52 (pp. 143–45).

14 Attwood, ‘Defining Vedanā’, p. 45 note 2.

15 Monier-Williams, Leumann, and Cappeller, pp. 672, 1016, 1115.

16 A. L. Basham, *History and Doctrines of the Ajīvikas: A Vanished Indian Religion*, New edition (Motilal Banarsidass, 1981), p. 255.

17 AN 8.6 at AN iv 157.

18 A *paribbājaka* (SN ii 22), or ascetics and brahmins (SN ii 37, Ud 69-70).

19 Buddhist texts use these terms as well when describing the three hedonic tones: MN i 302, SN v 209-10.

20 Paul Dundas, *The Jains* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 100; Padmanabh S. Jaini, ‘Saṃskāra-Duḥkhatā and the

While dating Jain doctrines is hard, it seems reasonable to consider that *vedanīya karma* goes back to this shared religious soil. (Note that all the doctrines above lack neutral feeling.<sup>21</sup>) Perhaps a non-Vedic focus on pleasure and pain adopted a generic Vedic term and, like many religious innovations in late-Vedic India, we owe the Buddhist concept of *vedanā* to the interplay of various ‘cultures’.<sup>22</sup> For now, we can know two things: one, that around the Buddha’s time the term *vedanā* began to be used, specifically for hedonic tone; and two, that concern with hedonic tone is older than that linguistic fact. Therefore, to understand the history of *vedanā* and how *vedanā* sits within a larger context, we must look for conceptual rather than linguistic antecedents, that is, preoccupation with what feels good, bad or neither. Let me end this chapter introduction with a sketch of those antecedents and contexts.

Indian religious traditions conceive of their goal as having the cognitive attribute of truth (*satya*) and the affective attribute of pleasure—often translated ‘bliss’ in these contexts. Thus, central in the shared religious imaginaire is that knowledge feels good or is happiness. Jains posit an isolation (*kaivalya*) of the soul (*jīva*) described as pleasure (*sukha*).<sup>23</sup> Ājīvakas likewise see liberation as the end of all sorrows, final bliss.<sup>24</sup> The old Vedic religion aims for happiness and prosperity. The Upaniṣads seek union with the Absolute (*Brahman*) as the highest form of bliss (*ānanda*). And Buddhist nirvana—the ending of greed, aversion and delusion—is equally ‘the highest pleasure’ (*paramam sukham*).

No matter how the goal is articulated metaphysically, the way it feels remains consistent across traditions. This need not mean that such a highest pleasure is ‘felt’ in the ordinary sense of the word—or at all, as I will explore. To recover the discussion on conceptual metaphors from chapter two: even descriptions of a ‘good place’ after death, or a place beyond pleasure and

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Jaina Concept of Suffering’, in *Revelation in Indian Thought: A Festschrift in Honour of Professor T. R. V. Murti*, ed. by Harold Coward and Krishna Sivaraman (Emeryville, California: Dharma Publishing, 1977), pp. 153–58 (p. 154).

21 In fact, Jain doctrine sees pleasure and pain as ‘atoms’ similar to Buddhist dharmas, but more physical, and do not mention a third as neither-painful-nor-pleasant. See Dundas, pp. 93–96.

22 The argument of two different religious cultures in ancient India has been made by several scholars, with various opinions on how much (or until when) they were independent entities. Here I suggest some features seem more characteristic of one of these cultures at some point, without attempting they can be isolated in a clear-cut way—see Patrick Olivelle, ‘The Renouncer Tradition’, in *The Blackwell Companion to Hinduism*, ed. by Gavin Flood (John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2003), pp. 271–87 (p. 273).

23 US 23.83, US 32.2. Jaini, ‘The Jaina Concept of Suffering’, p. 155; Padmanabh S. Jaini, *The Jaina Path of Purification* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), p. 104; Caillat Colette, ‘Mysticism and Mystic Experience in Yogīndu’s Poem Paramātmaprakāśa’, in *Jainism and Early Buddhism: Essays in Honor of Padmanabh S. Jaini*, ed. by Olle Qvarnström (Fremont, California: Asian Humanities Press, 2003), PART I, 113–28 (p. 115).

24 Basham, pp. 253, 257.

pain, can never be cut-off from the felt. In fact, setting aside that religions need to posit a *desirable* end, descriptions of the goal as bliss likely arise out of felt, blissful meditative experiences. I am not making a sweeping claim that religion originates in religious experience; but in the case of India around the Buddha's time, I think we are justified to see it as a key element.<sup>25</sup>

Traditions may agree on the hedonic tone of the religious goal, but they part ways regarding the hedonic tone of the path leading there. As I mentioned, this is not just about how religious practice 'happens to feel', but about how traditions ascribe soteriological value to affects—positive and negative, mental and physical. This chapter surveys these traditions, beginning with Buddhism's next-door neighbours Jainism and Ājīvakism, moving along the Vedic street from the orthodox blocks to the unorthodox ones, and finally knocking on the Buddhist door.

## No pain, no Jain (nor Ājīvaka)

Asceticism emphasises the soteriological effectiveness of pain. This results from the doctrine of karmic retribution, which implies that to experience a painful feeling is part of one's cleansing towards liberation,<sup>26</sup> since it is a sign that some past action is coming to fruition. As we will see, it may also be a characteristic of avoiding new karma through immobility or fasting—eventually to death.<sup>27</sup> As scholars have noted, the word for asceticism or austerities, '*tapas*', connotes to feel pain.<sup>28</sup>

Jains believed that all pain derived from earlier actions.<sup>29</sup> So, on observing that immobility and fasting increased pain they concluded that more actions were being 'burnt' or 'exhausted'. This is a crucial point: inaction may prevent future existence, as it does not create new karma, but it is the pain associated with it that clears out acts already done. Thus, Jains reasoned that

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25 For discussions on this topic, see: Eli Franco, 'Meditation and Metaphysics: On Their Mutual Relationship in South Asian Buddhism', in *Yogic Perception, Meditation and Altered States of Consciousness*, ed. by Eli Franco and Dagmar Eigner (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2009), pp. 93–132; Johannes Bronkhorst, 'The Religious Predisposition', *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion*, 33.2 (2020), 187–227 (pp. 6, 12) <<https://doi.org/10.1163/15700682-12341504>>.

26 This fits with the 'juridical' conception of pain, as described in Ariel Glucklich, *Sacred Pain: Hurting the Body for the Sake of the Soul* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 16–18.

27 Dundas, p. 179. An account of the process can be found in Bronkhorst, *Two Traditions of Meditation*, chap. 3.

28 References to this can be found in Arbel, *Early Buddhist Meditation*, p. 54.

29 Bronkhorst, *Two Traditions of Meditation*, p. 31.

inflicting pain on themselves would speed up the burning of past deeds and precipitate liberation.<sup>30</sup> Accordingly, Mahāvīra’s journey abounds in episodes of intense pain.<sup>31</sup> These include pulling out his hair by hand to show his ‘willingness to face pain for the sake of the goal’, as Jaini put it,<sup>32</sup> and seeking out confrontations with villagers to receive their painful beatings.<sup>33</sup> Jains believed more strongly than anyone that pain had soteriological value and helped *effect* liberation. They conform to an instrumental model of (religious) pain.<sup>34</sup>

Early Buddhist discourses depict Jains as holding the view that ‘pleasure is achieved through pain’<sup>35</sup> and practising ‘sharp, acute, self-inflicted feelings of pain’<sup>36</sup> with which earlier deeds are destroyed.<sup>37</sup> There is an instrumental case, as when Mahāvīra says: ‘Nigaṇṭhas, you have done bad deeds in the past; wear them away *through* doing unpleasant, severe actions’.<sup>38</sup> The Buddha mocks them for that idea.<sup>39</sup> Paul Dundas has criticised placing excessive emphasis on the pain of asceticism. Instead, he ‘defends’ asceticism by showing how Jainism frames it within its doctrines and presents it in a positive light.<sup>40</sup> While this may balance unfair views and mockery, to me it mixes hedonic and value assessments, and we must keep these separate, especially if we want to know the value *of* hedonic tones. One question is whether Jain practice truly is painful—I answer ‘yes’—the other, how Jainism values this—I answer ‘positively’. Let me expand.

Dundas brings up an 8th-century Jain text that on the surface conflicts with the view I am taking.<sup>41</sup> The text says that when engaged in religious practice, the mind remains unaffected by

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30 Dundas, pp. 164–65; Bronkhorst, *Two Traditions of Meditation*, pp. 13–14 (par. 1.2), 29–30 (par. 2.3); Arbel, *Early Buddhist Meditation*, pp. 53–54.

31 Dundas, pp. 26–28.

32 Jaini, *The Jaina Path of Purification*, p. 12.

33 Basham, pp. 43–46.

34 Emil Salim, ‘Senseless Pain in the Phenomenology of Religious Experience’, *Open Theology*, 6.1 (2020), 510–19 (p. 511) <<https://doi.org/10.1515/oph-2020-0105>>.

35 MN i 93: *na kho, āvuso gotama, sukkena sukhaṃ adhigantabbaṃ, dukkhena kho sukhaṃ adhigantabbaṃ*.

36 ‘*opakkamikā dukkhā tibbā kharā kaṭukā vedanā*’—found in three discourses at MN i 92, MN i 241, MN i 246, MN ii 93, MN ii 212.

37 The phrase ‘*iti purāṇānaṃ kammānaṃ tapasā byantībhāvā, navānaṃ kammānaṃ akaraṇā, āyatim anavassavo*’ appears at MN i 93, MN ii 214 ff, and AN i 221 (which replaces *āyatim anavassavo* with *setuḡhātaṃ*).

38 MN i 93: *atthi kho vo, nigaṇṭhā, pubbe pāpakammaṃ kataṃ, taṃ imāya kaṭukāya dukkarakārikāya nijjīvetha*.

39 MN ii 222.

40 Dundas, p. 165.

41 Some external influences to later Jain conceptions of meditation are detailed in Johannes Bronkhorst, ‘History of Jaina Meditation’, in *Asian Traditions of Meditation*, ed. by Halvor Eifring (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2016), pp. 96–98 <DOI: 10.21313/hawaii/9780824855680.001.0001>.

painful feelings. We find this idea already in the *Ācārāṅga Sūtra*,<sup>42</sup> but also in the Buddhist *Mahāsaccaka Sutta* (MN 36). There, Saccaka speaks of cultivating the body (*kāyabhāvanā*) and the mind (*cittabhāvanā*) to achieve tolerance to pain—bodily and mental, respectively.<sup>43</sup> The Buddha then recounts his spiritual journey using a narrative familiar to other discourses, and after each ascetic practice he performed he adds that ‘even the painful feelings that arose did not overpower my mind and remain’.<sup>44</sup> The text identifies Saccaka as a Jain,<sup>45</sup> though Eviatar Shulman has suggested he was an independent ascetic with Ājīvaka influence.<sup>46</sup> Whatever the case, clearly ascetics tried to prevent primary feelings from giving rise to secondary feelings, as in the Buddhist simile of the two arrows.<sup>47</sup> It still seems their practice was painful at the level of primary bodily feelings—except, as we will see, in liberation.

While early Buddhists would of course want to exaggerate to what extent pain was *the* point, since they want to contrast their own teachings, they may have hit the bullseye nonetheless. Self-inflicted pain is a widely known religious phenomenon. The belief that one will avoid future suffering by experiencing it now, or a symbolic link between pain and ideals of compassion and harmlessness,<sup>48</sup> can lessen one’s perception of pain and give it meaning. But then asceticism needs to be in the unpleasant range for that sensemaking to work. Furthermore, the stimulus overload that is intense pain can alter the sense of self, which would fit Jain ideas of liberation as isolating the *jīva*.<sup>49</sup> From their point of view, pain has beneficial effects. I think we can conclude that early Jain practice felt painful physically—albeit mitigated or mediated through religious means—and that such painfulness was considered positive. To

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42 AS I.3.1 (2)

43 MN i 237. The Pali text is a bit garbled. Saccaka and the Buddha define the terms under discussion (*kāyabhāvanā* and *cittabhāvanā*) differently, so the exchange flows oddly, e.g., the Buddha takes *kāyabhāvanā* as equanimity towards pleasure and not pain. Still, both understandings make Saccaka critique Buddhists as lax, for ascetic standards. It surprises me how the commentary relates pleasant feelings with *vipassanā* and painful feelings with *samatha* rather than the other way around. Since the Buddha then connects painful feelings to asceticism and pleasant feelings to the *jhānas*, this imbues ascetics with great *samatha* and the *jhānas* with *vipassanā*. For more details, see Anālayo, *Comparative Majjhima*, pp. 233–34.

44 MN i 243: *evarūpāpi kho me, aggivessana, uppannā dukkhā vedanā cittaṃ na pariyādāya tiṭṭhati.*

45 Scholars have stated that Buddhist texts do not always (correctly) distinguish between sects, like Jains and Ājīvakas. See Dundas, p. 29; Johannes Bronkhorst, ‘The Riddle of the Jainas and Ājīvikas in Early Buddhist Literature’, *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, 28.5 (2000), 511–29 <<https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1017500901500>>; Basham, pp. 10, 119.

46 Shulman, ‘Looking for Samatha and Vipassanā’, p. 122 ff, especially n. 63.

47 This was discussed in Chapter 1, in the distinction between primary and secondary feelings.

48 Austerities must be ‘infused with friendship towards all living creatures’—Dundas, p. 166.

49 Robert C. Fuller, *Spirituality in the Flesh: Bodily Sources of Religious Experiences* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 133–37 <<https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195369175.001.0001>>; Glucklich, *Sacred Pain*, pp. 42–44, 52 ff, 60, 99.

Jains, painful feelings do not merely *accompany* religious practice: they perform a soteriological *function*.

Let us now turn to Ājīvākism.<sup>50</sup> Ājīvākas maintained that one's progress to liberation was fixed by destiny. One just had to wait. But according to Johannes Bronkhorst, they did not question whether avoiding new karma worked, they only disagreed that one could exhaust *past* karma on purpose.<sup>51</sup> Our hedonic cutting of the orange allows us to test his hypothesis. If Bronkhorst is right, Ājīvākas would regard any self-inflicted pain beyond that of inaction as soteriologically irrelevant. Therefore, they would not *actively seek* pain. Basham's account of Ājīvāka asceticism is dominated by uncomfortable practices of reduced or halted action, not active seeking, and indeed the Ājīvāka leader Makkhali Gosāla appears less keen on receiving beatings to burn karma than Mahāvīra.<sup>52</sup> Basham mentions a few examples of actively sought discomfort, like lying on a bed of thorns, but the most extreme he actually attributes to 'freelance proto-Ājīvākas'.<sup>53</sup> So far this seems to back Bronkhorst, but the land is muddier than that.

Basham provides no evidence that early Ājīvākas were uniform and consistent enough to be cleanly separated from their 'freelance' *proto* version. And then Bronkhorst's thesis opens up questions he leaves unaddressed: How did Ājīvākas understand the pain of immobility or fasting? Where did it come from, if not from earlier actions? Why is what creates the least karma increasingly painful? Ājīvākas may have taken pain as a mere byproduct of ascetic practices, which undermines its soteriological function; but then they would be holding that at least some pain is not caused by past activity.<sup>54</sup> Is this what they mean when they deny that our

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50 The spelling Ājīvika and Ājīvīkism is common in scholarship. Caution is implied throughout my discussion of the Ājīvākas, since establishing their doctrines with certainty or detail is famously hard. For a critical look at whether the scholarly consensus is based on sources that can be attributed to actual Ājīvāka works, see Piotr Balcerowicz, 'Fragments from the Ājīvīkas', *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, 50.1 (2022), 65–115 <<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10781-021-09494-x>>.

51 Johannes Bronkhorst, 'Ājīvika Doctrine Reconsidered', in *Essays in Jaina Philosophy and Religion*, ed. by Piotr Balcerowicz, Internet version (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2003), pp. 153–78 (pp. 162–63, 171); republished in Bronkhorst, *Greater Magadha*, pp. 40, 45; Johannes Bronkhorst, 'Historical Context of Early Asceticism', in *The Oxford History of Hinduism*, ed. by Gavin Flood (Oxford University Press, 2020), pp. 62–78 (p. 64) <<https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198733508.003.0003>>.

52 Basham, p. 44. The account comes from a Jain text, which of course wants to paint Gosāla as a less hardcore ascetic, but to Ājīvākas that may not have been a bad thing.

53 Basham, pp. 109–15.

54 This discussion contextualises discourses like SN 36.21 (at SN iv 230), where the Buddha opposes the view that all that is felt results from past actions, which other ascetics hold.

defiled state has a cause?<sup>55</sup>

While Bronkhorst offers an important insight, we should still keep an eye on the general fatalism of Ājīvakas. Bronkhorst finds fatalism insufficient to motivate a path as hard as asceticism,<sup>56</sup> but it can make sense as a response to an extreme and effort-glorifying religious culture. Ājīvakism set itself apart by considering it a fiction that through practice one was shortening one's journey. Discarding that fiction as naive may have brought them relief and relaxed the pain-seeking frenzy. Acceptance is a powerful psychological force, and appealing to destiny is a universal sense-making strategy that persists in modern pop culture—if something happens it is because it had to, and if it does not happen then it was not meant to.<sup>57</sup> From a fatalist perspective, asceticism would just burn as many actions as it was supposed to burn. This distinguishes them from Jains, who bring about the effect (pain) in order to make the cause happen (past deeds burning). Therefore, the Ājīvaka path too is painful, but whether they regarded pain as effective, as performing a function on the path, is questionable. At least they de-emphasised it, perhaps as a consequence of their general criticism of human agency.

What, then, about pleasure? Needless to say, ascetics renounce novelty pleasure and judge it negatively. Like Buddhists, Jains see its pursuit as giving rise to evil actions<sup>58</sup> and command to bear any pleasant (and unpleasant) feeling with detached equanimity.<sup>59</sup> Jain texts contain only sprinkles of mastery pleasure, and the presence of play pleasure is ambiguous too. However, it would seem that neither Jains nor Ājīvakas ascribe soteriological value to any pleasant feeling whatsoever, seeing them as either the cause of defilement or a byproduct of religious practice. Let me briefly explore play pleasure and then mastery.

Mahāvīra's enlightenment, as well as the irreversible process of final liberation (*mokṣa*) that culminates in death, are explained as 'bright *dhyāna*' (*śukladhyāna/sukkajjhāna*)—the only early Jain practice that resembles what we call meditation.<sup>60</sup> Enlightenment reveals the qualities of

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55 DN i 53: *natthi mahārāja hetu natthi paccayo sattānaṃ saṃkilesāya, ahetū apaccayā sattā saṃkilissanti*. See Basham, p. 227.

56 Bronkhorst, 'Ājīvika Doctrine Reconsidered', p. 156; republished in Bronkhorst, *Greater Magadha*, p. 41.

57 Balcerowicz does not see fatalist passages as descriptions of Ājīvakism, like other scholars have done, but rather as ideas circulating in Indian literature which are continually recycled and pop up in different contexts. With this he does not deny that Ājīvakas may have been fatalists. See Balcerowicz, pp. 80–84.

58 US 5 (4, 8-11).

59 AS I.6.2 (2), KS 5 (117).

60 Dundas, pp. 166–68; Bronkhorst, *Greater Magadha*, pp. 22–24; Johannes Bronkhorst, 'Can There Be a Cultural History of Meditation? With Special Reference to India.', in *Hindu, Buddhist and Daoist Meditation. Cultural*

the *jīva*, one of which is *sukha*.<sup>61</sup> We must remember here that, like Buddhists and Epicureans, Jains might speak of pleasure in evaluative and privative ways: as absence of pain. Thus, bright *dhyāna* could also describe a meditative state that merely blocks physical pain. (According to modern medical accounts of voluntary death by refusing food and drink, it is clearly not a pleasant experience. They mention the use of pain medication, the need to monitor discomfort, and emotional distress due to delirium.<sup>62</sup>)

It is possible, and I would even say likely, that the *sukha* of bright *dhyāna* relates to the subsiding of physical pain, probably within the subsiding of feeling altogether. This could be a state like cessation (*nirodha*) connected to the altered sense of self coming from stimulus overload—that is, self-inflicted pain. Jains describe freedom from *vedanīya karma*, only experienced upon liberation, as ‘*avyābādha*’,<sup>63</sup> non-affliction.<sup>64</sup> Since *vedanīya karma* encompasses pleasant and painful, we can understand it as the ceasing of feeling altogether, but the fact it foregrounds affliction leads us to think pain is what was present. We find the same emphasis in the *Ācārāṅga Sūtra*: ‘Not minding heat and cold, equanimous against pleasure and pain, the Nirgrantha does not feel the austerity of penance’.<sup>65</sup> It is unclear if this refers to physical pain or to secondary mental feelings derived from them—the idea of pain ‘overwhelming the mind’. Another text, in speaking of the homeless monk’s happiness, claims that he cannot feel anything pleasant or unpleasant, he is free from all ties and unconnected to the world.<sup>66</sup> This sounds more encompassing. It describes not the everyday life of the Jain but a meditative state, possibly liberation. We are reminded of the paradox of *sukha*:<sup>67</sup> that the cessation of feeling is a type of

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*Histories* (Oslo: Hermes Publishing, 2014), pp. 27–40 (p. 32)  
 <[https://serval.unil.ch/notice/serval:BIB\\_D645BCE270FF](https://serval.unil.ch/notice/serval:BIB_D645BCE270FF)> [accessed 9 December 2019].

61 Dundas, p. 104; Jaini, *The Jaina Path of Purification*, p. 104.

62 Timothy E. Quill and others, ‘Voluntarily Stopping Eating and Drinking Among Patients With Serious Advanced Illness—Clinical, Ethical, and Legal Aspects’, *JAMA Internal Medicine*, 178.1 (2018), 123–27 <<https://doi.org/10.1001/jamainternmed.2017.6307>>; Timothy E. Quill and Ira R. Byock, ‘Responding to Intractable Terminal Suffering: The Role of Terminal Sedation and Voluntary Refusal of Food and Fluids’, *Annals of Internal Medicine*, 132.5 (2000), 408–14 (p. 410) <<https://doi.org/10.7326/0003-4819-132-5-200003070-00012>>. Others speak of a peaceful death but acknowledge that people without a serious condition may have a slower and more painful death. See Sandra Jacobs, ‘Death by Voluntary Dehydration — What the Caregivers Say’, *New England Journal of Medicine*, 349.4 (2003), 325–26 <<https://doi.org/10.1056/NEJMp038115>>.

63 Jaini, ‘The Jaina Concept of Suffering’, pp. 155–56.

64 Monier-Williams, Leumann, and Cappeller, p. 1038.

65 AS I.3.1 (2), *Jaina Sutras. Part I*, trans. by Hermann Jacobi, Sacred Books of the East, 22 (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1884), p. 28.

66 US 9 (14-16).

67 This was explored in chapter two.

pleasure. Since it is not something ‘felt’,<sup>68</sup> I hesitate to class this happiness as play pleasure in the way of the *jhānas* and immaterial attainments. I am more inclined to consider it a case of fully evaluative pleasure, aware there is room for debate. The question, of course, is to what extent this applies to the final process of liberation or to states one comes in and out of. I defend the former. Let us consider the following passage:

By dismissal of the body he gets rid of past and present (transgressions which require) expiatory rites; thereby his mind is set at ease like a porter who is eased of his burden; and engaging in praiseworthy contemplation he enjoys happiness.<sup>69</sup>

A clue to answering our question lies in the simile of a porter and his burden: ‘*ohariyabharu vva bhāravahē*’. Given how much Indian religious movements share terminology and imagery, we can interpret this in light of early Buddhist usage, where putting down the burden—the bundles of clinging (*upādānakkhandhā*)—means liberation.<sup>70</sup> From this, it seems ‘praiseworthy contemplation’ points to the bright *dhyāna* of final liberation—in fact, the expression contains the word ‘*jhāna*’. This also makes sense of the final bit of the quote, ‘*suheṇaṃ viharai*’: the liberated person dwells in *sukha*, a quality of the *jīva* revealed upon liberation. We still cannot definitively settle if this involves felt pleasure or if it is, as in the examples above, a state beyond feeling altogether. Whether play pleasure applies here is still up in the air. But however that state feels, we have grounds to allocate it to the end of the path. There is no indication Jains saw it as helping to effect liberation, but simply as a feature of it.

As for mastery pleasure, it seems to fit asceticism. After all, can any successful path include no satisfaction whatsoever? Yet early Jain texts seldom conceptualise the path in this way, nor do they theorise mastery *as a pleasure*. While they contain scarce mentions of delighting in truth<sup>71</sup> and contentment with little,<sup>72</sup> which would qualify as mastery pleasure, they do not develop a discourse around it. I am not aware they have any native concept that would correspond to mastery pleasure. Early Jains must have known Buddhists had a typology of pleasures, but it

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68 The Buddhist commentaries call the affect of cessation ‘unfelt pleasure’ (*avedayita sukha*)—see chapter two.

69 US 29 (12); *kāussaggeṇaṃ bhante jīve kiṃ jaṇayai kāussaggeṇaṃ tīyapaduppannaṃ pāyachittaṃ viśohei visuddhapāyachitte ya jīve nivvayahiyaē ohariyabharu vva bhāravahē pasatthajjhānovagae suhaṃ suheṇaṃ viharai*. Translation adapted from *Jaina Sūtras. Part II*, trans. by Hermann Jacobi, Sacred Books of the East, 45 (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1895), p. 164.

70 DN iii 83, DN iii 133, MN i 4, MN i 139, SN iii 25, A iii 84—and quite a few more, as part of a set formula describing arahatship. Very similar expressions to the Jain text are used, such as ‘*ohitabhāro*’ and ‘*bhāravahin*’.

71 AS I.2.6 (5).

72 US 15 (4).

seems they did not formulate one of their own—if confirmed, this in itself would be telling.

Two passages in the *Uttaradhyāyana Sūtra* could challenge my position, but not strongly enough. One claims that subduing the Self leads to happiness in both this world and the next; though again, subduing means austerities.<sup>73</sup> The other says:

He who starts on a long journey with provisions, will be happy on his way there, not suffering from hunger and thirst. / Thus he who after having followed the Law, starts for the next world, will be happy on his journey there, being exempt from Karman and suffering.<sup>74</sup>

Once more we find ambiguity. For one is not ‘exempt from Karman and suffering’ *while* on the journey but upon liberation. Perhaps the journey refers to the final and liberating process of death, or to ascent to a heavenly existence—it is a trip to ‘the next world’ (*param bhavam*). The happiness of subduing the Self could have similar referents. Even if they referred to ascetic practice before liberation, which as we see is doubtful, Jainism lacks a discourse of valuing *sukha* as part of hiking comparable to the one it has for the *sukha* found at the summit,<sup>75</sup> and nothing suggests Ājīvakas differ.<sup>76</sup> We have seen that asceticism provides ‘self-realisation’ by means other than satisfaction, and that mastery pleasure is *learnt*, like an acquired taste. Therefore, if Jainism and Ājīvakism did not evolve a message of finding satisfaction in asceticism, we must incline to think there was little or no mastery pleasure.<sup>77</sup> Their position is clear: the feelings that have soteriological value are unpleasant ones, bodily pain in particular.

## Vedic bliss

It is in the Vedic traditions where we find a precedent for pleasure as part of religious practice. It is baked in the *puruṣārtha* model, the idea there are various aims in human life which, while structured in a hierarchy, are all affirmed. Roy Perrett has called it an ordered value pluralism.<sup>78</sup> The old Vedic religion places great emphasis on prosperity, both in this life and in

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73 US 1 (15).

74 US 19 (20-21), Jacobi, *Jaina Sutras. Part II.*, p. 90.

75 A scholar who has already observed this is Arbel, *Early Buddhist Meditation*, p. 58.

76 There is a possibility that Ājīvakas allowed the frolicking pleasures of religious song and dance. It is unclear how this fits with their soteriology and how far back it should be cast, but a connection between Ājīvakas and the Āryan ‘troubadour’ tradition is suggested by Basham, pp. 7–8, 116–17.

77 Given our general negative attentional bias, it seems realistic to me (as well as sad) that one would pursue difficult endeavours, like a PhD, out of duty or ambition but never get much satisfaction from the achievement, rather moving along to the next thing without much presence of mind.

78 Perrett, pp. 21–25, 29.

the world of the ancestors,<sup>79</sup> and sexuality and offspring often connects and symbolises both things. In this way, Vedic religion affirms novelty pleasure. It also seems to include mastery pleasure: following one's 'dharma' leads not only to the bliss of heavenly existence—a pleasure not so easily classified in our threefold analysis—but to joy in this life.

Crucial, however, is the central role of ritual as a means to achieve prosperity. During a ritual, the priest consumes the sacred drink *soma*, a mind-altering substance that induces intense pleasure (*ānanda*).<sup>80</sup> *Soma* not only leads to the goal of prosperity symbolised by sex and offspring, but is itself compared to semen, and so *soma*-induced ecstasy mirrors sex-induced ecstasy. Here we have a form of pleasure, described in novelty-pleasure terms, that happens in a religious context and performs a function: *through* that blissful experience of the priest desires are fulfilled and goals achieved. We can call it religious pleasure, a religiously significant pleasure.

Then, in the late Vedic period, a soteriology emerges: rather than a heavenly life after death, and alternating between this world and the other world, one aspires to leave the cycle of existence altogether. For the heavens provide no ultimate bliss (*sreyas*) but fleeting delights (*preyas*).<sup>81</sup> Offspring is replaced as a religious good with knowledge of the Self (*ātman*).<sup>82</sup> But while the goal shifts, the idea of pleasure and its sexual connotations linger on. The blissful union of two persons is now the blissful union with the absolute; the organ connected with that religiously significant pleasure is now the mind instead of the penis; the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* articulates the equation of *ānanda* and mind with reference to sexual desire.<sup>83</sup> As Patrick Olivelle puts it, there is an 'explicit and unambiguous connection between *ānanda* as orgasmic rapture and *ānanda* as the experience of *brahman/ātman*'.<sup>84</sup> It is also linked to deep dreamless sleep.<sup>85</sup>

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79 Michael Witzel, 'Vedas and Upaniṣads', in *The Blackwell Companion to Hinduism*, ed. by Gavin Flood (John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2003), pp. 66–101 (p. 84).

80 Some explanation of the drink and its ritual can be found in Witzel, p. 74; and Cezary Galewicz, 'Ritual, Ascetic, and Meditative Practice in the Veda and Upaniṣads', in *The Oxford History of Hinduism: Hindu Practice*, ed. by Gavin Flood (Oxford University Press, 2020), pp. 35–61 (p. 37) <<https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198733508.003.0002>>.

81 Patrick Olivelle, *The Asrama System: the History and Hermeneutics of a Religious Institution*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 46.

82 Bṛh-Up 4.4.22, cited in Olivelle, 'The Renouncer Tradition', p. 276.

83 Olivelle, *Language, Texts, and Society*, p. 89.

84 Olivelle, *Language, Texts, and Society*, pp. 77–78.

85 Bṛh-Up 2.1.19.

Vedic religious pleasure has changed from novelty to play, and despite the soteriological shift we can observe a continuity of affect. Religious practice is still pleasurable.<sup>86</sup> Van Buitenen already suggested how the pleasure of knowing the Self could derive from the ecstasy induced by *soma*; and liberation, as it became linked to the former, took on many features of the latter.<sup>87</sup> (There are incidental parallels here with Western hippies in the 60's, who shifted from expanding their mind with drugs to expanding it with meditation.) We find in the Upaniṣads a hierarchy of pleasures culminating in the pleasure of the Brahma world, which amounts to union with *brahman*.<sup>88</sup>

It is not all roses, though. There were Vedic strands of asceticism too that granted liberating power to painful experiences, though how widespread this was is unclear. Against Bronkhorst, Alexander Wynne has argued that while there may have been Brahmanic ascetics, the mainstream meditative tradition was not painful.<sup>89</sup> Cezary Galewicz shows that ascetic elements can be found already in early Vedic hymns and, like Wynne, sees it as a tradition outside the mainstream *soma* sacrifice.<sup>90</sup> Given the lively circulation of ideas and practices in the Indian period around the Buddha's life, Vedic and non-Vedic ascetics surely cross-pollinated; but in comparison, the Brahmanic traditions clearly ascribed less of a role to painful feelings than did Jainism, and they had a positive discourse around pleasure. Jains and Ājīvakas seem to have lacked.

In that spiritually fertile environment, there was also a loose group of ascetics. Buddhist texts call *paribbājakas* ('wanderers'), which I discuss now. While these were often unaffiliated ascetics, they nonetheless had common features—no single trait may apply to all the *paribbājakas* who appear in the early discourses, but several seem to apply to most of them. In this sense, to include them in the present section is tendentious. Yet I do so because, by and large, I see them as occupying a similar space regarding positive and negative affect as Brahmanic practitioners, in contrast to Jains and Ājīvakas.

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86 Wynne, *The Origin of Buddhist Meditation*, p. 112.

87 J. A. B. van Buitenen, "'Ānanda", or All Desires Fulfilled', *History of Religions*, 19.1 (1979), 27–36 (p. 28 ff, 35) <<https://doi.org/10.1086/462834>>.

88 Brh-Up 4.3.32-33.

89 Wynne, *The Origin of Buddhist Meditation*, p. 98.

90 Galewicz, p. 39.

According to Bronkhorst, *paribbājakas* correspond to the *parivrājas* mentioned in the Āpastamba Dharmasūtra—part of the *Yajurveda*. The text mentions rejecting novelty pleasure and seeking union with the Self, but not painful mortifications.<sup>91</sup> Joseph Walser sees most *paribbājakas* as coming from a Brahmanic background.<sup>92</sup> According to his database,<sup>93</sup> they tend to discuss themes more associated with Brahmins than with non-Vedic ascetics: the nature of the Self, often as related to meditative states, the unanswered questions, etc.—though how far to extrapolate from this is questionable. G. P. Malalasekera likewise considers Brahmanism as a central influence. He reports *paribbājakas* saw the goal as blissful and that bliss as a post-mortem reward for moral behaviour.<sup>94</sup> Despite a lack of explicit evidence, if they were indeed mainly of Brahmanic influence we can expect them to be open to pleasant experience as part of religious practice. And since their practice resonated with that of early Buddhists (see below), we have grounds to believe this was the case to some extent.

I follow Oliver Freiberger in treating *paribbājakas* mainly as a Buddhist construct. In his focused article, like Malalasekera he concludes that the label ‘*paribbājaka*’ describes those ascetics whom Buddhists could not assign to a recognisable group, being sometimes interchangeable with the likewise generic<sup>95</sup> ‘ascetics and brahmins’ (*samaṇabrāhmaṇā*).<sup>96</sup> However, as I said, that they were not a clearly delineated, organised, self-identified group does not rule out they were an informal movement with broadly shared characteristics, much like how today the Western ‘Insight Meditation’ scene is recognisable yet pluralistic and unregulated as a whole. So I now turn to how early Buddhist sources talk about them.

We should distinguish between dialogues with specific *paribbājakas* on the one hand, and the collective label ‘wanderers of other schools’ (*aññatitthiyā paribbājakā*) on the other. The former can tell us about those wanderers through the topics that are discussed, the kind of language

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91 Johannes Bronkhorst, *The two sources of Indian asceticism*, 2nd ed (Bern: Peter Lang, 1993), pt. I, p. 6.

92 Joseph Walser, ‘When Did Buddhism Become Anti-Brahmanical? The Case of the Missing Soul’, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 2018, p. 113.

93 Joseph Walser, ‘AAR Atlanta Buddhist Brahmin Database’ <[https://www.academia.edu/18781633/AAR\\_Atlanta\\_Buddhist\\_Brahmin\\_Database](https://www.academia.edu/18781633/AAR_Atlanta_Buddhist_Brahmin_Database)> [accessed 16 March 2022].

94 Malalasekera, II, p. 159.

95 Bronkhorst sees the term as describing two opposing groups, whereas Nathan McGovern does not—in Ellis, p. 44; also Bronkhorst, *Two sources of asceticism*, p. 68.

96 Oliver Freiberger, ‘Zur Verwendungweise der Bezeichnung *paribbājaka* im Pāli-Kanon’, in *Untersuchungen zur buddhistischen Literatur. 2: Gustav Roth zum 80. Geburtstag gewidmet / hrsg. von Heinz Bechert*, ed. by Heinz Bechert and Gustav Roth (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997), pp. 121–30 (pp. 128–30).

employed, etc., as Walser tries to do with his database. But the latter tends to just reflect Buddhists. Of the 47 Pali discourses containing the expression ‘*aññatitthiyā paribbājakā*’, in 37 it is a prompt for Buddhists to explain themselves: sometimes through imagined critiques (‘wanderers of other schools might say...’), like a skilled public speaker who anticipates possible objections from the audience; sometimes through questions, actual or imagined, about what the Buddha teaches; sometimes by portraying Buddhists as more skilled than others with similar practices and doctrines.<sup>97</sup> Only the last case tells us anything about who they may have been, since Buddhists *chose* to acknowledge shared features with this undefined group of *paribbājakas* more than with anyone else. A Vedic text, whose date is contested, says they follow a ‘middle way’ (*madhyamaṃpadam*).<sup>98</sup>

Eight other texts mentioning ‘*aññatitthiyā paribbājakā*’ simply depict wanderers as unrestrained, unlearned or mediocre, and say nothing specific about them.<sup>99</sup> Of the remaining two, one explains that these wanderers understand solitude or withdrawal (*pavivēka*) in terms of clothing, food and lodging, whereas Buddhists do so in terms of moral conduct, right view and defilements.<sup>100</sup> The other reveals that they think the goal of supreme pleasure can be found in phenomenal experience—the five bundles of clinging. Either they affirm novelty pleasure, or they mistake meditative states of play pleasure for final liberation. The second option is discussed in the last section of this chapter.

One thing is clear: the Buddha of the early texts is friendlier to *paribbājakas* than to Jains, just like he has ‘amicable, respectful, and inquisitive’ interactions with Brahmins.<sup>101</sup> Sujato remarks how the early discourses attribute Buddhist attainments to these wanderers very generously.<sup>102</sup> This need not mean *paribbājakas* practised the exact same awakening factors, divine abidings, etc., nor that these items are not ‘actually’ Buddhist—in fact, the texts *also* say the awakening factors only arise in the Buddha’s teaching.<sup>103</sup> So, they could be doing the very natural thing of

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97 DN i 161, DN iii 117, MN i 64, MN i 84, MN i 397, MN i 433, MN iii 207, MN iii 291, SN ii 33, SN iii 116, SN iv 51, SN iv 138, SN 36 iv 224-29, SN iv 381, SN v 7, SN v 28-29, SN v 326-28, AN i 115, AN i 202, AN iv 339, AN iv 351, AN v 49, AN v 107, AN v 185-92. The passages where *paribbājakas* practice in a way very similar to but less skilled than the Buddhists are SN v 108-21.

98 Ellis, pp. 59–60; *Dharmasūtras: The Law Codes of Āpastamba, Gautama, Baudhāyana, and Vasiṣṭha*, ed. by Patrick Olivelle (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. xxxi.

99 DN iii 36, DN iii 99, AN i 63, AN iv 379, Ud 12, Ud 44, Ud 68, Ud 73.

100 AN 3.94 at AN i 241.

101 Ellis, p. 49.

102 Sujato, *A History of Mindfulness*, p. 179.

103 SN v 77.

describing the other using one's own terms, assimilating the other into the categories one is familiar with and glossing over subtle (or not so subtle) differences. More than just a group of unclassifiable ascetics, '*paribbājaka*' looks like a term early Buddhists used to describe those who practised on a similar wavelength yet remained independent, doing their own thing. Had they been hurting themselves for the sake of liberation, the tone of their interactions would be otherwise—the next section will show how harsh Buddhists could be with Jains.

All this justifies including *paribbājakas* in the current section for our specific purpose: to look at the Indian religious landscape through the feeling glass. They seem, to put it very cautiously, less obsessed with pain and less averse to pleasure. Otherwise early Buddhists would not have recognised them as practising similarly, something they never do with Jains. Both *paribbājakas* and the Vedic tradition, the latter quite explicitly so, make space for pleasure in religious practice and give it a soteriological role, while minority strands within them gave soteriological value to pain too. The most ambiguous question here is to what extent Upaniṣadic practitioners regarded play pleasure as a feature of the goal—the liberating experience of *ātman/brahman*—or also as part of the path thereto—as salvific means. The older times of the *soma* ritual could still influence the latter view. But perhaps they held no consistent position on this and it was still a matter of debate.

## The Buddhist, the Bad and the Ugly

Early Buddhists ascribed soteriological value to both pleasant and painful *mental* feelings—and neutral ones to an extent.<sup>104</sup> They did not simply channel those feelings skilfully when they arose, but actively sought them through the choice of meditative object and through contemplations. Bodily pleasure helps towards liberation too when resulting from skilful mind states, not sense experience. Physical pain is not given any role. This section and the next elucidate how unpleasant and pleasant *vedanā*, respectively, contribute to the liberating process in early Buddhism. And first this requires a general reflection on *vedanā*'s contributions towards the Buddhist goal.

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104 The value of neutral feelings, which is to leave the mind less biased and therefore more fit for truly knowing and seeing (*yathābhūtañāḍassana*), is addressed to some degree in chapter five.

Feeling itself has soteriological value as an object meditators take to develop insight into transiency and conditionality. This has been sufficiently researched.<sup>105</sup> But if we talk about specifically valuable *vedanās*, we step into the area of ethical feelings. According to the *Cūlavedalla Sutta* (MN 44), ethical feelings are not simply free from the underlying tendencies (*anusaya*), but it is *through* them that one abandons defilements.<sup>106</sup> This is a straightforward statement of their soteriological value—although the discourses only flesh out how that works in the case of spiritual joy and pleasure. Similarly, the *Sakkapañha Sutta* (DN 21),<sup>107</sup> the *Kūṭāgiri Sutta* (MN 70)<sup>108</sup> and its Chinese parallel,<sup>109</sup> and the Tibetan parallel to the *Cūlavedalla Sutta*<sup>110</sup> make clear some types of happiness, sadness and equanimity will decrease unskilful states and increase skilful states. Using *vedanā* in the path has a lot to do with ‘taking advantage’ of the affective pull feelings exert on practitioners—the motivational aspect of *vedanā*—in order to counter defilements. This approach remains mostly implicit in the early discourses, and I wonder if it could help solve Dhammadinnā’s riddle (MN 44):

One should not abandon the tendency to lust with regards all pleasant feelings. One should not abandon the tendency to resistance with regards all painful feelings. One should not abandon the tendency to ignorance with regards all neutral feelings.<sup>111</sup>

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105 Sujato, *A History of Mindfulness*, p. 245 ff; Anālayo, *From Craving to Liberation*, pp. 89–90, 94–96; Peacock and Batchelor, *The Definition, Practice, and Psychology of Vedanā: Knowing How It Feels*.

106 This shows the same use of the instrumental as with Jain austerities. MN i 303: *idhāvuso visākha, bhikkhu (...) paṭhamam jhānam upasampajja viharati. rāgam tena pajahati, na tattha rāgānusayo anuseti. idhāvuso visākha, bhikkhu (...) itī anuttaresu vimokkhesu piham upaṭṭhāpayato uppaṭṭhāyati piḥāppaccayā domanassaṃ. paṭigham tena pajahati, na tattha paṭighānusayo anuseti. idhāvuso visākha, bhikkhu (...) catuttham jhānam upasampajja viharati. avijjam tena pajahati, na tattha avijjānusayo anuseti ti.* The *Cūlavedalla Sutta* and its commentary do not say ethical feelings abandon the underlying tendencies, only the defilements (Ps ii 368). In our present journey, however, going down that road would drive us into a long detour on the distinction between active defilement (*pariyutthāna*) and underlying tendency (*anusaya*), which the early discourses do not elaborate, Theravādins and Sarvāstivādins deny, and some other schools affirm. See Sean M. Smith, ‘A Buddhist Analysis of Affective Bias’, *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, 47.1 (2019), 155–85 <<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10781-019-09379-0>>; Dhammajoti, *Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma*, p. 340 ff.

107 Section ‘*vedanākammaṭṭhānaṃ*’ at DN ii 278: *somanassaṃ p’ āhaṃ, devānaminda, duvidhena vadāmi sevitaḥḥam pi, asevitabbam pī ti itī kho paṇ’ etaṃ vuttaṃ, kiñ c’ etaṃ paṭicca vuttaṃ? tattha yaṃ jaññā somanassaṃ ‘imaṃ kho me somanassaṃ sevato akusalā dhammā abhivaḍḍhanti, kusalā dhammā pariḥāyanti’ ti, evarūpaṃ somanassaṃ na sevitaḥḥam. tattha yaṃ jaññā somanassaṃ ‘imaṃ kho me somanassaṃ sevato akusalā dhammā pariḥāyanti, kusalā dhammā abhivaḍḍhanti’ ti, evarūpaṃ somanassaṃ sevitaḥḥam.* (The same is repeated for *domanassa* and *upekkhā*.)

108 Specifically at MN i 475.

109 A translation can be found in Bhikkhu Anālayo, *Deepening Insight: Teachings on Vedanā in the Early Buddhist Discourses* (Pariyatti Press, 2021), p. 76.

110 Bhikkhu Anālayo, *Madhyama-Āgama Studies* (Taiwan: Dharma Drum Publishing Corporation, 2012), pp. 51–53.

111 MN i 303: *na kho, āvuso visākha, sabbāya sukhāya vedanāya rāgānusayo pahātabbo, na sabbāya dukkhāya vedanāya paṭighānusayo pahātabbo, na sabbāya adukkhamasukhāya vedanāya avijjānusayo pahātabbo.*

Should we *keep* our lust, resistance and ignorance regarding certain feelings? I would not want to read too much into this short passage—it is unique to the Pali version; neither the discourse nor modern scholars attempt to explain it; and there are other ways to solve the riddle.<sup>112</sup> But it does flag the idea that our basic drive for pleasure ‘can be harnessed for progress to liberation’,<sup>113</sup> as Anālayo puts it, and so can our innate turning away from the unpleasant. I argue much Buddhist meditation does precisely that, even if at another level it wants to counter such in-built behaviours.<sup>114</sup>

A different way to put this idea is that some skilful qualities resemble defilements. The *Bhikkhunī Sutta* (AN 4.159), for example, advises to abandon sensual craving by relying on craving for spiritual realisation.<sup>115</sup> Later traditions pick up this line of thinking, as I sketch now very briefly. Following the *Bhikkhunī Sutta*, the *Nettipakaraṇa* speaks of a type of skilful craving (*taṇhā*) that contributes to the path by helping to abandon craving.<sup>116</sup> Buddhaghosa points out that faith resembles lust: both go after something—one sense objects, the other skilful qualities—and do not let go.<sup>117</sup> Aversion shares with wisdom that they neither desire nor stick to objects: aversion sees false defects, while wisdom picks up on true defects. (As shown below, the discourses emphasise the renunciation side of this. For if ignorance manifests affectively as clinging, wisdom manifests as letting go or renunciation.) According to the abhidharma traditions, argues Rupert Gethin,<sup>118</sup> in a skilful mind greed becomes non-aversion—therefore friendliness (*mettā*);<sup>119</sup> aversion becomes non-greed—therefore letting go; and I would add that the non-reactiveness or indifference towards the neutral is transmuted into the impartiality of equanimity (*upekkhā*), though to the best of my knowledge the texts do not develop this idea.

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112 As my colleague Hyoeun Sunim suggested, Dhammadinnā could be saying that in the case of ethical feelings one has no need to abandon any underlying tendencies because they are not there to begin with. We can read the commentary as saying precisely this—Ps ii 386.

113 Anālayo, ‘The Potential of Pleasant Feelings’, p. 7.

114 In the last section of this chapter, I show how Buddhist soteriological ethics are built on the premise of our hedonic preferences, rather than counter them.

115 AN ii 145: *taṇhāsambhūto ayaṃ, bhagīni, kāyo taṇhaṃ nissāya. taṇhā pahātabbā*. The commentary calls this craving unskilful (*akusalā*) but to be developed (*sevītabbā*)—Mp iii 136.

116 Morrison, p. 106.

117 Vism 102 (III 75-77). Similarly, when the Vibhaṅga applies the principle of dependent arising (*paṭiccasamuppāda*) to a skilful episode of cognition, it substitutes faith (*pasāda, saddhā*) for craving (*taṇhā*) (Vibh 169-70). In Sarvāstivāda sources faith is explained as desire (*arhīva*)—see Gethin, *Buddhist Maps*, chap. 6.

118 Gethin, *Buddhist Maps*, chap. 6.

119 We find this idea in the commentary to the *Visuddhimagga* as well, which expands Buddhaghosa’s explanation of *mettā* as being sticky in the sense of affection and friendship—not craving and attachment, which is a different kind of stickiness (Vism-mhṭ i 378).

We find antecedents of all this in the early texts. As a gradual path, early Buddhism engages people's current affective tendencies, it does not pretend they have different ones nor expect them to leapfrog to the further shore—that is, awakening. To face whatever we experience mindfully and 'try' to not arouse defilements is but one strategy, and one which may not have been designed for beginners. In fact, some discourses place this ideal relationship with feelings after *samādhī*, the attainment of cessation,<sup>120</sup> or liberation,<sup>121</sup> making it sound more like the outcome of practice than instructions; and the *Salla Sutta*<sup>122</sup> makes it characteristic of noble disciples (*ariyasāvaka*), people with a certain degree of spiritual maturity.

I do not suggest being mindful of feelings non-reactively is restricted to the quasi-awakened, just that early Buddhism has other ways to practice with *vedanā* for defiled minds. These ways can be grouped into two strategies: countering and sublimating. We see the former in using unpleasant objects to subdue greed and pleasant objects to fight aversion<sup>123</sup> or disinterest,<sup>124</sup> the latter in replacing sensory indulgence with spiritual delight, and aversion to the unpleasant with turning away from conditioned existence. Without extrapolating to claims about *all* early Buddhist meditation, the spiritual uses of *vedanā* I identify do paint the picture of a widespread and standard approach.

These strategies are built on observations we find in the Discourse to Mahāli (*Mahāli Sutta*, SN 22.60). After stating that our experience contains both pleasure and pain, being neither wholly pleasant nor wholly unpleasant, the Buddha explains to Mahāli that it is because of the pleasant aspect that people get intoxicated (*sārajjati*), and because of the unpleasant aspect that people become disillusioned or dissatisfied<sup>125</sup> (*nibbindati*). The pleasant, he says, is the cause and condition for defilement, whereas the unpleasant is the cause and condition for purification.<sup>126</sup> Defilement and purification do not happen just because. To use my terms, the *Mahāli Sutta*

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120 SN v 317.

121 SN iii 126.

122 At SN iv 208.

123 Besides the examples I discuss below in this section, the practice of *mettā* as systematised in later literature uses pleasant thoughts to counteract unpleasant states like anger, illustrating the first strategy of MN 20 (at MN i 119). See Padmal de Silva, 'A Psychological Analysis of the Vitakkasanthana Sutta', *Buddhist Studies Review*, 18.1, 2001, 65–72.

124 The refined hedonism introduced in chapter two, of finding pleasure in subtle states, would be an example of this.

125 Cone, *G - n*, p. 584.

126 SN iii 69. This text uses the model of the five *khandhas*, which I read as shorthand for our lived experience, after Hamilton, *Identity and Experience*.

recognises how negative affect performs a soteriological function. It purifies, but in a different way than Jains thought: it starves clinging and nurtures renunciation.

In what follows I show how the early discourses apply this insight and promote systematic ways of dwelling on *dukkha* for pragmatic purposes. A list of seven perceptions in the *Ānguttara Nikāya* (*Dutiyasaññā Sutta*, AN 7.49) gathers the practices that do this: the perceptions of the unattractive, death, the disagreeable in food, non-delight in the whole world, impermanence, suffering in what is impermanent, and not-self in what is suffering<sup>127</sup>—the same list is found in a Chinese text.<sup>128</sup> The grouping is not coincidental: another discourse (*Asubha Sutta*, AN 4.163) calls those perceptions ‘the unpleasant path’ (*dukkhā paṭipadā*).<sup>129</sup> We can summarise those practices under two headings: mindfulness of the body, and reflections on impermanence and *dukkha*. Let us begin with the first.

The *Satipatthāna* and *Kāyagatāsati suttas* instruct the meditator to systematically regard the body as ‘full of all sorts of impurity’ like pus, bowels and excrement,<sup>130</sup> and to imagine a rotting corpse in detail.<sup>131</sup> The first is known as the contemplation on the ‘*asubha*’ (unattractive or un-beautiful)<sup>132</sup> or ‘*paṭikkūla*’<sup>133</sup> (for which Margaret Cone gives ‘unpleasant, disagreeable; repugnant’).<sup>134</sup> Later tradition extended ‘*asubha*’ to the corpse contemplation, even coming to associate it more with that than with the anatomical parts.<sup>135</sup> These two practices use the unpleasant hedonic tone associated with things like pus, bowels, excrement or decomposition,

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127 AN iv 46: *asubhasaññā, maraṇasaññā, āhāre paṭikkūlasaññā, sabbaloke anabhiratasaññā, aniccasaññā, anicce dukkhasaññā, dukkhe anattasaññā.*

128 T i 11c26, Bart Dessein, ‘Contemplation of the Repulsive: Bones and Skull as Objects of Meditation’, in *Hindu, Buddhist and Daoist Meditation: Cultural Histories* (Hermes Academic Publishing, 2014), pp. 117–47 (p. 131) <<http://hdl.handle.net/1854/LU-8554807>> [accessed 9 December 2019].

129 AN 4.163 (AN ii 151) mentions five of the seven perceptions in AN 7.49, leaving out the last two. However, we can reasonably see these as extensions of the fifth, ‘contemplating impermanence in all conditioned things’ (*sabbasaṅkhāresu aniccānupassī*).

130 MN i 57, MN iii 90: *puna ca paraṃ, bhikkhave, bhikkhu imeva kāyaṃ uddhaṃ pādatalā, adho kesamatthakā, tacapariyaṇtaṃ pūraṃ nānappakārassa asucino paccavekkhati ‘atthi imasmiṃ kāye kesā lomā nakhā dantā taco maṃsaṃ nhāru aṭṭhi aṭṭhimūñjaṃ vakkhaṃ hadayaṃ yakanāṃ kilomakaṃ pihakaṃ paṃphāsaṃ antaṃ antagaṇaṃ udariyaṃ karisaṃ pittaṃ semhaṃ pubbo lohitaṃ sedo medo assu vasā khelo siṅghānikā lasikā muttan’ ti.*

131 MN i 58, MN iii 91: *puna ca paraṃ, bhikkhave, bhikkhu seyyathāpi passeyya sarīraṃ sivathikāya chadditaṃ ekāhamataṃ vā dvīhamataṃ vā tīhamataṃ vā uddhumātakaṃ vinīlakaṃ vipubbakajātaṃ. ...*

132 AN v 109.

133 This is the subheading given in the *Satipatthāna Sutta*.

134 Cone, *P - bh*, p. 80. For explanations of the *asubha* contemplations, see Sarah Shaw, ‘Meditation Objects in Pali Buddhist Texts’, in *Asian Traditions of Meditation*, ed. by Halvor Eifring (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2016), p. 130. For the terminology used in non-Pali early Buddhist literature, see Anālayo, *Early Buddhist Meditation Studies*, pp. 47–48.

135 Vism 178 (VI).

for the rejection or avoidance they naturally inspire. While other bodily parts listed are more neutral, disgusting or unpleasant ones are always included. On the whole, the contemplations build a more than unflattering picture of the body. AN 7.49 explains the outcomes of *asubha* contemplation in the following way:

Mendicants, imagine how a rooster's feather or a tendon thrown into the fire would recoil, shrink and curl up, it would not be spread out. In the same way, when a mendicant frequently dwells familiarizing their mind with perceiving the unattractive, their mind recoils from obtaining sexual intercourse, it shrinks, it curls up, it is not spread out. Either equanimity or repugnance becomes established.

If, when a mendicant frequently dwells familiarizing their mind with perceiving the unattractive, their mind flows towards obtaining sexual intercourse and non-repugnance becomes established, the mendicant should note: 'My perception of the unattractive is not developed, compared to before there is no difference, I have not achieved meditative success.' Indeed they have full awareness. But if, when a mendicant frequently dwells familiarizing their mind with perceiving the unattractive, their mind recoils from obtaining sexual intercourse, it shrinks, it curls up, it is not spread out, and either equanimity or repugnance becomes established, the mendicant should note: 'My perception of the unattractive is well developed, compared to before there is a difference, I have achieved meditative success.' Indeed they have full awareness.<sup>136</sup>

The aim is not to cultivate aversion (*dosa*), the opposite of friendliness (*mettā*) vilified across Buddhist teachings, but a quality that turns away skilfully, countering greed and attachment.<sup>137</sup> The passage above recognises this quality can manifest in a range of affects and intensities: 'either equanimity or repugnance becomes established'. On the one hand, the discourses illustrate the *asubha* contemplation with someone discerning different grains from inside a bag.<sup>138</sup> As Anālayo has argued, this mild simile evokes a balanced, detached observation.<sup>139</sup> The mention of abandoning 'covetousness and dejection' in the *satipaṭṭhāna* definition can support this point as well.<sup>140</sup> On the other hand, we must also add to the bag other, less

136 AN iv 47: *seyyathāpi, bhikkhave, kukkuṭapattam vā nhārudaddulam vā aggimhi pakkhittam patilīyati patikūṭati pativattati, na sampasāriyati. evamevaṃ kho, bhikkhave, bhikkhuno asubhasaññāparicītena cetasā bahulam viharato methunadhammasamāpattiyā cittaṃ patilīyati patikūṭati pativattati, na sampasāriyati upekkhā vā pāṭikulyatā vā saññhāti. sace, bhikkhave, bhikkhuno asubhasaññāparicītena cetasā bahulam viharato methunadhammasamāpattiyā cittaṃ anusandahati appāṭikulyatā saññhāti, vedītabbametaṃ, bhikkhave, bhikkhunā 'abhāvitā me asubhasaññā, natthi me pubbenāparaṃ viśeso, appattam me bhāvanābalan' ti. itiha tattha sampajāno hoti. sace pana, bhikkhave, bhikkhuno asubhasaññāparicītena cetasā bahulam viharato methunadhammasamāpattiyā cittaṃ patilīyati patikūṭati pativattati, na sampasāriyati upekkhā vā pāṭikulyatā vā saññhāti, vedītabbametaṃ, bhikkhave, bhikkhunā 'subhāvitā me asubhasaññā, atthi me pubbenāparaṃ viśeso, pattam me bhāvanābalan' ti. itiha tattha sampajāno hoti.*

137 MN i 425: *asubhaṃ, rāhula, bhāvanam bhāvehi. asubhañ hi te, rāhula, bhāvanam bhāwayato yo rāgo so pahīyissati.*

138 MN i 57, MN iii 91.

139 Anālayo, *Satipaṭṭhāna*, p. 144.

140 MN i 56: *vineyya loke abhijjhādomanassaṃ.*

measured passages on the body and sensuality we find across the canon.<sup>141</sup> There is more than one way to feel about this. Besides, to acknowledge the balanced attitude implied in that simile does not mean we are talking of a purely mental or unemotional exercise either, as one could (mis)read Anālayo’s comment that examining grains would ‘not stimulate any affective reaction’.<sup>142</sup> Why invoke intestines and putrid cadavers if not to impact the listener-meditator at an affective, even visceral level? With more nuance, Padmasiri de Silva speaks of ‘no affective overload of repulsiveness’.<sup>143</sup> The grains simile counterbalances this overload or excess, but it does not entail that the contemplation *has* to feel like watching chickpeas, though it *can*.<sup>144</sup>

Hedonic tone matters. If pus, bowels, excrement or decomposition were pleasant to think about, see or smell, the practice would not work. There is a reason why a meditation designed to counter greed does not involve visualising your favourite K-pop star—unless you visualize them old, sick and lying in their own urine and faeces.<sup>145</sup> So much so that the exegetical tradition, overcautious and from its heteronormative stance, discourages visualising even a dead body of the opposite sex.<sup>146</sup> All of which shows that early Buddhism takes into account our habitual affective reactions, it chooses meditation objects considering their associated *vedanā*. The practice seeks to replace one perception (beautiful) with another (non-beautiful)<sup>147</sup> and it does so by replacing an object of one hedonic tone (pleasant) with an object of another (unpleasant, mainly).<sup>148</sup> As the *Devadaha Sutta* (MN 101) says, some things may be overcome

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141 Examples can be found in: *Buddhist Meditation: An Anthology of Texts from the Pāli Canon*, ed. by Sarah Shaw (London ; New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 105–6; Anālayo, *Satīpaṭṭhāna*, sec. VI.2, p. 117 note 11; Steven Collins, ‘The Body in Theravāda Buddhist Monasticism’, in *Religion and the Body*, ed. by Sarah Coakley (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 185–204 (pp. 185, 190–92).

142 Anālayo, *Satīpaṭṭhāna*, p. 144.

143 Padmasiri De Silva, *Emotions and The Body*, p. 14.

144 We can connect this to the sometimes undervalued emotional and aesthetic elements of the discourses. As some scholars point out, beyond preserving ‘dry’ philosophy the texts are also meant to *move* the listeners, sometimes delighting them and other times shocking them. They are teaching devices. See Shulman, ‘The Play of Formulas in the Early Buddhist Discourses’.

145 MN i 88.

146 Vism 184 (VI 42): *purisassa pana itthisarīraṃ itthiyā vā purisarīraṃ na vaṭṭati. visabhāge sarīre ārammaṇaṃ na upaṭṭhāti, vipphandanasseva paccayo hoti. ‘ugghātītāpi hi itthī purisassa cittaṃ pariyādāya tiṭṭhatī’ ti majjhimaṭṭhakathāyaṃ vuttam.* Pe Maung Tin takes *ugghātītā* to mean ‘dead’, whereas Nāṇamoli has ‘decaying’. The term can have various meanings, all of them unflattering if applied here. It appears at AN 5.55 (AN iii 68) next to *matā*, leading Sujato to translate ‘injured’ and Bodhi ‘swollen’. The latter, in the Vism context above, could still suggest a corpse. See Cone, *A - kh*, p. 396.

147 Kuan, *Mindfulness in Early Buddhism*, p. 21.

148 I write ‘mainly’ because this can include neutral objects, as acknowledged already, though always in combination with unpleasant ones. The Chinese parallel to the *Kāyagatāsati Sutta* contains the most comprehensive injunction to contemplate both the attractive and repulsive qualities of the body—Anālayo, *Early*

through developing equanimity and others through ‘striving’, which given the context of that discourse I take to mean a more unpleasant practice.<sup>149</sup>

Of course, early Buddhists were aware that one could lose the desired balance. The mass suicide story in the *Vesālī Sutta* (SN 54.9)<sup>150</sup> illustrates how *asubha* meditation can go wrong, so wrong that a number of monks who were practising it killed themselves. Through this extreme example, the texts show renunciation and aversion as two responses—intended and unintended, respectively—prompted by unpleasant feelings; perhaps two intensities in the dimmer switch of ‘not wanting’. And in doing so, they are recognising how this practice appeals to our affective side—it should just do so correctly: if our natural turning away from the unpleasant is not sublimated into renunciation, it can lead to the excessive revulsion this story illustrates. Buddhaghosa would say that those monks, lacking wisdom, shunned a ‘being’ instead of shunning ‘conditioning factors’.<sup>151</sup>

At Ānanda’s request, the Buddha then teaches an alternative practice: mindfulness of breathing. Whether the suicide story originates in fact or fiction,<sup>152</sup> what matters for our purpose is how the discourse uses it to contrast mindfulness of breathing as a ‘pleasant dwelling’ (*sukha vihāra*) that ‘pacifies and dissipates bad and unskillful qualities right where and when they arise’.<sup>153</sup> It presents mindfulness of breathing as correcting potential imbalances induced by contemplating the unattractive aspects of the body.<sup>154</sup> To simplify: if unpleasant objects do not work, try pleasant objects. Therefore, the *Vesālī Sutta* seems to acknowledge *asubha* practice as being (at least a bit) more on the side of disgust than of equanimity. For there would be no need to balance it with or teach it alongside *other* practices if it were so equanimous by itself.<sup>155</sup> Still, to what extent this particular discourse speaks for the whole

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*Buddhist Meditation Studies*, p. 50.

149 MN ii 223. I come back to this text a bit later.

150 SN i 320.

151 Vism 102 (III 76).

152 This has been explored most recently by Dhammajoti, for whom the mass suicide story ‘probably originated as a justificatory *nidāna* in the Vinaya tradition’, in K. L. Dhammajoti, ‘Meditative Experiences of Impurity and Purity—Further Reflection on the *Asubhā* Meditation and the *Śubha-Vimokṣa*’, *Religions*, 12.2 (2021), 86 (p. 4 ff) <<https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12020086>>.

153 SN v 321: *ayam pi kho, bhikkhave, ānāpānassatisamādhi bhāvito bahulīkato santo ceva pañīto ca asecanako ca sukho ca vihāro uppannuppanne ca pāpake akusale dhamme thānaso antaradhāpeti vūpasameti*.

154 Bhikkhu Anālayo, ‘The Mass Suicide of Monks in Discourse and Vinaya Literature’, *Journal of the Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies*, 7 (2014), pp. 16, 20 note 36; Shaw, *Buddhist Meditation*, p. 107.

155 Buddhaghosa acknowledges this practice is only peaceful upon penetration but not while learning it, since the object is repulsiveness, whereas mindfulness of breathing is peaceful as an object already—Vism 267 (VIII

canon is hard to say. The suicide story could be pointing to an ambivalent attitude towards the body in early Buddhism<sup>156</sup> or to tensions among groups of meditators<sup>157</sup>—perhaps tensions around the value of negative affect for liberation.

In summary: the *asubha* and corpse contemplations use the affective pull of unpleasant *vedanā*, its motivational aspect, to bring about valued qualities,<sup>158</sup> while aiming to keep things balanced, within a safe window of appropriate affective responses. They provide controlled exposure to difficult and unpleasant realities.<sup>159</sup> We must also remember that these are only two of many practices offered by early Buddhism, and that they use negative affect as a tool, not an end point. Eventually, as they generate renunciation and letting go, they lead to positive affects, the feeling evolves.<sup>160</sup> Some traditions even expanded this into a visualisation and experience of the body as fantastically beautiful.<sup>161</sup> Thus, no bit of this discussion should revive old stereotypes of Buddhism as entirely negative about our embodiment.<sup>162</sup>

We now move on to reflections on impermanence and *dukkha*. These foreground or summon unpleasant *vedanā*, as did *asubha* practices, but in a less visceral way—figuratively and literally.

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156 Anālayo, ‘The Mass Suicide of Monks’, pp. 21–25.

157 Dhammajoti, ‘Impurity and Purity’, pp. 5–6.

158 According to AN 7.49, the *asubha* contemplation addresses *kāmatanḥā*, and the corpse contemplation, *bhavatanḥā*. However, both practices have been connected to sensual desire. Various exegetical traditions paired particular types of greed to particular elements of *asubha* imagery—see K. L. Dhammajoti, ‘The Aśubhā Meditation in the Sarvāstivāda’, *Journal of the Centre for Buddhist Studies, Sri Lanka*, 2009, 248–95 (pp. 258–63). The perception of the disagreeable in food (*āhāre paṭṭikūlasaññā*) addresses craving for tastes, and seems to have much affinity to *asubha* practice, although it is only detailed in later literature—see Shaw, ‘Meditation Objects in Pali Buddhist Texts’, pp. 183–86; Man-Shik Kong, ‘Variations in the Contemplation of the Repulsiveness of Food, Āhārepaṭṭikūlasaññā: Canonical, Theravāda, Sarvāstivāda and Mahāyāna Forms’, *Contemporary Buddhism*, 20.1–2 (2019), 95–110 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/14639947.2019.1599568>>; Dhammajoti, ‘The Aśubhā Meditation’, p. 263.

159 Scholars have explored this perspective regarding death meditation: George D. Bond connects it to Mircea Eliade’s ideas about ‘initiatory death’, Anālayo to Terror Management Theory. See George D. Bond, ‘Theravāda Buddhism’s Meditations on Death and the Symbolism of Initiatory Death’, *History of Religions*, 19.3 (1980), 237–58 (p. 248 ff); Bhikkhu Anālayo, *Mindfully Facing Disease and Death* (Cambridge, UK: Windhorse Publications, 2016), chap. XXIV.3.

160 Anālayo, *Early Buddhist Meditation Studies*, p. 54 ff; Dhammajoti, ‘The Aśubhā Meditation’, p. 275; Giuliano Giustarini, ‘The Truth of the Body: The Liberating Role of Physical (and Mental) Boundaries in Aśubhabhāvanā’, *Thai International Journal of Buddhist Studies*, II (2011), 96–124 (p. 109 note 33). Dhammajoti mentions the Atthasālinī suggests an image of feeling better after vomiting, which I wonder if we should take as illustrating this.

161 Dhammajoti, ‘The Aśubhā Meditation’, p. 279.

162 For discussions of those stereotypes and alternative views, see Elizabeth J. Harris, ‘Sleeping next to My Coffin: Representations of the Body in Theravāda Buddhism’, *Buddhist Studies Review*, 29.1 (2012), 105–20 <<https://doi.org/10.1558/bsrv.v29i1.105>>; Hamilton, *Identity and Experience*, p. 184; Anālayo, *Early Buddhist Meditation Studies*, p. 43 ff.

Still, sometimes they use vivid imagery and references to felt pain, which have an intensifying effect contrary to the softening effect of the grains simile.

The paradigm for reflections of this kind is the Buddha's own 'great renunciation', triggered by a poignant encounter with ageing, sickness and death. These realities head the first noble truth, but also a famous list of 'themes to contemplate often' (*thānāni abhiñhaṃ paccavekkhitabbāni*).<sup>163</sup> Meditators must engage in this as a systematic practice. Then there is recollection or mindfulness of death (*marañassati*) through reflecting on the many unpredictable ways one could die, or on the consequences of dying while still having defilements.<sup>164</sup> In the latter case, the *Dutiyamarañassati Sutta* (AN 6.20) says one should act with the same vehemence as if one's head or clothes were on fire. The image appeals to how intense felt pain, or the immediate prospect of it, naturally motivates action. Similarly, another discourse compares being aware of death, in increasing degrees of intimacy up to feeling deadly pain oneself, to a horse's experience of the goad, from seeing its shadow to being hit with it more and more vigorously.<sup>165</sup> Despite all this vivid imagery of felt pain, it does not seem like these reflections would generate as intense an unpleasantness as would the *asubha* contemplations. And yet if these were happy thoughts to have they would not spark fire-extinguishing reactions either. They must fall somewhere on the unpleasant side of the spectrum. Liang and Morseth call them 'aesthetically unpleasing existential truths'.<sup>166</sup> Early Buddhists recognised *dukkha* triggers search (*pariyesanā*),<sup>167</sup> urgency (*saṃvega*) and faith (*saddhā*).<sup>168</sup> Therefore, they devised practices to think about *dukkha*.

Another class of systematic reflection focuses on novelty pleasure (*kāma* and *sāmisā sukha*) and, by extension, sense experience and its *vedanās*. Alongside acknowledging the sweetness of

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163 AN iii 97: *jarādhammo 'mhi, jaram anatīto ti abhiñhaṃ paccavekkhitabbaṃ itthiyā vā purisena vā gahaṭṭhena vā pabbajitena vā. byādhihammo 'mhi, byādhiṃ anatīto ti abhiñhaṃ paccavekkhitabbaṃ itthiyā vā purisena vā gahaṭṭhena vā pabbajitena vā. marañadhammo 'mhi, marañam anatīto ti abhiñhaṃ paccavekkhitabbaṃ itthiyā vā purisena vā gahaṭṭhena vā pabbajitena vā.*

164 AN iii 307, SN i 71, Anālayo, *Mindfully Facing Disease and Death*, chap. XIII.

165 AN ii 115. This discourse contains a good example of the importance of sound, aesthetic and playful elements in the Pali texts. It abounds with wordplay and alliteration: the phrase '*saṃvijjati saṃvegaṃ āpajjati*' (he is shocked, he meets with shock), *saṃvijjati* used also with its meaning of 'existing', the forms *vedha* and *viddha* related to *vijjhati* (to pierce or hit), and insight being characterised as having penetrated or pierced (*ativijjha*) with wisdom.

166 Lisa Liang and Brianna K Morseth, 'Aesthetic Emotions: The Existential and Soteriological Value of Saṃvega/Pasāda in Early Buddhism', *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, 28 (2021), 205–39.

167 AN 4.255 at AN ii 247.

168 Also, what made the Buddha enquire about conditionality was the affliction caused by old age and death—SN 12.10 at SN ii 10, SĀ 285 at T ii 80a1.

sensuality—the pleasant feelings it provides<sup>169</sup>—the practitioner should bring to mind its drawbacks or dangers, for focusing on the former brings craving whereas focusing on the latter drives it away.<sup>170</sup> The *Mahādukkhakkhandha Sutta* (MN 13) lists the drawbacks of *kāma* as: the inconveniences of working to obtain it, potential failure to obtain it, the pain and unhappiness of worrying about losing one’s wealth, losing it, getting into disputes and battles even causing deaths or deadly pain, robbery, adultery, punishment if one gets caught, immoral behaviour and rebirth in hell.<sup>171</sup> The *Potaliya Sutta* (MN 54) illustrates the drawbacks of *kāma* with similes invoking either disappointment or deadly pain.<sup>172</sup> The *Girimānanda Sutta* (AN 10.60) explains the perception of drawbacks (*ādīnavasaññā*) in relation to the body by listing possible diseases and afflictions.<sup>173</sup> Another text seeks to dispel immoral thoughts by comparing them to wearing the carcass of a dead dog around one’s neck instead of jewellery.<sup>174</sup> All the things mentioned here are unpleasant, either to think about or to experience. On top of it, pleasant feelings themselves are transient—the practitioner should also consider—so sooner or later they will bring pain and disappointment.<sup>175</sup>

Practitioners are being asked to anticipate future or potential painful feelings, to bring them into the present moment through thought. This replaces the pleasant feeling of experiencing and anticipating pleasure, or at least balances it out by using our natural avoidance of what feels bad in order to modify behaviour and stimulate renunciation.<sup>176</sup> Crucially, as I elaborate in the last section of this chapter, Buddhism argues that the unpleasant consequences of sensual indulgence *outnumber* pleasant ones.

It seems to me this contextualises the instruction to regard all pleasant feelings as unpleasant or painful (SN 36.5).<sup>177</sup> At first sight, such an instruction may seem odd. Why not simply regard them as transient? For, as we can infer and as the commentaries spell out,<sup>178</sup>

169 E.g., MN i 85: *yaṃ kho, bhikkhave, ime pañca kāmaguṇe paticca uppañjati sukhaṃ somanassaṃ, ayaṃ kāmānaṃ assādo.*

170 *Upādāna Sutta* (SN 12.52 at SN ii 85)—the same idea seen in the *Mahāli Sutta* (SN iii 69).

171 MN i 87, MN i 92. For a fuller treatment of the drawbacks of sense pleasures and the similes used to illustrate them, see Payutto, pp. 1085–93.

172 Similes start at MN i 364.

173 AN v 110.

174 MN i 119-20. This simile agrees with ideas of moral disgust resembling physiological disgust, like Jonathan Haidt’s—cited in Padmasiri De Silva, *Emotions and The Body*, p. 18.

175 MN i 90: *yaṃ, bhikkhave, vedanā aniccā dukkhā vipariṇāmadhammā, ayaṃ vedanānaṃ ādīnavo.*

176 At the risk of being repetitive: if thinking about those consequences of sensual indulgence felt good, the exercise would not discourage sensual indulgence.

177 SN iv 207: *sukhā, bhikkhave, vedanā dukkhato datṭhabbā.*

178 Spk iii 76: *dukkhato datṭhabbā ti vipariṇāmanavasena dukkhato datṭhabbā.*

impermanence already entails dissatisfaction, it is the drawback of feeling itself—all hedonic tones are transient, conditioned, dependently arisen,<sup>179</sup> and all should be seen as transient, *dukkha*, not-self, empty, etc.<sup>180</sup> Later tradition has also retained impermanence as a ‘contemplative link’ to see the *dukkha* of pleasure.<sup>181</sup> But most drawbacks mentioned above are not about impermanence. When the early texts specify, they reserve the perception of impermanence for the neutral hedonic tone. They seem to acknowledge that, since pleasant feelings exert more affective pull than neutral feelings, they need a counterweight as affectively charged. Invoking the painful feelings connected to the pursuit of pleasure provides that stronger counterbalance and is more direct than reflecting on impermanence. Thus, it is as if the perception of pleasant feelings as painful condensed all the reflections above, almost as a mnemonic;<sup>182</sup> it is the maximum expression of the ‘anticipated *dukkha*’ I mentioned in the second chapter, put in a practical context. Instead, reflecting on impermanence is a better fit for the subtler clinging to neutral feeling.

Discussing the contemplations of *asubha*, *dukkha* and *anicca*, Giuliano Giustarini maintains *anicca* is the key link, for something impermanent cannot be ultimately pure.<sup>183</sup> But while impermanence is invoked to induce an affect of dissatisfaction, what all those contemplations share is *dukkha* or negative affect. A putrid cadaver is unpleasant in a straightforward and visceral way beyond its symbolising impermanence—would an eternally putrid object be less unpleasant?—and the repugnance of certain anatomical parts does not depend on their impermanence—would incorruptible intestines be pretty?

I have suggested that reflections on impermanence have a lower affective charge. This may be why insight into impermanence can have the full range of hedonic affects. One of these is

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179 SN iv 214.

180 Formulas to this end are repeated in the *Khandha* (SN 22) and *Salāyatana* (SN 35) *saṃyuttas*.

181 Along the lines I am arguing, the Burmese abhidharma scholar Nandamālābhivamsa writes that ‘All people dislike and do not welcome painful feeling’, therefore ‘a meditator has to see *sukha vedanā* as *dukkha vedanā* in order to abandon it’. He suggests to do that via contemplating the impermanence of pleasant feeling. See Sayadaw Nandamālābhivamsa, ‘An Analysis of Feeling (Vedanā)’ (Aggacāra Dhamma Distribution Group, 2014), p. 110 <[http://abhidhamma.com/Analysis\\_of\\_Feeling.pdf](http://abhidhamma.com/Analysis_of_Feeling.pdf)>.

182 Anālayo relates seeing painful *vedanā* as an arrow (SN iv 207: *dukkhā vedanā sallato datṭhabbā*) with the famous simile from the immediately following discourse, the *Salla Sutta* (SN 36.6)—chapter one explored that simile. Thus, such a perceptual exercise could also be a mnemonic of a larger teaching: to meet pain without the underlying tendency to rejection (*paṭighānusaya*) so as to not shoot oneself with a second arrow. See Anālayo, *Deepening Insight*, p. 15.

183 Giustarini, ‘The Truth of the Body’, pp. 102, 106–7.

renunciant sadness (*nekkhammasita domanassa*), one of the ‘thirty-six feelings’.<sup>184</sup> Just like every bit of knowledge you gain during a PhD shows you how much you ignore, renunciant sadness arises when insight reveals the path lying ahead. While sparking the desire for progress, it also illuminates you have not gotten there yet. I hesitate to count this as a negative affect to be systematically cultivated comparable to unpleasant visualisations or dwelling on *dukkha*. But it does count as a valued feeling contributing to the path, in so far as it motivates more walking. In fact, renunciant sadness is *the* example Dhammadinnā gives for ethical unpleasant feeling.<sup>185</sup> Its soteriological function parallels contemplating ageing, sickness and death, but at a further stage on the path that apprehends not general realities such as those, but more minute sense stimuli.

Let me summarise. Reflections on drawbacks, as well as on impermanence, *dukkha*, and sometimes not-self, are found throughout the early discourses, applied to a variety of formulas.<sup>186</sup> They became, for the early Buddhist community, systematic contemplations, hinging on the presence of actual felt *dukkha* that is then brought to mind. Plus, impermanence and conditionality are in themselves uncomfortable truths to contemplate. Together with unsightly anatomical parts and decomposing corpses, these are the ways early Buddhists actively sought what is unpleasant, just like Jains sought bodily pain—for the soteriological value they ascribed to those experiences. Yet for Buddhists, that value did not lie in ‘burning’ past actions but in weakening attachment and inducing renunciation now.<sup>187</sup> It does not seem a coincidence that the Short Discourse on the Mass of Suffering (*Cūladukkhakkhandha Sutta*, MN 14) places the Buddha’s criticism of Jains right after listing all the painful drawbacks of sensuality that can be seen here and now (*sanditthika*).<sup>188</sup> For, in contrast, the Jains focus on their past evil deeds as the origin of pain without knowing their past lives nor how to give up the unskilful and take up the skilful in this very life (*ditth’ eva*).

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184 This has been discussed in chapter 1.

185 MN iii 218.

186 See particularly the *Samyutta Nikāya*, which applies it to each of the bundles of clinging (*upādānakkhandha*) and sense bases (*saḷāyatana*).

187 Since this gives birth to spiritual pleasant feelings, in a sense it *is* a way of achieving pleasure through pain, but rather differently than Jains—plus, as I have argued, Buddhists use it as an ‘intervention’ for certain occasions, and moderately.

188 Except the last one, which refers to the next life (*samparāyika*) and may serve as transition to discussing the Jains—MN i 92.

## A liberation theory of pleasure

In case the spiritual practice of early Buddhists has seemed gloomy so far, they complement it by granting effectiveness to certain pleasures too. Compared to the *puruṣārtha* model of Vedic society, early Buddhism expounds a much more highly ordered pluralism of values, to borrow Roy Perrett's terminology.<sup>189</sup> Novelty pleasure is tolerated only insofar as lay practice is an option—some passages attest to the presence of good lay followers who 'enjoy sense desires' (*kāmaabhogino*).<sup>190</sup> Still, the mastery pleasure of ethical behaviour is held in higher esteem, as a vehicle towards a better rebirth more fit for religious practice; and in that better existence, or in the still normative path of the renunciant, novelty pleasures are rejected as strongly as in any ascetic tradition. Where early Buddhists stood out is in promoting play pleasure as well, not because play pleasure in religious life was totally unheard of, as we have seen, but because of the emphasis and detail they put into it. This section explores the soteriological value early Buddhism places on certain pleasant feelings. I begin with the Buddha finding the middle way, then I survey the use of play and mastery pleasures for spiritual progress.

As the famous story goes, after trying harsh asceticism for a few years the Buddha has a change of heart that concerns *vedanā*. He remembers it when, some time later, Prince Bodhi tells him that the goal should be achieved through pain.<sup>191</sup> At that point Prince Bodhi is not yet a follower of the Buddha, and we do not know if he follows the Jains or is repeating a spiritual trope of the day. In any case, this prompts the Buddha to reveal how he thought the same *before* he woke up, and to recount his spiritual biography.<sup>192</sup> The segment on asceticism repeatedly mentions painful feelings,<sup>193</sup> almost as a refrain that builds up until the Buddha concludes:

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189 Perrett, p. 29.

190 DN iii 126, MN i 491.

191 MN ii 93.

192 Expositions and analyses of this biography can be found, among others, in: Bhikkhu Anālayo, *A Meditator's Life of the Buddha: Based on the Early Discourses* (Cambridge: Windhorse Publications, 2017); Shulman, 'Looking for Samatha and Vipassanā', p. 101 ff; Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli, *The Life of the Buddha: According to the Pali Canon* (Seattle: Buddhist Publication Society, 2001), pp. 10–30; Richard H. Robinson and others, *The Buddhist Religion: A Historical Introduction*, Religious Life in History Series, 4th ed (Belmont, Calif: Wadsworth Pub. Co, 1996), pp. 10–16.

193 While the three famous similes of the log say one *may* or *may not* experience painful feelings, in doing so—and in using the expression used elsewhere to describe Jain practice (*opakkamikā dukkhā tibbā khavā kaṭṭukā vedanā*)—they convey an expectation of what spiritual practice involves. Most ascetic practices the Buddha tries are described as a 'painful striving' (MN i 241, MN ii 93, MN ii 212: *dukkhappadhāna*) and/or as causing painful feelings (MN i 243: *evariṭṭapāpi kho me, aggivessana, uppannā dukkhā vedanā cittaṃ na pariyādāya tiṭṭhati*). And when they are not, they still sound painful.

I have experienced *as many* sharp, acute, self-inflicted feelings of pain *as any* ascetic and brahmin of the past, present or future. Yet through this painful, severe work I have not achieved *any* superhuman states or *any* truly noble distinction in knowledge and vision. Could there be another path to awakening?<sup>194</sup>

The Buddha has exhausted the possibilities of painful feelings and none has led anywhere. With this the texts are stating, categorically and without any space for doubt,<sup>195</sup> that bodily painful feelings are soteriologically ineffective.<sup>196</sup> They do not work. They do not help. We find a partial exception to this in the Discourse to Rāsiya (*Rāsiya Sutta*, SN 42.12), where the Buddha admits asceticism (*tapas*) can yield skilful qualities and even knowledge and vision. However, even in that success he still criticises ascetics for tormenting themselves as a method.<sup>197</sup> Elsewhere, Ānanda contends with the Jain belief that self-inflicted pain precipitates liberation, and instead refers to experiencing the effect of past deeds little by little (*phussa phussa*).<sup>198</sup> And in the *Devadaha Sutta* (MN 101) the Buddha challenges Jains, among other ways, by pointing out that if they only feel intense pain when practising austerities, then the pain comes from the practice, it has nothing to do with past deeds.<sup>199</sup> He concludes that ‘the method of the venerable *nigaṇṭhas* is fruitless, their striving is fruitless’.<sup>200</sup> The fruitful method and striving, instead, is only unpleasant mentally, temporarily, and often for the pragmatic reason of countering a strong defilement.

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194 (My emphases.) MN i 247, MN ii 93, MN ii 212: ‘*ye kho keci atītamaddhānaṃ samaṇā vā brāhmaṇā vā opakkamikā dukkhā tikkhā kharā kaṭukā vedanā vedayim̐su, etāvaparamaṃ nayito bhīyyo. ye pi hi keci anāgatamaddhānaṃ samaṇā vā brāhmaṇā vā opakkamikā dukkhā tikkhā kharā kaṭukā vedanā vedayissanti, etāvaparamaṃ nayito bhīyyo. ye pi hi keci etarahi samaṇā vā brāhmaṇā vā opakkamikā dukkhā tikkhā kharā kaṭukā vedanā vedayanti, etāvaparamaṃ nayito bhīyyo. na kho paṇāhaṃ imāya kaṭukāya dukkarakārikāya adhiḡacchāmi uttari manussadhammā alamariyañāḡadassanavisesaṃ; siyā nu kho añño maggo bodhāyā’ ti.*

195 Alexander Wynne has observed the Buddha is less harsh when assessing the formless attainments learnt under Ājāra Kālāma and Uddaka Rāmaputta, which leaves some soteriological hope in them—Wynne, *The Origin of Buddhist Meditation*, p. 19.

196 Although the passages do not specify, the descriptions are clearly of bodily feelings, moreover they are said to not overpower the Buddha’s mind. Anālayo interprets the latter comment as a reference to the first *jhāna* the Buddha had experienced before going forth, for certainly no pain is felt there. But neither is bodily pain. More generally, the reference could be to Jain-like meditative states which, while blocking painful feelings, do not seem equivalent to the positively pleasant *jhānas*, as explored earlier in this chapter. Bhikkhu Anālayo, ‘The Buddha’s Last Meditation in the Dirghāgama’, *Indian International Journal of Buddhist Studies*, 15 (2014), 1–43 (pp. 29–30).

197 SN iv 339: *atītaṃ atāpeti paritāpeti ti, iminā ekena thānena gārayho.*

198 AN i 221.

199 MN ii 219. The discourse seems to express Buddhist positions through the Jains’ mouths. In some cases this has strange results like Jains saying austerities cannot advance the ripening of deeds, which would probably clash with their doctrines.

200 MN ii 221: *evaṃ sante āyasmantānaṃ nigaṇṭhānaṃ aphaḷo upakkamo hoti, aphaḷaṃ padhānaṃ.*

Wondering what else could be effective, the Buddha remembers a childhood experience of the first *jhāna*. He asks himself why he fears (*bhāyati*) such a pleasure unrelated to sense desire and unskilful qualities.<sup>201</sup> Writing about this famous episode, most scholars assume *jhāna* had been part of the Buddha's spiritual training just like the formless attainments.<sup>202</sup> This is indeed plausible and may happen to be correct, although it is nowhere stated in the early texts.<sup>203</sup> Whatever the case, we can target the specific question of fear.

Why would (and did) the Buddha *fear* spiritual pleasure in the first place? Eviatar Shulman has noted the central place of overcoming fear in various narratives of spiritual progress,<sup>204</sup> and here it plays a particular function: it highlights differences between soteriological perspectives on affects. The Buddha may have dismissed the *jhānic* experience because it did not fit the widespread ascetic ideology I explored earlier, which he seems to have adopted at one point: that the path must feel painful. In an environment where the only affect with a role is pain<sup>205</sup> and where suffusing pleasure is only linked to bondage, if the practice feels too good you must be doing it wrong. Fear is a reasonable response.<sup>206</sup>

That this episode is remembered at all, even more that it is remembered *as a shift*, is highly significant. Not all versions of the Buddha's awakening recount it—not all are a spiritual biography, to begin with—but all those containing the account of asceticism also contain the memory of the first *jhāna* and vice versa.<sup>207</sup> This speaks to what early Buddhists thought

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201 MN i 247, MN ii 94, MN ii 212: *tassa mayhaṃ, aggivessana, etadahosi: 'kiṃ nu kho ahaṃ tassa sukhasa bhāyāmi, yaṃ taṃ sukhaṃ aññatv' eva kāmehi aññatra akusalehi dhammehi' ti?*

202 This is discussed in Sujato, *A History of Mindfulness*, p. 164; Anālayo, *A Meditator's Life of the Buddha*, p. 39. Arbel disagrees, and implicitly it seems Wynne may too—Arbel, *Early Buddhist Meditation*, p. 56; Wynne, *The Origin of Buddhist Meditation*, pp. 29, 94.

203 My issue is those arguments do not seem solid enough to me *formally*: they abound with filling gaps by relying on other assumptions, like the *jhānas* being required for the formless attainments; they border on arguments from silence and circular reasonings. I simply doubt we have *primary data* that would settle this particular debate. Why, for example, does the Buddha recall a childhood experience and not his (supposedly) extensive *jhāna* practice under Āḷāra Kālāma and Uddaka Rāmaputta?—I owe this question to Rupert Gethin.

204 Shulman, 'Looking for Samatha and Vipassanā', p. 126. Torkel Brekke also explores fear as related to the Buddhist goal and motivation, although he mixes *bhāya* and *saṃvega*—Torkel Brekke, *Religious Motivation and the Origins of Buddhism* (Routledge, 2005), chap. 5 <<https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203994832>>.

205 The Buddha's five companions in asceticism not only abandon him when he embraces positive affect, but later they cannot conceive of his awakening: he achieved nothing through painful feelings, so what can he have achieved otherwise? (MN ii 93)

206 Bhikkhu Anālayo, 'A Brief History of Buddhist Absorption', *Mindfulness*, 11.3 (2020), 571–86 (p. 576) <<https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-019-01268-7>>.

207 Rupert Gethin, 'Schemes of the Buddhist Path in the Nikāyas and Āgamas', in *Mārga: Paths to Liberation in South Asian Buddhist Traditions*, ed. by Cristina Pecchia and Vincent Eltschinger (Austrian Academy of Sciences Press, 2020), pp. 5–78 (p. 47).

distinguished them, what they saw as central to their teaching. More than a rediscovery of a certain meditative state, the Buddha's shift is a (re)discovery that play pleasure is a *means to*, and not just a *feature of*, liberation.

I write '(re)discovery' because, given similar ideas we saw in the section 'Vedic bliss', I would find it too bold to proclaim the Buddha the absolute discoverer of play pleasure as path. Not that it is too unreasonable either. After all, a main aspect of the middle way, *the* distinctive note of Buddhism, is precisely about *vedanā*, about pleasure as path,<sup>208</sup> and is something the Buddha has discovered and had not heard before.<sup>209</sup> To go back to the *Devadāha Sutta*: a fruitful method and striving is one which does not abandon the right pleasure (*dhammika sukha*), of course without being infatuated with it either.<sup>210</sup> We should remember ethical pleasure is not said to merely avoid feeding unskilful states: it is said to *decrease* them as well as *increasing* skilful ones. So, now let us explore how the early discourses see play pleasure as doing that, and afterwards discuss mastery pleasure.

The early texts say play pleasure leads to awakening with statements about *jhāna*<sup>211</sup> and the awakening factor of joy.<sup>212</sup> Those right types of pleasures should not simply not be feared (*na bhāyitabbaṃ*), but should be cultivated (*bhāvetabbaṃ*), developed (*bahulikātabbaṃ*), practised (*āsevitabbaṃ*), one should be devoted (*anuyūñjeyya*) to them.<sup>213</sup> The *Pāsādika Sutta* (DN 29) anticipates the criticism that early Buddhists indulge in pleasure. They preemptively respond 'no' if by that one means finding satisfaction in immoral behaviour and sense pleasures. These forms of indulgence in pleasure are 'inferior, vulgar, ordinary, ignoble, not connected to the

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208 Scholars have tended to express this idea as the middle way being the four *jhānas*—Oliver Freiberger, 'Early Buddhism, Asceticism, and the Politics of the Middle Way', in *Asceticism and Its Critics: Historical Accounts and Comparative Perspectives*, ed. by Oliver Freiberger (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 235–58 (p. 239); Arbel, *Early Buddhist Meditation*, p. 60 ff; Padmanabh S. Jaini, 'States of Happiness in Buddhist Heterodoxy (1999)', in *Collected Papers on Buddhist Studies* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 2000), pp. 3–28 (p. 19).

209 The middle way the Buddha discovers is neither novelty pleasure nor spiritual pain, but a third option: an eightfold path culminating with *sammā samādhi*, the four *jhānas*. See Bronkhorst, *Two Traditions of Meditation*, p. 121.

210 MN ii 223: *kathaṃ ca, bhikkhave, saphalo upakkamo hoti, saphalaṃ padhānaṃ? idha, bhikkhave, bhikkhu na heva anaddhabhūtaṃ attānaṃ dukkhena addhabhāveti, dhammikaṃ ca sukhaṃ na pariccajati, tasmīṃ ca sukhe anadhimucchito hoti*. The commentary interprets '*dhammika sukha*' from a monastic perspective, as the pleasure arising from the four requisites (Ps iv 11). But it makes more sense that it refers to the ethical pleasures of moral conduct, sense-restraint, and *jhāna*, since the text ends with those and this fits better the canon as a whole. At the same time, the commentarial view fits with the simplicity element of the gradual training.

211 Some of this compiled in Grzegorz Polak, *Reexamining Jhāna: Towards a Critical Reconstruction of Early Buddhist Soteriology* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej, 2011), p. 26 ff.

212 The statements are made about each of the *bojjhaṅgas*—MN iii 83, MN iii 88, SN v 72, SN v 76, SN v 82.

213 MN i 454, MN iii 230.

goal, and they do not lead to disillusion, dispassion, cessation, peace, higher knowledge, awakening, nirvana'.<sup>214</sup> Since the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta* (SN 56.11) uses this phrase when speaking of indulgence in sense pleasures,<sup>215</sup> the *Pāsādika Sutta* is reminding us of the distinction between extremes that lead nowhere and paths that lead to freedom. But early Buddhists proudly admit to being guilty of another type of indulgence in pleasure: the four *jhānas*. These 'lead to total disillusion, dispassion, cessation, peace, higher knowledge, awakening, nirvana'.<sup>216</sup>

This soteriological claim deserves attention.<sup>217</sup> Sixteen other discourses use the same phrase to describe the following things: the eightfold path,<sup>218</sup> the tenfold path,<sup>219</sup> the Buddha's teaching,<sup>220</sup> practice-related conversation,<sup>221</sup> the awakening factors,<sup>222</sup> the four *satipatthānas*,<sup>223</sup> the four bases of power,<sup>224</sup> the four factors of stream-entry,<sup>225</sup> the ten recollections (*anussati*),<sup>226</sup> and the unpleasant practices explored in the previous section.<sup>227</sup> One text presents it as a criterion to distinguish what is the Buddha's teaching from what is not.<sup>228</sup> The point is not that these elements can be isolated, able by themselves to get one awakened. In their leading to awakening, they involve *other* parts of the path. The point is precisely that they *do* this, they do

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214 DN iii 130: *cattārome, cunda, sukhallikānuyogā hīnā gammā pothujjanikā anariyā anattasamhītā na nibbidāya na virāgāya na nirodhāya na upasamāya na abhiññāya na sambodhāya na nibbānāya samvattanti. katame cattāro? idha, cunda, ekacco bālo pāṇe vadhitvā vadhitvā attānaṃ sukheti piṇeti. ayaṃ paṭhamo sukhallikānuyogo. ...*

215 SN v 421.

216 DN iii 131: *cattārome, cunda, sukhallikānuyogā ekantanibbidāya virāgāya nirodhāya upasamāya abhiññāya sambodhāya nibbānāya samvattanti. katame cattāro? idha, cunda, bhikkhu vivicc' eva kāmehi vivicca akusalehi dhammehi savitakkaṃ savicāraṃ vivekajaṃ pītisukhaṃ paṭhamaṃ jhānaṃ upasampajja viharati. ayaṃ paṭhamo sukhallikānuyogo. ...*

217 Anālayo has dismissed similar claims in the *Jhāna Saṃyutta* (SN 53) as a systematic application of formulas from earlier *saṃyuttas*. Why should that disqualify those claims is questionable—the early texts do this constantly and identifying the original home of a formula is not often evident. But a stronger counter-argument is the presence of other passages, elsewhere, that escape his critique and claim effectiveness for the *jhānas* or spiritual pleasure, like the one discussed here. Not only is the fact something contains a pericope no reason for automatic dismissal, as Gethin argues, but far from being highly formulaic, this passage is embedded in a narrative that makes a point. See Anālayo, 'History of Absorption', p. 580; Rupert Gethin, 'Reading Repetitions in the Saṃyutta-Nikāya and Early Abhidhamma: From the Mahā-Vagga to the Dhammasaṅgaṇi', in *Research on the Saṃyukta-Āgama*, ed. by Bhikkhuni Dhammadinnā (Taipei: Dharma Drum Corporation, 2020), pp. 109–72 (p. 127).

218 DN ii 251, MN ii 82, AN v 216.

219 AN v 238, AN v 239.

220 DN ii 285.

221 MN iii 113, Ud 36—topics such as contentment, seclusion, energy, collectedness, wisdom...

222 SN v 82.

223 SN v 179.

224 SN v 255.

225 SN v 361.

226 AN i 30.

227 AN iii 82.

228 AN iv 143.

it naturally, they can be expected to, there is a logic of progress.

The formula emphasises this with the word *ekanta*.<sup>229</sup> I have translated ‘total’ since in many usages it conveys totality: a world of ‘*ekantasukha*’ is one with no unpleasantness at all;<sup>230</sup> human experience is neither ‘*ekantasukha*’ nor ‘*ekantadukkha*’, but mixed.<sup>231</sup> Scholars and translators read it in two ways: (1) as expressing that the *only* possible outcome of something is liberation<sup>232</sup>—the *Pāsādika Sutta* could support this, for it claims one can expect any of the four levels of awakening from the *jhānas*;<sup>233</sup> and (2) as an intensifier of the indirect object, as I have done.<sup>234</sup> Grammatically, the first group reads *ekanta* as an adverb (e.g. *ekantaṃ*) qualifying the main verb,<sup>235</sup> whereas the second follows the commentaries and takes it to qualify *nibbidā* and the rest as action nouns.<sup>236</sup> Does it make a difference? I think *ekanta* mostly underlines that the thing talked about *does* lead to freedom, in contrast to something else which does *not*.<sup>237</sup> However, if those from the first group want to say *jhāna* is infallible this goes too far, and it feeds scholarly responses that point to other discourses which express reservations about *jhāna* and its fallibility. I find discussions like these unproductive, and it may be useful to anticipate here a philosophical and methodological reflection from the next section.

It is common to argue that something is not liberating because it is not enough by itself and it needs other path factors.<sup>238</sup> If the discourses cited above thought along these lines, various of

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229 Cone, *A - kh*, p. 528; Monier-Williams, Leumann, and Cappeller, p. 230.

230 MN ii 36. See Chapter 2: ‘The paradox of sukha & refined hedonism’.

231 SN iii 69.

232 Bhikkhu Sujato, ‘Pāsādikasutta’, *SuttaCentral* <<https://suttacentral.net/dn29/en/sujato>> [accessed 15 July 2023]; Walshe: Walshe, p. 434; C. A. F. Rhys Davids and Thomas Williams Rhys Davids, ‘Pāsādikasutta’, *SuttaCentral* <[https://suttacentral.net/dn29/en/tw-caf\\_rhysdavids](https://suttacentral.net/dn29/en/tw-caf_rhysdavids)> [accessed 15 July 2023]; Ṭhānissaro, ‘DN 29 Pāsādika Sutta | The Inspiring Discourse’, *Dhamma Talks*, p. 29 <<https://www.dhammadata.org/suttas/DN/DN29.html>> [accessed 15 July 2023].

233 Already the first level, stream-entry (*sotāpatti*), assures the future achievement of awakening. Nevertheless, only here and at MN i 34 do the discourses present stream-entry as coming out of meditative attainments, more often it leads to them, e.g., AN i 231, AN v 313, SN v 398). However, most scholars go with the traditional Buddhist view that stream-entry requires *jhāna*. See Bernat Font, ‘The Notion of Stream-Entry in the Early Buddhist Texts’ (unpublished MA thesis, University of South Wales, 2018), pp. 13–15 <[https://www.academia.edu/49261119/The\\_notion\\_of\\_stream\\_entry\\_in\\_the\\_early\\_Buddhist\\_texts\\_MA\\_Thesis\\_](https://www.academia.edu/49261119/The_notion_of_stream_entry_in_the_early_Buddhist_texts_MA_Thesis_)>; Cousins, in Gombrich, *How Buddhism Began*, p. 126 note 21.

234 Gunaratana, p. 14; Paul J. Griffiths, ‘Buddhist Jhāna: A Form-Critical Study’, p. 64; Gethin, *The Buddhist Path to Awakening*, p. 166 note 112; Bodhi, *The Connected Discourse of the Buddha*, p. 1583; Cousins, *Meditations of the Pali Tradition*, p. 43.

235 They could also be reading it as a noun joined with *nibbidā* in a *kammadhāraya* compound—‘the one aim of disillusion, etc.’—but still translating it as an adverb, idiomatically.

236 Sv ii 670, Sv iii 739, Mp ii 19.

237 About a third of the references above make that contrast against something soteriologically ineffective.

238 Such are the arguments by Anālayo I explore in the next section, for example.

the things they list would be disqualified, leaving only the ‘path as a package’ as liberating. So, clearly, they do not think along these lines. While it may be understandable to ask what is it *really* that liberates, no matter the answer one provides—like wisdom about the three characteristics—I find it comparable to asking what step *really* gets you to the second floor and answering ‘the last one’, as if it could float independently of the stairway. More often, the early texts ask whether something is a step in the stairway to nirvana or not. They think more in terms of necessary conditions than sufficient ones. I argue this is how we should read statements of soteriological value like those above, including those about *jhāna*.

Now, *how* is play pleasure soteriologically effective? As seen in chapter two, early Buddhism engages what Western psychology calls the ‘pleasure principle’: the tendency to seek what feels good. It is fascinating how aware and explicit the early texts are about this. They propose that play pleasure does two things: first, it helps the mind gather towards states of collectedness (*samādhi*); secondly, it fulfills one’s need for pleasure so that one depends less on the senses for it, thereby aiding letting go or renunciation. The first is a direct usage of the motivational aspect of pleasant feelings, its affective pull, while the second is an indirect one. For these two reasons, Buddhists actively seek spiritual pleasant feelings. Regarding the first reason, here is a passage from the *Cetanākaraṇīya Sutta* (AN 10.2) that parallels the gladness formula:

When the mind is joyful, one need not think ‘May my body relax’. It is natural that the body relaxes when mind is joyful. When the body is relaxed, one need not think ‘May I feel pleasure’. It is natural that one feels pleasure with a relaxed body. When one feels pleasure, one need not think ‘May my mind become collected. It is natural that the mind becomes collected when one feels pleasure.’<sup>239</sup>

This claims spiritual pleasant feelings naturally make the body relaxed and the mind collected—the Buddhist logic that pleasure precedes *samādhi*, it gathers the mind’s attention. It is not saying that *samādhi* is pleasant, which it is, but that pleasure leads to *samādhi*.<sup>240</sup> The discourses do not feel the need to flesh out why that happens, as far as I have gathered, but they certainly see the mind’s process of settling as inseparable from finding comfort or satisfaction. When

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239 AN v 3: *pīṭimanassa, bhikkhave, na cetanāya karaṇīyaṃ ‘kāyo me passambhatū’ ti. dhammatā esā, bhikkhave, yaṃ pīṭimanassa kāyo passambhati. passaddhakāyassa, bhikkhave, na cetanāya karaṇīyaṃ ‘sukhaṃ vediyāmi’ ti. dhammatā esā, bhikkhave, yaṃ passaddhakāyo sukhaṃ vediyati. sukhino, bhikkhave, na cetanāya karaṇīyaṃ ‘cittaṃ me samādhīyatū’ ti. dhammatā esā, bhikkhave, yaṃ sukhino cittaṃ samādhīyati.*

240 Anālayo, *Early Buddhist Meditation Studies*, p. 134; Johannes Bronkhorst, *Absorption: Human Nature and Buddhist Liberation*, Buddhism Series (Wil [Switzerland]: University Media, 2012), pp. 202–7.

discussing the Discourse to Tapussa (AN 9.41), chapter two showed how the verbs *pakkhandati* and *pasīdati* have both these connotations.<sup>241</sup> The mind settles into a higher state when it feels cozy there, and this can take time. One *learns* to enjoy subtler, wholesome states, and to find pleasure in those feelings. The exegetical tradition only goes as far as naming *sukha* the proximate cause of *samādhi* or *ekaggatā*,<sup>242</sup> explaining that its function is to intensify or develop associated qualities and that it manifests as assistance (*anuggaha*).<sup>243</sup> Such assistance can also be understood as showing favour or kindness,<sup>244</sup> but Pe Maung Tin refers to an interpretation of it as meaning ‘repeated grasping’.<sup>245</sup>

Beyond helping collectedness, play pleasure’s other role is to upstage novelty pleasure, thanks to its very pleasant nature. The commentaries explain ‘more refined’ pleasures as ‘more not satiating’, in the sense that one cannot have enough of them<sup>246</sup>—I assume compared to how soon one has had enough brownies, for example. We have seen that spiritual ascent relies on some amount of intimacy with two realities: the unpleasant side of one’s current state, and a better-feeling higher state. With ‘intimacy’ I imply direct contemplative experience: meditators are not meant to talk themselves into despising ordinary experience. The exercise of seeing drawbacks in sense pleasure may be on the cognitive side, but others explored in this section are more embodied. In the same vein, experiencing fully embodied play pleasures makes a deep impact that naturally weakens dependence on novelty pleasures. Transformation does not happen through reflective, cognitive or even metacognitive<sup>247</sup> means alone, and certainly not through focus on the *dukkha* side alone. When Mahānāma wonders why his mind is still prone to defilements, even though he understands them to be so, the Buddha replies (MN 14):

Mahānāma, even when a noble disciple truly sees with wisdom that sense desires give little gratification but much pain and disappointment, and that its drawbacks are greater, as long as they have not achieved a joy and pleasure other than sense desires and unskilful qualities, or something more peaceful, they will still resort to sense desires. But once they have achieved it, they will not resort to sense desires.<sup>248</sup>

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241 Section ‘The paradox of sukha & refined hedonism’.

242 Vism 464 (XIV 139).

243 Vism 145 (IV 100).

244 Cone, *A - kh*, p. 110.

245 Tin, p. 155, note 2.

246 Ps iii 115: *panūtataraṇaṃ ti atappakataraṇaṃ*. See Cone, *G - n*, p. 293.

247 This refers to the capacity of mindfulness (*sati*) to monitor one’s own thoughts, reactions and relations to any given element of experience.

248 MN i 91: ‘*appassādā kāmā bahudukkhā bahupāyāsā, ādīnava ettha bhīyyo’ ti. iti ce pi, mahānāma, arīyasāvakassa yathābhūtaṃ sammappaññāya sudiṭṭhaṃ hoti, so ca aññatī’ eva kāmehi aññatra akusalehi dhammehi pītisukhaṃ nādhigacchati,*

The Buddha then relates his own experience of this, saying it was not until he had achieved spiritual joy and pleasure<sup>249</sup> that he ‘confirmed’ (*paccaññāsīm*)<sup>250</sup> he would not resort to sense pleasures again. In the Discourse to Māgaṇḍiya (*Māgaṇḍiya Sutta*, MN 75), he states that the reason he does not envy those desiring and indulging in sense pleasures is because he delights in a much better pleasure.<sup>251</sup> Elsewhere the Buddha leaves the pleasures of fame and possession to others, for he can dwell in spiritual pleasures whenever he wants.<sup>252</sup> MN 75 accentuates this through a present active participle: ‘delighting (*ramamāno*) in that pleasure, I do not lust after an inferior one, I do not find enjoyment there’. A verse found in a few places suggests that as one abandons sensuality one should delight in seclusion, which is not easy,<sup>253</sup> it takes practice; as the Discourse to Poṭṭhapāda (*Poṭṭhapāda Sutta*, DN 9) makes clear, the training consists in substituting the fine perception of *jhānic* joy and pleasure for the perception of sensuality;<sup>254</sup> and the Analysis of the Six Spheres (*Salāyatanavibhaṅga Sutta*, MN 137) commands to abandon domestic happiness by relying on renunciant happiness.<sup>255</sup>

If we wondered why play pleasure leads to disillusion and dispassion—which is not self-evident—the early discourses would reply something like ‘because in replacing novelty pleasure it makes the latter pale in comparison’. It *allows* one to dispense with novelty pleasure. Yet as other passages show, it does not guarantee one will.<sup>256</sup> While this may sound

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*aññaṃ vā tato santataraṃ; atha kho so n’ eva tāva anāvattī kāmesu hoti. yato ca kho, mahānāma, ariyasāvakaṃsa ‘appaṣādā kāmā bahudukkā bahupāyāsā, ādinavo ettha bhīyyo’ ti. evametam yathābhūtaṃ sammappaññāya sudittṭhaṃ hoti, so ca aññatr’ eva kāmehi aññatra akusalehi dhammehi pītisukhaṃ adhiḅgacchati aññaṃ vā tato santataraṃ; atha kho so anāvattī kāmesu hoti.*

249 The text does not say ‘*nirāmisā*’, but elsewhere a pleasure apart from *kāma* and *akusala dhammā* means *jhāna*, starting with the narrative of discovering the middle way. Nevertheless, I see no reason to not widen this to ethical and spiritual feelings that may not qualify as absorption.

250 *Paṭijānāti*, in its senses of assert, state, confirm, or promise, conveys a weighty, certain type of knowledge—Monier-Williams, Leumann, and Cappeller, p. 665.

251 MN i 504: *so aññe satte passāmi kāmesu avītarāge kāmataṅhāhi khajjamāne kāmāparilāhena pariḅdayhamāne kāme paṭisevante. so tesam na piḅemi, na tattha abhiramāmi. taṃ kissa hetu? yāhayaṃ, māgaṇḍiya, rati, aññatreva kāmehi aññatra akusalehi dhammehi, api dibbaṃ sukhaṃ samadhigayha tiṭṭhati, tāya ratiyā ramamāno hīnassa na piḅemi, na tattha abhiramāmi.*

252 AN iv 341.

253 Dhḅ 87-88, SN v 24, SN v 82, AN v 233-4, AN v 253-4: *okā anokamāgama, viveke yattha dūramaṃ. / tatrābhīratimiccheyya, hitvā kāme akīṅcana.* Since the absolutive does not always indicate an action previous to the main verb, one could not argue that abandoning sense pleasures necessarily comes first, followed by finding pleasure in solitude; it may well occur simultaneously or even after finding pleasure in solitude. It is clear that the two actions complement or compensate each other.

254 DN i 182: *tassa yā purimā kāmāsaññā, sā nirujjhati. vivekajapītisukhasukhumasaccasaññā tasmīṃ samaye hoti, vivekajapītisukhasukhumasaccasaññāyeva tasmīṃ samaye hoti. evam pi sikkhā ekā saññā uppajjati, sikkhā ekā saññā nirujjhati. ayaṃ sikkhā ti bhagavā avoca.*

255 MN iii 220.

256 The next section will discuss this. Payutto writes: ‘Not all people who realize more refined kinds of happiness immediately abandon sensual happiness. Many people continue to live their lives by enjoying both kinds or both levels of happiness. In these circumstances such people have more options or have a greater

unimpressive, it is still bold and significant to argue that closing the tap of sense indulgence will *not* work *unless* one fills one's pleasure jug elsewhere.

This is clearer when we see that the discourse serves to highlight yet again the contrast with (Jain) ascetics, to whom the Buddha alludes in the conversation. Although Mahānāma was asking about greed, hatred and confusion generally, the Buddha's response focuses on pleasure because, while ascetics reject novelty pleasure just like him, what they lack is an effective method to let go of the related defilements. This discourse has another go at the clumsy ways of the Jains, at their ignorance of swimming in play pleasure down the stream to liberation.<sup>257</sup>

This brings us to another important role of spiritual pleasure that goes to the root of the problem. As the *Salla Sutta* states, pursuing sense gratification is often a response to pain.<sup>258</sup> Ordinary beings do this because they know of no other escape from painful feelings, but noble disciples know of that alternative escape, therefore they do not seek sensual gratification nor feed the underlying tendency to greed.<sup>259</sup> We could speculate: is the escape from painful feelings spiritual pleasure?<sup>260</sup> While the discourse does not say this, the commentary points to the path and fruit of *samādhi*<sup>261</sup> and the sub-commentary mentions taking up *jhāna*.<sup>262</sup> By themselves, these distant interpretations do not prove the *Salla Sutta* meant this. Yet if spiritual pleasure should replace the habitual escape from painful feelings—namely, sense pleasures—it follows it is at least *an* alternative escape from them. With this I close the investigation of Buddhist play pleasure.

Mastery pleasure tends to be left out in all of these arguments and passages. So, is it soteriologically valuable? There is no explicit canonical claim that it helps let go of novelty pleasures. After all, lay people live with both rather than substitute one for the other. Yet two things are undeniable: that early Buddhism sees things like morality, impulse control and

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advantage in regard to experiencing happiness.' Payutto, p. 1116.

257 MN i 94.

258 Interestingly, abhidharma thought considers gratification-seeking a form of aversion (to the current situation), not of greed—see Gethin, *Buddhist Maps*, chap. 5.

259 SN iv 208.

260 Keren Arbel hints at this, although she does not use this phrasing—Arbel, *Early Buddhist Meditation*, p. 67.

261 Spk iii 77: *dukkhāya vedanāya nissaraṇan ti dukkhāya vedanāya hi samādhimaggaphalāni nissaraṇaṃ, taṃ so na jānāti, kāmasukhameva nissaraṇan ti jānāti.*

262 Spk-ṭ ii 356: *samādhimaggaphalāni nissaraṇaṃ vikkhambhanasamucchedapaṭippassaddhivasena. samādhisīsenā hettha jhānaṃ ca gahitaṃ.*

attentional training as part of the stairway to liberation,<sup>263</sup> and that it prescribes deriving pleasure from them. No doubt the latter is used as a motivator, in both the rhetorical and experiential senses explored so far. That aside, mastery pleasure paves the way for play pleasure—next chapter will elaborate on this.

Ariel Glucklich defines mastery pleasure as ‘the satisfaction one gets from mastering the organism’s response’ to novelty pleasures.<sup>264</sup> This fits how the early texts trace immoral and antisocial behaviour to the pursuit of and relationship with *kāma*,<sup>265</sup> so it follows moral conduct depends on mastering that relationship. The *suttas* contain two forms of this: impeccable pleasure (*anavajjasukha*) linked to moral conduct (*sīla*), and purified pleasure (*abyāsekasukha*) linked to sense-restraint (*indriyasamvara*), mindfulness and full awareness (*satisampajañña*). Let us start with impeccable pleasure, since it comes earlier in the gradual training. Taking the Fruits of the Ascetic Life (*Sāmaññaphala Sutta*, DN 2) as a paradigm, at the end of the large section on *sīla* we find:

Great king, just as a consecrated king who has defeated his adversaries would see fear nowhere, regarding his enemies, so a mendicant endowed with moral conduct sees fear nowhere, regarding their moral restraint. Endowed with this noble set of moral conduct, they feel an impeccable pleasure within.<sup>266</sup>

The discourses explain it further thus:

Householder, a noble disciple has impeccable conduct of body, speech and mind. Thinking ‘I have impeccable conduct of body, speech and mind’, they obtain pleasure and happiness. This is called impeccable pleasure.<sup>267</sup>

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263 Giuliano Giustarini, ‘The Interaction of Morality (Sīla) with Cognitive Factors in the Pali Nikāyas’, *The Indian International Journal of Buddhist Studies*, 18 (2017), 43–70; Justin S. Whitaker and Douglass Smith, ‘Ethics, Meditation, and Wisdom’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Buddhist Ethics*, ed. by Daniel Cozort and James Mark Shields (Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 51–73 (p. 55 ff) <<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198746140.013.31>>.

264 Glucklich, *The Joy of Religion*, p. 9. Glucklich speaks also of deriving pleasure from (religious) learning, a good example of which can be found in Payutto, pp. 1168–75.

265 MN i 87, MN i 92.

266 DN i 69-70: *seyyathāpi, mahārāja, rājā khattiyo muddhābhisitto nihatapaccāmitto na kutoci bhayaṃ samanupassati, yadidaṃ paccatthikato; evameva kho, mahārāja, bhikkhu evaṃ sīlasampanno na kutoci bhayaṃ samanupassati, yadidaṃ sīlasamvarato. so iminā ariyena sīlakkandhena samannāgato ajjhantaṃ anavajjasukhaṃ paṭisaṃvedeti.*

267 AN ii 69: *katamañ ca, gahapati, anavajjasukhaṃ? idha, gahapati, ariyasāvako anavajjena kāyakammaṃ samannāgato hoti, anavajjena vacīkammaṃ samannāgato hoti, anavajjena manokammaṃ samannāgato hoti. so ‘anavajjenamhi kāyakammaṃ samannāgato, anavajjena vacīkammaṃ samannāgato, anavajjena manokammaṃ samannāgato’ ti adhigacchati sukhaṃ, adhigacchati somanassaṃ. idaṃ vuccati, gahapati, anavajjasukhaṃ.*

Impeccable pleasure is the precise opposite of enjoying immorality, which the *Pāsādika Sutta* calls a wrong way of indulging in pleasure.<sup>268</sup> At the grosser and interpersonal level of actions, it constitutes a first training in deriving pleasure from what is skilful, just like workers and artisans get satisfaction from their jobs<sup>269</sup>—in fact, ‘*anavajja*’ is often treated as a synonym of ‘*kusala*’.<sup>270</sup> This is so important that not making oneself happy with one’s moral acquisition of wealth, for example, is as reprehensible as clinging to that pleasure or ignoring its drawbacks.<sup>271</sup> Schemes of gradual training (*anupubbāsikkhā*) like that of the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta* omit generosity, but I agree with Justin Whitaker and Douglass Smith that this is probably due to their being addressed to monastics.<sup>272</sup> Indeed, gradual instruction (*anupubbikathā*) to lay people starts with generosity,<sup>273</sup> so it seems reasonable to class generosity under impeccable pleasure as a form of good conduct.

How does this pleasure come about? I think it matters that the quotation above contains indirect speech or thought, as follows: ‘I have impeccable conduct of body, speech and mind’. This ‘*ti* clause’ denotes either a minimal self-reflective awareness of having just done a good deed, or more fully formed thoughts of being aligned with one’s values, like a healthy pride.<sup>274</sup> The practitioner consciously recognises the absence of the guilt that often comes with misbehaviour. In contrast to that guilt, this self-reflective awareness is accompanied by a mental pleasant feeling—or causes it to arise, nothing hinges on this detail—of a kind similar to the eighteen ruminations or the thirty-six domestic/renunciant feelings. As chapter one explored, those described *vedanā* related to thinking activity (*upavicāra*) and perception (*saññā*). Impeccable pleasure is a secondary feeling: it sits on the awareness or memory of an action, which may have come with any hedonic tone, *and* the perception that it is good conduct, ‘impeccable’.<sup>275</sup> Otherwise, I may overlook how this morning I brought a bag of mandarins

268 DN iii 130.

269 This is a reference to the question King Ajātasattu asks various spiritual teachers, leading the Buddha to explain the gradual path and the various pleasures they enjoy in the here and now—*Sāmaññaphala Sutta* at DN i 51 & 60.

270 Cousins, ‘Good or Skillful?’, pp. 139–49.

271 SN iv 335. The terms used for making oneself happy are *sukheti* and *pīneti*—note the parallel with *pīti* and *sukha*.

272 Whitaker and Smith, p. 53.

273 DN i 110, DN i 149, DN ii 41, MN i 379, MN ii 145, AN iv 186, AN iv 209, AN iv 213.

274 Other texts connect this to being free from remorse (*avippaṭisāra*)—AN v 1-7, AN v 311-17.

275 The commentarial tradition continues to think along these lines, to the point where such happiness becomes a meritorious deed in itself—see Rita Langer, ‘Merit: Ten Ways of Making Merit in Theravāda Exegetical Literature and Contemporary Sri Lanka’, in *Routledge Handbook of Theravāda Buddhism*, ed. by Stephen C. Berkwitz and Ashley Thompson (London: Routledge, 2022), pp. 257–70 (pp. 258, 264).

for everyone at the office, and miss out on some potential impeccable pleasure. An act of conscious attention is required, together with the concept that mandarin sharing is a nice gesture. A modern-day example is the label ‘cruelty-free’: without it, consumers would not get the extra good feeling of *knowing* no animal has suffered in manufacturing that product. In saying ‘conscious’, I do not preclude this can become ingrained and automatic, as the kind act itself can.<sup>276</sup> But if I do a kind deed perceiving it as bad, will it feel good to me? Probably not —as commentators argued, misperception (*saññāvīpallāsa*) ‘inverts agreeableness and disagreeableness’.<sup>277</sup> Thus, the ‘*ti* clause’ seems to express the need for a correct perception of a skilful act as skilful.

While such reflexivity may manifest discursively, it may also just be a concept or label operating in the background. I would certainly distinguish all this from the contemplative exercises of ‘*sīlānussati*’, recollecting one’s own moral conduct, and ‘*cāgānussati*’, recollecting one’s generosity.<sup>278</sup> I think that, as an expanded version of that moral self-awareness, these shade more towards the cultivation of play pleasure, whereas here we are dealing with a simpler moral-attentional training at the earliest stage of the path. However, we can see a continuity from one thing to the other.

Next in *The Fruits of the Ascetic Life* comes another form of mastery pleasure: purified pleasure (*abyāsekasukha*).

Endowed with this noble sense-restraint, they feel a purified pleasure within. In this way, Great King, one keeps the doors of the senses guarded.<sup>279</sup>

The commentaries refer it to a skilful mind, rid of and untouched by defilements,<sup>280</sup> and also call it ‘unscattered’ and ‘the pleasure of sense-restraint’.<sup>281</sup> Like impeccable pleasure, purified pleasure is internal (*ajjhataṃ*) and has ethical and attentional aspects, but here the ethical goes to the background while the attentional comes to the fore. In Sanskrit it is called

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<<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351026666-21>>.

276 The abhidhamma categories of ‘prompted’ (*sasañkhārika*) and ‘unprompted’ (*asañkhārika*) acknowledge that. See Bodhi and Narāda, p. 84.

277 Gethin, *Buddhist Maps*, chap. 7.

278 E.g., AN v 330-31.

279 DN i 70: *so iminā ariyena indriyaṣaṃvarena samannāgato ajjhataṃ abyāsekasukhaṃ paṭisaṃvedeti. evaṃ kho, mahārāja, bhikkhu indriyesu guttadvāro hoti.*

280 Sv i 183: *abyāsekasukhan ti kilesabyāsekavirahitattā abyāsekaṃ asammissaṃ parisuddhaṃ adhicitasukhaṃ paṭisaṃvedeti ti.*

281 Ps ii 214 & Mp iii 198: *abyāsekasukhan ti kīlesehi anavasittasukhaṃ, avikiññasukhanti pi vuttaṃ. indriyaṣaṃvārasukhañ hi dīṭṭh’ ādīsu dīṭṭhamattādivasena pavattatāya avikiñṇaṃ hoti.*

*avyābādhasukha*,<sup>282</sup> which is how the Jains described the state beyond feelings of pleasure and pain, and one Pali discourse describes *jhānic* feelings as *avyābajjha*.<sup>283</sup> These are all ways to apply the idea of something being unafflicted. Terminology aside, the attentional aspect is clearly important here. We could say purified pleasure is what the gatekeeper of mindfulness feels, well-established at the sense doors. Mindfulness and sense-restraint are intimately related qualities, as scholars have explored well,<sup>284</sup> and the texts present them in various orders: the Fruits of the Ascetic Life follows sense-restraint with mindfulness and full awareness (*satisampajañña*), elsewhere the latter nurtures and precedes the former.<sup>285</sup>

While both impeccable and purified pleasures have to do with mastering impulses—the former related to external behaviour, the latter to internal behaviour—purified pleasure is of a simpler nature. It is not said to arise from an act of self-reflective awareness, but from the mere absence of defilements. Because defilements make the mind an unpleasant place, and because presence of mind at the sense doors prevents them to some degree, the resulting experience must feel better.<sup>286</sup> From a *sutta* and Sarvāstivāda perspective, this means one has primary feelings of any hedonic tone, born of sense contact, but swims only in the pleasant-to-neutral lanes of secondary feelings. The Theravāda perspective makes it feel even nicer, for it only allows unpleasant feelings for the sense of touch, so most primary feelings are already neutral.<sup>287</sup>

Lastly, we can include contentment (*santutthi*) with the basic monastic requisites as a form of mastery pleasure: it is a training to derive satisfaction from simplicity,<sup>288</sup> something opposed to greed and associated with having few wishes (*appicchata*).<sup>289</sup> The *Sāmaññaphala Sutta* places it after mindfulness and full awareness, whereas the *Cūlahatthipadopama Sutta*<sup>290</sup> and texts from other lineages mention it earlier in the narrative.<sup>291</sup> There may be little reason to try and find a

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282 SBV ii 241.

283 MN i 90.

284 Kuan, *Mindfulness in Early Buddhism*, pp. 42–45; Gethin, ‘Schemes of the Buddhist Path’, p. 53.

285 AN 10.61 at AN v 115.

286 ‘This joy manifests because the mind is not impaired, so to say, by being caught up in reactivity and proliferation of what has been experienced’—Anālayo, ‘The Potential of Pleasant Feelings’, p. 8.

287 Chapter one dealt with these different interpretations of what hedonic tones are possible for each sense.

288 DN i 71: *kathaṃ ca, mahārāja, bhikkhu santuttho hoti? idha, mahārāja, bhikkhu santuttho hoti kāyaparihārikena cīvarena, kucchiparihārikena piṇḍapātena. so yena yeneva pakkamati, samādāyeva pakkamati.*

289 E.g., DN iii 115, MN i 13, MN i 214.

290 MN i 180.

291 Gethin, ‘Schemes of the Buddhist Path’, pp. 17, 25; Bhikkhu Anālayo, ‘The Gradual Path of Training in the Dīrgha-Āgama, From Sense-Restraint to Imperturbability’, *The Indian International Journal of Buddhist Studies*, 17

reason for this discrepancy, since gradual path elements show up in different orders commonly. However, in the progression from the external to the internal, it is not so obvious where satisfaction with little sits. On the one hand it does not relate to actions as overtly as moral conduct; on the other, is the most logical place for it after sense-restraint and mindfulness?

Studies of the gradual path have marginalised hedonic aspects and therefore have been less systematic in checking their presence/absence in the different versions.<sup>292</sup> What I presented here is not a quirk of a few discourses or of the Pali tradition alone. In terms of mastery pleasure,<sup>293</sup> the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Saṅghabhedavastu*<sup>294</sup> contains impeccable pleasure (*anavadyasukha*) and purified pleasure (*avyābādhasukha*), both qualified with ‘*adhyātmam*’ (internal, within) as in the Pali. Instead, the Sarvāstivāda MĀ 187 only has ‘supreme contentment’,<sup>295</sup> and the Dharmaguptaka DĀ 20<sup>296</sup> speaks of ‘joy and happiness within’.<sup>297</sup>

Whether trademarked or generic, mastery pleasure shows up on the shelves of various liberating aisles. Beyond the Fruits of the Ascetic Life (DN 2), in the *Sīlakkhandha Vagga* impeccable pleasure shows up in discourses 8 and 10,<sup>298</sup> and purified pleasure only in 10. Both pleasures appear at MN 27, 38, 51, 94, 101 and 112,<sup>299</sup> as well as AN 4.198 and AN 10.99,<sup>300</sup> all using the same pericope of moral conduct, contentment and sense-restraint.<sup>301</sup> All these fall under what Rupert Gethin calls the ‘Tathāgata appears ...’ gradual scheme<sup>302</sup>—except MN 112, which belongs to the ‘four-dhyāna scheme’ and is the only one there naming impeccable and purified pleasures. Path schemes containing the elements of moral conduct, moderation

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(2016), 1–24 (p. 15).

292 Graeme MacQueen, *A Study of the Śrāmaṇyaphala-Sūtra* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1988); Anālayo, ‘The Gradual Path in the Dīrgha-Āgama’; Roderick S. Bucknell, ‘The Buddhist Path to Liberation: An Analysis of the Listing of Stages’, *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, 7.2 (1984), 7–40; Gethin, ‘Schemes of the Buddhist Path’; Kin Tung Yit, ‘A Study of a Standard Path-Structure in Early Buddhist Literature: A Comparative Study of the Pāli, Chinese and Sanskrit Sources’ (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Bristol, 2004).

293 Play pleasure was already dealt with in chapter three when looking at joy (*pīṭhi*) in various textual lineages.

294 SBV ii 240-41.

295 T I 732a21, parallel to the Pali *Chabbisodhana Sutta* (MN 128 at MN iii 30). See Anālayo, *Madhyama-Āgama Studies*, p. 241, note 28.

296 T I 84c13, parallel to the Pali *Ambaṭṭha Sutta* (DN 3 at DN i 87).

297 Anālayo, *Early Buddhist Meditation Studies*, p. 69; Anālayo, ‘The Gradual Path in the Dīrgha-Āgama’, p. 3.

298 DN i 173 and DN i 206.

299 Respectively, MN i 180-81, MN i 269, MN i 346, MN ii 162, MN ii 226, MN iii 34-35.

300 AN ii 210, AN v 206.

301 The *Samyutta Nikāya* contains no mention of *anavajja* and *abyāseka* pleasures. It is worth noting path narratives are really not its specialty.

302 Table 5 in Gethin, ‘Schemes of the Buddhist Path’, p. 23.

in eating and devotion to wakefulness qualify moderation in eating with ‘impeccability and a comfortable dwelling’.<sup>303</sup> While this sounds like impeccable pleasure, it seems such comfort is physical<sup>304</sup> so it is unclear whether we should count it here. All in all, specific mastery pleasures are more connected to certain path elements than to path schemes as a whole.

I end this section by summarising its main points. Amidst a context where some saw all positive affect negatively, early Buddhists advocated it performed a soteriological function when not derived from sensuality and unskilful qualities. Especially, they defended that play pleasure leads to liberation and it is wrong to neglect it—it is a *necessary* condition for awakening. Its value lies in how it uses our natural drive for pleasure for a spiritual end: it drives the mind towards collected states of *samādhi* and away from novelty pleasures, weakening dependence on these and, eventually, upstaging and replacing them as a source of gratification. Given how the quest for gratification is usually an unskilful response to painful feelings, this fully integrates *jhāna* into a path of and towards skilfulness. And given how it nourishes disenchantment through upstaging novelty pleasure, and how it relates to understanding sense experience, it is hard to fully divorce it from insight. Forms of mastery pleasure, which arise from moral conduct, sense-restraint and establishing mindfulness, also provide satisfaction based on taming one’s relationship to sensuality. The discourses do not say it helps abandon sensual gratification, nor do they contrast these two pleasures. However, as I elaborate in the next chapter, mastery pleasure belongs to the same hedonic training and paves the way for play pleasure. It does so through the key element of turning the practitioner’s mind to *how it feels* to be skilful or wholesome.

## Of landscapes and maps

This last section weaves the chapter’s threads into two fabrics. First, a tapestry of the wide religious landscape showing how the various colours compare and fit together: having zoomed in to different traditions in each section, I now zoom out again. Secondly, a more philosophical cloth to frame early Buddhist maps, stitching in methodological issues and the

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303 *yātrā ca me bhavissati anavajjatā ca phāsuvihāro cā ti*—MN i 273, MN i 355, MN iii 2, SN iv 104, SN iv 177, AN i 114, AN ii 40, AN iv 167. Also found in discourses that mention moderation in food but not as part of a path structure alongside moral conduct and devotion to wakefulness: DN iii 130, MN i 10, MN ii 139, AN ii 145, AN iii 388.

304 DĀ 20 in Anālayo, ‘The Gradual Path in the Dīrgha-Āgama’, p. 4.

age-old debate on *jhāna*. I refine what the target of some canonical warnings about *jhāna* is, arguing that scholars sometimes conflate different critiques. But I enter this debate with some reluctance, for it does not help my aim of discussing spiritual pleasure *beyond* the confines of particular formulations of it like the four *jhānas*. However, I must engage with existing scholarship; and so I do, leaving my wider aim for chapter five. I end this section, and chapter, with a short philosophical reflection on wisdom and hedonic tones.

Let us begin with the comparison. Figure 5 shows the various traditions according to how much room they leave for novelty and play pleasures in religious practice. The spatial representation is approximate and the precise position of each school should not be analysed to the millimetre—the figure illustrates general affinities. I have left out mastery pleasure both for practical table-making reasons and because it is not part of the explicit discourse of all traditions as much as the other two. *Paribbājakas* appear there as a Buddhist construct. And inevitably perhaps, the table retains some Buddhist bias.

All ascetic movements score pretty low on novelty pleasure, in contrast to mainstream Vedic religion. I have placed the Brahmanism of the Upaniṣads higher than ascetic movements because it overtly links religious pleasure and sexual intimacy, something not found in those. On the play pleasure axis, Jains and Ājīvakas are the lowest: they only include a (still debatable) form of play pleasure at or around the moment of liberation, but no pleasure has a function on the way there. The Vedic religion comes next because the drug-induced play pleasure of ritual is not fully distinguished from novelty pleasure, so they score lower than play pleasure ‘purists’. Brahmanism and *paribbājakas* stand closer to Buddhists in that they more probably leave room for non-sensual pleasure on the spiritual path. In the section ‘Vedic bliss’ I concluded that the role they ascribe to it is ambiguous, whereas Buddhists took a much clearer position and, according to them, Brahmins tend to see play pleasure as marking the goal. The lack of explicit statements depicting play pleasure as a means to liberation fits the image Buddhists evoke. For when debating Jains, Buddhists trumpet pleasure, and with Brahmins and *paribbājakas* they nuance and delimit how one should (and should not) understand that pleasure—I expand on this below. Thus, Buddhists squeeze play pleasure the most, they give it the most room and function.

In a third axis for mastery pleasure I would rank, from lowest to highest: Jains and Ājīvakas, Vedic traditions, and Buddhists. The latter gather elements already present in the shared religious culture to varying degrees, and take it a step further. Early Buddhism elaborates on how we can derive satisfaction from moral and skilful behaviour (impeccable pleasure) and extends it to the inner domain (purified pleasure). It represents a qualitative step up in mastery pleasure *as a thing*. The explicit Buddhist discourse around mastery pleasure does not simply elevate its importance, it also links mastery pleasure to meditative progress. See the contrast with Jainism, which tells followers to abandon novelty pleasure and the immorality associated with it, but then switches to painful feelings for formal spiritual practice.

All traditions speak of a state beyond all *vedanā*. One can speculate whether that state is exactly the same for them all or not, but they certainly get there by different routes. Jains (and to a lesser extent perhaps Ājīvakas) achieve the cessation of feeling by blocking it out through intense pain—a form of stimulus overload that dislocates the sense of self, already discussed. Buddhists achieve it through refining perception. In this they are influenced by Brahmanical teachings on the formless attainments.<sup>305</sup> The distinctive Buddhist addition<sup>306</sup> is refining one's perception of the affective-hedonic aspect of experience, specifically of pleasantness becoming subtler and subtler—as the second chapter showed, neutral feeling from the fourth *jhāna* onwards can be thought of *and felt* as pleasant too, a flexibility characteristic of play/mystical states.

Compared to other ascetic movements, early Buddhism enjoys a longer stretch between the subsiding of pain (first *jhāna*) and the cessation of feeling, during which one bathes in pleasure. Such bathing serves to stimulate and/or actualise insights about the inadequacy of novelty pleasure. Buddhists consider this *effective* and they criticise Jain methods as inadequate to cleanse defilement, as neglecting the meditator's psychology here and now.

Figure 5 defies the popular image of Buddhism and Brahmanism as confronted.<sup>307</sup> I argue that despite differences in doctrinal and metaphysical teachings, *affectively* early Buddhism

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305 Wynne, *The Origin of Buddhist Meditation*, p. 103.

306 As stated earlier, I consider we cannot know if the Buddha-to-be practised the *jhānas* before the formless attainments, and assuming so seems circular reasoning to me. But whatever the case, the fact remains that the refining I speak of is not found in the Upaniṣadic teachings the Buddha learnt, as far as I know.

307 For a survey of scholarly views on the Buddhist-Brahmin relationship, see Walser, 'When Did Buddhism Become Anti-Brahmanical?', pp. 98–106.

continues Brahmanism. As a scholar once put it, the *vipassanā* side of early Buddhism looks like Jainism and the *samatha* side like Brahmanism. Since I find the bifurcation of *samatha* and *vipassanā* unhelpful in our context, I would rather say, simplifying a lot, that early Buddhism often sounds like Jainism but feels like Brahmanism.

A key to the affinity between early Buddhists and Brahmins lies in the parallelism between *pīti* and *ānanda* introduced in the previous chapter. Brahmanic ‘*ānanda*’ bridges sexual and meditative bliss, it reveals how for that tradition play pleasure mirrors novelty pleasure. The Upaniṣads openly compare the two. While early Buddhist texts no longer do that, ‘*pīti*’ still bridges those two kinds of pleasure. Like *ānanda*, *pīti* has specific romantic connotations that a term like ‘*somanassa*’ lacks;<sup>308</sup> and it refers to mental joy, just like *ānanda* came to denote the joy of erotic union rather than its physical pleasure. When the *Brahmajāla Sutta* (DN 1) speaks of an excited mind, in one place it uses *ānanda* and in the other *pīti*—and the commentary understands that ‘*ānanda*’ as *pīti*.<sup>309</sup> Moreover, both terms tend to be preceded by words from the root √*mod*—Sanskrit: *moda*, *pramud*/*pramoda*;<sup>310</sup> Pali: *pāmojja*. The continuity is clear. From a purely affective-hedonic stance, the experience of union with *ātman*/*brahman* feels like Buddhist forms of spiritual pleasure as described in *jhāna* or the gladness formula. If we cut these oranges on the *vedanā* axis, essentially we see the same image. In fact, when the *Yōga Sūtra* lists *samādhi* factors, in spite of Buddhist influence it retains the ‘native’ terminology of *ānanda* instead of *pīti*.

Another interesting and broader fact: it is only in the Yajurvedic Brāhmaṇas and Upaniṣads where we find *brahman* defined as pleasure (*ānanda*),<sup>311</sup> and scholars generally agree these are precisely the Brahmanical teachings most likely to have interacted with early Buddhism.<sup>312</sup> In examining parallels between the Upaniṣadic contemplation of *upāsana* and Buddhist *satipatthāna*, Sujato noted certain meditation objects are common to both, like bliss, and that

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308 Cousins, ‘Buddhist Jhāna’, p. 121.

309 DN i 3 (Sv i 53), DN i 37.

310 Olivelle, *Language, Texts, and Society*, p. 78 ff; van Buitenen, p. 29.

311 Olivelle, *Language, Texts, and Society*, pp. 87, 99; van Buitenen, pp. 30–32.

312 See, for example, Wynne’s defense that the *Yājñavalkyakāṇḍa* circulated around Magadha as an independent work before being incorporated into the Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, against Bronkhorst’s famous challenge to the scholarly consensus—Alexander Wynne, ‘The Buddha’s “Skill in Means” and the Genesis of the Five Aggregate Teaching’, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 20.02 (2010), 191 (pp. 206–9) <<https://doi.org/10.1017/S1356186309990496>>.

the *satipatthānas* of *vedanā* and *citta* correlate to *brahman's* attributes of *ānanda* and *cit*.<sup>313</sup>

We can make yet another observation here. The early Buddhist hedonic training, in commanding to replace novelty with play pleasure, essentially mirrors the Vedic history regarding positive religious affect—namely, that it came to replace novelty pleasure with play pleasure. If Buddhism explains various types of pleasures, which using Glucklich I have classified into three, why is the main teaching not a gradual replacing of novelty pleasure with mastery pleasure and then play pleasure? Why is the emphasis on juxtaposing novelty and play pleasures and swapping the former for the latter? Where did this idea come from, since it is so foreign to Jains and Ājīvakas? Was it the Buddha's genius?

To be fair, there *is* a gradual journey from novelty to mastery to play, which next chapter will explore, but mastery pleasure only partially substitutes novelty pleasure. More specifically, it supplants its direct antonym: enjoying immorality. It seems to me early Buddhism is influenced by a Brahmanical trend, and since Buddhist spiritual pleasure is not as sexualised—the only remnant being the term '*pīti*'—it represents a further step in a movement to decouple religious pleasure from sensual and ordinary ones. It makes more sense to understand early Buddhism in light of this history than *vis-à-vis* non-Vedic asceticism, which swaps novelty pleasure for self-inflicted pain.

With all this, we can answer the question posed in chapter three more fully: why have two words (*pīti* and *somanassa*) if, as I argued, they are basically synonyms? Because *pīti* belongs to a lineage of celebrating meditative pleasure in comparison and reference to sensuality. While *pīti* is often paired with generic words and quasi-synonyms, acknowledging a certain non-specialness, at the same time its special presence in models of spiritual progress sends a message '*somanassa*' would not. Spiritual seekers may have picked up on the undertones of '*pīti*' and its affinity with Brahmanical practice. Perhaps this is why Brahmins and *paribbājakas* were drawn to the Buddhists, and why Jains thought Buddhists were indulgent, given to pleasures. Using *pīti* rather than *sukha* alone, or *somanassa*, clarifies how the early Buddhist path feels *because of* the historical religious context.

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313 Sujato, *A History of Mindfulness*, pp. 156, 160.

Having surveyed the *vedanā* land of 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE India, let us raise our eyes to the sky, get philosophical, and ask a basic question: what is Buddhism’s take on pain and pleasure—*dukkha* and *sukha*—in themselves? In broad terms, early Buddhists are quantitative hedonists. Their soteriology is built on the principle that *dukkha* is bad and should be avoided, whereas *sukha* is good and should be approached. As Karunadasa puts it: ‘[h]appiness is the only thing we pursue for its own sake’.<sup>314</sup> The main problem, for Indian traditions generally, is less approach-avoidance *per se* than approaching the wrong objects.<sup>315</sup> What makes an object wrong is that it passes. Since satisfaction is the quenching of a desire or thirst (*taṇhā*),<sup>316</sup> something fleeting and unstable cannot finish the job. Thus, a ‘noble quest’ (*ariyā pariyesanā*) seeks what does not pass and decay<sup>317</sup> and, therefore, can truly make one satisfied (*nibbuta*).<sup>318</sup> Impermanence is not ultimately the problem—for if it were, an unchanging state of suffering could be a solution. Impermanence simply *entails* the ultimate problem: unpleasantness in its many forms, *dukkha*. The real issue is hedonic.

On this hedonist basis, Premasiri observed how early Buddhist texts present their argument as quantitative,<sup>319</sup> as do the Upaniṣads<sup>320</sup> and Jain texts.<sup>321</sup> The Buddha argues against novelty pleasure because it involves ‘collateral’ pain, because it brings *little* satisfaction and *many* disadvantages<sup>322</sup>—the quantity of pleasure is what tips the scale. Moral conduct leads to pleasant results, so less collateral pain, but may still be mixed with some pain here and now.<sup>323</sup> And when the Buddha boasts to the Jains, he boasts about his ability to experience *more* pleasure and for *longer* periods of time than King Bimbisāra.<sup>324</sup> It is unclear if refined pleasures are better necessarily in terms of intensity; but surely, in carrying no collateral pain, the total sum of pleasure is greater. While the texts consider qualitative aspects such as reliability,<sup>325</sup> in

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314 Karunadasa, *Early Buddhist Teachings*, p. 117.

315 Webster, pp. 7, 57, 63, 86, 94; Morrison, p. 106 ff.

316 Payutto, pp. 1060, 1065. We are reminded here of the commentarial image of *pīti* and *sukha* compared to a thirsty man finding a well. Already in Vedic texts we saw *ānanda* is the fulfillment of desires.

317 MN i 162.

318 Collins, *Nirvana and Other Buddhist Felicities*, p. 192.

319 Premasiri, p. 75.

320 Jaini, ‘States of Happiness’, p. 5.

321 US 14 (13).

322 MN i 132: *appaṣāḍā kāmā vuttā mayā, bahudukkhā bahupāyāsā, ādīnavo ettha bhīyyo*. See Premasiri, pp. 68–71.

323 See the conversation with Udāyī ‘Snakehead’ in chapter two, section ‘The paradox of *sukha* & refined hedonism’.

324 MN i 94.

325 In the *Cūḷadukkhakkhandha Sutta*, the Buddha’s play pleasure is better than Bimbisāra’s novelty pleasure because it can be achieved without moving or uttering a word, and maintained for up to seven days and nights

the end most can be subsumed under quantity—if a pleasure is more reliable, one can experience more of it. Even the best qualitative candidate, that spiritual pleasures are disconnected from immoral patterns, relates to how they cause painful feelings, either for oneself or others, and either in this life or in a future one.

While I cannot deep dive into Buddhist ethics here, I must note works in that field tend to skip over rather quickly the importance of pleasure and pain, they fail to properly engage in discussions about ethical hedonism. Damien Keown’s influential favouring of virtue ethics<sup>326</sup> may have made scholars reluctant to consequentialism, but this can also go too far. For example: contrary to what I wrote two paragraphs earlier, Jay Garfield claims that in Buddhism ‘no calculus of pleasure and pain is at work, with pleasure taken to be intrinsically good, and pain to be intrinsically bad’.<sup>327</sup> I find this inconsistent with something else he writes, with which I agree:

The Buddha also assumed that suffering is a bad thing, even when one does not know that one is suffering, and even when one experiences suffering as pleasure. If one disagrees with this assessment, Buddhist moral discourse has no basis.<sup>328</sup>

Garfield’s own justification—that ‘pleasure is problematized as a source of suffering in much Buddhist thought’—plays against him. Precisely, novelty pleasure is a problem because the calculus does not add up. Our misperception (*vipallāsa*) is that we calculate wrongly, we mistake what provides pleasure and pain and to what extent,<sup>329</sup> as the simile of the leper illustrates.<sup>330</sup> In burning their wounds, lepers engage in a bad bargain: a bit of satisfaction now for more pain later. To be fair, Garfield’s scope is wider than just the early texts, but one cannot

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(MN i 94), it does not depend on factors beyond one’s reach. Many passages extol being able to dwell in the four *jhānas* at will (MN i 356, SN ii 211, SN iv 299, AN ii 36, AN iv 292, AN v 132), considering it ‘a superhuman distinction in knowledge and vision’ (MN ii 207). AN iv 341 uses the model of the pleasures of renunciation, withdrawal, peace and awakening.

326 Damien Keown, *The Nature of Buddhist Ethics* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1992). Some have sought to add nuance by bringing back consequentialist—and to an extent hedonist—elements: Abraham Velez de Cea, ‘The Criteria of Goodness in the Pāli Nikāyas and the Nature of Buddhist Ethics’, *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, 11 (2004), 123–42 (pp. 135–36); Bronwyn Finnigan, ‘The Nature of a Buddhist Path’, in *A Mirror Is for Reflection: Understanding Buddhist Ethics*, ed. by Owen Flanagan and Jake H. Davis (Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 33–52 (p. 40 ff); Christopher W. Gowans, ‘Buddhist Moral Thought and Western Moral Philosophy’, in *A Mirror Is for Reflection: Understanding Buddhist Ethics*, ed. by Owen Flanagan and Jake H. Davis (Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 53–70.

327 Jay L. Garfield, *Buddhist Ethics: A Philosophical Exploration* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022), p. 20.

328 Garfield, p. 6.

329 AN 4.49 at AN ii 52.

330 *Māgaṇḍīya Sutta* (MN 75 at M i 506). I discuss it in chapter two, at the beginning of the section ‘Evaluative Pleasure’.

downplay how much the Buddhist vehicle runs on the ‘badness’ or undesirability of pain.<sup>331</sup> If Christopher Gowans adds that ‘[m]oreover, at least sometimes, promoting happiness is also important’,<sup>332</sup> in the case of early Buddhism this should be said much more boldly.

Often, early Buddhists do not argue that we should not approach the pleasant, but that the object we consider pleasant is actually not.<sup>333</sup> Again, it is the wrong object. As the famous statement goes, ‘what others call pleasure noble ones call pain’.<sup>334</sup> Since it is painful—and since we *should* avoid what is painful—the object should be avoided.<sup>335</sup> So, one could say that Garfield’s assessment applies to ordinary people’s distorted view, but not to the view Buddhism deems correct, according to which actual pleasure is indeed good, and what is not good is then seen as suffering. Many of the exercises explored in the previous two sections exemplify how a main function of mindfulness (*sati*) is to rectify misperceptions, and in terms of what is actually *sukha* or *dukkha* later literature considers this the job of *vedanānupassanā*.<sup>336</sup>

A central question in all this is why need one *not fear* spiritual pleasures? Let us recap the dangers of novelty pleasure. First and foremost are unwanted consequences, both for the individual—it backfires—and for others—it leads to antisocial behaviour. Secondly, Indian religions seem to have intuited that the fleetingness of novelty pleasures, with their corresponding painful feeling, is what makes them addictive. In the short story *The lottery in Babylon* by Jorge Luis Borges, the public is losing interest in the game, so its creators decide to interpolate negative prizes in the hopes of increasing its appeal—and it works.<sup>337</sup> Similarly, Oscar Wilde wrote that ‘[a] cigarette is the perfect type of a perfect pleasure. It is exquisite, and it leaves one unsatisfied.’<sup>338</sup> We know how losing more often than winning is what makes slot machines and social media feeds so irresistible—what modern psychology calls

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331 Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics: Foundations, Values and Issues*, p. 33.

332 Gowans, p. 56.

333 This is why I am doubtful of Garfield’s perspective. To me, problematizing novelty pleasure need not clash with a view of pleasure as intrinsically good. For the point is it does not truly count as pleasure in the grand scheme of things, it is a phenomenon related to more pain than pleasure.

334 SN iv 127, Snp 767: *yam pare sukhato āhu, tadariyā āhu dukkhato*.

335 In using this term I do not connote active avoidance of anything pleasant coming one’s way, but the non-pursuit of carnal pleasures, renouncing and abandoning them. This may also seem to clash with the instruction to meet painful feelings mindfully, but we must remember this tries to avoid further mental pain—the second arrow—and eventually any first arrows in this or future lives. Again, an arrow is the image of something one should extract, i.e., avoid behaviour.

336 Sujato, *A History of Mindfulness*, p. 191.

337 *Ficciones* (1944).

338 In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Chapter VI.

‘intermittent reinforcement’. Put simply: dissatisfaction sprinkled with occasional relief is especially addictive.<sup>339</sup>

Play pleasure avoids both types of dangers. Being internal, it does not lead to harming others in order to obtain it. And being less fleeting and unreliable, it involves less of the pain and ‘losing’ that feeds addiction. Yet it is very satisfying, so meditators can still prefer it and fulfill their need for pleasure with it, without building the same sort of dependency. Though it is not a perfect object—only liberation is—it is a better one, one which can actively help one become free. Of course this needs training: training *in* being satisfied, and training *out of* the lottery-type addiction of intermittent reinforcement. In other words, it takes some time to overcome the novelty habits and see that pleasures free from drawbacks are worth it; it takes ‘hedonic training’, as Glucklich would put it. A crucial piece of that hedonic training is precisely the experience of spiritual pleasures.

No matter how much the early texts rave about *jhānic* pleasure—how it decreases unskillful qualities instead of increasing them, how it is free from the underlying tendency to lust, how it helps to let go, and how it should not be feared—there is a tradition of undermining *jhāna* that even comes to see it as dangerous.<sup>340</sup> In part, such views respond to how the discourses express both enthusiasm and caveats about *jhāna*. And yet it is quite different, in spirit, to insist on *jhāna*’s drawbacks while acknowledging its goodness—as some scholars and modern teachers do—or to insist on its goodness despite acknowledging its drawbacks—as the early Pali texts do. A faithful scholarly account of early Buddhism should mirror the early Buddhist emphasis, which I try to do here. In light of what I have developed in this chapter, I want to argue that instead of interpreting certain caveats as if they were questioning the soteriological value of *jhāna*/spiritual pleasure, we should read them as affirming its status *as a means to*, rather than *a feature of*, liberation. They caution against the exclusive association of play pleasure with the religious goal, common at that time, and its counterpart of the path not being pleasant. They do not convey, as Anālayo has put it, ‘the *inherent* drawback of absorption experiences and their *inability* to result in a total removal of sensuality and other unwholesome conditions’ (my

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339 A connection between this basic idea, the ‘hedonic treadmill’, and Buddhism has recently been made in Robert Wright, *Why Buddhism Is True: The Science and Philosophy of Meditation and Enlightenment* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2017), p. 7 ff.

340 See a survey of these views by Buddhist teachers in Polak, *Reexamining Jhāna*, pp. 21–24.

emphasis).<sup>341</sup> Such a strong statement does not reflect the overall ‘vibe’ of the early Buddhist texts.

The debate on *jhāna*’s value intersects with others, like whether or not it is ‘truly’ Buddhist,<sup>342</sup> or the thesis that there are two irreconcilable paths to awakening.<sup>343</sup> I cannot ignore this scholarly debate, given this chapter’s arguments. Yet considering the topic’s magnitude and the scope of this thesis, I cannot get too bogged down in it either. Therefore, aiming to add but a brush-stroke to the collective painting, I confine my discussion to the following points: a methodological reflection on ‘infallibility’, anticipated in the previous section, and the nature of certain (not all) *jhāna* caveats. I deal mainly with arguments put forth by Anālayo, for the sole reason they are recent and nuanced examples of this scholarly debate and provide a good starting point.

The soteriological claims gathered in the previous section insisted spiritual pleasure is a necessary condition for letting go of sense pleasure, not that it is infallible—i.e., letting go cannot happen without it, but it may not work always and automatically. Potential drawbacks do not erase liberating potential. Drawbacks may well be signalled so meditators can keep an eye on them while driving through the *jhānic* road, not so they take different routes. For Anālayo, however, ‘that absorption in itself is productive of insight is difficult to reconcile with several early discourses which clearly point to the potential drawbacks of absorption’.<sup>344</sup> This may hinge on what is meant by the ambiguous ‘in itself’: it is unclear to me whether he argues from the premise that a practice either *does* (must) bring insight or it *does not* (cannot). Where do we place something that *may* bring insight sometimes and at other times it *may not*?

Strictly speaking, it seems Anālayo only critiques the infallibility implied in claiming *jhāna* is ‘in itself’ ‘productive of liberating insight’, and in that sense we agree. But there seems to be a

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341 Anālayo, *Early Buddhist Meditation Studies*, p. 172.

342 A recent and comprehensive account of this debate can be found in Arbel, *Early Buddhist Meditation*, chap. 1. She defends the *jhānas* are a Buddhist innovation.

343 The latter, kickstarted by Louis De La Vallée Poussin in 1936, inspired a recent back-and-forth between Anālayo and Alexander Wynne. Their articles begin by recounting the history of the ‘two path thesis’—and identifying its nature, on which they do not seem to fully agree. Bhikkhu Anālayo, ‘A Brief Criticism of the “Two Paths to Liberation” Theory’, *Journal of the Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies*, 11.0 (2016); Alexander Wynne, ‘Text-Critical History Is Not Exegesis: A Response to Anālayo’, *Journal of the Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies*, 15.0 (2018); Bhikkhu Anālayo, ‘On the Two Paths Theory: Replies to Criticism’, *Journal of the Centre for Buddhist Studies, Sri Lanka*, 15 (2018); Alexander Wynne, ‘Further Thoughts on the “Two Path Thesis”’, *Journal of the Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies*, 16.0 (2019).

344 Anālayo, ‘Brief Criticism of Two Paths Theory’, p. 45.

tendency to question *jhāna*'s effectiveness and potential based on instances of fallibility. For example, Keren Arbel claims that spiritual joy and pleasure 'allows the mind to abandon completely the desire for sense pleasures' and the latent tendency to seek them—my emphasis.<sup>345</sup> And to this, Anālayo responds that 'early Buddhist thought does not consider absorption attainment as *automatically ensuring* that one becomes free from sensual desire'—my emphasis. But it is unclear that Arbel shares that premise and proposes that each and every instance of *jhāna* entails insight.<sup>346</sup> While as mentioned earlier the issue of the *anusayas* can be a rabbit hole, we can bring to mind the Buddha's claim that it is thanks to spiritual pleasure that he did not go back to sensual pleasures. We cannot jump from 'not ensuring' to 'not allowing', an impression given when Anālayo writes that 'concentration experience *cannot* have a liberating *potential* in and of itself'—my emphasis.<sup>347</sup> He grounds his views mainly in two examples that I discuss starting three paragraphs below: the simile of the sticky hand, which I will argue does *not* warn against dangers of deep *samādhi* but rather recommends going deeper, and the story of how Citta goes back to lay life despite his meditative attainments—as I will point out, the story ends by Citta taking up the holy life again and becoming liberated, which strongly suggests that a drawback or 'failure' does not erase liberating potential.

Before delving into these examples, my other main issue with this 'reasoning from infallibility' is its selective application. The mass suicide story<sup>348</sup> warns about potential drawbacks of mindfulness of the body, but I have yet to read a scholar who uses that story in the way drawbacks of *jhāna* are used. Similarly, the Discourse on the Cooks (*Sūda Sutta*, SN 47.8) recognises that a *satipatthāna* meditator may be clumsy and fail to abandon defilements.<sup>349</sup> Does this call into question the soteriological value of *satipatthāna*? (If we applied here the same logic used on *samādhi* drawbacks, we should conclude that *satipatthāna* 'cannot have liberating potential in and of itself' or that 'it does not automatically ensure final liberation' or has an 'inability' to do so.) Then, a text Anālayo uses to show how *samādhi* still leaves one vulnerable

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345 Arbel, 'Jhānic Joy and Pleasure', p. 193.

346 In her 'Final Reflections', she accepts one may enter *jhāna* and still be a *puṭhujāna*, and considers it 'problematic to uphold that attaining any conditioned state will automatically bring about the 'unconditioned'.' Arbel, *Early Buddhist Meditation*, pp. 199–200.

347 Anālayo, 'The First Absorption', p. 277.

348 SN i 320.

349 SN v 150: *tassa kāye kāyānupassino viharato cittaṃ na samādhīyati, upakkilesā na pahīyanti. so taṃ nimittaṃ na uggaṇhāti.* The same is repeated for the other *satipatthānas*. The commentary glosses *upakkilesā* as the five hindrances (Spk iii 201).

to conceit and discourages progress<sup>350</sup> says the exact same thing about knowledge and vision (*ñānadassana*).<sup>351</sup> So, if being liberating implies infallibility, then mindfulness of the body is not liberating, *satipaṭṭhāna* is not ‘in itself productive of liberating insight’, and knowledge and vision have ‘inherent drawbacks’. But those arguments are not made. Because, luckily, potential drawbacks do not erase liberating potential.

Now, what are these drawbacks? The early discourses say clinging to the sweetness (*assāda*) of spiritual feelings makes the mind ‘internally unsettled’ (*ajhattam asaṅṅhitam*).<sup>352</sup> This qualifies as a specific danger related to spiritual feelings, though if I can be picky, it is a problem of clinging, not of feeling itself—I come back to this at the end of my reflections. Still, even accepting such a danger, one should not amplify and extend it to other critiques which have a different nature. These other critiques are twofold: not deepening enough and thinking one is liberated. The first one can be conceptualised as clinging in the sense of being too cozy in a particular state, but also as lack of courage and trust regarding higher states, and as insufficiently refined hedonism. The texts whisper ‘go deeper’, not ‘do not go there’ or ‘dip your toes but with utmost caution and suspicion’. They do not convey reluctance about spiritual feelings or *samādhi*, but further encouragement. In contrast, the second critique deals with views, with cognitive rather than affective aspects.

A good example of not deepening enough is the *Jambālī Sutta* (AN 4.178).<sup>353</sup> This is a key text Anālayo uses in his arguments around the liberating potential of *jhāna* or *samādhi*. He interprets that text’s imagery as cautioning against deep *samādhi*.<sup>354</sup> I question this. Here is the relevant passage:

Imagine someone grabbed a branch with a sticky hand. Their hand would adhere, cling, and be trapped. In the same way, a mendicant enters and dwells in a certain peaceful freedom of the heart. They attend to the cessation of personality. Yet, with regards to it, their mind does not spring forward, it is not pleased, settled and decided. The cessation of personality is unlikely for that

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350 Anālayo, ‘History of Absorption’, p. 577.

351 MN i 195: *so tēya samādhisampadāya na majjati nappamajjati na pamādaṃ āpajjati appamatto samāno ñānadassanaṃ āvādheti. so tena ñānadassanena attamaṇo hoti pariṇaṇṇasāṅkappa. so tena ñānadassanena attānukkamaṇeti, paraṃ vambhetai ‘ahamasmi jānaṃ paṣsaṃ viharāmi. ime paṇaṇṇe bhikkhū ajānaṃ aṇṇaṃ viharanti’ ti. so tena ñānadassanena majjati pamajjati pamādaṃ āpajjati, pamatto samāno dukkhaṃ viharati.*

352 MN iii 226. See Anālayo, *Comparative Majjhima*, p. 788 note 152.

353 AN ii 166.

354 Bhikkhu Anālayo, ‘The Second Absorption in Early Buddhist Discourse’, in *Buddhist Meditative Traditions: Dialogue and Comparison*, ed. by Kuo-pin Chuang (Taipei: Dharma Drum Publishing Corporation, 2014), pp. 25–58 (p. 30); Anālayo, *Early Buddhist Meditation Studies*, pp. 114–15.

mendicant. (...)

Imagine someone grabbed a branch with a clean hand. Their hand would certainly not adhere, cling, or be trapped. In the same way, a mendicant enters and dwells in a certain peaceful freedom of the heart. They attend to the cessation of personality. And, with regards to it, their mind springs forward, it is pleased, settled and decided. The cessation of personality is likely for that mendicant.<sup>355</sup>

Chapter two showed how the formula of springing forward, being pleased, and so forth, describes settling into a higher state, in this case one of cessation.<sup>356</sup> This happens with a clean hand, whereas the entrapment of a sticky hand illustrates not going deeper. But the person with a clean hand is equally going into the peaceful freedom of the heart, they just go deeper than that. The text certainly conveys the need to let go of a particular state, yes, but by relying on the branch of an even higher, refined state—more *samādhi*, not less. So, it is contestable that this particular discourse warns against *samādhi* as such. It recommends driving further into it rather than taking alternative roads, and this would be achieved by finding satisfaction in more neutral feelings. It can easily be read as a critique of insufficiently refined hedonism.

The same applies to the case of becoming conceited around *samādhi* attainments mentioned above. That discourse explains how conceit leads to neglecting the practice, *and also* how if one does not fall for that and sticks to the practice, then *samādhi* will bear the fruit of knowing and seeing, and so on<sup>357</sup>—again, no suggestion of less *samādhi*. Complacency is a danger on the

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355 AN ii 165: *seyyathāpi, bhikkhave, puriso lepagatena hatthena sākhaṃ gaṇheyya, tassa so hattho saṃjeyya pi gaṇheyya pi bajjheyya pi; evamevaṃ kho, bhikkhave, bhikkhu aññataraṃ santaṃ cetovimuttiṃ upasampajja viharati. so sakkāyanirodhaṃ manasi karoti. tassa sakkāyanirodhaṃ manasi karoto sakkāyanirodhe cittaṃ na pakkhandati nappasīdati na santiṭṭhati nādhimuccati. tassa kho evaṃ, bhikkhave, bhikkhuno na sakkāyanirodho pātikaṅkho. (...) seyyathāpi, bhikkhave, puriso suddhena hatthena sākhaṃ gaṇheyya, tassa so hattho neva saṃjeyya na gaṇheyya na bajjheyya; evamevaṃ kho, bhikkhave, bhikkhu aññataraṃ santaṃ cetovimuttiṃ upasampajja viharati. so sakkāyanirodhaṃ manasi karoti. tassa sakkāyanirodhaṃ manasi karoto sakkāyanirodhe cittaṃ pakkhandati pasīdati santiṭṭhati adhimuccati. tassa kho evaṃ, bhikkhave, bhikkhuno sakkāyanirodho pātikaṅkho.*

356 The reference is to the cessation of personality (*sakkāyanirodha*), not to insight into personality view (*sakkāyaditṭhi*). Personality (*sakkāya*) refers to the five bundles of clinging (*pañc’ upādānakkhandhā*) (e.g. MN i 299). The commentary to the *Jambālī Sutta* glosses *sakkāyanirodha* as ‘the ceasing of personality reckoned as existence in the three planes’ of sense desire, form and the formless (Mp iii 153). Another commentary explains it as the absence of both the five bundles and the craving that produces them (Sv iii 991-2). At DN iii 240, *sakkāyanirodha* parallels states like the formless attainments. And in general *sakkāyanirodha* mirrors how, for example, feeling originates in contact, its cessation is the ceasing of contact, and one gets there through the noble eightfold path. So, it is either a state of *samādhi* with no contact (cessation) or the ultimate lack of phenomenal, embodied experience (not being reborn). All commentaries say the cessation of personality is nirvana, as is the cessation of contact, the third noble truth (Mp iii 404). Only one text (MN iii 284) lends itself both to this cessationist-*samādhi* reading and to a more ‘insight’ reading.

357 MN i 196: *so tāya samādhisampadāya na majjati nappamajjati na pamādaṃ āpajjati, appamatto samāno nānādassanaṃ ārādheti.*

spiritual path generally, and other discourses relate it to the factors of stream-entry<sup>358</sup> or ascetic mortification,<sup>359</sup> which does not even feel good.

In a few publications, Anālayo has also mentioned the *Hatthisāriputta Sutta* (AN 6.60) and its parallel. This is another passage he uses to ground his views about liberating potential. These texts report how Citta disrobes despite his meditative attainments,<sup>360</sup> and so they present the benefits of *jhāna* as reversible.<sup>361</sup> Yet Anālayo omits how the text continues: the Buddha predicts Citta will soon remember renunciation, and indeed shortly afterwards Citta returns to the holy life and becomes liberated.<sup>362</sup> Is this not a tale of a temporal lapse, a crisis of faith? If it says one can stray after *jhāna*—which it does—it also says *jhāna* can leave an imprint strong enough to get one back on track. This text helps my point. For it is a clear argument against infallibility and not against soteriological value or potential—quite the opposite, if we consider how it ends!<sup>363</sup> Moreover, as Wynne observes, the *Hatthisāriputta Sutta* does not say insight is the solution to the problem it lays out.<sup>364</sup> We may find that a reasonable assumption, but ultimately we have no way of knowing how Citta finally becomes awakened.

I would not want to misrepresent Anālayo: he does not dismiss *jhāna* altogether. From the passages above he infers it must be combined with insight because by itself it ‘does not suffice to ensure that sensual passion does not overwhelm the mind on a later occasion’.<sup>365</sup> I have already argued that not being a sufficient condition for awakening does not constitute a meaningful critique of a path element, it is not how the early discourses think, and the point is that spiritual feelings are a *necessary* condition. Nevertheless, and without questioning the role of wisdom, the interesting thing is that Anālayo’s point is the exact opposite of the Buddha’s explicit words to Mahānāma, discussed earlier: that ‘truly seeing with wisdom’ is not enough

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358 SN v 398.

359 DN iii 43.

360 For the similes in various recensions of this discourse, see Anālayo, *Early Buddhist Meditation Studies*, p. 114.

361 Besides *jhāna*, this also applies to the ‘signless collectedness of mind’ (*animitta cetosamādhī*).

362 AN iii 399: *te bhikkhū bhagavantaṃ etadavocuṃ: ‘citto, bhante, hatthisāriputto imāsaṃ ca imāsaṃ ca vihārasamāpattīnaṃ lābhī, atha ca pana sikkhaṃ paccakkhāya hīnāyāvattati’ ti. ‘na, bhikkhave, citto ciraṃ sarissati nekkhammassā’ ti. atha kho citto hatthisāriputto nacirass’ eva kesamassuṃ ohāretvā kāsāyāni vatthāni acchādetvā agārasmā anagāriyaṃ pabbajī. (...) aññataro ca panāyasmā citto hatthisāriputto arahataṃ ahoṣīti.*

363 I would question it shows ‘drawbacks’ of *jhāna* in the sense of the other examples above, as in increasing unskillfulness and decreasing skillfulness; but even if it does it certainly does not endorse that potential drawbacks erase liberating potential.

364 Wynne, ‘Text-Critical History Is Not Exegesis’, p. 92.

365 Anālayo, ‘Brief Criticism of Two Paths Theory’, p. 46.

and must be complemented with *jhāna*.<sup>366</sup> An equally reasonable inference from those passages, and consistent with the words to Mahānāma, would be that one needs to keep at it for long enough so that defilements are destroyed, and not assume that just ticking the box of this or that attainment does the job.

As an example, the Discourse at Sāpūga (*Sāmuḡiya Sutta*, AN 4.194) presents four things ‘to purify beings, to overcome sorrow and grief, to drive away pain and sadness, to attain the path and realise nirvana’—a phrase famously applied to *satipatthāna*.<sup>367</sup> The second of these four things is the *jhānas*, and one must strive to perfect them, or if perfected then protect them with wisdom; which of course gives wisdom a role, while also expressing a need to maintain them.<sup>368</sup> This does not say *jhāna* cannot overcome sensual passion, but it can suggest another susceptibility for which wisdom has more need to watch out: views (*dittthi*). We turn to these now.

For Anālayo, the *Brahmajāla Sutta* (DN 1) presents *jhāna* ‘as a source for the arising of mistaken views’.<sup>369</sup> I would like to qualify this claim. While I concur with Anālayo and Nathan Katz that the *Brahmajāla Sutta* provides an analysis of view formation, I am less convinced it is mainly a psychological analysis<sup>370</sup> in a sense that would support seeing *jhāna* as inherently dangerous, ineffective, or prone to clinging. For what matters in this discussion, I see the *Brahmajāla Sutta* as a wide epistemological critique, which Stephen Evans sums up well.<sup>371</sup> I do not think its target is the soteriological value of spiritual pleasure—and even less, specifically, greed for it. While there are psychological elements in the text, I would not dismiss doxographic ones as Anālayo and Katz do.

The *Brahmajāla Sutta* warns against building metaphysical or cosmological beliefs on the basis of phenomenal experience. In this, both the Pali and Chinese versions foreground the role of

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366 MN i 91.

367 AN ii 194-95.

368 Insight into the four noble truths and liberation equally need to be maintained with wisdom.

369 Anālayo, ‘Brief Criticism of Two Paths Theory’, p. 47.

370 Anālayo, ‘Brief Criticism of Two Paths Theory’, pp. 47–48; Anālayo, *Early Buddhist Meditation Studies*, p. 171; see also *The Discourse on the All-Embracing Net of Views: The Brahmajāla Sutta and Its Commentaries*, ed. by Bhikkhu Bodhi, 2nd edn (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 2007).

371 He identifies the following main critiques: taking limited experience as exhaustive, arguing from lack of evidence, and trusting conditioned experience as a reliable source of knowledge about the unconditioned or ultimate. See Stephen A Evans, ‘Epistemology of the Brahmajāla Sutta’, *Buddhist Studies Review*, 26.1 (2009), 67–84 (pp. 69–71, 80–81); also Paul Fuller, chap. 5.

feeling, the Chinese puts a bit more emphasis on craving,<sup>372</sup> and both culminate by highlighting contact (*phassa*)—for without it, say the discourses, none of those doctrines would arise.<sup>373</sup> (Pleasant) feelings are no exclusive target of the critique. The point is that any view depends on phenomenal experience, and since that can cease, in the end views have no solid ground.<sup>374</sup> Not even when mentioning the four *jhānas* does the text stress clinging to spiritual pleasure as such, but the habit of thinking in terms of Self (*attā*). If, as Gabriel Ellis suggests, *jhāna/samādhi* and *anattā* were often taught separately, and sometimes Brahmins were taught *samādhi* without challenging their metaphysical views,<sup>375</sup> other (non-Brahmin) Buddhists could have raised complaints and criticisms—which we see in the early discourses. But then those are a defense of not-self, not of not-*jhāna*.

However, the *Brahmajāla Sutta*'s section on *jhāna* mentions the belief in liberation where other sections deal with views about the cosmos; and this is significant. The 'epistemic habits' portrayed in that text are both natural to humans and specific to the Buddha's religious context, and a purely psychological reading of the *Brahmajāla*'s critique would miss the latter, which depends on socialisation. Non-ordinary experiences, like meditative states, naturally lend themselves to believing one has accessed a truer reality or nature of the mind.<sup>376</sup> (In a way this discourse predates arguments in comparative mysticism that distinguish the phenomenal aspect of religious experience from its doctrinal interpretation.) I would argue that the tendency to interpret spiritual pleasure in terms of Self is not intrinsic to the pleasant feeling—and the *Brahmajāla* does not claim it is. Rather, it is intrinsic to religious doctrines and

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372 See, for example, Bhikkhu Anālayo, 'Views and the Tathāgata: A Comparative Study and Translation of the Brahmajāla in the Chinese Dirgha-Āgama', in *Buddhist and Pāli Studies in Honour of The Venerable Professor Kakkapallīye Anuruddha*, ed. by Y Karunadasa and K. L. Dhammajoti (University of Hong Kong, 2009), pp. 183–234 (p. 217). Anālayo's translation of T i 93c20-22 is more accurate than Cheng Jianhua's, which parallels the Pali—available at <https://suttacentral.net/da21/en/cheng> [Accessed: 29 November 2022]. I owe this observation to Benedetta Lomi.

373 DN i 42-43, T i 93c23.

374 Hence Wynne's remark that one could interpret the critique of views in meditative-cessationist terms, though why 'not very convincingly' I am not sure—Wynne, 'Text-Critical History Is Not Exegesis', p. 92. Philosophically, it is interesting that an insight about the dependence of views on phenomenal experience equally depends on experiencing first-hand the cessation of phenomenal experience—there is no reason to think the insight is merely an inference. To prevent this argument from being self-undermining, the Buddha adds he does not even cling to *that* insight either. I think the Buddha would agree with scholars who root Indian philosophy in meditative states, and the *Brahmajāla Sutta* still provides a doxography even if as a byproduct of its 'actual' psychological point.

375 Ellis, pp. 73–76.

376 Johannes Bronkhorst, 'Can Religion Be Explained?: The Role of Absorption in Various Religious Phenomena', *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion*, 29.1 (2017), 1–30 <<https://doi.org/10.1163/15700682-12341375>>; Gethin, 'The Jhānas', pp. 192–94.

habits practitioners bring along with them, and which are the real target of the discourse.<sup>377</sup> In other words, the relation between spiritual feelings and views is associative, not causal.

This brings us back to the shared religious idea that the goal, such as union with the Self, is a form of pleasure. It helps us understand, on top of the ‘natural’ explanation, why would anyone consider themselves liberated from an experience of spiritual pleasure in the first place. The Buddha had to anticipate and counter this widespread association that could fuel misunderstandings—hence the caveats—for his teaching takes spiritual pleasure as material for the path rather than a destination sign. Thus, the *Brahmajāla Sutta* suggests changing how one thinks of play pleasure, it does not suggest fearing it, avoiding it, or considering it ineffective; and this is consistent with the rest of the early texts. One could say mistaking the *jhānas* for the final goal is understandable, given how even Buddhists describe the goal as the ending of *dukkha* and the *jhānas* as states devoid of *dukkha*.<sup>378</sup> It takes further and finer contemplation to see that through. Each cluster of views in the *Brahmajāla* is followed by a refrain that the Buddha has understood the arising and ceasing of *vedanā*, as well as its sweetness, drawback and way out. Indeed seeing the contingency of *vedanā* shatters the exclusive association between spiritual pleasure and final liberation.<sup>379</sup> For the latter cannot be contingent.

If Winston King wrote that downgrading *jhāna* is ‘only a declaration of the limits of all means’,<sup>380</sup> I think many of these caveats are about establishing spiritual pleasure precisely *as* means. This seems to me the most charitable interpretation of the tensions between enthusiastic endorsements and caveats about *jhāna*, in that it makes both intelligible and consistent rather than in competition and potentially undermining the other. When the early discourses say *jhāna* does not automatically imply liberation, they do so not as part of a message that spiritual pleasure is ineffective, but as part of a message that spiritual pleasure is precisely ‘*a means to*’ liberation, not liberation itself—even if that too is a type of pleasure. Plus, there is no reason this should feed the mindset that only what is infallible is liberating.

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377 As put by Sujato, the Buddha’s chief innovation is ‘to not interpret *samādhi* experience in terms of a metaphysical “self”’—Sujato, *A History of Mindfulness*, pp. 174–75.

378 AN iii 207.

379 DN i 17, T i 088b12.

380 Winston L. King, *Theravāda Meditation: The Buddhist Transformation of Yōga* (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1992), p. 109.

In a way, it is the same as with all feelings: *vedanā* itself is not ‘the problem’, but the ignorance brought to it.<sup>381</sup> Chapter one mentioned scholars who forget this and instead speak as if *vedanā* was intrinsically problematic, for it triggers defilements. I see a similar tendency with spiritual *vedanā* and it is equally a mistake. This does not prevent us from acknowledging the problems of ignorance+feeling, whether ordinary or spiritual; but it does rule out concluding *any feeling* is inherently dangerous. Every type of feeling has its particular dangers, and in the case of spiritual joy and pleasure it is the association of pleasure with the goal so prevalent in India—*that* should be relinquished. It simply does not follow from this that play pleasure is either effective or ineffective at relinquishing novelty pleasure.

Let me close this chapter with brief philosophical musings. One could say that letting go of sense pleasures and our ordinary state is wisdom, whereas running towards spiritual pleasures is not wisdom, but just a ‘skilful means’ building on our affective preferences. The commentaries already link seeing *dukkha* with *vipassanā*. Yet I have shown such wisdom to equally rely on an affective preference: avoiding the painful. There is a habit of excising wisdom from the body and affect, and placing it in a brain jar. Buddhism has thought along these lines, even though in exploring the early texts in detail we find a constant emphasis on the impossibility to separate the felt from the cognitive, and constant links between wisdom and feelings.

From Buddhaghosa’s recognition that intelligence (*buddhi*) resembles aversion, we can consider certain wisdom as a type of saying no to painful things—the right painful things, that is, conditioned existence marked by suffering (*dukkha*). The purpose of wisdom, says Sāriputta, is abandoning (*pahāna*).<sup>382</sup> But as the Buddha insinuates in discussion with his cousin Mahānāma, ‘truly seeing with wisdom’ may not be enough.<sup>383</sup> To stay only with this ‘wisdom’ always related to painfulness would be a lopsided spiritual development that ignores pleasantness, and early Buddhism wants to distance itself from such an ideology. For our natural drive for pleasure is the other side of wanting to leave pain behind. Aligned with such a drive, spiritual pleasure provides an embodied sense of wellbeing which ‘says’ something wise about human nature. It reveals ordinary existence in a different light. The wisdom of refined hedonism

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382 MN i 293: ‘*paññā kho, āvuso, abhiññatthā pariññatthā pahānatthā’ ti.*

383 For more on this point, see Arbel, *Early Buddhist Meditation*, pp. 62–63.

resembles how the more you learn about wine the less able you are to enjoy cheap ones. Thus, we could say (gradual) liberation always has something to do with both the unpleasant and pleasant segments of the hedonic spectrum. It may be that spiritual pleasures help dissolve the thick fog of gross clinging, clearing up the view for insight about suffering. Or it may be that as a consequence of insight about suffering the mind is lifted to pleasurable heights.

## Chapter 5: How does it feel to wake up?

This last chapter continues to make cuts along the *vedanā* axis, but now the orange is early Buddhism alone. Building on findings from previous chapters, I delineate a shared hedonic curve underlying early Buddhist soteriology. Despite a diversity of practices, most (if not all) lead to experiencing a wholesome positive affect that lubricates the path ahead. The experience of something that feels good but is unrelated to defilement seems to be the axis of the rolling dharma wheel. Unsurprisingly, this mirrors the Buddha's own spiritual journey. The curve describes how religious experience feels better and better, and having peaked, mellows into equanimity. I also suggest that towards the end, the neutral, flat segment of the curve is 'disturbed' by a small wobble before final liberation. Figure 6 is a rough visual representation of the hedonic curve, with the progression I believe more likely normative, and including some possible alternatives.

After describing these waves of feeling that wash practitioners towards the further shore, I dive into them to see the mechanisms underneath. I apply Ariel Glucklich's thesis that religions offer 'patterns of hedonic training' to early Buddhism. Thus, this chapter moves from a 'what', in the first and second sections, to a 'how', in the last. The logic found in this hedonic training—from novelty to mastery to play, based on perceiving absences—strengthens the shared nature of the underlying hedonic curve. In other words, according to Buddhist psychology, it just makes sense things develop in this way. Seen from the viewpoint of *vedanā*, early Buddhism is a coherent system of taming and refining not just our cognitive abilities but our affective and hedonic ones as well. It is also very much about what one feels.

This chapter in particular highlights my approach to intertextuality, alluded to in the introduction. Intertextuality uses the meaning of one text to elucidate another. I privilege the interpretation that the early discourses, in their variety, convey some core, coherent ideas. I do not deny divergent voices in the texts. Yet while some have expressed the primary job of

scholarship is to find these divergences,<sup>1</sup> it seems to me that finding convergence among the myriad teachings of the early Buddhist texts is a worthwhile (if not prior) task. Why? Because, to take one example, if the *jhānas*, the awakening factors and the gladness formula overlap considerably, the chance is big they are trying to describe the same single process, one which is central to early Buddhism. (Then, we can better contrast this with competing ideas, for identifying the mainstream accentuates what is alternative.) These core ideas prick my interest more than the particular formulas in which they curdled. With this, I am stating an approach that treats certain models or codified formulas as all versions of the same basic idea. This requires some discussion.

In the famous 2001 French film, a kid tells Amélie Poulain: ‘when a finger points to the sky, the fool looks at the finger’.<sup>2</sup> I want to say we have several fingers pointing at the moon and this moon is worthy of study. However, unlike other scholars I do not necessarily ascribe historical reality to this moon, as in being what the Buddha *actually* taught,<sup>3</sup> or in order to recover a ‘pre-canonical Buddhism’.<sup>4</sup> Nor do I check fingers against each other to discover which one tells the truth and shows us the real moon.<sup>5</sup> Rather, the moon is a theoretical construct, it symbolises the shared direction of the fingers. The content of these core ideas, and not their historicity, is the object of this chapter. But still we *can* say they must constitute undeniable features of the earliest phase of Buddhist thought—as far as we can access. Otherwise, none of the fingers pointing in that direction would make sense.<sup>6</sup>

A good example of this is dependent arising (*paṭiccasamuppāda*). Roderick Bucknell has studied the various formulations of this principle.<sup>7</sup> Despite the twelve-link version having won the

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1 Alexander Wynne, ‘Sariputta or Kaccāna? A Preliminary Study of Two Early Buddhist Philosophies of Mind and Meditation’, *Journal of the Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies*, 14 (2018), 77–107 (p. 99); see comments on Vetter and Schmithausen in C. W. Huntington Jr, ‘History, Tradition, and Truth’, *History of Religions*, 46.3 (2007), 187–227 (p. 211 ff).

2 *Le Fabuleux Destin d’Amélie Poulain*, dir. by Jean-Pierre Jeunet (Miramax, 2001).

3 Sujato and Brahmāli, chap. 4; Gombrich, *What the Buddha Thought*, p. 1 ff; Bronkhorst, *Buddhist Teaching in India*, pp. 7–8; Wynne, *The Origin of Buddhist Meditation*, p. 2; Alexander Wynne, ‘Did the Buddha Exist?’, *Journal of the Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies*, 16.0 (2019) <<http://jocbs.org/index.php/jocbs/article/view/193>> [accessed 18 December 2020].

4 Christian Lindtner, ‘The Problem of Precanonical Buddhism’, *Buddhist Studies Review*, 14.2 (1997), 109–39.

5 Anālayo, *Comparative Majjhima*, p. xxvi; Anālayo, ‘“Visions of the Buddha”: A Critical Reply’, p. 12. One could say I am following Anālayo’s criterion of coherence, but applied to general principles and themes rather than smaller units such as paragraphs, phrases, or items mentioned in a *sutta*.

6 I leave to others the task of figuring out the origin of these features: whether in a single historical figure, a generation of early Buddhists, etc.

7 Bucknell, ‘Conditioned Arising Evolves’.

competition, scholars do not attack other versions as illegitimate, such as the nine-link version in the *Mahānidāna Sutta* (DN 15).<sup>8</sup> Rather, they agree all versions express the same basic idea.<sup>9</sup> They are, to extend Shulman’s approach in his critique of the comparative method, versions of each other.<sup>10</sup> Just like with conditionality, we have various formulations of collectedness (*samādhi*), some more codified than others. One of the less codified speaks of collectedness with and without thinking and reflection, with and without joy, with pleasantness and with equanimity.<sup>11</sup> It is hard to not see this model and the *jhānas* as versions of each other, for example—the variables of the former are factors of the latter, and both are called a ‘comfortable dwelling’ (*phāsuwihāra*).<sup>12</sup> Thus, here I take further the parallels Gethin observed between the *jhānas* and the awakening factors,<sup>13</sup> I add the gladness formula and others, and argue we can see them all as versions of each other. To go back to the metaphor: the moon is what all these are reciprocal versions of.

## Surfing towards the further shore

In this section I draw the shared, underlying hedonic curve of early Buddhism—the rise from pain to pleasure, the flattening towards neutral, and the final wobble—and I analyse what those feelings are in each of the formulas. But first let us take it from the variety of *samādhi* models I began to sketch in the introduction. The *Dasuttara Sutta* (DN 34) contains another two alternative models: one mentioning only the presence or absence of thinking and reflection,<sup>14</sup> and a definition of right collectedness as ‘suffused with joy, pleasure, mind, brightness, a theme

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8 DN ii 55.

9 Steven Collins, *Selfless Persons: Imagery and Thought in Theravāda Buddhism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 106; Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism*, pp. 65–66; David J. Kalupahana, *Causality: The Central Philosophy of Buddhism* (Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1986), p. 141; Payutto, p. 157.

10 Shulman questions the feasibility, desirability and value of comparing different renditions of a discourse in order to identify which is the earlier and therefore truer one—or what elements in it are earlier and truer. Instead, he prefers to see texts as versions of each other. See Shulman, ‘The Play of Formulas in the Early Buddhist Discourses’, p. 581.

11 MN iii 162: *so kho ahaṃ, anuruddhā, savitakkampi savicāraṃ samādhiṃ bhāvesiṃ, avitakkampi vicāramattaṃ samādhiṃ bhāvesiṃ, avitakkampi avicāraṃ samādhiṃ bhāvesiṃ, sappītikampi samādhiṃ bhāvesiṃ, nīppītikampi samādhiṃ bhāvesiṃ, sātasahagatampi samādhiṃ bhāvesiṃ, upekkhāsahagatampi samādhiṃ bhāvesiṃ.*

12 MN i 207. In the case mentioned above, it is understood that the *samādhi* the Buddha speaks of is the *phāsuwihāra* he asked about earlier in the discourse, at MN iii 157.

13 Beyond both models sharing items, both rely on withdrawal (*viveka*) as well. See Gethin, *The Buddhist Path to Awakening*, p. 162 ff.

14 DN iii 274.

for review'.<sup>15</sup> There continues to be a lot of overlap.<sup>16</sup> Elsewhere, all four 'divine dwellings' (*brahmavihāra*) and all four *satipaṭṭhānas* are called a *samādhi* that should be developed with and without thinking and reflection, with and without joy, with pleasantness and with equanimity,<sup>17</sup> so that one will be comfortable (*phāsu*) whatever one does. We should note both sets of four are linked to the awakening factors,<sup>18</sup> whose fourth element is joy 'with thinking and reflection' and 'without thinking and reflection'.<sup>19</sup> In describing *satipaṭṭhāna* practice, the *Dantabhūmi Sutta* (MN 125) seems to speak of something akin to the first *jhāna*, since with the further pacification of thinking it mentions entering the second.<sup>20</sup> *Samādhi* can also be qualified as 'boundless' (*appamāṇa*), which is how the divine dwellings are called, and as pleasant both now and in the future,<sup>21</sup> something which elsewhere refers to *jhāna*.<sup>22</sup> Are the texts not acknowledging there are many ways to present the common process of what happens to the mind through spiritual practice?

The Nun's Quarters (*Bhikkhunupassaya Sutta*, SN 47.10) expands on how to develop *satipaṭṭhāna* along the 'variables' just mentioned:<sup>23</sup> when tensions or distractions arise, the meditator should think and reflect on an inspiring theme, and once this has had the desired effect—explained using the gladness formula, with its joy and pleasure—they should withdraw and dwell without thinking and reflection, knowing they are internally mindful and happy<sup>24</sup> (*sukham asmī*). This not only brings *jhānic* factors into *satipaṭṭhāna*,<sup>25</sup> but implies that successful *satipaṭṭhāna*

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15 DN iii 278: *pañcaṅgiko sammāsamādhi pītipharaṇatā, sukhaparaṇatā, cetoparaṇatā, ālokaparaṇatā, paccavekkhaṇanimittam.*

16 The *Pañcaṅgika Sutta* (AN 5.28) tops up the four *jhānas* with this 'theme for review' (*paccavekkhaṇanimitta*) at AN iii 27.

17 AN 8.63 at AN iv 300.

18 For the case of the *brahmavihāras*, see SN 46.54 (at SN v 119). Associating *satipaṭṭhāna* with the awakening factors is more widespread, such as in the *Ānāpānassatī Sutta*'s opening statement that developing the former fulfils the latter.

19 SN v 111: *yada pi, bhikkhave, savitakkasavicārā pīti tada pi pītisambojjhaṅgo, yada pi avitakkaavicārā pīti tada pi pītisambojjhaṅgo.*

20 This has been spotted by Tse-Fu Kuan and Keren Arbel. MN 78 (at MN ii 23) is also invoked here: it suggests unskilful thinking goes away in the first *jhāna*, and skilful thinking in the second—Tse-Fu Kuan, 'The Four Satipaṭṭhānas in Early Buddhism', *Satyābhisamaya: A Buddhist Studies Quarterly*, 17 (2001), 154–209 (pp. 181–85); Arbel, *Early Buddhist Meditation*, p. 88. However, Anālayo has spotted two occasions where, after the subsiding of thought, one parallel jumps to the second *jhāna* while the other includes the first—Anālayo, *Early Buddhist Meditation Studies*, p. 124; Anālayo, 'The First Absorption', pp. 79–80.

21 AN iii 24, DN iii 279.

22 MN i 309. However, at MN i 315 it refers to moral conduct, deriving mastery pleasure from it.

23 SN v 156.

24 Here, my translation 'happy' for *sukham* is only due to the English language: it is weird to say 'I am pleasant' or 'I feel pleasant'.

25 Some discussion on this can be found in Kuan, 'The Four Satipaṭṭhānas', pp. 179–81.

practice is supposed to feel good, sharing the same hedonic progression of other formulas.

Likewise, the Discourse on the Cooks (*Sūda Sutta*, SN 47.8) says *satipaṭṭhāna* succeeds when the mind becomes collected and defilements are abandoned, which then leads to a ‘pleasant dwelling’ (*sukhavihāra*).<sup>26</sup> This expression features in the stock definition of the third *jhāna*,<sup>27</sup> is an epithet of *all four jhānas*,<sup>28</sup> it appears related to mindfulness of breathing<sup>29</sup> and to meditation more generally,<sup>30</sup> but we also find it in not overtly meditative usages.<sup>31</sup> In these, it may convey how Buddhist practice lessens *dukkha*, making one feel better in an overall sense. But in the present discourse the simile amplifies the meditative hedonic dimension: just as a cook who prepares dishes for the king must ensure the king enjoys them and must adjust the recipes to the king’s liking, the meditator must ensure the mind finds comfort and pleasure, adjusting the practice to that end. Lastly, this discourse mentions abandoning defilements, which is both part of *satipaṭṭhāna* and the starting point of *jhāna*.<sup>32</sup> It should not surprise that right mindfulness—the four *satipaṭṭhānas*—and right collectedness—often the four *jhānas*—appear in that order on the noble eightfold path.

Against all these considerations, to challenge whether the four *jhānas* were the original content or stock definition of right collectedness (*sammā samādhi*) looks futile.<sup>33</sup> There are too many internal cross-references among the myriad expressions of right collectedness—and those not using ‘right’ but still recommended, which amounts to the same thing—for that challenge to mean much. Clearly, what the *jhāna* formula *describes* fits what other mentions of the *samādhi* sanctioned by the Buddha describe too. Hence, Sujato is justified in claiming that ‘[a]ll of the basic statements on the function of *satipaṭṭhāna* in the path confirm that its prime role is to support *samādhi*, that is, *jhāna*’.<sup>34</sup> Again, to take various formulations as complementary has

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26 SN v 150. The Chinese parallel (SĀ 616 at T ii 172b23) does not differ in this regard.

27 E.g., DN i 75.

28 DN iii 113, DN iii 223, MN i 33, MN i 41, MN i 354, MN iii 11, MN iii 97, SN ii 278, AN ii 23, AN ii 36, AN ii 88, AN iii 114, AN iii 131, AN iii 262, and a few more in AN.

29 SN v 326, AN v 328. It also appears in Chinese parallels, see K. L. Dhammajoti, ‘The Sixteen-Mode Mindfulness of Breathing’, *Journal of the Centre for Buddhist Studies, Sri Lanka*, VI (2008), 1–38 (p. 1).

30 SN ii 239, SN iii 169, AN iii 212.

31 MN i 23, AN iv 363, MN i 459, MN iii 153.

32 MN i 181, MN i 270, EĀ 12.1—see Sujato, *A History of Mindfulness*, p. 294. At MN iii 136, *satipaṭṭhāna* happens *after* abandoning the hindrances, as *jhāna* usually does.

33 Bhikkhu Anālayo, ‘Definitions of Right Concentration in Comparative Perspective’, *Singaporean Journal of Buddhist Studies*, 5 (2019), 9–39; Bhikkhu Anālayo, *Developments in Buddhist Meditation Traditions: The Interplay Between Theory and Practice* (Barre, Massachusetts: Barre Center for Buddhist Studies, 2022), pp. 118–37.

34 Sujato, *A History of Mindfulness*, pp. 182–83. For a response to Sujato, see Anālayo, ‘The Role of Mindfulness

more explanatory power than seeing them in competition. The strength of my current argument lies not in any single piece of evidence, which could be undermined if it lacks a Chinese parallel, for example, but in the overall amount and diversity of evidence.

When Anālayo defends that the four *jhānas* were not the original definition of *sammā samādhi*,<sup>35</sup> his argument depends on a logically prior commitment to the idea that the various explanations he compares point to different phenomena, rather than being alternative ways of describing the same thing—fingers pointing to the same moon. He states that the stock formula of *sammā samādhi* as the four *jhānas* ‘is only found in three instances. In contrast, four instances define right concentration without any reference to the four absorptions’.<sup>36</sup> (Coincidentally, the three instances are also the only three times the phrase ‘*katamo ca, bhikkhave, sammāsamādhi*’—what, mendicants, is right collectedness?<sup>2</sup>—ever appears in the Pali discourses.) My question concerns what we infer from this and the relevance it has. Because those other four definitions, discussed below, can still be interpreted as compatible with *jhāna*, as describing the same kind of experience the *jhāna* model points to. This is the ‘prior commitment’ in reading these formulas which is quite hard to justify—both Anālayo’s and mine—but I think treating them as compatible brings more harmony to the texts, gives rise to simpler explanations, and makes better sense of the internal cross-references we find in the discourses and which I surveyed above. Unfortunately I cannot deal with all of Anālayo’s arguments, as it would take us too much off track, but I hope to give enough of a sense of his approach and mine in the next two paragraphs.<sup>37</sup>

Anālayo lists explanations of *sammā samādhi* that instead of mentioning *jhāna*, describe it as a *samādhi* supported by the other factors of the eightfold path.<sup>38</sup> But why need this exclude *jhāna*?

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in the Cultivation of Absorption’, p. 2342.

35 See two previous notes for references.

36 Anālayo, *Developments in Meditation Traditions*, p. 118.

37 In terms of a bigger point related to the comparative methodology: Anālayo shows how parallels to the Pali texts defining *sammā samādhi* as the four *jhānas* do not mention the four *jhānas* (p. 120 ff). The first simply lists it without defining it—in fact, it lists *all* path factors without defining *any* of them; the second mentions a settled, undistracted, absorbed mind in relation to several contemplations; and the third describes a unified mind with various adjectives. I believe it is still possible to read those parallels as certainly different fingers pointing to the same moon. The second instance (MĀ 31 at T i 469b24) could be understood as the maturation of certain contemplations, rather than an ‘insight’ type of practice starkly opposed to *jhāna*. (As I develop in this chapter, I see depth of absorption/concentration as a variable of the process described both in *jhāna* and in *other formulas*, rather than a fixed feature of it.) So, while discovering how those parallels define *sammā samādhi* without recourse to the four *jhānas* may indeed be surprising, I am less sure of how ‘consequential’ (p. 123) it is.

38 Anālayo, *Developments in Meditation Traditions*, p. 123 ff.

Instead of an either/or mentality, we can read them compatibly, declaring *jhāna* as supported by the previous path factors—which is congruent with seeing *satipatthāna* as leading to *jhāna*, as defended above by Sujato. Another two definitions that do not explicitly list the four *jhānas* and therefore Anālayo dismisses—as in not counting as evidence for the *jhānas* being ‘originally’ the content of *sammā samādhi*—are found in the *Dasuttara Sutta*. One, already mentioned in my survey above, is the *samādhi* ‘suffused with joy, pleasure, mind, brightness, a theme for review’.<sup>39</sup> While acknowledging differences, I see enough overlap to treat this as another finger pointing to the same moon, especially considering the passage he himself cites of a five-factored right *samādhi* that lists the four *jhānas* followed by this admittedly mysterious ‘theme for review’.<sup>40</sup> The other is *sammā samādhi* as giving rise to the knowledge that it is pleasant now and has a pleasant result. Considering how another discourse<sup>41</sup> explains the way of practice that is pleasant now and has a pleasant result as the four *jhānas*, by the transitive law, as it were, the *Dasuttara Sutta* here speaks of *sammā samādhi* as the four *jhānas*. The *samādhi* is also called noble (*ariya*) and spiritual (*nirāmisa*), and something one enters into and emerges from—all attributes we can associate with *jhāna*.

Anālayo also attaches significance to the inclusion or omission of ‘right’ (*sammā*) in discussions of *samādhi*, especially when a Pali text contains it but its parallel(s) do not.<sup>42</sup> Now, for instance, when various discourses identify the *samādhi* the Buddha recommended or cultivated himself, and that lead to liberation, as the *jhānas*,<sup>43</sup> how would the absence of the word ‘*sammā*’ in those discourses be significant? It appears commonsensical to me that this is what ‘right’ *samādhi* means—the *samādhi* one should cultivate—otherwise the logic of those discourses makes no sense. Why would these not count as evidence in the discussion of *sammā samādhi*? It begs a very general question: why would any Buddhist discourse speak of a not-right *samādhi* except if criticising it, which is not the case with any of these examples? I feel that the compatible approach I take provides easier explanations than seeing these different formulations presumably as having experiential referents different enough so as to constitute distinct

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39 DN iii 278: *pañcaṅgiko sammāsamādhi pūṭipharanātā, sukhaṭharanātā, cetopharanātā, ālokaṭharanātā, paccavekkhaṇanimittam.*

40 AN iii 25.

41 MN i 309.

42 Anālayo, *Developments in Meditation Traditions*, p. 124 ff, 130–33. p. 124 ff, 130–33. He considers that the context does not imply rightness either, but if this context differs from the Pali one we are not told. At other times, he does consider ‘rightness’ is implicit.

43 MN i 22, MN i 117, SN iv 263.

‘things’, a perspective required for the enterprise of finding that the true or earlier meaning of *sammā samādhi* is ‘this as opposed to that’.

My focus, though, is not *samādhi* as such but feelings. I want to show that no matter what path of practice one is treading, from the viewpoint of *vedanā* they all lead to the same clearing in the forest: a wholesome positive affect. For this I only need to list the evidence gathered both in the third chapter and in this one so far: *satipaṭṭhāna* leads to a pleasant dwelling and should be cultivated with joy and pleasure; the same applies to the *brahmavihāras*; mindfulness of breathing leads to joy and pleasure;<sup>44</sup> the awakening factors include spiritual joy, which is *jhānic* joy;<sup>45</sup> the recollections (*anussati*) lead to the gladness formula, essentially an expanded version of the awakening factors adding ‘*sukha*’,<sup>46</sup> and they also lead to a pleasant dwelling;<sup>47</sup> so do restraint of the senses,<sup>48</sup> visceral attention (*yoniso manasikāra*),<sup>49</sup> dwelling vigilantly in solitude,<sup>50</sup> and experiencing ‘the point of the teaching’;<sup>51</sup> observing the five bundles of clinging come and go leads to gladness and joy too;<sup>52</sup> regarding them as transient, painful and not-self leads to a pleasant dwelling;<sup>53</sup> and the same contemplation directed to sensory experience brings renunciant happiness (*nekkhammasita somanassa*).<sup>54</sup>

We can see how for early Buddhism spiritual pleasure is not just one option on the path: it is the normative, expected and logical outcome of the practice. Too much nit-picky attention to detail and collating of formulas in order to tell differences apart conceals the view of this shared affective-hedonic clearing all practices open—whether they be classed as *samatha* or *vipassanā*—and we can miss the forest for the trees.<sup>55</sup> Thus, before we continue surfing the hedonic curve, I want to suggest that a recent focus in our field can obscure what I am putting forward.

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44 MN iii 82.

45 SN v 68, SN v 111. See chapter three: ‘What is this thing called joy (pīti)?’.

46 AN iii 285, AN v 329-34, SN i 203, Th 382.

47 AN iii 212.

48 SN iv 78.

49 DN iii 288.

50 SN v 399.

51 DN iii 241, DN iii 279, AN iii 22.

52 DhP 373-374. This fits another passage presenting this contemplation as *sammā samādhi* (AN ii 202).

53 SN iii 169.

54 MN iii 217.

55 I am not advocating for a superficial reading of the early discourses, just one that sees common themes as very significant, for they harmonise diverse data.

If Buddhist Studies issued a ‘greatest hits’ album of the last decades, the Discourse on Establishing Mindfulness (*Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, MN 10) would likely be the first track,<sup>56</sup> no doubt due to the popularity of secular mindfulness.<sup>57</sup> Yet, it remains a disconcerting text,<sup>58</sup> a compendium without a user’s manual.<sup>59</sup> Only the contemplation of the body (*kāyānupassanā*) reads as specific exercises—and maybe some bits in the contemplation of *dharmā*—while the contemplations of feeling (*vedanānupassanā*) and mind (*cittānupassanā*) seem more like experiential aspects one is aware of, perhaps during those specific exercises. Moreover, the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* does not read as an account of progress in meditation. In the previous chapter I pointed out passages suggesting that a meditator does not usually start by discerning feelings non-reactively, which is rather the outcome of practice.<sup>60</sup> But the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* offers no help in that regard, it does not pinpoint the practice of observing feelings at any point on the journey.

We can boil down *vedanānupassanā* into knowing what one is feeling, ‘where’ it comes from, and how it relates to liberation. These are the three *vedanā* axes or variables I established at the beginning of the thesis. The first is hedonic tone: pleasant, painful, or neutral.<sup>61</sup> The second is origin: in this case, bodily or mental.<sup>62</sup> The third is ethics: in this case, carnal or spiritual.<sup>63</sup> Yet

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56 Some examples are: Anālayo, *Satipaṭṭhāna*; Anālayo, *Perspectives on Satipaṭṭhāna*; Kuan, ‘The Four Satipaṭṭhānas’; Kuan, *Mindfulness in Early Buddhism*; Sarah Shaw, *Mindfulness: Where It Comes from and What It Means* (Boulder: Shambhala, 2020); Sujato, *A History of Mindfulness*.

57 On the mindfulness-Buddhism dialogue, see Ajahn Amaro, ‘A Holistic Mindfulness’, *Mindfulness*, 6.1 (2015), 63–73 <<https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-014-0382-3>>; Bhikkhu Anālayo, ‘Mindfulness-Based Interventions and the Four Satipaṭṭhānas’, *Mindfulness*, 10.4 (2019), 611–15 <<https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-019-1097-2>>; Georges Dreyfus, ‘Is Mindfulness Present-Centred and Non-Judgmental? A Discussion of the Cognitive Dimensions of Mindfulness’, *Contemporary Buddhism*, 12.1 (2011), 41–54 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/14639947.2011.564815>>; Rupert Gethin, ‘On Some Definitions of Mindfulness’, *Contemporary Buddhism*, 12.1 (2011), 263–79 (p. 268 ff) <<https://doi.org/10.1080/14639947.2011.564843>>; R. H. Sharf, ‘Is Mindfulness Buddhist? (And Why It Matters)’, *Transcultural Psychiatry*, 52.4, 470–84; *Buddhist Foundations of Mindfulness*, ed. by Edo Shonin, William Van Gordon, and Nirbhay N. Singh, Mindfulness in Behavioral Health, First softcover printing (Cham Heidelberg New York Dordrecht London: Springer, 2016).

58 ‘We believe that this text, despite the overwhelming amount of attention it continues to attract, is still poorly understood, and in great need of a close conceptual and historical analysis’—Wynne, ‘Sariputta or Kaccāna?’, p. 86.

59 Kuan, ‘The Four Satipaṭṭhānas’.

60 SN iii 126, SN iv 208, SN v 317. Also It 46: *samāhito sampajāno sato buddhassa sāvako / vedanā ca pajānāti ...*

61 The Ekāyana Sūtra (EĀ 12.1 at T ii 568a01) parallel emphasises the mutually exclusive nature of hedonic tones by adding that one knows one feels a pleasant feeling and not a painful feeling, etc.

62 This is found in the *Smṛtyupasthāna Sūtra* (MĀ 98 at T 1 582b07), but not in the Pali versions. The *Śāriputrābhidharma* has it too, but using the six senses rather than bodily/mental—Sujato, *A History of Mindfulness*, p. 266. See the following comparative tables: Kuan, *Mindfulness in Early Buddhism*, p. 167; Sujato, *A History of Mindfulness*, p. 306.

63 The *Smṛtyupasthāna Sūtra* of the Sarvāstivāda school adds the distinction ‘sensual’/‘non-sensual’, but this seems only to restate the same principle—Anālayo, *Perspectives on Satipaṭṭhāna*, p. 122. Unlike Anālayo (and Sujato),

if one set off into the forest with only a copy of the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* as one’s guide,<sup>64</sup> I am not sure how much would be clear as to what is supposed to happen through the practice. As if feelings arose a bit randomly—now a carnal pleasant bodily one, now a spiritual painful mental one—and one just had to keep track, this famous text gives no hint that a *vedanā* progression is to be expected: from carnal to spiritual, towards pleasant (and then neutral) feelings. Where we do find this hint is in the statements that frame *satipaṭṭhāna*, which I surveyed above, and in another key meditation text: the Discourse on Mindfulness of Breathing (*Ānāpānassati Sutta*, MN 118).

Steps five and six consist in experiencing joy (*pīti*) and pleasure (*sukha*) while breathing in and out.<sup>65</sup> In line with the shared hedonic curve, the *Ānāpānassati Sutta* does not tell you to be aware of *whatever* feelings happen as you breathe. Rather, it submits that as you meditate you will feel certain *particular* feelings: pleasant ones. And while the discourse does not specify, it only makes sense that they be spiritual. When the sixteen steps are correlated to the four *satipaṭṭhānas*, the discourse connects the second tetrad to feelings saying that close attention to the breath is a kind of feeling.<sup>66</sup> Admittedly a puzzling claim, this could be trying to convey how tuning into the affective-hedonic aspect of experience requires some attentional refinement. If this interpretation is correct, then the passage is placing *vedanānuṃpassanā* not at a very advanced stage but also not as a first step, at least in the context of breath meditation. This fits the gradual—though perhaps not strictly linear—spirit of mindfulness of breathing. (Notice how collectedness *follows* in the next tetrad, exactly as it does in the *jhānas*, the awakening factors and the gladness formula.)

I said that the joy and pleasure of *ānāpānassati* must be spiritual—that is, *nirāmisā pīti* and *nirāmisā sukha*. Since the sixteen steps describe progress, they cannot be carnal feelings; and neither do they sound like the kind that is ethical but not labelled ‘spiritual’, such as joy from

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Kuan translates ‘with desire’ and ‘without desire’—Kuan, *Mindfulness in Early Buddhism*, p. 152; Sujato, *A History of Mindfulness*, p. 261.

64 Here I am referencing and paraphrasing Gethin, who says this of the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta*. Curiously, I will claim that text to be a better guide than the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* in some respects, although their combination is probably the best guidance—Rupert Gethin, ‘On the Practice of Buddhist Meditation According to the Pali Nikāyas and Exegetical Sources’, *Buddhismus in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, 9, 2004, 201–21 (p. 202).

65 MN iii 84. The same is said in parallel versions—Anālayo, ‘Mindfulness of Breathing in the Saṃyukta-Āgama’, p. 139. That *ānāpānassati* is meant to illustrate how to develop *satipaṭṭhāna* has been observed by Anālayo and also by Gethin, *The Buddhist Path to Awakening*, p. 169.

66 MN iii 84: *vedanāsu vedanāññatarāhaṃ, bhikkhave, evaṃ vadāmi yadidaṃ assāsaṃpassāsānaṃ sādhukaṃ manasikāraṃ*. On this expression, see Anālayo, *Comparative Majjhima*, p. 669.

meeting *bhikkhus*, for this is a meditative context. Moreover, the discourse connects *ānāpānassati* with the *bojjhaṅgas*, which has *nirāmisā pīti*. Later Buddhist thought too must have understood *ānāpānassati* feelings as spiritual, since it reads *ānāpānassati* as *jhāna*.<sup>67</sup> For Cousins, the formula of sitting down cross-legged and establishing mindfulness insinuates *jhāna* already.<sup>68</sup> Instead, Anālayo considers that while this practice may lead to *jhāna*, it may also involve lower degrees of collectedness.<sup>69</sup> But from the point of view of *vedanā*, these are all the same feelings: those described in *jhāna*, in the awakening factors, in the gladness formula, and in the Analysis of the Six Spheres (MN 137).

What more can we say of these spiritual feelings? Analysing the gladness formula in chapter three, I established joy (*pīti*) as mental and pleasure (*sukha*) as bodily. I now look more closely at what I think this means in the context of the early Pali discourses, and how exegetical accounts fit with that or not. To begin, *sukha*'s polysemy introduces ambiguity, for sometimes it means pleasant feelings generally and other times bodily pleasure in particular. Since *ānāpānassati* presents them in sequence, one could interpret *sukha* as a more encompassing well-being which is both bodily and mental—so says a Pali commentary,<sup>70</sup> perhaps influenced by conceiving of *pīti* as a *sankhāra*. Besides this polysemy, in chapter three I also laid out how various abhidharma schools (re)interpret joy and pleasure in light of their notion that *jhāna* does not admit sensory awareness, shared by all but the Sautrāntikas. But as Anālayo has rightly argued, the *jhānas* include a bodily dimension: they appear under mindfulness of the body<sup>71</sup> and their similes convey embodiment.<sup>72</sup> Here are the similes for *jhānas* one and two, from the Pali:<sup>73</sup>

Great king, just like a bath attendant or his pupil would scatter bath powder into a bronze vessel and then knead it, sprinkling it with water drop by drop, so that the ball of soap is moist, pervaded

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67 Overviews of this are found in Dhammajoti, ‘The Sixteen-Mode Mindfulness of Breathing’, p. 16 ff; L. S. Cousins, ‘The Sutta on Mindfulness With In and Out Breathing’, in *Buddhist Meditative Praxis: Traditional Teachings and Modern Applications*, ed. by Dhammajoti (Hong Kong: Center of Buddhist Studies University of Hong Kong, 2015), pp. 1–24.

68 Cousins, ‘Mindfulness with In and Out Breathing’, p. 2 ff.

69 Anālayo, ‘Understanding and Practicing the Ānāpānassati-Sutta’, p. 60. In part, Anālayo’s views relate to his reluctance to accept the equation between *pīti* and *bojjhaṅga* and *nirāmisā pīti*—since chapter three touched on this, I will not repeat my arguments here.

70 Sv i 217: *sukhaṃ vedetī ti kāyikam pi cetasikam pi sukhaṃ vedayati*.

71 *Kāyagatāsati Sutta* (MN 119 at MN iii 93).

72 Anālayo, ‘The Second Absorption’, pp. 46–49; also Gethin, ‘The Jhānas’, p. 179.

73 A translation of these from the Chinese can be found in Anālayo, ‘The Gradual Path in the Dīrgha-Āgama’, pp. 8–9.

with moisture inside and out, but not dripping; in the same way, a mendicant fills, drenches and pervades this body with the joy and pleasure born of withdrawal, so that no part of the entire body is unpervaded with the joy and pleasure born of withdrawal.

Great king, just like a deep lake of spring water with no inflow from the east, the south, the west or the north, which the sky does not supply with rain from time to time, would be filled, drenched and pervaded with the cool water welling up from the lake, so that no part of the entire lake would be unpervaded with cool water; in the same way, a mendicant fills, drenches and pervades this body with the joy and pleasure born of collectedness, so that no part of the entire body is unpervaded with the joy and pleasure born of collectedness.<sup>74</sup>

In interpreting this, later exegesis tries to balance its concern for the phenomenology of meditation, characteristic of the early discourses, with its desire to also be very precise, systematic, and avoid any inconsistencies. It struggles between loyalty to the doctrine of no-sensory-awareness and honouring the felt meditative experience as embodied. On the one hand, the commentary to the *Dīgha Nikāya* understands the meditator's body as 'born from action',<sup>75</sup> which means the physical body (*rūpakāya*). The subcommentary confirms this.<sup>76</sup> On the other hand, the *Visuddhimagga* says that one feels pleasure with the mental body (*nāmakāya*). But then, it adds, this has an effect on the physical body once one emerges from *jhāna*.<sup>77</sup> We find similar ideas in Sarvāstivādin sources.<sup>78</sup> This is a characteristic move of the exegetical traditions—resorting to the moments right before or after *jhāna* to smooth out problems of interpretation—which we seldom find in the earlier literature.<sup>79</sup> But with it, they try to account for the embodied nature of meditative experience without giving the wrong impression that

74 DN i 74: *seyyathāpi, mahārāja, dakkho nhāpako vā nhāpakantevāsī vā kaṃsathāle nhānīyacūṇṇāni ākiritvā udakena pariṃphosakam pariṃphosakam sanneyya, sāyaṃ nhānīyaṃṇi snehānugatā snehāparetā santarabāhīrā phutā snehena, na ca paggharaṇī; evameva kho, mahārāja, bhikkhu imameva kāyaṃ vivekajena pītisukhena abhisandeti parisandeti pariṃpūreti pariṃpharati, nāssa kiṃ ci sabbāvato kāyassa vivekajena pītisukhena apphutaṃ hoti. ... seyyathāpi, mahārāja, udakarahado gambhīro ubbhīdodako tassa nevassa puratthimāya disāya udakassa āyamukhaṃ, na dakkhiṇāya disāya udakassa āyamukhaṃ, na pacchimāya disāya udakassa āyamukhaṃ, na uttarāya disāya udakassa āyamukhaṃ, devo ca na kālenakālaṃ sammādhāraṃ anuppaveccheyya. atha kho tamhāva udakarahadā sītā vāridhārā ubbhijjivā tameva udakarahadaṃ sītena vārinā abhisandeyya parisandeyya pariṃpūreyya pariṃphareyya, nāssa kiṃ ci sabbāvato udakarahadassa sītena vārinā apphutaṃ assa. evameva kho, mahārāja, bhikkhu imameva kāyaṃ samādhijena pītisukhena abhisandeti parisandeti pariṃpūreti pariṃpharati, nāssa kiṃ ci sabbāvato kāyassa samādhijena pītisukhena apphutaṃ hoti.*

75 Sv i 217: *imameva kāyaṃ ti imaṃ karajakāyaṃ.*

76 Sv-ṭ i 262. See also Cone, *A - kh*, p. 643.

77 Vism 163 (IV 175). The subcommentary can also be read along these lines: 'Surely it is the mental body whose benefit is thus obtained through joy and pleasure born of withdrawal, but from the utterance starting with 'it pervades' the physical body is meant here, thus he has said 'this body born from action' (Sv-ṭ i 262: *kāmaṃ nāmakāyo pi vivekajena pītisukhena tathāladhupakāro, "abhisandeti" ti ādivacanato pana rūpakāyo idhādhippeto ti āha "imaṃ karajakāyaṃ" ti.*)

78 Kuan, 'Clarification on Feelings', pp. 295–97.

79 A classic case is the *Anupada Sutta* (MN 111 at MN iii 25), where the meditator reviews the content of each *jhāna* upon emerging from it, or according to others while in it. A discussion of this (rather proto-abhidharmic) text can be found in Anālayo, *Early Buddhist Meditation Studies*, p. 117 ff.

one can get *jhānic* pleasure by stimulating the sense of touch, which is the specific meaning of *kāya* in the abhidharma. Instead, such a pleasure originates ultimately from mental factors—I will soon argue that the discourses say something like this too.

Scholarly discussions about this point to how the third *jhāna* formula says the meditator feels pleasure ‘*kāyena*’.<sup>80</sup> Read most literally, this means ‘with the body’. However, Anālayo and Harvey have shown that other discourses use this expression with the formless attainments or ultimate truth, so Anālayo suggests it means ‘with the whole being’.<sup>81</sup> Margaret Cone takes it in a generic sense of ‘the experiencer’,<sup>82</sup> and Sujato translates it as referring to a direct or personal experience.<sup>83</sup> The *Vibhaṅga* suggests that it refers to the bundles of perception, conditioning factors and consciousness.<sup>84</sup> While strange at first sight—these *khandhas* are not entities that can themselves feel pleasure!—this looks like another way to clarify that the *sukha* of the third *jhāna* comes from mental activities. But here I believe the discourses, as they often do, speak phenomenologically, and so in a way what they want to say is much simpler than the tangle exegesis ties itself into.

I suggest the idea of being embodied expresses *kāyena* quite well: ‘one feels pleasure in an embodied way’, or more idiomatically, ‘one feels an embodied pleasure’ (*sukhañ ca kāyena paṭisaṃvedeti*); which may involve, as it is perceived, a sort of tactile experience. This is perhaps what the discourses mean with the ‘bodily’ *nirāmisā sukha*, and what the Sautrāntikas mean when they interpret it as ‘pleasure felt with the physical body’,<sup>85</sup> with no suggestion that it is related to touching things or being touched.<sup>86</sup> Bearing in mind their phenomenological bent, I contend that the early texts see meditators as feeling bodily pleasure during *jhāna* in the same sense they see them as feeling the whole body—even if something like a ‘subtle body’ or a

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80 DN i 75: *puna caparaṃ, mahārāja, bhikkhu pītiyā ca virāgā upekkhako ca viharati sato sampajāno, sukhañ ca kāyena paṭisaṃvedeti, yaṃ taṃ ariyā ācikkhanti ‘upekkhako satimā sukhavihārī’ ti, tatiyaṃ jhānaṃ upasampajja viharati.*

81 I find the suggestion peculiar for a state in which at least four of the five physical senses are dampened if not completely inoperative: this is hardly ‘the whole being’. But I get his point. Anālayo, ‘The Second Absorption’, p. 47; Harvey, ‘The Four Jhānas’, p. 14.

82 Cone, *A - kh*, p. 670.

83 ‘Directly’ (*kāyena*) and ‘direct meditative experience’ (*kāyena phusitvā viharati*) in MN 70, and ‘personally experiencing the bliss’ (*sukhañ ca kāyena paṭisaṃvedeti*) in the *jhāna* formula, e.g. AN 5.28—<https://suttacentral.net/mn70/en/sujato> and <https://suttacentral.net/an5.28/en/sujato> [accessed: March 2023].

84 Vibh 259.

85 Kuan, ‘Clarification on Feelings’, p. 299.

86 It is unclear where Kuan, Bucknell and Arbel would position themselves in this distinction, when claiming that *jhānic sukha* is bodily. See Bucknell, ‘Reinterpreting the Jhānas’, p. 381; Arbel, *Early Buddhist Meditation*, p. 59.

sense of embodiment.<sup>87</sup>

If I can go into a short philosophical detour, I wonder whether Buddhism acknowledges that tactile experience is slightly different from other senses. The Theravāda abhidharma claims feelings born of touch are always either pleasant or unpleasant, whereas those born of seeing, hearing, smelling and tasting are always neutral. And all sensory experience, in fact, is linked back to *phassa*—contact or touch. Touch is the most basic of senses, shared by all organisms, arising early in evolution, and the first one humans develop in gestation. We also have proprioception and interoception, our being embodied locates us in the world. It would be reasonable to think that tactile experience, according to the early texts, is the one that recedes the least into the periphery of awareness during *jhāna*.<sup>88</sup>

The problem (and tangle) of traditional interpretations, except the Sautrāntika, is that in not allowing anything that might sound like the sense of touch, they only leave space for one feeling per *jhāna*, and this requires redefining terms in sometimes quite confusing ways.<sup>89</sup> But *jhānic* bodily pleasure, despite its origin in mental skilfulness, is distinct from mental pleasure: *pīti/somanassa*. The Discourse on Joy (*Pīti Sutta*, AN 5.176)<sup>90</sup> states that when dwelling in the joy of seclusion—the first and second *jhānas*<sup>91</sup>—five things are absent: pain (*dukkha*) and unhappiness (*domanassa*) connected with sense desires (1), with the unskilful (2), and with the skilful (3); pleasure (*sukha*) and happiness (*somanassa*) connected with sense desires (4) and with the unskilful (5). Since it says nothing about *sukha* and *somanassa* connected with the skilful, we must surmise these are present, and we know these mean bodily and mental pleasure.<sup>92</sup>

How do we distinguish these pleasant bodily and mental feelings, since both are felt in an embodied way, and what is their relationship? We must remember that ‘bodily’ (*kāyika*) and ‘mental’ (*cetasika*) refer to the stimulus where a feeling *originates*, more than where it is felt—ugly

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87 Harvey speaks of the ‘experienced ‘body’—Harvey, ‘The Four Jhānas’, p. 6.

88 I am aware something like interoception is not the same as the sense of touch, but it contributes to a felt embodiment that, phenomenologically, is closer to touch than to smell or sound.

89 A Theravādin example: ‘*Sukha* in the first three *jhānas* refers to the *somanassa* faculty, while *sukha* mentioned in the fourth *jhāna* refers to the *sukha* faculty, and *somanassa* mentioned in the fourth *jhāna* is identical with *sukha* in the first three *jhānas*.’—Kuan, ‘Clarification on Feelings’, pp. 294–98.

90 AN iii 206.

91 Beyond a commonsensical interpretation, this is also how the commentary understands it (Mp iii 303).

92 To identify in what *jhāna* does each ‘feeling faculty’ cease, scholars have followed various texts which contradict each other, and most crucially, they all contradict the *Pīti Sutta* and the majority consensus in the early texts: that no unpleasantness, whether bodily or mental, is present during *jhāna*. See Kuan, ‘Clarification on Feelings’, p. 288 ff; Harvey, ‘The Four Jhānas’.

sights, for example, are not experienced as pain in the eyeball. Since the *jhāna* formulas explain both feelings as simultaneous, we need to peek into others to see the causal chain of this process, like the gladness and *bojjhaṅga* process formulas:<sup>93</sup>

When one is glad, joy is born. When the mind is joyful, the body relaxes. With a relaxed body, one experiences pleasure. When one experiences pleasure, the mind becomes collected.<sup>94</sup>

When the mind is joyful the body and mind relax. When the body and mind of a mendicant whose mind is joyful relax, then the awakening factor of relaxation is aroused, cultivated, and perfected in the mendicant. When there is a relaxed body and pleasure, the mind becomes collected.<sup>95</sup>

We all understand that a relaxed body experiences pleasure, even if I cannot translate ‘*passaddhakāyo sukhaṃ vedeti*’ of the first passage in this way, making ‘body’ the grammatical subject.<sup>96</sup> Nonetheless, we can envisage how spiritual bodily pleasure may come about as a result of the body relaxing, rather than being the mere physical counterpart of a mental feeling. Yet, since this physical calming results from joy, bodily pleasure is still causally connected to a mental feeling.

Let us continue surfing. Having peaked in pleasantness, the hedonic curve flattens and goes to neutral feeling, as we can see in the following examples. After *pīti*, *passaddhi* and *samādhi*, the awakening factors culminate in *upekkhā*, equanimity. Similarly, the *pīti* of the first two *jhānas* disappears in the third, which has *upekkhāsukha*, and in the fourth *sukha* is gone and only *upekkhā* remains. As seen above, the last variable mentioned for the *satipatthānas* and *brahmavihāras*, after practising them with pleasantness, is to do so with equanimity. The Analysis of the Six Spheres equally says that one overcomes renunciant happiness by relying on renunciant equanimity.<sup>97</sup> In the case of mindfulness of breathing and the gladness formula, equanimous feeling is not mentioned: the former does not talk about feelings again after joy and pleasure, and the latter stops at *samādhi* before *upekkhā* tends to show up. However, both in the way the gladness formula sometimes continues and in the later stages of breath meditation, we can

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93 For an analysis of the *bojjhaṅga* process formula, see Gethin, *The Buddhist Path to Awakening*, p. 168.

94 DN i 73: *pamuditassa pīti jāyati, pīṭīmanassa kāyo passambhati, passaddhakāyo sukhaṃ vedeti, sukhīno cittaṃ samādhīyati.*

95 MN iii 86: *pīṭīmanassa kāyo pi passambhati, cittaṃ pi passambhati. yasmim samaye, bhikkhave, bhikkhuno pīṭīmanassa kāyo pi passambhati, cittaṃ pi passambhati, passaddhisambojjhaṅgo tasmim samaye bhikkhuno āradho hoti, passaddhisambojjhaṅgaṃ tasmim samaye bhikkhu bhāveti, passaddhisambojjhaṅgo tasmim samaye bhikkhuno bhāvanāpāripūriṃ gacchati. passaddhakāyassa sukhīno cittaṃ samādhīyati.*

96 It is more likely *passaddhakāyo* is a *bahubbhi* compound; there are no other instances of *kāya* being the grammatical subject of *vedeti*.

97 MN iii 220.

assume the presence of equanimity.

Before I go on to explain that, I must anticipate a question: is equanimity a feeling or an attitude? A *vedanā* or a *saṅkhāra*? This connects with chapter two's discussion on evaluative feelings and the porous borders of *vedanā*. There I showed how the early discourses do not kick things out of Feelingtown for including elements of perception (*saññā*) or conditioning factors (*saṅkhāra*), as long as the hedonic aspect is a defining feature of that thing—or, put differently, as long as they want to emphasise the hedonic aspect of that thing. I believe this happens with *upekkhā*. When the discourses define it, they do so as *vedanā*.<sup>98</sup> They classify it into carnal (*sāmisa*) and spiritual (*nirāmisa*), into domestic (*gehasita*) and renunciant (*nekkhammasita*), and apply to it the phrase *ime pañca kāmāguṇe paṭicca uppajjati* ('conditioned by the five strands of sense desire there arises...'), all of which are markers of *vedanā*. At the same time, attitudinal elements are already in the word 'upekkhā', which denotes 'lack of involvement or reaction',<sup>99</sup> and its verb form 'ajjhupekkhati' means to look on impartially or without interfering.<sup>100</sup> But the effort to separate explicitly, on the one hand, equanimity as neutral feeling, and on the other, as neutrality—a mental balance and impartiality (*tatramajjhataṭṭā*), does not come until the abhidharma.<sup>101</sup>

Given what we know about secondary feelings, with their dependence on *saññā* and *saṅkhāras*, it would be strange to divorce neutral feeling and neutrality. Whenever we come to see a given situation in a fairer way than earlier, when we were affected by the biases of our own passions, we also *feel* more neutral with regards to it. A balanced outlook on something must reflect on a hedonic neutral quality. For an imbalanced relationship, either of greed or aversion, would have pleasant or unpleasant secondary feelings accordingly, as we saw with the simile of the second arrow<sup>102</sup> and domestic feelings. This is an important point of Buddhist psychology: *vedanā* reflects one's attitudes and perceptions. It seems to me the discourses emphasise this feeling side more than later literature, and scholars sometimes lose sight of it.

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98 SN v 209: *katamañ ca bhikkhave upekkhindriyaṃ? yaṃ kho bhikkhave kāyikaṃ vā cetasikaṃ vā n' evasātaṃ nāsātaṃ vedayitāṃ, idaṃ vuccati bhikkhave upekkhindriyaṃ. ... tatra bhikkhave yadidaṃ upekkhindriyaṃ adukkhamasukhā sā vedanā datthabbā.*

99 Cone, *A - kh*, p. 488.

100 Cone, *A - kh*, p. 39.

101 Kuan, 'Clarification on Feelings', p. 303; Gethin, *The Buddhist Path to Awakening*, p. 157; Gethin, *Buddhist Maps*, chap. 6.

102 SN iv 207.

Let us go back to the hedonic curve and see the neutral segment as it shows up in various models. I propose that in the *jhāna* model, *upekkhā* does not describe two different kinds of equanimity, one a feeling and another a conditioning factor, but bodily and mental neutral feeling. Thus, the third *jhāna* has neutral mental feeling and pleasant bodily feeling. According to SĀ 483,<sup>103</sup> this is spiritual equanimity (*nirāmisā upekkhā*), whereas its parallel SN 36.31<sup>104</sup> assigns spiritual equanimity only to the fourth *jhāna*. We can see there is debate on where exactly to place this feeling, but not on whether it is a feeling. After all, *jhānic upekkhā* is *upekkhā* unaffected by the underlying tendency to ignorance (*avijjānusaya*),<sup>105</sup> which again marks it as a feeling. While the early texts are not definitive here, another reason to interpret third-*jhāna* equanimity as mental feeling is that it replaces joy—a mental feeling. Let us look at the formula:

Due to joy fading away, they dwell in equanimity, mindful and fully aware, and experience an embodied pleasure, which noble ones describe as ‘dwelling in pleasure, equanimous and mindful’—they enter and dwell in the third *jhāna*. They fill, drench and pervade this body with pleasure without joy, so that no part of the entire body is unpervaded with pleasure without joy.<sup>106</sup>

This transition describes a change of mental feeling from pleasant to neutral, while bodily feeling remains pleasant. This has not been appreciated due to excessive reliance on Theravāda exegesis, which, as I concluded in chapter three, has consequences. This is why Roderick Bucknell, despite arguing like me that equanimity replaces joy, infers that equanimity must be a *saṅkhāra* because so is joy—according to the Theravādins.<sup>107</sup> But I have defended that seeing joy as a *vedanā* captures better the spirit of the discourses. Similarly influenced, Harvey writes that while ‘here the *feeling-tone* is happy, the *attitude* is one of even-minded, balanced equanimity’ (his emphasis).<sup>108</sup> Of course the hedonic change relates to a change of attitude, something made more obvious by translating ‘*virāga*’ not as fading away but as dispassion.<sup>109</sup> Yet, I think the usage of equanimity here at least encompasses neutral feeling, if

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103 T ii 123a23.

104 SN iv 236.

105 MN i 304. As with SN 36.31 at SN iv 236, this discourse speaks of the fourth, not third *jhāna*. The Pali texts are internally consistent in this.

106 DN i 75: *piṭṭhā ca virāgā upekkhako ca viharati sato sampajāno, sukhañ ca kāyena paṭisaṃvedeti, yaṃ taṃ ariyā ācikkhanti ‘upekkhako satimā sukhavihārī’ ti, tatiyaṃ jhānaṃ upasampajja viharati. so imameva kāyaṃ niṣṣīṭikena sukkena abhisandeti paṭisaṃvedeti pariṇāmeti pariṇibbati, nāssa kiñ ci sabbāvato kāyassa niṣṣīṭikena sukkena apphūtaṃ hoti.*

107 An example of this is Bucknell, ‘Reinterpreting the Jhānas’, pp. 380–81.

108 Harvey, ‘The Four Jhānas’, p. 10.

109 Cousins, *Meditations of the Pali Tradition*, p. 46; Gethin, *Sayings of the Buddha*, p. 29.

it does not mainly refer to it—let us remember *jhāna* is a model that centres feeling.

Harvey's view also depends on allowing only one feeling per *jhāna*, the exegetical reluctance regarding bodily feelings as a result of which much needs to be moved around: *sukha* here has to mean pleasant mental feeling, and with that slot taken, equanimity cannot be a feeling at all. (Re)allowing bodily feelings puts things into place with elegant simplicity, it dissolves many difficulties of interpretation, just like stubborn stains washed away with the bath powder of the first *jhāna*. Thus we have pleasure without joy—i.e., with equanimous feeling—where before there was pleasure and joy. The mental feeling has changed, the bodily feeling has stayed the same. This could be what '*upekkhāsukha*' refers to.<sup>110</sup> The commentaries offer no help on whether we should read this compound as a *tappurisa*—'the pleasure of equanimity', like in perceiving neutral feeling as a subtle pleasure—or as a *dvandva*, which is how Ñāṇamoli translates it ('equanimity and bliss').<sup>111</sup> But when the *Poṭṭhapāda Sutta* (DN 9) speaks of 'subtle and real perceptions',<sup>112</sup> in all *jhānas* these seem to apply to the feelings therein, and in the third they are applied to *upekkhāsukha*. Similarly, the *Uddesavibhaṅga Sutta* (MN 138) cautions against the mind chasing after and binding itself to the sweetness (*assāda*) of certain *jhānic* elements, which again seems to refer to feelings: joy and pleasure born of withdrawal for the first *jhāna*, joy and pleasure born of collectedness for the second, *upekkhāsukha* for the third, and neither pain nor pleasure for the fourth.<sup>113</sup> We have grounds to see *upekkhāsukha* as a combination of mental neutral feeling and bodily pleasant feeling.

Let us advance towards the fourth *jhāna*:

Due to letting go of pain and pleasure, and due to happiness and unhappiness disappearing earlier, they enter and dwell in the fourth *jhāna*, which is neither-painful-nor-pleasant, purity of equanimity and mindfulness.<sup>114</sup>

Since unpleasant hedonic tones have never been part of *jhāna* to begin with, the opening of this passage sounds deliberately exhaustive. It insists on having left behind *all* feelings that are *not* neutral: *sukha*, *dukkha*, *somanassa* and *domanassa*. But my argument's award must go to an

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110 DN i 182, MN i 455, MN iii 226, AN iv 412, AN iv 450.

111 Buddhaghosa, p. 379.

112 *sukhumasaccasaññā*, DN i 181 ff.

113 MN iii 226.

114 DN i 75: *sukhassa ca pahānā dukkhassa ca pahānā, pubbeva somanassadomanassānaṃ atthaṅgamā adukkhamasukhaṃ upekkhāsatiṭṭhāpārisuddhiṃ catutthaṃ jhānaṃ upasampajja viharati, so imameva kāyaṃ parisuddhena cetasā pariyoḍātena pharitvā nisīno hoti, nāssa kiñ ci sabbāvato kāyassa parisuddhena cetasā pariyoḍātena apphutaṃ hoti.*

undervalued star: *adukkhamasukha*. Like *sukha* and *dukkha*, *adukkhamasukha* can refer to either bodily or mental feelings,<sup>115</sup> as can *upekkhā*.<sup>116</sup> But it never *specifically* means mental feeling. From the first chapter we can remember how analyses of secondary (and therefore mental) feelings, like the eighteen ruminations or the thirty-six domestic and renunciant feelings, always use *upekkhā*, never *adukkhamasukha*.<sup>117</sup> Moreover, the fourth *jhāna* already has an *upekkhā* which the early texts clearly treat as a feeling, as we have just seen—whether spiritual or beyond-spiritual—and *adukkhamasukha* cannot be anything else than feeling. Therefore, it must refer to bodily feeling. (This is also a strong argument for allowing two feelings per *jhāna*.)

The fourth *jhāna* formula contains various mysteries. One is the sudden mention of unpleasant feelings I have just discussed. The others are the terms ‘earlier’ and ‘happiness’. Scholars have debated on the meaning of *pubb’ eva*: the *earlier* disappearance of happiness and unhappiness.<sup>118</sup> With my proposal, it fits how mental joy has ceased earlier than physical pleasure—and generally, as I expand later, it makes sense secondary feelings cease before primary ones. As to the ‘happiness’ mystery: if *pīti* is *somanassa*, why say ‘*somanassa*’ instead of ‘*pīti*’ here? Why change terminology within the same stock passage? As anticipated in chapter three, this can be explained due to linguistic habits: when paired with *domanassa*, it makes more sense to say *somanassa* than the more odd-sounding ‘*pīti* and *domanassa*’. My simple point is languages do this: a certain word becomes fixed to a particular context or expression, and replacing it with a synonym may not be ‘incorrect’, people will understand what you mean, but it sounds odd. Learners of a new language make mistakes of this kind all the time, and in the end we must surrender to a certain arbitrariness and just accept it is ‘housewarming’ gift, not ‘homewarming’ gift.

We now move on to the awakening factors. In this context equanimity cannot be reduced to a feeling, but I believe it *implies* feeling. Once the mind is well collected, the meditator watches over it closely with equanimity—such is the arousal, development and perfection of the

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115 MN i 302: *yaṃ kho, āvuso Visākha, kāyikaṃ vā cetasikaṃ vā n’ eva sātāṃ nāsātāṃ vedayitaṃ ayaṃ adukkhamasukhā vedanā ti.*

116 SN v 209: *katamañ ca bhikkhave upekkhindriyaṃ? yaṃ kho bhikkhave kāyikaṃ vā cetasikaṃ vā n’ evasātāṃ nāsātāṃ vedayitaṃ, idaṃ vuccati bhikkhave upekkhindriyaṃ. ... tatra bhikkhave yadidaṃ upekkhindriyaṃ adukkhamasukhā sā vedanā daṭṭhabbā.*

117 SN iv 232.

118 This debate is helpfully surveyed in Harvey, ‘The Four Jhānas’, p. 14.

awakening factor of equanimity.<sup>119</sup> This describes an activity, as passive as it may seem, which one applies to external and internal phenomena.<sup>120</sup> At the same time, exegetical sources correlate this awakening factor with *jhānic* equanimity, which unlike me they read as attitudinal neutrality.<sup>121</sup> On top of my earlier arguments for *jhānic* equanimity being a feeling, this awakening factor sounds close to renunciant equanimity, which refers to experiencing sensory stimuli with wisdom and is a *vedanā*.<sup>122</sup> And again as I said earlier, a neutral balanced attitude must reflect on a hedonic neutrality.

Lastly, breath meditation and the gladness formula. The Discourse on Mindfulness of Breathing tosses in ‘watching closely with equanimity’ when discussing the fourth tetrad, which it links to contemplating *dhammā*, the fourth *satipatthāna*.<sup>123</sup> Thus, while at first it seems *ānāpānassati* has nothing else to say about feelings after joy and pleasure, here we find something that, once again, suggests a mellowing of the hedonic curve. Moreover, the links between equanimity and insight are uncontroversial: the fourth tetrad connects especially to *vipassanā*,<sup>124</sup> the fourth *jhāna* constitutes a privileged place for developing it, equanimity’s impartial nature lends itself to seeing things more clearly. Hence it does not shock that the gladness formula continues on not to equanimity, but to ‘truly knowing and seeing’ (*yathābhūtañānadassanā*).<sup>125</sup> My point is that, in a way, those two elements are different sides of the same coin—one more affective and the other one more cognitive.

The point and the benefit of gladness is joy. The point and the benefit of joy is relaxation. The point and the benefit of relaxation is pleasure. The point and the benefit of pleasure is collectedness. The point and the benefit of collectedness is truly knowing and seeing.<sup>126</sup>

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119 SN v 69: *yasmim samaye, bhikkhave, bhikkhu tathāsamāhūtaṃ cittaṃ sādhukaṃ ajjhupakkhūtā hoti, upekkhāsambojjhaṅgo tasmim samaye bhikkhuo āradho hoti; upekkhāsambojjhaṅgaṃ tasmim samaye bhikkhu bhāveti; upekkhāsambojjhaṅgo tasmim samaye bhikkhuo bhāvanāpāripūriṃ gacchati.*

120 SN v 111.

121 Bhikkhu Anālayo, ‘Upekkhā’, ed. by G. P. Malalasekera and W. G. Weeraratne, *Encyclopaedia of Buddhism* (Government of Ceylon, 2008), 442–49 (p. 443); Gethin, *The Buddhist Path to Awakening*, p. 158.

122 MN iii 219.

123 MN iii 85.

124 Cousins, ‘Mindfulness with In and Out Breathing’, p. 17; Dhammajoti, ‘The Sixteen-Mode Mindfulness of Breathing’, p. 17; Sujato, *A History of Mindfulness*, pp. 184–85.

125 This idea appears, redacted in various ways, in the first five discourses of both the Book of Tens and the Book of Elevens in the *Anguttara Nikāya*.

126 AN v 2: *pāmojjaṃ pītatthaṃ pītānisamsaṃ; pīti passaddhatthā passaddhānisamsā; passaddhi sukhathā sukhānisamsā; sukhaṃ samādhaththaṃ samādhānisamsaṃ; samādhi yathābhūtañānadassanatto yathābhūtañānadassanānisamsa.*

## Wobbles and reverberations

We have surfed the hedonic curve all the way to the shore. It begins on the low point of suffering, as early Buddhism characterises unawakened life. Chapter four touched on how the spiritual journey itself starts there, with consciously recognising the degree to which unpleasantness soaks ordinary existence, triggering faith (*saddhā*) and seeking (*pariyesanā*). This is illustrated in the model of ‘transcendental dependent arising’, a sequence of preconditions (*upanisā*)<sup>127</sup> that begins in suffering and faith and then goes through the whole curve, gradually rising to more and more pleasantness until it begins to lower again towards equanimity.<sup>128</sup> But just like waves break before reaching the sand, so the practitioner undergoes a last bit of turmoil before final liberation—see figure 6. The end of the process, I want to suggest, is like a small wobble that reflects the whole hedonic curve once again, but which in the bigger picture is still contained in the equanimity segment. I offer two interpretations for this: that these are alternatives—practitioners *either* experience the wobble *or* stay flat—and that these coexist—practitioners experience the wobble *within* the middle bit of the hedonic spectrum.

This wobble is the *vedanā* side to the sequence of disillusion (*nibbidā*), dispassion (*virāga*) and liberation (*vimutti*). Such a sequence stems from insight into the perceptual process based on sensory stimuli,<sup>129</sup> the bundles of clinging<sup>130</sup> or feeling itself,<sup>131</sup> to name a few examples. It features extensively in the *Samyutta Nikāya*. Here are two passages of that sequence:

When one is glad, joy is born. When the mind is joyful, the body relaxes. With a relaxed body, one experiences pleasure. When one experiences pleasure, the mind becomes collected. When the mind is collected, one truly knows and sees. Truly knowing and seeing, one grows disillusioned. Disillusioned, one becomes dispassioned. Due to dispassion, one is liberated.<sup>132</sup>

Seeing in this way, the learned disciple of the noble ones grows disillusioned with appearance, feeling, perception, conditioning factors and awareness. Disillusioned, they become dispassioned. Due to dispassion, they are liberated. Liberated, they know ‘I am liberated’.<sup>133</sup>

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127 I follow Dhivan Jones’s translation of the term—Jones.

128 SN ii 30 and others.

129 SN iv 20.

130 MN i 139, SN iii 68.

131 MN i 500.

132 DN iii 288: *pamuditassa pīti jāyati, pītimanassa kāyo passambhati, passaddhakāyo sukham vedeti, sukhino cittaṃ samādhīyati, samāhite citta yathābhūtaṃ jānāti passati, yathābhūtaṃ jānaṃ passaṃ nibbindati, nibbindaṃ virajjati, virāgā vimuccati.*

133 SN iii 68: *evaṃ passaṃ, bhikkhave, sutavā ariyasāvako rūpasmim pi nibbindati, vedanāya pi nibbindati, saññāya pi nibbindati, saṅkhāresu pi nibbindati, viññānasmim pi nibbindati. nibbindaṃ virajjati. virāgā vimuccati. vimuttasmiṃ vimuttam itī*

While such a disillusion is no doubt a complex experience, it seems fair to consider it involves some unpleasantness,<sup>134</sup> even if coupled with relief. It is bittersweet. Disillusion mirrors the process of renunciation (*nekkhamma*) and withdrawal (*viveka*) in earlier stages of the path: it relies on seeing *dukkha* and on our natural tendency to turn away from it.<sup>135</sup> I find the word ‘disillusion’ captures well the emotional colour evoked in these passages. Margaret Cone gives weariness, disenchantment, dissatisfaction and even disgust; and for the verb *nibbindati*, to be despondent or fed up, and to turn away from something.<sup>136</sup> A negative hedonic tone seems implied in many of these terms. At the same time this is like a happy sadness, in that it opens up avenues for freedom—as Alanis Morissette put it, ‘thank you disillusionment’.<sup>137</sup>

To clarify what may happen at this stage, we can resort to the presentation of renunciant feelings in the Analysis of the Six Spheres, but with caution to not assign them exclusively to this final wobble. Allow me to explain. The commentary sees renunciant feelings as arising from *vipassanā*<sup>138</sup>—insight, not the modern understanding that equates this word to *satipatthāna* meditation *practice*. But I think they can also denote lower degrees of wisdom. For example, renunciant sadness comes with a yearning for the ‘greatest liberations’ of the noble ones, and this implies there is some way to go until awakening.<sup>139</sup> Let us also remember the equivalence between the terminologies of carnal-spiritual and domestic-renunciant:<sup>140</sup> Dhammadinnā uses them interchangeably,<sup>141</sup> the unethical element of both those dyads is equally defined as depending on the strands of sense desires (*kāmaguṇa*), and *suttas* and commentaries alike ascribe

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*ñāṇaṃ hoti*. I translate the last sentence in a personal rather than impersonal way for idiomatic reasons, but inspired by Schmithausen’s exploration of whether the original could have been *\*vimuttamhī ti*. See Lambert Schmithausen, ‘On Some Aspects of Descriptions or Theories of Liberating Insight and Enlightenment in Early Buddhism’, in *Studien Zum Jainismus Und Buddhismus: Gedenkschrift Ludwig Alsdorf*, ed. by Klaus Bruhn and Albrecht Wezler (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1981), pp. 199–250 (p. 219 note 69).

134 Exegesis will of course not entertain this possibility, since abhidharma considers only the unskilful mind can have *domanassa*.

135 I cannot quite see Cousin’s rationale for suggesting that *nibbidā* in insight meditation mirrors *pīti* in calm meditation, given their very different affective tonalities. This is why I suggest *nekkhamma* and *viveka* as parallels to *nibbidā*, with pleasant hedonic tones *following* them. See L. S. Cousins, ‘The Origin of Insight Meditation’, in *The Buddhist Forum*, ed. by Tadeusz Skorupski, 1994, IV, 35–58 (p. 56); also Heim and others, p. 327.

136 Cone, *G - n*, p. 584.

137 Alanis Morissette, *Thank U* (Maverick Records, 1998), SUPPOSED FORMER INFATUATION JUNKIE.

138 Ps v 22: *gehasitāni ti kāmaguṇanissitāni. nekkhammasitāni ti vipassanānissitāni*.

139 Those liberations are interpreted to mean awakening (MN iii 218, Ps v 23). Renunciant sadness (*nekkhammasita domanassa*), with its accompanying wish to achieve the greatest liberations, was explained in the first chapter.

140 Boisvert, pp. 74–76; Anālayo, *Perspectives on Satipatthāna*, sec. VII.5; Anālayo, *From Craving to Liberation*, p. 84.

141 MN i 303-304.

*somanassa* to the *jhānas*, a *somanassa* which therefore cannot be domestic, but renunciant.<sup>142</sup>

In this case, being at the end of the path, I find renunciant sadness unlikely to arise. This leaves us with happiness and equanimity. Should we understand these as two equally viable options, left to chance or to the meditator's character? Perhaps. But again, the Analysis of the Six Spheres suggests renunciant happiness is followed by renunciant equanimity.<sup>143</sup> After disillusion's initial discomfort, with dispassion and letting go comes relief, and this feels good—the subsiding of unpleasant feelings always does. Then things settle back down into a balanced, neutral-feeling state. So here we have the two options: a movement that replicates the big hedonic curve—small dip into unpleasant feeling, rising towards pleasant, mellowing into equanimity—or the various hedonic tones as equally possible alternatives.

These options make sense of how this wobble, according to my own analysis, happens in the neutral segment of the hedonic curve. At first this appears to be a contradiction: is it a wobble or a flat line? I have noted how the fourth tetrad of *ānāpānassati* is likely associated with equanimous feeling. It consists in what is essentially an iteration of the same sequence as above: to observe transiency (*anicca*), dispassion (*virāga*), cessation (*nirodha*) and giving up (*paṭinissagga*). Not featuring disillusion, this looks like a less emotional version of the sequence, which perhaps explains the equanimity. Maybe *ānāpānassati* in particular describes the option that stays flat in neutral feeling, but maybe it shows how wobble and flatness need not be mutually exclusive. We can understand this by coming back to *vedanā* as a spectrum comparable to temperature—the middle bit is the hardest to determine. Cousins wrote how the neutral always shades towards the pleasant or unpleasant.<sup>144</sup> Think, for example, of how lukewarm water feels too warm in the summer and not warm enough in winter. In a similar way, with disillusion I am not suggesting the meditator necessarily feels a disturbance in the force of dramatic proportions, but a small dip towards the unpleasant which, comparatively, from the perspective of ordinary suffering, still looks quite equanimous.

Options show up too with the next and last step: liberation (*vimutti*). At the moment of knowledge of liberation, upon reviewing the liberated mind,<sup>145</sup> there can arise either beyond-

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142 This equivalence, applied to the *jhānas*, is also made in Kuan, 'Clarification on Feelings', p. 312 ff.

143 MN iii 220.

144 Cousins, 'The Paṭṭhāna and the Development of the Theravādin Abhidhamma', p. 31.

145 This is a self-reflective awareness like the one involved in impeccable pleasure (*anavajjasukha*).

spiritual pleasant feelings—*pīti* and *sukha*—or beyond-spiritual neutral feelings—*upekkhā*.<sup>146</sup> The sources suggest no hierarchy or order here. But considering the Indian pan-religious emphasis on liberation as a form of pleasure, I am tempted to privilege beyond-spiritual pleasant feelings, the ultimate play pleasure. I can only speculate its newness contributes to this, it must be quite an awesome thing; but the feeling may subside, and further self-reviews in the life of an awakened being may give rise to this or that feeling depending on conditions.

One final note about this. In using renunciant feelings to shed some light on the possible hedonic progression of disillusion, dispassion and liberation, I do not suggest spiritual (*nirāmisā*) feelings belong only to the main hedonic curve, and renunciant (*nekkhammasita*) feelings only to the final wobble. Someone could interpret this in classical terms of *samatha* followed by *vipassanā*, but I would find this simplistic.<sup>147</sup> It would betray the shared nature of the hedonic curve and ignore evidence that connects it to both *samatha* and *vipassanā* alike, such as the passage where observing the bundles' impermanence leads to *pīti* rather than renunciant *somanassa*; or how the awakening factors, readable as both *samatha* and *vipassanā*, have *pīti*, as does mindfulness of breathing.<sup>148</sup> We could say that an initial insight, with its weakening of reactivity and clinging, leads to the main hedonic curve—with pleasant feelings being spiritual and renunciant alike—and, later on, a deeper wisdom and letting go take place, creating the small hedonic wobble I describe. So it seems the model of renunciant feelings is more 'all terrain', applicable both to the main hedonic curve and to the wobble; whereas the model of spiritual feelings is not used for the latter. But I believe this pertains to the models or formulas in question more than the feelings these refer to.

To complement this section, I peek into how the hedonic curve reverberates and reappears in later Buddhist thought, strengthening that *samatha* and *vipassanā* both partake of the shared hedonic curve, rather than only *samatha*. Rupert Gettin has observed that Buddhaghosa's

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146 *Nirāmisā Sutta* (SN 36.31) at SN iv 236.

147 According to the *Yuganaddha Sutta* (AN 4.170 at AN ii 157) the two can also be developed in tandem, or *vipassanā* be followed by *samatha*. See L. S. Cousins, 'Samatha-Yāna and Vipassanā-Yāna', in *Buddhist Studies in Honour of Hammalava Saddhātissa*, 1984, pp. 56–68 (p. 61); Arbel, 'Jhānic Joy and Pleasure', p. 183, note 10; Pyi Physo Kyaw and Kate Crosby, 'Meditation: Techniques and Processes of Transformation', in *Routledge Handbook of Theravāda Buddhism*, ed. by Stephen C. Berkwitz and Ashley Thompson (London: Routledge, 2022), pp. 127–39 (p. 130) <<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351026666>>.

148 Buddhaghosa reads the *pīti* of *ānāpānassati* as arising either from the object of attention, which sounds on the *samatha* side, or from non-confusion, which sounds on the *vipassanā* side. The two sides share the hedonic curve. See *Vism* 287 (VIII 226) and *Vism-mhṭ* 276.

defilements of insight (*vipassanupakkilesa*) are ‘*jhāna*-like qualities of the experience of insight’, ‘so powerful that the meditator believes that he or she has reached awakening’.<sup>149</sup> These qualities include *pīti*, *sukha* and *upekkhā*,<sup>150</sup> and once again we see pleasant feelings associated with the idea of liberation, as in the previous chapter. These ‘defilements’ show how insight too leads to the hedonic curve—as we have already seen, in fact—and I believe that in using the later concept of ‘transcendent *jhāna*’ (*lokuttarajjhāna*) to explain awakening experiences, Buddhaghosa and the abhidharma thinkers acknowledge this too. I do not suggest to back-read ‘transcendent *jhāna*’ into the early discourses, which say nothing about it, but the evidence I have been gathering would not support Brahmāli Bhikkhu’s claim that ‘lokuttarajjhāna and *jhāna*/samādhi refer to very different types of experience’.<sup>151</sup> These experiences are conceptualised and organised differently,<sup>152</sup> they may not be identical. Yet if we cut them on the *vedanā* axis they look very much alike. This supports Gethin’s observation that there is a ‘broadly consistent vision’ of an early Buddhist psychology of meditation and awakening.<sup>153</sup>

The exegetical tradition is making a similar point as my wobble at the end of the hedonic curve. In short: a more skilful, wise, and awakened mind *feels* a particular way. But since exegesis wants to fix things, increasing the precision of the more fluid early texts and pinning down *jhāna*—or anything else, for that matter—to a specific point on the map, when they suggest insight leads to that kind of experience they need to come up with new terms. (My affective-hedonic vantage point dispenses with this need.) In a similar way, modern Buddhist thinkers promoted concepts like the ‘*vipassanā jhānas*’.<sup>154</sup> Anālayo reads this as trying to accommodate the ‘perceived need to master tranquility’, especially in connection to stream-entry (*sotāpatti*). In addition, we can also see an attempt to account for the felt experience that results from the *vipassanā/satipatthāna* methods of these contemporary teachers. They recognise their meditation practice leads to the hedonic curve, just like how in the early discourses observing arising and passing away brings joy.

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149 Vism 633-38 (XX 105 ff)—Gethin, ‘The Jhānas’, p. 201; see also Cousins, IV, p. 56.

150 *Passaddhi* stands between the *pīti* and *sukha*, again mirroring the gladness and *bojjhaṅga* process formulas.

151 Bhikkhu Brahmāli, ‘Jhāna and Lokuttara-Jjhāna’, *Buddhist Studies Review*, 24.1 (2007), 75–90 (p. 77) <<https://doi.org/10.1558/bsrv.v24i1.75>>.

152 A chief difference, Brahmāli points out, is thinking in terms of mind moments (abhidharma) or more enduring, ‘ongoing realities’ (discourses).

153 Gethin, ‘On the Practice of Buddhist Meditation’, pp. 216–18.

154 Anālayo, ‘History of Absorption’, p. 581 ff; Anālayo, *Developments in Meditation Traditions*, p. 180 ff.

I conclude that these later recognitions of the hedonic curve—or put differently, an admission that those *vedanās* can occur at different degrees of collectedness—align well with what we find in the early discourses. These obsess less about questions of ‘depth’ and choose to define *jhāna/samādhi* mainly by its affective-hedonic elements, as well as the mind’s skilfulness. While constrained by the way exegesis interprets the texts and fixes concepts, these modern teachers revert back to giving utmost importance to the affective-hedonic elements as characterising meditative transformation and spiritual progress. A slightly different perspective is held by Anālayo:

dimensions of access concentration can be matched with the four absorptions [*jhānas*], if one focuses only on the presence or absence of selected absorption factors and disregards the depth of concentration required for actual absorption attainment. It is in this way that the four *vipassanā jhānas* have successfully entered the scene, inaugurating what by now has become a widespread tendency of identifying even shallow levels of concentration as being a form of “absorption.”<sup>155</sup>

Admittedly, all Buddhist schools except the Sautrāntika held that *jhāna* entails full absorption, for sensory awareness is not operative there, and it is not straightforward how to make sense of this. On the one hand, we could yield to the majority opinion. On the other hand, the school that disagreed was precisely the one claiming to stick to the early discourses instead of going along with the abhidharma project. So, does fully absorbed *jhāna* represent the earliest teaching or a slightly later but widespread development? As I said, I find the *choice* of what to include in codified formulas of *jhāna* relevant, and this was mainly affective-hedonic qualities.<sup>156</sup> At the same time, several canonical passages cast doubt on the ability to hear sounds during *jhāna*,<sup>157</sup> which would imply *at least some* withdrawal from peripheral sensory awareness,<sup>158</sup> but bodily awareness being part of *jhāna* undermines *complete* absorption from the

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155 Anālayo, *Developments in Meditation Traditions*, p. 183.

156 Here I do not get into a discussion of *ekaggatā* (only occasionally mentioned in the first *jhāna*) and *ekodibhāva*, factor of the second *jhāna*, because it has more potential for circular reasonings: it depends on how the terms are interpreted, and this in turn is conditioned by views on absorption.

157 Anālayo, ‘The Second Absorption’, pp. 40–46. I say ‘cast doubt’ rather than a stronger ‘disproves’ because I believe that evidence still admits some interpretation before considering it describes a fixed feature of *jhāna*. The episode in the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* (at DN ii 130-133) sounds like spiritual one-upmanship: if Ālāra Kālāma could not hear five hundred carts pass by while in meditation, then the meditating Buddha cannot hear a pouring rain and thunder that even kills villagers and oxen. The Vinaya episode concerning Mahāmoggallāna is ambiguous and explained with the habitual resorting to moments right before or after *jhāna*, mentioned already. Lastly, that sound is a ‘thorn’ (*kaṇṭaka*) to the first *jhāna* means it makes attaining it difficult, as other examples of thorns confirm (AN v 134), and the Chinese parallel is explicit about this (MĀ 84 at T i 561a7). Anālayo brings up one example from DĀ 11 which reads more clearly as sound ceasing in the first *jhāna*, but is still in the context of mendicants who could not attain *jhāna* because of noise.

158 I owe to Rupert Gettin the helpful example of being absorbed in an activity such as reading or watching a

senses.

Let me be clear: I do not argue that *jhāna* is definitely not absorption,<sup>159</sup> but I wonder if absorption is a *sine qua non* feature of it. Could it be a spectrum instead of an invariable and determinant characteristic? Just like exegesis narrowed the intensity spectrum of *pīṭi*, settling on the most intense segment, perhaps it also ended up identifying *jhāna* only with the deepest segment of its absorption spectrum. This speculation would help explain the later proliferation of *samādhi* levels—momentary (*khaṇika*), neighbouring (*upacāra*) and fixed (*appanā*)—and the suspicion of very absorbed *samādhi*, a consequence of Buddhism’s own interpretive choice which devolves into a suspicion of *jhāna* altogether, since *jhāna* has become synonymous with the far end of the absorption spectrum.<sup>160</sup>

If we take a bird’s-eye view of the Buddhist traditions, or at least of Southern ones, the elements of the hedonic curve emerge as more consistent to *jhāna* than depth of absorption, a topic that spurred and continues to spur debate—even contemporary *jhāna* teachers cannot agree on how deeply absorbed *jhāna* is.<sup>161</sup> I leave the significance of this to the reader. But to me it matters because, in making the wider case these two sections have made, what we find is an overwhelming presence of the hedonic curve in early Buddhism, well over issues of concentration depth. The conclusion must be that affective-hedonic matters were the most central to early Buddhists as a whole. Even exegesis itself cannot avoid to hint at this with the concepts of transcendent *jhāna* and the defilements of insight. All these are glimmers of moonlight, from that early Buddhist moon so many fingers are calling us to look at: the core idea that the practitioner proceeds along a predictable and organic succession of feelings,

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film, so that if called by someone you do not register it—peripheral awareness recedes to the background. Now, is that the same as the *fully* absorbed state Buddhist exegesis proposes?

159 Some scholars who do are: Arbel, *Early Buddhist Meditation*, p. 45 ff; Polak, ‘How Was Liberating Insight Related to the Development of the Four Jhānas in Early Buddhism?’, p. 109; Wynne, ‘Sariputta or Kaccāna?’, p. 103.

160 A few of these suspicions by contemporary meditation teachers are gathered in Polak, *Reexamining Jhāna*, pp. 21–24.

161 Anālayo excellently summarises modern views on this and scholarship about them—Anālayo, ‘History of Absorption’, pp. 582–84; Anālayo, *Developments in Meditation Traditions*, pp. 184–89; see also Natalie Quli, ‘Multiple Buddhist Modernisms: Jhāna in Convert Theravāda’, *Pacific World: Journal of the Institute of Buddhist Studies*, 3, 10, 2008, 225–49; Leigh Brasington, ‘Interpretations of the Jhanas’, 2022 <<http://leighb.com/jhanantp.htm>> [accessed 11 April 2023]; John Yates, Matthew Immergut, and Jeremy Graves, *The Mind Illuminated: A Complete Meditation Guide Integrating Buddhist Wisdom and Brain Science for Greater Mindfulness* (New York: Hay House, 2017), pp. 385, table 6; Richard Shankman, *The Experience of Samādhi: An in-Depth Exploration of Buddhist Meditation*, 1st ed (Boston: Shambhala, 2008), chap. 4.

regardless of their specific meditation exercise or style.

## The hedonic training of early Buddhism

Having surveyed the feelings present in each segment of the hedonic curve, this final section of the dissertation looks more closely at the dynamics of this hedonic transformation: how and why does it happen? To do this, I gather and summarise findings from the previous chapter in light of the current guiding question, seeking to expand on a key idea first introduced in chapter three: that recognising that the mind is skilful triggers positive affect.<sup>162</sup> I show how mastery pleasure is an indispensable bridge to play pleasure, and how both types of pleasure depend on perceiving the absence, disappearance or abandonment of unpleasant feelings, however subtle.

Ariel Glucklich observes that religions provide ‘patterns of hedonic training’:<sup>163</sup> they teach people to manage pleasure and obtain it from the right sources. He draws parallels with the way children are taught ‘to eat well beyond the salty, sweet and fatty of evolutionary pleasure’.<sup>164</sup> If we apply this idea to early Buddhism, we can see a similar education in ‘complex pleasures’, as Glucklich calls them—skilful pleasant feelings that start with the concern of living ethically with others and advance towards what is spiritually liberating.

The gradual path narrates a progression from novelty, through mastery, to play pleasures.<sup>165</sup> The practitioner first learns to derive pleasure from something other than sensory stimuli, namely, from moral conduct (*sīla*). This is aided by the *concept* or *thought* that something is skilful, free from guilt or blame; by an act, however subtle, of self-reflective awareness or review. This brings to the surface our first absence: the lack of remorse. A plot in the TV show *The Good Place* illustrates this well.<sup>166</sup> The lead character Eleanor Shellstrop has a moral epiphany when she realises every time she behaved unethically there was a little voice in her head telling her to act otherwise, which she ignored. But as she starts to become a better

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162 MN i 95, MN i 414, MN iii 293, AN iii 306, AN iv 320.

163 Glucklich, *The Joy of Religion*, pp. 6, 50.

164 Glucklich, *The Joy of Religion*, p. 54.

165 Two paradigmatic examples of this are the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta* (DN 2 at DN i 47) and the *Devadaha Sutta* (MN 101 at MN ii 214).

166 ‘Derek’, dir. by Jude Weng, *The Good Place* (National Broadcasting Company, 2017).

person, the voice goes away, to her relief. Dependent on that, the *suttas* would say, impeccable pleasure (*anavajjasukha*) arises.<sup>167</sup> Such a learning goes beyond the mere performance of good actions: it involves a training in noticing good actions, listening to one’s conscience, and tuning into the hedonic dimension of that experience, hopefully to make a first link between skilfulness and pleasantness.<sup>168</sup> It includes *vedanānupassanā*.

In the next stage, successful sense-restraint (*indriyaśamvara*), mindfulness and full awareness (*satisampajañña*) manifest as purified pleasure (*abyāsekasukha*). While not depending on a review, this also involves lack of reactivity and tuning into *vedanā*. If impeccable pleasure is how the thought of being skilful feels, now in speaking of purified pleasure the texts direct the listener’s attention to how a skilful mind *itself* feels. And just like here *satisampajañña* prepares one for the next stage of establishing mindfulness (*satipaṭṭhāna*) in seated meditation, so this trains one to notice how the absence of the hindrances feels like in that next stage, as Anālayo has noted.<sup>169</sup> Let us expand on how, exactly, does this work.

Realising that the mind is thoroughly skilful during seated mindfulness practice is absolutely key. Chapter two showed how ‘seeing “this is peaceful”’ (*etaṃ santan ti passato*) helps the mind find satisfaction and settle in a higher state. Similarly, here ‘seeing that the five hindrances have been abandoned in oneself’ (*tass’ ime pañca nīvarane pahīne attani samanupassato*)<sup>170</sup> pleases and relaxes the body-mind into collectedness (*samādhi*). The practitioner learns to recognise a less agitated state and to revel in the skilful mind. This is what terms like *rāti* (delight) and perhaps *pāmojja* (gladness)<sup>171</sup> could be expressing, as in the last ‘noble lineage’ (*ariyavaṃsa*): to delight in

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167 ‘Thinking “I have impeccable conduct of body, speech and mind,” they obtain pleasure and happiness. This is called impeccable pleasure.’ (AN ii 69: *so ‘anavajjenamhi kāyakammaṇa samannāgato, anavajjena vacīkammaṇa samannāgato, anavajjena manokammaṇa samannāgato’ ti adhigacchati sukhaṃ, adhigacchati somanassaṃ. idaṃ vuccati, gahaṇāti, anavajjasukhaṃ.*)

168 There is debate on whether remorse (*viṇṇāsa*, *kukkucca/kaukrīya*) feels unpleasant or not, complicated by the abhidharmic doctrine that the skilful mind never feels bad—ethical and hedonic discussions become mixed. But the ethical status of remorse is not an issue here, for the point is how the abstraction that something is impeccable and could not entail remorse feels good. Of course, it helps if remorse indeed feels bad, which I think it does—and it constitutes a case of skilfully using our tendency to turn away from unpleasant feelings in service of the path. See Gethin, *Buddhist Maps*, chap. 5 PDF page 263; Gethin, *Buddhist Maps*, chap. 6 PDF pages 18-20; Maria Heim, ‘Shame and Apprehension: Notes on the Moral Value of Hiri and Ottappa’, in *Embedded Languages: Studies of Sri Lankan and Buddhist Cultures: Essays in Honor of W. S. Karunatilake*, ed. by Carol S. Anderson and others (Colombo: Godage, 2012), pp. 237–60 (p. 245).

169 Anālayo, ‘The Potential of Pleasant Feelings’, p. 6.

170 DN i 73.

171 Chapter 3 concluded, against Theravāda exegesis, that *pāmojja* and *pīti* are differentiated qualities.

abandoning.<sup>172</sup> Like impeccable pleasure, spiritual joy (*nirāmisā pīti*) is a secondary feeling linked to an act of review, the springboard to an experience of an altogether different pitch: play pleasure. We should also remember that ultimate play pleasure, such as beyond-spiritual joy, equally depends on an act of review. Clearly this self-reflective awareness is no marginal concept in early Buddhist soteriology.

In the title of a paper,<sup>173</sup> Roderick Bucknell identifies the central question in Buddhist meditation theory as ‘What is the first *jhāna*?’<sup>174</sup> A bit embarrassed to attempt yet another answer, I suggest the first *jhāna* constitutes the ultimate mastery pleasure and stands at the threshold between mastery and play pleasures. The discussion up to this point elevates the significance of a distinction early Buddhists *chose* to make: that in the first *jhāna*, joy and pleasure (*pītisukha*) are born of withdrawal from unskilfulness,<sup>175</sup> whereas in the second they are born of collectedness (*samādhi*). This gains even more significance when we remember two things: that the *jhānas* in fact *are* those feelings being described,<sup>176</sup> and that pleasure is used *to* gain collectedness, as attested in the gladness formula, the awakening factors, and the steps of mindfulness of breathing.

While the omission of *samādhi* in the standard first *jhāna* formula need not mean there is absolutely none of it,<sup>177</sup> considering also how in the other formulas collectedness *follows* joy and pleasure, I think we have to conclude early Buddhists identified a stage where collectedness is at least not fully established or dominant, and crucially, it is not the source of how good such a state feels. The standard first *jhāna* formula describes it most explicitly, whereas in other models like the gladness and *bojjhaṅga* formulas we need to infer it.

The Fruits of the Ascetic Life (DN 2), *locus classicus* of the early Buddhist gradual path, provides us with a good model to see this progression of soteriologically valuable pleasures.

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172 AN ii 28: *bhikkhu bhāvanārāmo hoti bhāvanārato, pahānārāmo hoti pahānarato*. The commentary goes into a long list of what the practitioner delights in cultivating and abandoning—Mp iii 56.

173 Bucknell, ‘What Is the First Jhāna?’

174 Also Keren Arbel: ‘What kind of joy (*pīti*) and pleasure (*sukha*) is this attainment referring to (i.e., born of *viveka*)?’ Arbel, *Early Buddhist Meditation*, p. 46.

175 Arbel reads *viveka* as also implying ‘discernment’ regarding the nature of experience. Of course, understanding can lead to a skilful mind without hindrances, but the key is the (hedonic) awareness of this absence or withdrawal—Arbel, *Early Buddhist Meditation*, pp. 50–51; Arbel, ‘Jhānic Joy and Pleasure’, p. 190 ff

176 It is interesting that as the *jhānas* progress, they become slightly less emphatic about feelings, which ‘lose positions’ in the formula. Since feeling mellows, it makes sense.

177 Cousins, ‘Buddhist Jhāna’, p. 122; Anālayo, ‘The First Absorption’, p. 78.

Practitioners learn to derive pleasure from skilful external behaviour aided by acts of self-reflective awareness. They also learn to recognise the hedonic tone of keeping sense-restraint and mindfulness in activities—skilful internal behaviour. Equipped with that preparatory training, when by further cultivating mindfulness in seated meditation the mind is without hindrances, they become mindful of it and derive pleasure from their awareness of that absence. Being a complete suspension of unskilful impulses, they are enjoying the ultimate form of mastery pleasure as defined by Glucklich: ‘the satisfaction one gets from mastering the organism’s response’ to stimuli, chiefly—but not exclusively—novelty pleasures.<sup>178</sup> *Jhāna* is but one of the models that depicts this. Consider the following passages again (my emphases):

*Seeing that the five hindrances have been abandoned in oneself, gladness is born. When one is glad, joy is born. When the mind is joyful, the body relaxes. With a relaxed body, one experiences pleasure. When one experiences pleasure, the mind becomes collected.*<sup>179</sup>

*Ānanda, the point and the benefit of skilful conduct is lack of remorse. The point and the benefit of lack of remorse is gladness. The point and benefit of gladness is joy. The point and the benefit of joy is relaxation. The point and the benefit of relaxation is pleasure. The point and the benefit of pleasure is collectedness.*<sup>180</sup>

Quite withdrawn from sense desires, *withdrawn from unskilful qualities*, they enter and dwell in the first *jhāna*, which is the joy and pleasure *born of withdrawal*, with thinking and reflection. They fill, drench and pervade their body with the joy and pleasure *born of withdrawal*, so that no part of the entire body is unpervaded with the joy and pleasure *born of withdrawal*.<sup>181</sup>

Mahānāma, when a noble disciple recollects the Buddha, their mind is *not seized by lust, aversion or delusion; but upright*, concerned with the Buddha. When their mind is upright, a noble disciple gets to experience the point of the teaching and gladness in relation to the teaching. When one is glad, joy is born...<sup>182</sup>

178 Glucklich, *The Joy of Religion*, pp. 9–10.

179 DN i 73: *tass’ ime pañca nīvaraṇe pahīne attani samanupassato pāmojjaṃ jāyati, pamuditassa pīti jāyati, pītimanassa kāyo passambhati, passaddhakāyo sukhaṃ vedeti, sukhino cittaṃ samādhīyati.*

180 AN v 2: *iti kho, ānanda, kusalāni sīlāni avipparisāraṭṭhāni avipparisārānisamsāni; avipparisāro pāmojjattho pāmojjānisamsa; pāmojjaṃ pītattthaṃ pītānisamsaṃ; pīti passaddhatthā passaddhānisamsā; passaddhi sukhatthā sukhānisamsā; sukhaṃ samādhattthaṃ samādhānisamsaṃ.*

181 DN i 73: *so vivicc’ eva kāmehi, vivicca akusalehi dhammehi savitakkaṃ savicāraṃ vivekaṃ pītisukhaṃ paṭhamaṃ jhānaṃ upasampajja viharati. so imameva kāyaṃ vivekajena pītisukhena abhisandeti parisandeti pariṇīreti parippharati, nāssa kiñci sabbāvato kāyassa vivekajena pītisukhena apphutaṃ hoti.*

182 AN iii 285: *yasmim, mahānāma, samaye ariyasāvako tathāgataṃ anussarati nevassa tasmim samaye rāgaparīyutthitaṃ cittaṃ hoti, na dosaparīyutthitaṃ cittaṃ hoti, na mohaparīyutthitaṃ cittaṃ hoti; ujugatamevassa tasmim samaye cittaṃ hoti tathāgataṃ ārabha. ujugatacīto kho pana, mahānāma, ariyasāvako labhati atthavedaṃ, labhati dhammavedaṃ, labhati dhammūpasamhūtaṃ pāmojjaṃ. pamuditassa pīti jāyati ...*

All these show how the hedonic curve is consistent not only in terms of what feelings it involves, but also in how these come about: the absence of unskilful qualities. In pointing out all these similar progressions, Rupert Gethin has remarked that the awakening factor of energy (*vīriyasambojjhaṅga*) ‘fails to find a direct parallel here’, and finds it in other formulas that introduce the four *jhānas* mentioning mindfulness and energy.<sup>183</sup> I believe our current exploration allows us to fill in that gap by helping us to answer the following question: why would energy give rise to joy?<sup>184</sup> This is not self-evident until we understand this logic is of an ethical nature, as follows.

After mindfulness, the awakening factors continue to *dhammavicayasambojjhaṅga*: investigation of *dhamma(s)*. Being an employee of Wisdom, one of discernment’s jobs is to sift the skilful from the unskilful.<sup>185</sup> Then comes energy, which as a faculty (*vīriyindriya*) refers to cultivating the skilful and abandoning the unskilful,<sup>186</sup> a summary of the four great efforts constituting the path factor of right effort (*sammā vāyāma*).<sup>187</sup> We find this idea in The Great Forty (*Mahācattārīsaka Sutta*, MN 117).<sup>188</sup> There we see right view, effort and mindfulness interacting to cultivate any given path factor: the wisdom element is discerning it—discerning what is skilful and unskilful; the energy/effort element is actually doing it—cultivating the skilful and abandoning the unskilful; and the mindfulness element is the presence of mind necessary for all that to work.<sup>189</sup> Therefore, energy gives rise to joy because it refers to getting rid of unskilful qualities<sup>190</sup> after having discerned it on the basis of mindfulness. What remains—a skilful mind—feels good.

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183 Gethin, *The Buddhist Path to Awakening*, p. 171.

184 This belongs to the linear understanding of the awakening factors, expressed mainly in the *bojjhaṅga* process formula.

185 MN i 46.

186 SN v 197: *katamañ ca, bhikkhave, vīriyindriyaṃ? idha, bhikkhave, ariyasāvako āradhāvīriyo viharati akusalānaṃ dhammānaṃ pahānāya, kusalānaṃ dhammānaṃ upasampadāya, thāmaṃ dāḷhaḥaparakkamo anikkhittadhuro kusalesu dhammesu.*

187 SN v 9. For commentarial understandings along the same line, see Gethin, *The Buddhist Path to Awakening*, p. 69 ff.

188 MN iii 71.

189 This works less well when the awakening factors start with hearing a teaching, where energy simply arises from analysing that teaching, which mindfulness remembers (SN v 67-8); or when analysed as twofold, giving bodily and mental energy (SN v 111)—the commentary relates physical energy to walking meditation and mental energy to the determination to sit until one is liberated (Spk iii 170). In the latter case it could still work, for energy comes from discerning inner and outer *dhammā*.

190 Bucknell already suggested a degree of equivalence between right effort and sense-restraint—Bucknell, ‘The Buddhist Path to Liberation: An Analysis of the Listing of Stages’, p. 13.

Now, why should a skilful mind feel good in the first place? Put simply, because an unskilful mind tends to feel bad and the disappearance of an unpleasant feeling is pleasant. However, according to the abhidharma, an unskilful mind can also feel good, when rooted in greed. Here we must remember that greed is wanting a current pleasant feeling to continue, whereas the desire to get a pleasant feeling not present right now is a form of aversion and therefore feels bad.<sup>191</sup> In this respect, Payutto explains satisfaction as the stilling of desire, either because it is fulfilled or because one observes it with mindfulness and lets it naturally fade.<sup>192</sup>

The abhidharma aligns well with the discourses here—obtaining a desired object brings domestic happiness.<sup>193</sup> Still, other texts suggest more generally that an unskilful mind feels pain and unhappiness,<sup>194</sup> including when affected by greed. This may refer to the future, but it could also be invoking a sort of ‘instant *karma*’, saying that even the clinging to a pleasant feeling, wanting to ensure it does not go away, backfires and decreases the enjoyment, just like enjoying a delightful Sunday afternoon is ruined by not wanting to go back to work on Monday.<sup>195</sup> While primary feelings of pain like those of sickness and old age are not related to current unskilfulness, it is a central early Buddhist doctrine that secondary feelings of an unpleasant tone often arise from an unskilful relation to experience, involving perceptions (*saññā*) and conditioning forces (*saṅkhārā*).

If the ingredients making the soup sour are taken out, the soup will not be sour—the skilful mind feels good. Yet both early discourses and abhidharma consider it can feel neutral as well.<sup>196</sup> This is where I think the hedonic training comes in: the insistence in noticing a lack, an abandonment of a formerly present defilement, enhances the awareness of that change and therefore drives the hedonic temperature up. For ‘painful feeling is painful while it lasts and pleasant when it changes’.<sup>197</sup> This insistence promotes pleasant rather than neutral feeling. In the last series of quotes, the absences of hindrances, remorse, unskilful qualities, and greed

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191 Gethin, *Buddhist Maps*, chap. 5.

192 Payutto, p. 1065.

193 MN iii 217.

194 AN i 157.

195 As mentioned in previous chapters, it seems a difference between early discourses and abhidharma is that for the latter no mental unpleasantness is ever skilful, whereas the discourses leave room for ‘spiritual sadness’ (*nekkhammasita domanassa*).

196 Insight can lead to renunciant happiness or renunciant equanimity, and as explored in the previous section, advanced stages feel neutral.

197 MN i 303: *dukkhā vedanā tīṭhidukkhā vipariṇāmasukhā*.

and hatred and delusion, all occupy the same ‘space’ in the progression. They perform the same function in this hedonic training, which is clearly a pattern. They teach practitioners to find and deepen mastery pleasure by steering them to notice something about the mind: how the *absence*—and more crucially the *disappearance*—of unskilful qualities affects the way one feels.

In order to feel the relief, though, one must become more familiar with the pain involved in the unskilful, which the ordinary person tends to overlook. The training increases awareness of this through the rhetorical and contemplative uses of *dukkha* seen in chapters two and four, such as seeing drawbacks (*ādīnava*) in sense pleasures or in any given state of meditation in order to ascend onto a higher one. The discourses on emptiness (MN 121 & 122) also involve a training in noticing the *dukkha* in certain perceptions and what the present is empty of.<sup>198</sup>

What I suggest, then, is dual. On the one hand, spiritual positive affect arises because the skilful in itself feels good. On the other hand, it is often helped by a certain concept, be it the notion of something as ‘skilful’ or ‘impeccable’, or be it the ‘absence’ or ‘abandonment’ of unskilfulness. As the secondary feeling of spiritual joy causes the body to relax, the resulting spiritual pleasure (*nirāmisā sukha*) is a primary feeling, if my interpretations are correct—a bodily pleasure unrelated to the fulfilment of sensory desires. Bronkhorst traces unpleasant and pleasurable experiences to bodily tension and its discharge, respectively.<sup>199</sup> The key point for early Buddhism is to bring about such a discharge through becoming aware of how a skilful mind feels, which amplifies the pleasure.

Many are the instances emphasising the ethical basis for *satipatthāna*, the awakening factors or *jhāna*.<sup>200</sup> This makes sense only if we do not conceive of early Buddhist meditation as a merely attentional exercise. Without an ethical mind training, there would be no skilfulness to find pleasure in—the hedonic training—which could then lead to *samādhi*. As some have observed, nowhere do the early discourses say one enters the first *jhāna* by focusing on an object.<sup>201</sup> I do

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198 A great overview of this can be found in Bhikkhu Anālayo, *From Grasping to Emptiness - Excursions into the Thought-World of the Pāli Discourses (2)* (New York: Buddhist Association of the United States, 2010), pp. 151–60.

199 Bronkhorst, *Absorption*, p. 142 ff.

200 E.g., AN i 221, SN v 63, SN v 78, SN v 112, SN v 143. The Vibhaṅga also emphasises the activities linked to mastery pleasure in its analysis of *jhāna* (Vibh 248 ff). MN i 90 calls *jhānic* feelings ‘harmless’ (*abyābajjha*) rather than simply not painful (MN i 90)—they are ethical. I find this highly suggestive, but in the end not enough to count as evidence for anything.

201 Arbel, *Early Buddhist Meditation*, p. 47; Bucknell, ‘Reinterpreting the Jhānas’, p. 403.

not think this kicks out such a focus from the practice, at least as an option—after all, the *Ānāpānassati Sutta* clearly centres the breath, even if not necessarily with an exclusive type of attention.<sup>202</sup> But I also do not think this means the texts say nothing about how one achieves *jhāna*. The meditative states of early Buddhism are a direct outcome of an ethical-hedonic training, which results in becoming absorbed in the satisfaction one has learnt to derive from being skilful.

I identify the first *jhāna* not only as the ultimate expression of mastery pleasure, but also as the transition between mastery and play pleasures. For on the one hand its positive affect arises from being withdrawn from sense desires and unskilful qualities—that is, it qualifies as mastery pleasure. But on the other hand, it is marked as the first in a *new* type of pleasure: spiritual (*nirāmisā*). It may seem that the various classifications of pleasure do not match perfectly, and/or that there is some overlap. But what at first sight looks like a bug in the theory in fact reveals something paramount: early Buddhist play pleasure is an extension of mastery pleasure. So it may be more fitting to see these as a gradation than as separated by a sharp line.

The transition happens through the instruction to ‘dwell’ (*viharati*) in the spiritual pleasure of the first *jhāna*, to bathe in it, as the simile suggests. Since the mind stays where it feels good, and since this pleasure is more reliable than sensory ones, sustaining it promotes collectedness. At this stage a modicum of collectedness may co-exist with the mastery pleasure that gave rise to it. Then, as *samādhi* becomes more established and simultaneously thought subsides, the pleasant feelings from an awareness of the lack of hindrances are gradually replaced by, or gradually morph into, pleasant feelings from an awareness of yet another absence or abandonment: thinking (*vitakka*) and reflection (*vicāra*), ‘joy and pleasure born of collectedness’.

Cousins writes that the pleasure of the second *jhāna* derives from attaining the first,<sup>203</sup> and Arbel suggests its proximate cause is the fading of thinking and reflection.<sup>204</sup> At first sight their perspectives clash, because the pleasure of the second *jhāna* must come either from a state with thinking and reflection or from their disappearance; it cannot be both. Here we should note

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202 Anālayo, ‘Meditation on the Breath’.

203 Cousins, *Meditations of the Pali Tradition*, p. 37.

204 Arbel, *Early Buddhist Meditation*, p. 89.

that Cousins considers the first *jhāna* has *samādhi* whereas Arbel does not.<sup>205</sup> So, if we conceive of this as a dance in which one actor gradually steps to the foreground (*samādhi*) while another one recedes off-stage (*vitakkavicāra*), we can bring their views closer. Arbel takes into account more explicitly how the relationship between the absence of thought and entering the second *jhāna* is not merely temporal: it is a causal relationship, expressed by an ablative case (my emphasis):

*Due to the subsiding of thinking and reflection, they enter and dwell in the second jhāna, which is the joy and pleasure born of collectedness, without thinking and reflection, with inner stillness and mental unification. They fill, drench and pervade this body with joy and pleasure born of collectedness, so that no part of the entire body is unpervaded with joy and pleasure born of collectedness.*<sup>206</sup>

After having learnt to derive pleasure from being skilful, now the meditator learns to find satisfaction in a state of inner silence. For a happiness without thinking and reflection, the Buddha says to Sakka, is more refined than one with thinking and reflection.<sup>207</sup> If the previous positive affect was at least partially mastery pleasure, if not fully, we are now in clear play pleasure territory. Its nature is no longer linked to handling novelty pleasure or ethical issues—thought *per se* is not unskilful. Things now look more like a playful exploration of experience, removing elements of it to see how refined and peaceful it is able to become. It is, however, still related to erasing subtler and subtler forms of *dukkha*. Put differently: how much more fun can this get?<sup>208</sup>

Because the *pīti* of the second *jhāna* depends on an awareness of a disappearance (thinking and reflection), it would make sense that it faded with time, as the novelty wears off. This is precisely what happens in the third *jhāna*: *pīti* goes away and only the bodily *sukha* it caused through relaxation stays on, almost as an echo. It is logical that secondary feelings disappear earlier than primary ones, for they depend on more mental activity and construction. Perhaps through becoming acquainted with the *dukkha* this can entail, the mind becomes less excited about the attainment of collectedness, and this more balanced attitude feels mentally neutral.

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205 Cousins, ‘Buddhist Jhāna’, p. 122.

206 DN i 74: *bhikkhu vitakkavicāraṇaṃ vūpasamā ajjhataṃ sampasādanaṃ cetaso ekodibhāvaṃ avitakkaṃ avicāraṃ samādhijam pītisukhaṃ dutiyaṃ jhānaṃ upasampajja viharati. so imeva kāyaṃ samādhijena pītisukhena abhisandeti parisandeti paripūreti parippharati, nāssa kiṃ ci sabbāvato kāyassa samādhijena pītisukhena apphūtaṃ hoti.*

207 DN ii 278.

208 This is not a frivolous remark. While I adopt the language of ‘play’ here, I refer to early Buddhism’s refined hedonism: the most ‘fun’ of all would be whatever entails the least possible *dukkha*.

In addition, we may consider that mental and bodily spiritual feelings keep feeding off each other, and so the third *jhāna* depicts a phase where the meditator is also less excited and more balanced towards its bodily pleasure, resulting in neutral mental feeling rather than joy.<sup>209</sup> With time, the bodily pleasant feeling too calms down, as it reflected a joy which has faded away. The body-mind is now in a hedonic state of neutrality where it can dwell and truly know and see—the fourth *jhāna*.

This is also the culmination of the gladness formula, the awakening factors, and mindfulness of breathing. The difference is that the *jhāna* model expands on something other models gloss over: what happens between the initial spiritual pleasure and spiritual equanimity. Among these models, mindfulness of breathing does provide a bit more detail. The key is in steps seven and eight: to breathe in and out while experiencing and relaxing the ‘mental conditioning force’ (*cittasaṅkhāra*).<sup>210</sup> Why is this under the *vedanā* tetrad? Buddhist schools have interpreted *cittasaṅkhāra* in various ways, most frequently as perception and feeling (Theravāda) or as perception and intention (Vaibhāṣika and Dharmaguptaka).<sup>211</sup> As far as I know, no one has suggested that *cittasaṅkhāra* in the context of breathing mindfulness could be related to the carnal-spiritual distinction of the second *satipaṭṭhāna*, contemplation of *vedanā*. For such a distinction also requires being aware of feeling-related perceptions and intentions which, strictly speaking, belong to other *khandhas* and *satipaṭṭhānas*. Since in *ānāpānassati* we only deal with spiritual feelings, noticing and calming the perceptions around feelings could also refer to the process by which *pīti* subsides and, more generally, to making feelings more and more refined.

Here, another basic question becomes relevant: why should the hedonic curve evolve towards neutral feeling instead of forever rising to more pleasure? Especially when we consider how the mind settling somewhere is the same as the mind finding pleasure there, which seems to always require pleasure. The answer is, at first, rather simple. The elements the meditator lets go of are increasingly subtle, and therefore, so is their unpleasantness. Given how spiritual

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209 Buddhaghosa suggests something like this, but of course from his very different interpretation of *jhānic* feelings—Vism 163 (IV 177).

210 MN iii 83: *cittasaṅkhārappaṭisaṃvedī assasissāmī ti sikkhati, cittasaṅkhārappaṭisaṃvedī passasissāmī ti sikkhati, passambhayaṃ cittasaṅkhāraṃ assasissāmī ti sikkhati, passambhayaṃ cittasaṅkhāraṃ passasissāmī ti sikkhati.*

211 These are summarised in Dhammadipa, ‘The Role of Mindfulness of Breathing (Ānāpānasati/Smṛti) in Early Buddhism and the Abhidharma’ (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Bristol, 2006), pp. 191–94, 346; Cousins, ‘Mindfulness with In and Out Breathing’, p. 10; Anālayo, *Comparative Majjhima*, p. 282.

pleasant feelings relate to the fading away of unpleasantness, these too become more subtle: they are proportional to the unpleasant feelings that subsided.

Let us also remember how the hedonic spectrum is a gradient, not three clear-cut hedonic tones with an abrupt shift between each other. Thus, a *subtler* or *more refined* pleasant feeling—the term is ‘*paṇīta*’—is also a *more neutral* feeling. Similar to the previous discussion of the wobble before final liberation, those states are just closer and closer to the centre of the hedonic spectrum and it depends on how one looks at it. Two perspectives co-exist in that ‘blended space’, as cognitive linguists call it:<sup>212</sup> from a bird’s eye view, considering how intense feelings can get on either side of the spectrum, it makes sense to describe them as feeling neutral; from a closer perspective, the pleasantness is still worth mentioning as it draws the mind in. We find both perspectives in the early discourses. While many models depict an increasing hedonic neutrality, and *jhānas* stop describing things in terms of pleasantness in the third, we saw in chapter two how the *Mahāsaccaka Sutta* (MN 36) calls even the fourth *jhāna* a pleasant feeling,<sup>213</sup> how Pañcakaṅga considers neutral feeling a subtle pleasure,<sup>214</sup> how a meditator finds pleasure in a higher state through conceiving of it as peaceful, and, in the previous chapter and this one, how all *jhānas* collectively are spoken of as a form of pleasure and comfort.

To finish this chapter, let us zoom out and go back to where it started. I have been suggesting that early Buddhism showcases a consistent hedonic curve in its depiction of progress to awakening, and that it provides a wonderful example of Glucklich’s patterns of hedonic training: sitting on the recognition that people go for what feels good, it builds a soteriology *on* that tendency rather than *against* it, guiding people towards more refined or complex pleasures. What the training goes against is ordinary perceptions of what ‘actually’ feels good and bad, more than our tendencies regarding feelings. A specific pattern of this early Buddhist hedonic training has to do with perceiving absences, with noticing how the absence, disappearance or abandonment of certain things feels. These things are, first, more coarse unskillful behaviours, both external and internal, and then experiential elements that are not unskillful in themselves,

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212 Kövecses and Benczes, p. 268 ff.

213 MN i 247: *sukhasa ca pahānā dukkhasa ca pahānā, pubbeva somanassadomanassānaṃ atthaṅgamā, adukkhamasukhaṃ upekkhāsatiṭṭhānaṃ catutthaṃ jhānaṃ upasampajja vihāsiṃ. evarūpāpi kho me, aggivessana, uppannā sukhā vedanā cittaṃ na pariyādāya tiṭṭhati.*

214 M i 396: *na kho bhante Udāyi tisso vedanā vuttā bhagavatā, dve vedanā vuttā bhagavatā: sukhā vedanā, dukkhā vedanā. yāyaṃ bhante adukkhamasukhā vedanā, santasmiṃ esā paṇīte sukhe vuttā bhagavatā ti.*

like thinking, but still entail some *dukkha*. Thus, the latter—play pleasure—is an extension of the former—mastery pleasure. It continues its logic of feeling into the gradual absence of unpleasantness (*dukkha*). Absences have fascinated Buddhist traditions ever since.

Glucklich writes that play pleasure mediates between novelty and mastery pleasures.<sup>215</sup> While he does not develop this idea, what I understand is play helps soften the tensions and the competing demands of novelty and mastery, it provides an avenue for gratification that is more immediate and satisfying than mastery but, like it, still uses rules. This suggests cultivating mastery pleasure is not enough—perhaps not *fun* enough? In line with this, the previous chapter noted early Buddhist texts do not speak of mastery pleasure as liberating. Soteriologically speaking, its function is to be a bridge towards play pleasure. Payutto observes how in the gradual instruction (*anupubbikathā*) the Buddha does not introduce the critique of sense pleasures until after praising generosity, moral conduct and heavenly life.<sup>216</sup> With these, practitioners see they *can* feel good from things other than sensory stimulation, through internal dispositions and attitudes—such is, essentially, the dispositional theory of pleasure. Only then can they wonder what ways of feeling good are preferable, pondering their benefits and disadvantages, and so it is at this point that ideas about novelty versus play pleasure are introduced, eroding—first through reflection, then through direct experience—the rationale of novelty pleasure. This would be unnecessary if mastery pleasure were enough.

It is only when meditators learn to heat up mastery pleasure so it fills the play pleasure balloon that the grip of novelty pleasure loosens and they fly. Yet, while mastery pleasure's contribution to liberation is indirect, it is also indispensable. If play pleasure were unconnected to ethics, it might not be liberating either—after all, other types of play pleasure such as games, art or scientific research do not sever novelty pleasure's ties. This highlights the soteriological agenda of early Buddhism.<sup>217</sup> If Bucknell is right, and the central question in Buddhist meditation theory is 'What is the first *jhāna*?', I believe I have provided a satisfying answer. For the transition from mastery pleasure to play pleasure is like a synecdoche that makes sense of the whole early Buddhist path.

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215 Glucklich, *The Joy of Religion*, p. 11.

216 Payutto, p. 1099.

217 Glucklich remarks that the biological function of play pleasure is unclear, for 'it is not related to the response to either some immediate environmental stressor or to some extrinsic social demand or agenda'—Glucklich, *The Joy of Religion*, p. 11.

## Conclusion

This thesis started by asking ‘what is *vedanā*’ according to the early Buddhist texts, especially the Pali *suttas*. While it could seem such a basic question was not worth asking, I have evinced it was. For, besides there being no systematic monograph on this topic, I have shown that recent scholarship has leaned towards reductive and selective views of *vedanā*, too influenced by the lenses through which they looked at this material, namely, the modern concept of ‘emotion’. In the earliest phase of Buddhist thought, *vedanā* is a small unit of hedonic lived experience, like the pleasantness of a cool breeze, but also bigger units that are dominated by the affective-hedonic dimension, like feeling sad. What holds together these two experiences—very different, from the perspective of contemporary categories—besides that dimension is their place in Buddhist soteriological ethics: they are not moral issues in themselves, rather they signal morally-relevant behaviours that gave rise to them, from either the immediate or distant past, and they are susceptible to morally-relevant behaviours that will shape the immediate or distant future. These morally-relevant behaviours, summarised as greed, hatred, and ignorance, as well as their opposites, fall under different headings like *saṅkhāra* or *citta*. To take sadness out of *vedanā* and place it into another category overlooks this, whereas appreciating it emphasises how early Buddhist maps of the inner life had a soteriological goal in mind and were designed to fit that function.

Looking at this material ‘through the feeling glass’ has foregrounded the centrality of *vedanā* for early Buddhist soteriology. Perhaps we could even characterise it as a *vedanā*-based soteriology. Its ultimate goal already refers to this—the ending of pain (*dukkha*) is an orientation built on the hedonic preference to avoid what feels bad. While the notion of *dukkha* encompasses things that do not feel painful all the time, it is still an *extension* of that preference natural to living organisms, and the argument that conditioned experience is on the whole *dukkha* is made with reference to the possibility or inevitability of felt pain. It boils down to *vedanā*. Of course this is not everything Buddhism is, but it is a central concern in which Buddhists themselves are seeing the human condition through the feeling glass. Such an

emphasis on negative affect underpins and supports the movement to let go of conditioned existence, since we do not want what feels bad.

The other side of this is our preference for what feels good, or in privative terms, what does not feel bad. *Vedanā* is best conceptualised as a spectrum, but also a relative one, more akin to felt temperature than to a scientific measuring. Thanks to the thermostat in my house, I know 19 degrees does not always feel equally warm. In a similar way, ‘hedonic temperature’ going up from pain feels pleasant—that is, more pleasant than before—and when meditative states get ever more refined their feelings go towards the neutral. Intelligently, Buddhism counters the latter with the former. It stimulates an awareness of how such states have left behind things that involve pain and affliction, however subtle, for this makes them be experienced as a subtle pleasure, appealing to the natural motivation to seek what feels good so that the mind settles there. This dynamic is harder to appreciate if one misplaces the boundary between feelings and evaluations, as I have shown some scholars have done, if one gives too much weight to the one claim that hedonic tones are mutually exclusive, or if one puts a very thick boundary between *vedanā* and *saññā*. For this obscures the intimate and central interplay between them.

Focusing more on *vedanā*’s contribution to unawakened experience, scholars have neglected its significance in getting practitioners to the further shore—awakening or liberation. Their resulting picture of early Buddhism is too cognitive and skims the gradual nature of its path and its specific mechanics. A general contribution of this thesis is to highlight early Buddhism’s refined hedonism and to detail exactly how that is put into practice. Early Buddhist soteriology does not combat the tendency to turn away from the unpleasant and seek the pleasant: it is precisely built on it. What it does challenge is our ordinary perception of what is pleasant and unpleasant: we underestimate the collateral pain that our pursuit of sensory pleasure brings about, and we fail to appreciate peaceful and refined states that actually feel better. The motivational pull of feelings is used in the service of liberation in a gradual path that works with people’s current affective tendencies. Spiritual pleasures are considered a necessary condition for awakening, and experiencing them in an embodied way is a necessary complement to rationally understanding the unskilful as unskilful. Spiritual pleasures are meant to eventually upstage the habit of gratification-seeking that is often an unskilful response to painful feelings.

In contextualising early Buddhism within its historical religious landscape, I have shown an affinity with the Vedic traditions—epitomized in the terminology of ‘*pīti*’—that remains unacknowledged when foregrounding other, perhaps more metaphysical aspects of the various religious movements. This adds to the debate on the relationship between Buddhism and Brahmanism. As I summarised in chapter four, simplifying, early Buddhism often sounds like Jainism but feels like Brahmanism. It brings together the non-Vedic ascetic concern with pain with the Vedic valuing of pleasure or bliss. The Buddhist middle way, the idea of ‘pleasure as path’, helps read some critiques to other schools in the *Brahmajāla Sutta* as defending this idea against misinterpretations that arise from associating pleasure with the religious goal, as is widespread in Indian religion, not as warnings about the dangers of spiritual pleasant feelings *per se*. I have argued that spiritual pleasant feelings have been unfairly blamed, something akin to blaming feeling as a whole for triggering defilements. But feelings, of any kind, may or may not lead to defilement—the problem is ignorance.

While interesting and valuable in themselves, all these findings served as foundation and support for my big and final argument in the last chapter: that early Buddhist soteriology contains an underlying hedonic curve. In other words: looked at from the perspective of *vedanā*, all major models of progress to awakening proceed along a consistent affective-hedonic transformation. All describe a hedonic curve that rises towards ethical pleasure and then mellows into equanimity, and which begins with consciously recognising that the mind is skilful. But while the skilful mind can feel either pleasant or neutral, the hedonic curve consistently progresses from the former to the latter. This is because the hedonic curve of the gradual Buddhist path answers to a specific hedonic training that teaches to notice the disappearance of things that entail *dukkha*, and like any relief, this tends to feel good. Then, as the unpleasantness left behind becomes more and more refined, so the corresponding pleasant feelings become milder—that is, more neutral.

The gradual path is a process of eliminating elements of experience and learning to take pleasure in their disappearance or absence. At first, these are elements with (negative) moral valence, be they immoral behaviour or subtle unskilful mental impulses. Later, they are elements with either no moral valence or a positive one, like thought—skilful thought—or certain perceptions (*saññā*), but which still entail fine levels of *dukkha*. This is something to

which scholars have not given the deserved attention: how the pleasure of the first *jhāna* differs in a significant sense from that of the second. For it is not yet born of *samādhi*, but of an awareness that one is withdrawn from the hindrances—elements with negative moral valence.

Thus, the first *jhāna* is closer to the pleasure of earlier stages in the gradual path than to that from the second *jhāna* onwards. At the same time, the discourses speak of it as the first item of a new type of pleasure: spiritual (*nirāmisa*). So, taking Roderick Bucknell's suggestion that the central question of Buddhist meditation theory is 'What is the first *jhāna*?', I have concluded that it describes the threshold between two types of positive affect, following a typology from evolutionary theory: mastery pleasure, which here relates to controlling impulses with negative moral valence, and play pleasure, which does not. This threshold gives continuity to the overall progress to awakening and somewhat challenges two assumptions: that the early texts do not say anything about how one gets into *jhāna*, and that it is mainly an exercise in attentional focus. Rather, *jhāna* is but one among several models that depict how practitioners learn to derive satisfaction from skilfulness, then extend that capacity to enter non-ordinary states of consciousness, and later delight in the disappearance of even skilful or morally-neutral elements of experience. It is a hedonic training. This perspective also questions the significance of the debate about whether *jhāna* is necessary for awakening or not, which relies on isolating *jhāna* from this context, treating it as *sui generis* and overemphasising the question of absorption depth.

Glucklich has carried out the latest, most systematic and perhaps most significant attempt to study religions' complicated relationship with pleasure, and the role that pleasure plays in them. If the value of his scholarship lies in its breadth, it needs to be complemented with more in-depth research for each religious tradition. I have tried to fill that gap in the case of early Buddhism. My portrayal of it is biased towards the Pali tradition. Having consulted much of the existing comparative literature, I am unsure that more research into the parallel discourses in other languages would drastically change the picture I have presented, but it is possible, and it would surely nuance some of the arguments and add richness. Similarly, given my focus, I have made a limited use of the commentaries and abhidharma. Delving more deeply into these would expand our understanding of the hedonic curve of Buddhist soteriology according to Theravāda, Sārvāstivāda, and Yogācāra thought. My findings can be

used for further and perhaps wider studies on the place of pleasure in the Buddhist tradition(s), Indian religions and philosophy—especially chapter four, which should be supplemented with deeper research into non-Buddhist sources—other religions, or religion in general. Another further avenue is to look for these topics in narrative literature like the *Jātakas*.

My research also contributes to the debate of calm (*samatha*) and insight (*vipassanā*), still alive in Buddhist studies. By approaching the theory of meditation and spiritual progress from the perspective of *vedanā*, I have suggested these are based on our natural motivation to abandon the painful and seek the pleasant. Insight rests ultimately on the former, with calm relying on the latter. Progress means to move along this vector given a specific Buddhist conception of what is actually painful and pleasant, a conception justified in quantitative hedonist terms. Therefore, progress always and necessarily involves degrees of wisdom.

The Pali *suttas* link entering a (pleasant) meditative state to understanding the drawbacks of lower, ordinary states, including sense desires and sense pleasures. In fact, the data gathered in support of the hedonic curve shows how insight into the three characteristics leads to the same ethical/spiritual pleasant feelings described in models traditionally understood as *samatha*. Later traditions acknowledge this with new concepts like *lokuttarajjhāna* or the *vipassanā jhānas*. At the same time, some initial—and probably limited—experience of those pleasant states feeds into the insight that habitual ways of being are rather painful. And this is an embodied learning, something which has not always been appreciated, instead portraying wisdom as a matter of cognitive understanding. My *vedanā* perspective demonstrates all this is a single process, and that even wisdom is an affective-hedonic process, one related to unpleasantness—namely, letting go of it. Without claiming that the early texts speak with only a single voice, we can say there is nevertheless a widespread and internally consistent vision of how—and why—beings move towards liberation, and a lot of it has to do with *vedanā*.

# Figures

Figure 1: Statistics of vedanā classifications

|  | <b>DN</b>  | <b>MN</b>  | <b>SN</b>  | <b>AN</b>  | <b>Total</b> |
|--|--|--|--|--|--------------|
| <b>2 feelings</b><br>(bodily and mental)                                       |  |  | 36.6 (iv 207), 36.22 (iv 231)  | 2.70 (i 81)**  | <b>3</b>     |
| <b>3 feelings</b><br>(pleasant, painful, neutral)                              | 1 (i 1), 2 (i 47), 15 (ii 55), 22 (ii 290), 33 (iii 207), 34 (iii 272) | 10 (i 55), 37 (i 251), 38 (i 256), 43 (i 292), 44 (i 299), 70 (i 473), 74 (i 497), 101 (ii 214), 102 (ii 228), 136 (iii 207), 140 (iii 237), 146 (iii 270), 148 (iii 280), 149 (iii 287) | 12.32 (ii 50), 12.51 (ii 80), 12.62 (ii 95), 12.63 (ii 97), 22.79 (iii 86), 22.88 (iii 124), 35.24-26 (iv 15), 35.28-32 (iv 19), 35.33-42* (iv 27), 35.43-51* (iv 29), 35.52-55 (iv 29), 35.59 (iv 32), 35.75-82 (iv 47), 35.84-86 (iv 53), 35.89-91 (iv 63), 35.99-102 (iv 80), 35.129-130 (iv 113), 35.147-150 (iv 133), 35.152 (iv 138), 35.160-7 (iv 143), 35.235 (iv 168), 36.1-3 (iv 204), 36.5-19 (iv 207), 36.21-24 (iv 230), 36.26-28 (iv 234), 36.30 (iv 235), 38.7 (iv 255), 45.29 (v 21), 45.169 (v 57), 47.49 (v 189), 54.8 (v 316) | 3.62 (i 173), 6.61 (iii 399), 6.63 (iii 410), 7.61 (iv 85) | <b>111</b>   |
| <b>5 faculties</b><br>(pleasure, pain, happiness, unhappiness, equanimity)     | 33 (iii 207)   |  | 36.22 (iv 231), 48.31-40 (v 207)   |  | <b>12</b>    |
| <b>6 feelings</b><br>(visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile, mental) | 15 (ii 55), 22 (ii 290), 33 (iii 207)                                  | 9 (i 46), 10 (i 55), 143 (iii 258), 148 (iii 280)  | 12.2 (ii 2), 14.4 (ii 141), 14.5 (ii 142), 18.5 (ii 247), 18.12-20* (ii 251), 22.56 (iii 58), 22.57 (iii 61), 25.5 (iii 226), 26.5 (iii 230), 27.5 (iii 233), 36.22 (iv 231)   |  | <b>18</b>    |
| <b>18 ruminations</b>  | 33 (iii 207)   | 137 (iii 215), 140 (iii 237)   | 36.22 (iv 231)   | 3.62 (i 173)   | <b>5</b>     |
| <b>36 feelings</b><br>(domestic and renunciant)                                |  | 137 (iii 215)  | 36.22 (iv 231)   |  | <b>2</b>     |
| <b>108 feelings</b>  |  |  | 36.22 (iv 231)   |  | <b>1</b>     |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>6</b>   | <b>17</b>  | <b>107</b>   | <b>5</b>   | <b>135</b>   |

\* Counted as one.

\*\* Only mentions *sukha*.

The table does not register all occurrences of the term *vedanā*, but of the templates here discussed, in order to see where they are operative. Given the enormity of the textual body, a few have probably escaped me, but all those instances where feeling is explicitly presented should definitely be registered. I have omitted the *Bahuvedanīya*, *Pañcakaṅga*, and *Bhikkhu suttas* because they merely list all the types of *vedanā* (except *sāmisa* and *nirāmisa*) but do not actually present their content, i.e., they say “the six *vedanās*” but do not explain what those are. The three hedonic tones appear in the *sutta* in the context of their disagreement, but I have still not counted that.

Figure 2: Primary and secondary vedanā

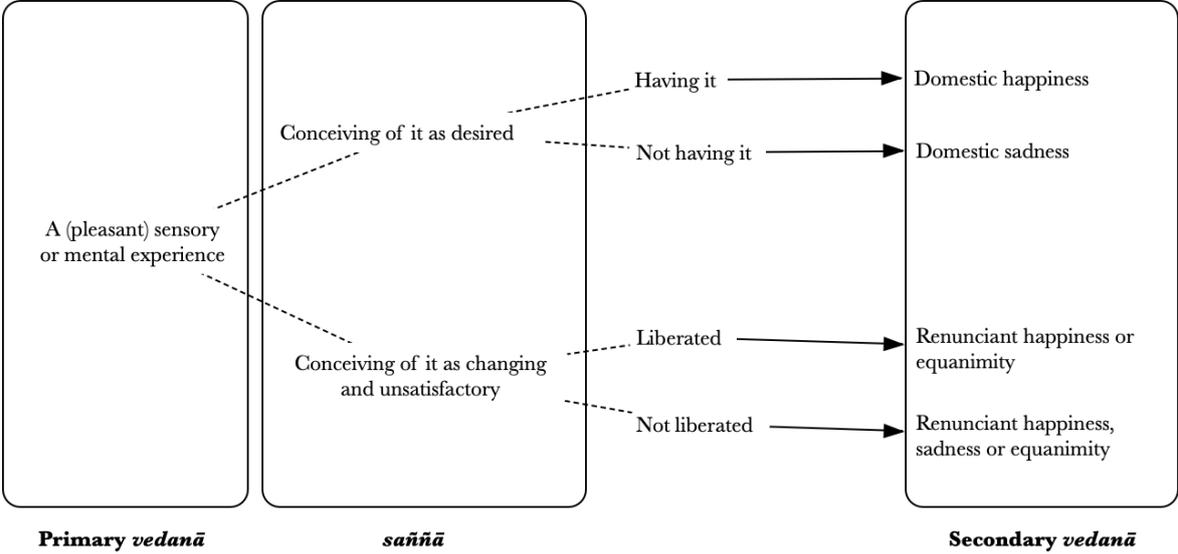


Figure 3: Spiritual joy

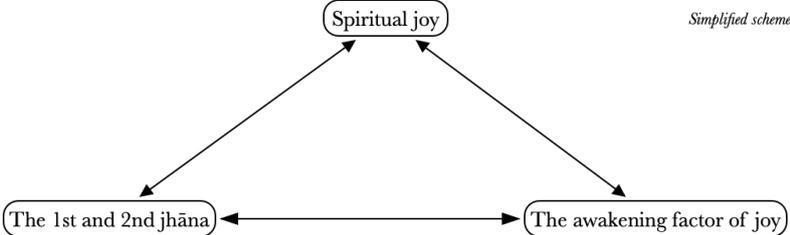
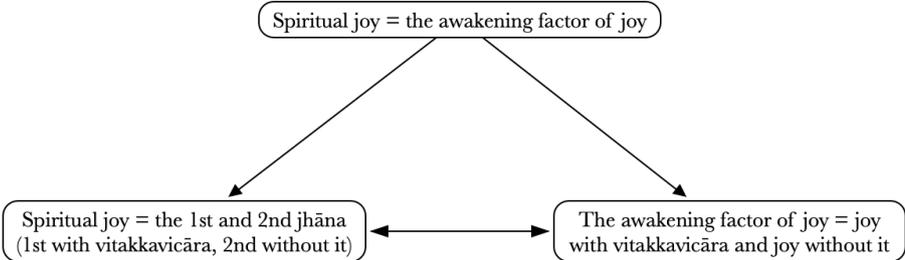


Figure 4: Carnal-spiritual

|                                  |   | SN 36.31                            |                     | SĀ 483   |                     |
|----------------------------------|---|-------------------------------------|---------------------|--|---------------------|
|                                  |   | <i>pīti, sukha,<br/>and upekkhā</i> | <i>vimokkha</i>     | <i>sati (pīti),<br/>sukha, and<br/>upekkhā</i> | <i>vimokkha</i>     |
| Stage / Type<br>of <i>vedanā</i> | Five strands of sense desire /<br>Feelings connected to sense desire      | <i>sāmisā</i>                       | —                   | <i>sāmisā</i>                                  | —                   |
|                                  | Jhāna /<br>Feelings connected to form                                     | <i>nirāmisā</i>                     | <i>sāmisā</i>       | <i>nirāmisā</i> &<br><i>nirāmisatara</i>       | <i>sāmisā</i>       |
|                                  | Formless attainments / Feelings<br>connected to the formless              | — <sup>1</sup>                      | <i>nirāmisā</i>     | — <sup>2</sup>                                 | <i>nirāmisā</i>     |
|                                  | Awakening / Feelings connected<br>to the absence of influxes <sup>3</sup> | <i>nirāmisatara</i>                 | <i>nirāmisatara</i> | —  | <i>nirāmisatara</i> |

1 Possibly *nirāmisā upekkhā*.

2 Possibly *nirāmisā nirāmisatarā upekkhā*.

3 Excluding *nirāmisā nirāmisatara vimokkha*.

Figure 5: Novelty and play pleasures

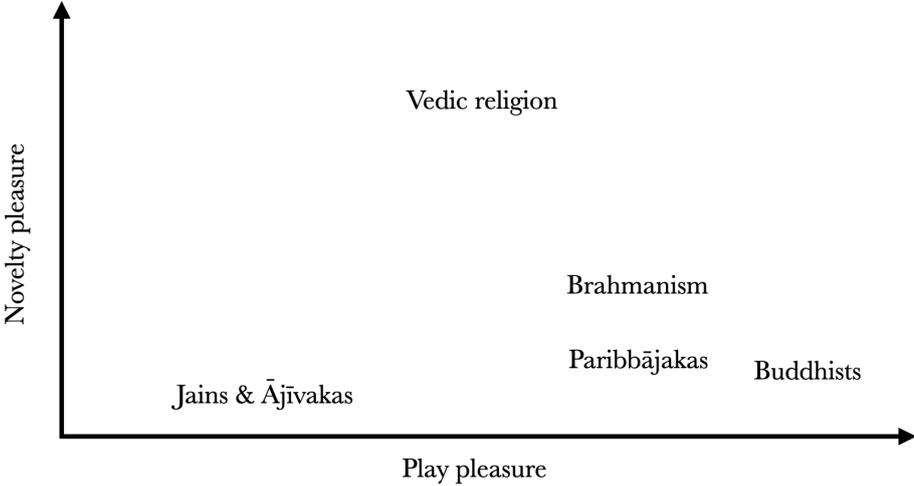
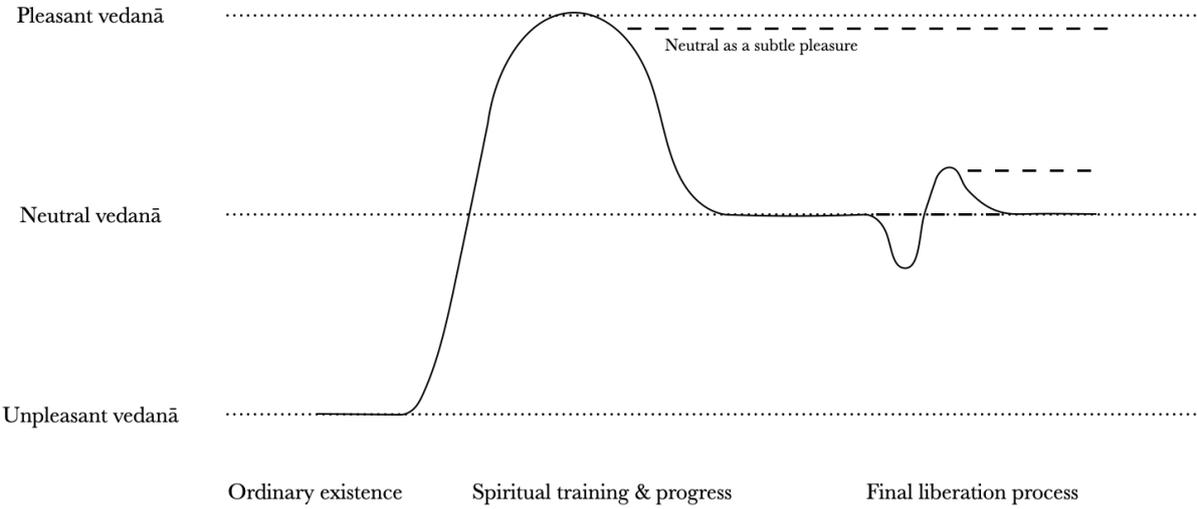


Figure 6: The hedonic curve



# Abbreviations

I follow the abbreviation and citation methods of the Critical Pali Dictionary, except I do not indicate line numbers.<sup>1</sup> When I use discourse numbers, these follow the 6th Council edition. For subcommentaries I give the page numbers of the Burmese edition. My main source for Pali texts is the 6th Council edition as available on SuttaCentral or the Digital Pali Reader, comparing it with the Pali Text Society's edition.

To *Visuddhimagga* references, I add between parenthesis the chapter and paragraph number of Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli's English translation, as has become standard. The *Saṅghabhedavastu* is abbreviated SBV, and I use the edition by Raniero Gnoli of the Gilgit Manuscript.<sup>2</sup> For the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* (AKB), I use the digital edition by Dan Lusthaus and Paul Hackett, from 2020.<sup>3</sup>

Jain scriptures are abbreviated as follows: *Ācārāṅga Sūtra* (AS), *Kalpa Sūtra* (KS), *Sūtrakṛtāṅga Sūtra* (SS), *Uttarādhyāyana Sūtra* (US). I provide, as applicable, number of 'book' (in Roman numerals), 'lecture' and 'lesson', and paragraph in between parenthesis, following Hermann Jacobi's translation. The original of the US is taken from a 1997 transcription by Yumi Ousaka and Moriichi Yamazaki.<sup>4</sup>

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1 'Abbreviations Vol. I - Critical Pali Dictionary', *Data Center for the Humanities - University of Cologne* <[https://cpd.uni-koeln.de/intro/vol1\\_epileg\\_abbrev\\_texts](https://cpd.uni-koeln.de/intro/vol1_epileg_abbrev_texts)> [accessed 15 July 2023].

2 Available at 'Sanghabhedavastu', *GRETEL* <[http://gretl.sub.uni-goettingen.de/gretl/1\\_sansk/4\\_rellit/buddh/vinv172u.htm](http://gretl.sub.uni-goettingen.de/gretl/1_sansk/4_rellit/buddh/vinv172u.htm)> [accessed 15 July 2023].

3 Available at 'Vasubandhu: Abhidharmakośabhāṣya', *GRETEL* <[http://gretl.sub.uni-goettingen.de/gretl/corpustei/transformations/html/sa\\_vasubandhu-abhidharmakozabhASya.htm](http://gretl.sub.uni-goettingen.de/gretl/corpustei/transformations/html/sa_vasubandhu-abhidharmakozabhASya.htm)> [accessed 15 July 2023].

4 Available at 'Uttarajjhaya', *GRETEL* <[http://gretl.sub.uni-goettingen.de/gretl/2\\_prakrt/uttaraju.htm](http://gretl.sub.uni-goettingen.de/gretl/2_prakrt/uttaraju.htm)> [accessed 15 July 2023].

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