

Not Perceiving the Feeling

(Notes on MN 43)

Bhikkhu Ninoslav Ñāṇamoli

Friend, feeling and perception and consciousness—these things are associated, not disassociated. It is not possible to separate them and by separating them point out the difference [between them]. What one feels, that one perceives. What one perceives, that one cognizes. Therefore, these things are associated not disassociated. It is not possible to separate them and by separating them point out the difference [between them].—MN 43.

The Teaching is for the one who feels. When one thinks “this is what I feel”, that is what one *thinks*, not what one *feels*. Feeling cannot be thought, it cannot be perceived. What one perceives is one’s perception, what one feels is one’s feeling.¹ Feeling and perception are simply *there*, superimposed, independent and different in nature.

“What one feels, that one perceives.”

Thinking that it is *the same* thing that one feels and *simultaneously* perceives, means one *assumes* that [same] thing as *independent* of that feeling and perception. That thing *is*.

Thinking that it is *a different* thing that one feels and *simultaneously* perceives, means one *assumes* that [different] thing as *independent* of that feeling and perception. That thing *is*.

Thinking that it is *both-the-same-and-different* thing that one feels and *simultaneously* perceives, means one *assumes* that [both-the-same-and-different] thing as *independent* of that feeling and perception. That thing *is*.

Thinking that it is *neither-the-same-nor-different* thing that one feels and *simultaneously* perceives, means one *assumes* that [neither-the-same-nor-different] thing as *independent* of that feeling and perception. That thing *is*.

Thus, through that assumption, one *identifies* that thing.

Whether one thinks it is the same, or different, or both or neither, feeling is there, *regardless* of the perception in regard to it. Thus, a feeling cannot be thought, it can only be *felt*. A perception cannot be felt, it can only be *perceived*. One has to learn *how to feel*, or how to *know* ‘that because of which’ the feeling is.² This means how to *discern* it from that which perception is. This cannot be done by separating feeling and perception and examining them individually.³ So how can one do it then?—

By *feeling* [the feeling]. By *perceiving* [the perception]. By *cognizing* [the cognizance].

By *cognizing feeling-while-perceiving*.

By *understanding* cognizing.

By *not-conceiving* perception.

¹ Cf. Ñāṇavīra Thera, *Clearing the Path*, SAÑÑĀ, §2.

² Or how to not-conceive ‘that because of which’ perception is.

³ Thinking it in isolation from the present experience (i.e. from perception and consciousness) would amount to this. Since the separation cannot actually occur (*not even* in one’s imagination), all one can do is assume *that which is different* between those three.

If the superimposition of these two completely independent simultaneously present domains is understood, the assumption of *an independent thing*,⁴ outside of feeling and perception ceases to be “a bridge” for the two. The ‘thing’ which is being *identified* (as the same, different, both-the-same-and-different, neither-the-same-nor-different), is that “bridge” and feeling and perception ‘meet’ or ‘come together’ because of it. That thing is assumed *to be that* which one *feels* and *perceives*.⁵ In this way, feeling and perception (and consciousness) also come to be *identified*.⁶ Thus, that ‘[assumption of a] thing’ which identifies the *unidentifiable*⁷ feeling and perception makes them *manifest in that identity*—feeling and perception come to *exist*. The identity feels, the identity perceives—I feel, I perceive.

One feels pleasure, one feels pain, one feels neither-pain-nor-pleasure.

One perceives blue, one perceives yellow, one perceives red, one perceives white.⁸

One can be *aware* of what one feels; one can also be *aware* of what one perceives. *Through understanding that because of which one is aware of*, one *knows* the feeling and perception *structurally* cannot overlap or merge or “be bridged” or identified;⁹ This makes the *assumption* in regard to feeling and perception (as the same, different, both-the-same-and-different, neither-the-same-nor-different),¹⁰ *redundant, irrelevant, not worth maintaining*. Why? Because it does not and it cannot make *any difference* to the *structural order* of things (feeling feels, perception perceives). If it could, the freedom from suffering would not be possible.¹¹ Fully understanding that whichever way one’s thought (assumption) goes, the feeling cannot be *identified* as (the same, different, both-the-same-and-different, neither-the-same-nor-different from) perception, leaves that feeling and that perception just standing there—*indifferent* to each other.¹²

¹³

⁴The [sense of] independence is the inevitable outcome of the presence of the assumption in one’s experience. It is not therefore accidental that one’s sense of Self is always regarded as an *extra-temporal and changeless*, i.e. *independent* (from the rest of the experience). Cf. Nāṇavīra Thera, *op.cit.*, *ATTA*, §1 and *L.147*, §3.

⁵Thus, because of this assumption, one feels the thing, not one’s feelings; one perceives the thing, not one’s perception. By doing so one conceives things different to what they are, and when those things change one suffers.

⁶Cf. my essay *Determining Determinations*. ‘That *because of which*’ [feeling, perception, consciousness are] is assumed as ‘that which’ feeling, perception, consciousness ‘are’.

⁷“It is not possible to separate them and by separating them point out the difference...”—MN 43.

⁸Cf. MN 43.

⁹Or cross into each other’s domains.

¹⁰All of these are *forms of identity*.

¹¹Cf. my essay *The Infinity of Mind*.

¹²By *understanding* this structural ‘indifference’, one *feels indifferent* to the whole structure—which is what *upekkhā* is.

¹³It is the nature of the superimposition that breeds this indifference, since *concern* is in its nature always in *relation to something*.

Agreeable perception is assumed *to be that* which is pleasantly felt;

Disagreeable perception is assumed *to be that* which is unpleasantly felt;

Neutral perception is assumed *to be that* which is neutrally felt.

Thus, one thinks it is *this sight*¹⁴ (sounds, smells...thoughts) *that is felt*. Because of that feeling one sets upon to 'affect' those sights (sounds, smells, ...thoughts), sets upon to change them, modify them, adjust them, pursue them, avoid them; one gets *entangled* in the sights (sounds, smells...thoughts) *on account of what* one feels *when they are simultaneously present*. Knowing that feeling is *just there*—being felt, and perception is *just there*—being perceived, makes further entanglement *impossible*, and any entanglement that was there¹⁵ is made redundant, disowned, dropped down, never to be picked up again. Why? Because it was structurally impossible to get entangled in the first place, but until one has fully understood that, one's 'not-knowing-that-one-cannot-be-entangled' *was one's entanglement*. When one understands that the arisen things cannot structurally *relate* to each other—feeling feels the feeling, perception perceives the perception¹⁶—*concern* becomes impossible or *inconceivable*—*dukkha* completely ceases, never to arise again.

¹⁴ disagreeable (or agreeable, or neutral)

¹⁵ In the past, or possible in the future, or standing there in the present.

¹⁶ Matter matters, feeling feels, perception perceives, determinations determine, consciousness cognizes.