SN 36.19 — SN 36:19 Pañcakaṅga | Pañcakaṅga Sutta

English translation by Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu.

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Text

Pañcakaṅga

Pañcakaṅga Sutta (SN 36:19)

(Except for the opening and closing sentences, this sutta is identical to MN 59.)

Then Pañcakaṅga the carpenter1 went to Ven. Udāyin and, on arrival, having bowed down to him, sat to one side. As he was sitting there, he said to Ven. Udāyin, “Venerable Udāyin, how many feelings have been described by the Blessed One?”

“The Blessed One has described three feelings, householder: a feeling of pleasure, a feeling of pain, a feeling of neither pleasure nor pain. These are the three feelings described by the Blessed One.”

When this was said, Pañcakaṅga the carpenter said to Ven. Udāyin, "No, Venerable Udāyin, the Blessed One hasn't described three feelings, he's described two feelings: a feeling of pleasure & a feeling of pain. As for the feeling of neither pleasure nor pain, that has been described by the Blessed One as a peaceful, sublime pleasure."

A second time... A third time, Ven. Udāyin said to Pañcakaṅga the carpenter, "No, householder, the Blessed One hasn't described two feelings, he's described three feelings: a feeling of pleasure, a feeling of pain, a feeling of neither pleasure nor pain. These are the three feelings described by the Blessed One."

A second time... A third time, Pañcakaṅga the carpenter said to Ven. Udāyin, "No, Venerable Udāyin, the Blessed One hasn't described three feelings, he's described two feelings: a feeling of pleasure & a feeling of pain. As for the feeling of neither pleasure nor pain, that has been described by the Blessed One as a peaceful, sublime pleasure."

But neither was Ven. Udāyin able to convince Pañcakaṅga the carpenter, nor was Pañcakaṅga the carpenter able to convince Ven. Udāyin.

Ven. Ānanda heard of Ven. Udāyin's conversation with Pañcakaṅga the carpenter. So he went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, having bowed down to him, sat to one side. As he was sitting there, he told the Blessed One the entire extent of Ven. Udāyin's conversation with Pañcakaṅga the carpenter.

(The Blessed One said,) "Ānanda, it was a genuine exposition that Pañcakaṅga the carpenter didn't accept from Udāyin the monk, and it was a genuine exposition that Udāyin the monk didn't accept from Pañcakaṅga the carpenter. There is the exposition whereby I have spoken of two feelings, the exposition whereby I have spoken of three feelings... five... six... eighteen... thirty-six... one hundred and eight feelings.2

"Thus I have taught the Dhamma by means of exposition. When I have taught the Dhamma by means of exposition, if there are those who do not concede, allow, or approve of what has been well-spoken & well-stated by one another, it can be expected that they will dwell arguing, quarreling, & disputing, stabbing one another with weapons of the mouth.

Thus I have taught the Dhamma by means of exposition. When I have taught the Dhamma by means of exposition, if there are those who concede, allow, & approve of what has been well-spoken & well-stated by one another, it can be expected that they will dwell harmoniously, cordially, without dispute, becoming like milk mixed with water, regarding one another with affectionate eyes.

"Ānanda, there are these five strings of sensuality. Which five? Forms cognizable via the eye—agreeable, pleasing, charming, endearing, enticing, linked with sensual desire. Sounds cognizable via the ear... Aromas cognizable via the nose... Flavors cognizable via the tongue... Tactile sensations cognizable via the body—agreeable, pleasing, charming, endearing, enticing, linked with sensual desire. Now, whatever pleasure & joy arises in

dependence on these five strings of sensuality, that is called sensual pleasure.

“Though there are those who say, ‘They [i.e., beings] experience this as the highest existing pleasure & joy,’3 I do not grant them that. Why is that? Because there is another pleasure more excellent than that pleasure and more sublime.

“And which, Ānanda, is the other pleasure more excellent than that pleasure and more sublime? There is the case where a monk—quite secluded from sensuality, secluded from unskillful qualities—enters & remains in the first jhāna: rapture & pleasure born of seclusion, accompanied by directed thought & evaluation. This is the other pleasure more excellent than that pleasure and more sublime.

“Though there are those who say, ‘They experience this as the highest existing pleasure & joy,’ I do not grant them that. Why is that? Because there is another pleasure more excellent than that pleasure and more sublime.

“And which, Ānanda, is the other pleasure more excellent than that pleasure and more sublime? There is the case where, with the stilling of directed thoughts & evaluations, a monk enters & remains in the second jhāna: rapture & pleasure born of concentration, unification of awareness free from directed thought & evaluation—internal assurance. This is the other pleasure more excellent than that pleasure and more sublime.

“Though there are those who say, ‘They experience this as the highest existing pleasure & joy,’ I do not grant them that. Why is that? Because there is another pleasure more excellent than that pleasure and more sublime.

“And which, Ānanda, is the other pleasure more excellent than that pleasure and more sublime? There is the case where a monk, with the fading of rapture, remains equanimous, mindful, & alert, and senses pleasure with the body. He enters & remains in the third jhāna, of which the noble ones declare, ‘Equanimous & mindful, he has a pleasant abiding.’ This is the other pleasure more excellent than that pleasure and more sublime.

“Though there are those who say, ‘They experience this as the highest existing pleasure & joy,’ I do not grant them that. Why is that? Because there is another pleasure more excellent than that pleasure and more sublime.

“And which, Ānanda, is the other pleasure more excellent than that pleasure and more sublime? There is the case where a monk, with the abandoning of pleasure & pain—as with the earlier disappearance of elation & distress—enters & remains in the fourth jhāna: purity of equanimity & mindfulness, neither pleasure nor pain. This is the other pleasure more excellent than that pleasure and more sublime.4

“Though there are those who say, ‘They experience this as the highest existing pleasure & joy,’ I do not grant them that. Why is that? Because there is another pleasure more excellent than that pleasure and more sublime.

“And which, Ānanda, is the other pleasure more excellent than that pleasure and more sublime? There is the case where a monk, with the complete transcending of perceptions of form, with the disappearance of perceptions of resistance,5 and not attending to perceptions of multiplicity,6 (perceiving,) ‘Infinite space,’ enters & remains in the dimension of the infinitude of space. This is the other pleasure more excellent than that pleasure and more sublime.

“Though there are those who say, ‘They experience this as the highest existing pleasure & joy,’ I do not grant them that. Why is that? Because there is another pleasure more excellent than that pleasure and more sublime.

“And which, Ānanda, is the other pleasure more excellent than that pleasure and more sublime? There is the case where a monk, with the complete transcending of the dimension of the infinitude of space, (perceiving,) ‘Infinite consciousness,’ enters & remains in the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness. This is the other pleasure more excellent than that pleasure and more sublime.

“Though there are those who say, ‘They experience this as the highest existing pleasure & joy,’ I do not grant them that. Why is that? Because there is another pleasure more excellent than that pleasure and more sublime.

“And which, Ānanda, is the other pleasure more excellent than that pleasure and more sublime? There is the case where a monk, with the complete transcending of the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness, (perceiving,) ‘There is nothing,’ enters & remains in the dimension of nothingness. This is the other pleasure more excellent than that pleasure and more sublime.

“Though there are those who say, ‘They experience this as the highest existing pleasure & joy,’ I do not grant them that. Why is that? Because there is another pleasure more excellent than that pleasure and more sublime.

“And which, Ānanda, is the other pleasure more excellent than that pleasure and more sublime? There is the case where a monk, with the complete transcending of the dimension of nothingness, enters & remains in the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception. This is the other pleasure more excellent than that pleasure and more sublime.

“Though there are those who say, ‘They experience this as the highest existing pleasure & joy,’ I do not grant them that. Why is that? Because there is another pleasure more excellent than that pleasure and more sublime.

“And which, Ānanda, is the other pleasure more excellent than that pleasure and more sublime? There is the case where a monk, with the complete transcending of the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception, enters & remains in the cessation of perception & feeling.7 This is the other pleasure more excellent than that pleasure and more sublime.

“Now, it’s possible, Ānanda, that some wanderers of other persuasions might say, ‘Gotama the contemplative speaks of the cessation of perception & feeling and yet describes it as pleasure. What is this? How is this?’ When they say that, they are to be told, ‘It’s not the case, friends, that the Blessed One describes only pleasant feeling as included under pleasure. Wherever pleasure is found, in whatever terms, the Blessed One describes it as pleasure.’”

Notes

1. See MN 78.

2. See SN 36:22. SN 48:38–9 provide further explanations of the five feelings. MN 137 provides a further explanation of the eighteen and thirty-six feelings.

The two types of feelings described in SN 36:22 do not correspond to the two types cited here by Pañcakaṅga, but see note 4, below. As for the three types described in SN 36:22, they do correspond to the three types cited here by Ven. Udayin. It may be that, in this sutta, Ven. Udāyin is still smarting from the rebuke he received from the Buddha in MN 136 for trying to apply the teaching that all feelings are stressful—essentially, an assertion that there is only one type of feeling—to a question about the results of kamma: a question that, the Buddha said, should have been answered with an explanation of the three types of feeling, corresponding to the three types of action.

3. Reading, ‘etaṁ paramaṃ santaṁ sukhaṁ somanassaṁ paṭisaṃvedentīti,’ with the Thai edition.

4. By identifying the neither-pleasure nor pain of the fourth jhāna as a kind of pleasure, the Buddha shows that Pañcakaṅga was, at least partially, right.

5. “Resistance” is a translation of the Pali term, paṭigha. According to DN 15, resistance-contact results from the characteristics of physical form and allows mental activity to know the presence of form. In other words, if form did not put up resistance to something else taking its place, one would not know that form is present. Thus the disappearance of perceptions of resistance aids in the mind’s ability to transcend perceptions of form and to sense, in its place, infinite space.

6. “Multiplicity” is a translation of the Pali term, nānattā. MN 137 identifies multiplicity as the input of the five physical senses. See the essay, “Silence Isn’t Mandatory.”

7. Notice that this description of the cessation of perception & feeling lacks the statement often added in some passages where this attainment is described (as in MN 26 and AN 9:38): “and, as he sees (that) with discernment, his effluents are completely ended.” This suggests that the arising of discernment may not be an automatic feature of this attainment.

Publisher references (not part of the sutta)

See also: DN 2; DN 9; MN 14; MN 140; AN 9:33; AN 9:34; Dhp 202–204; Thag 9