Exploring Vedanā (Feeling Tone)

Andrea Fella · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Andrea Fella · 1:03:47

This evening I'd like to explore a little bit more around the topic of feeling tone that Greg and Jaya spoke to the last couple of days.

It is such an important area of our practice, of our awareness—this exploration of the quality of whether experience is pleasant, unpleasant, or neither pleasant nor unpleasant. So important that the Buddha put it into its own foundation in terms of the four foundations of mindfulness, really highlighting its importance in our understanding. It comes up a lot in the teachings, being aware of and understanding the nature of feeling tone.

Part of the reason for that is because when we are motivated by our habitual tendencies, when our belief structure is oriented around believing that when we get things that are pleasant, we'll be happy, and when we get rid of things that are unpleasant, we'll be happy—this is a fundamental, very human belief structure. When we are oriented in that way, we act. Basically what happens is that the craving that Jaya spoke about last night arises in dependence on feeling tone. When something is pleasant and this belief structure is in place—that getting something pleasant will make me happy—craving arises. When something is unpleasant and this belief structure is in place, then craving arises that leads us towards aversion.

This mechanism of how our suffering begins, how our suffering arises with this underlying belief structure around having pleasant things making me happy and getting rid of unpleasant things making me happy, is a fundamental delusion that we tend to share as human beings. That ignorance, that delusion, is often an unseen motivating force that leads pleasant on to liking, to wanting, to greed; and leads unpleasant on to not liking, to not wanting, to wanting to get rid of, to aversion.

Beginning to explore the feeling tone itself helps us to see this pattern of how the mind moves in this direction and also begins to help us see something about that underlying belief system.

I'm going to read what Greg read the other day, the beginning of the section on the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta:

And how does one abide contemplating feelings as feelings? Here, when feeling a pleasant feeling, one understands, "I feel a pleasant feeling." When feeling an unpleasant feeling, one understands, "I feel an unpleasant feeling." When feeling a neither pleasant nor unpleasant feeling, one understands, "I feel a neither pleasant nor unpleasant feeling."

It's so simple. It sounds simple. It's actually not that simple. But the encouragement here is not, "Oh, something pleasant is happening, hold on to it," or "Something unpleasant is happening, push it away or

figure out how to get rid of it." Rather, it's just this very simple, non-judgmental awareness. This is what we've been practicing with—this simple receptive awareness: this is what's happening in this moment. The Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta as a whole has this flavor of just noticing, this is what's happening right now. And so it is with the feeling tone.

Feeling tone can be kind of subtle sometimes. Sometimes it's more obvious. If we fall down and bruise our knee, the unpleasantness of that can be kind of obvious. But we may not be so oriented towards the simple unpleasantness of it. We're probably more interested in telling stories about this, in figuring out what we need to do about it, rather than just recognizing, "Oh, this is unpleasant."

Not to say that figuring out what we need to do when we've fallen down and bruised our knee is not useful and necessary. But we often skip over the actual experience of the unpleasantness and start reacting to it. Again, because of this underlying belief structure: this unpleasant thing is a problem, this unpleasant thing is something I need to get rid of—how am I going to do that?

In terms of beginning to understand this pattern, this underlying belief structure and that movement from feeling to craving, craving, as Jaya pointed to last night, is already suffering. Often we don't quite notice that in the moment, but already as soon as craving springs up, as soon as that wanting something arises—we want something that's not here, we want to get rid of something that is here—there's some imbalance. We are not simply recognizing the unpleasantness or the pleasantness of the experience. Beginning to get familiar with feeling tone can help us to see these patterns and see how the habitual movement of our minds leads us from feeling to craving.

As Greg mentioned the other day, feeling is arising with every single sense contact—every single sight, sound, smell, taste, touch sensation. Everything arising in our mind has a feeling tone. It's a basic aspect of human experience, and it's conditioned. The texts tell us that dependent on the eye and sight, eye consciousness arises. The meeting of the three is contact. And then there's feeling. Feeling and perception arise.

With contact as condition, there is feeling. With every sense base, when there's contact with that sense base—that sensitivity that Greg pointed to—when there's contact with that sensitivity, feeling is there.

And yet so often we don't notice it. We don't see the pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral aspect of experience because our habit is to try to arrange the world around the pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral. We're more in our minds reflecting on or thinking about the world. We've kind of taken birth in the world of what it's going to be like either when I get that thing or when I get rid of that thing, rather than really being aware of what this experience is. What is this experience of pleasant or unpleasant?

And so we tend to habitually and automatically react to feeling because of this underlying belief structure. But we don't really notice it. This feeling tone, as I said, tends to be where the reactivity is born when we have this ignorance or this delusion underlying our minds. And we all have this. It's not some unique

thing to you if you find that you tend to shift from pleasant to greed, from unpleasant to aversion. It's very human.

This morning I was speaking about intention and how those intentions are connected with motivation. These responses to feeling—whether we like it and want more of it, or don't like it and want to get rid of it—that's very commonplace. That's where often our motivations arise from: not clearly seeing the feeling tone, instead being motivated by this underlying view or belief, this need to get or need to get rid of.

The Buddha pointed out that this habitual movement, the habitual way that we tend to respond to feeling tone, is not necessary. It's optional. He described this in a sutta, where at the beginning of the text he said that ordinary people—the translation here is "the uninstructed worldling"—the uninstructed worldling feels things that are pleasant, feels things that are unpleasant, and feels things that are neutral. And then he says, "And so too does an instructed noble disciple." Someone who is fully awakened will experience things that are pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral.

So right there, that pops the bubble—the belief that if we get fully awakened everything will be pleasant. He says right here that people who are awakened will experience pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral experience.

But then he goes on to ask: what's the difference? And basically, what he describes is that for an uninstructed worldling, for an ordinary person, when a pleasant feeling arises, they want more of it. They gravitate to it. Desire springs up for it. Craving arises. When an unpleasant experience arises, aversion springs up in relationship to it.

He gives an analogy for unpleasant feeling. He says, "When an uninstructed worldling is contacted by a painful feeling, they sorrow, grieve, and lament. They weep, beating their breast, and become distraught. They feel two feelings, a bodily one and a mental one. Suppose one were to strike a person with a dart and then strike them immediately afterwards with a second dart. That person would feel a feeling caused by two darts. So too, when the uninstructed worldling is contacted by a painful feeling, they feel two feelings, a bodily feeling and a mental one."

This is what happens to us a lot, especially around painful feeling. Unpleasant sensation arises and aversion arises. We don't like it. We sorrow, grieve, lament, weep, beating our breast, and become distraught. And it says here that we feel two feelings, a bodily one and a mental one. But my experience is that it's not just like they're added together. It's more like it's multiplied, because of this feedback loop. Like when you take a microphone and put it up to a speaker and the volume just goes crazy. It gets really loud because of that feedback loop. It's kind of like that with unpleasant feeling.

When we experience an unpleasant feeling and there's aversion, then our experience of the unpleasant feeling gets more painful, which creates more aversion, which makes us feel more pain, which makes us feel more aversion. It's just feedback—a feedback loop. That's a very common pattern. When we're not

able to be mindful of either the unpleasant feeling or the aversion, that kind of cycle will tend to happen.

And the Buddha goes on to describe what happens when an instructed noble disciple is contacted by a painful feeling.

They do not sorrow, grieve, or lament. They do not weep, beating their breast, and become distraught. They feel one feeling—a bodily feeling, not a mental one. Suppose one were to strike a person with a dart, but not strike them immediately afterwards with a second dart. That person would feel a feeling caused by one dart only. So too, when the instructed noble disciple is contacted by a painful feeling, they feel one feeling—a bodily one, not a mental one.

This really points to the possibility, through instruction, through training, through practice, through the work that we are doing, of transforming our relationship to feeling. Basically, it's touching into that underlying belief structure. Through witnessing feelings, seeing the reaction to feelings, seeing how this plays out over and over again, we begin to understand that the movement towards pleasant, the movement away from unpleasant—the greed, the aversion—are not very useful.

Greed has its delusion embedded in it. When we are caught in the mind state of greed, there's a delusion embedded there. The greed itself is the wanting of something pleasant. But the delusion embedded in greed is the belief that having that thing will make me happy. Having that pleasant thing will make me happy. And when we're caught in the mind state of greed, we are buying that belief. We are caught by that delusion. The mind tends to orient towards greed in relationship to pleasant things.

Similarly with aversion, there's a delusion embedded in it that says getting rid of that unpleasant experience will make me happy. When that belief system is in place, feeling becomes like a springboard—we leap right from feeling into craving.

But as we begin to explore feeling, begin to get curious about the experience itself, start seeing how this process unfolds, that belief structure begins to weaken. And we can in that moment simply be with what's happening: "Oh, this is feeling. This is the feeling that's arising." Sometimes the clear mindfulness of it can short-circuit our habitual movement into craving. We get a taste of the possibility that it's not necessary to follow through on that belief.

This leaping from feeling into craving is a very human, natural kind of movement. It's almost organic. Even single-celled organisms move towards food, away from noxious chemicals in the environment. It's a very natural movement. And yet this movement towards pleasant, away from unpleasant, and the mind states motivating it—the mind states of greed and aversion—are really where the suffering is. In the craving. That's where the suffering is.

The suffering isn't in the pleasant or unpleasant itself, or in responding to pleasant or unpleasant based on compassion, kindness, or wisdom. Because we can, in seeing pleasant experience, understand a skillful response. This isn't about sitting here being a lump on a log. But it is about noticing the habitual response

of greed and aversion, and recognizing the suffering found there.

Feeling tone is experienced around both bodily feeling and mental feeling. All physical contacts have a feeling tone and all mental contacts have a feeling tone. Both kinds of feeling tone—those connected with physical experiences and sense impressions, and those connected with the mind—are all mind-created.

This can be a little hard to understand in the realm of physical sense experience. It seems as though certain kinds of contact would be inherently unpleasant or pleasant. It feels like it's physically unpleasant or physically pleasant, so it may be difficult to grasp this point.

But I will say that I read a recent report of a study that corroborates this—that feeling tone, even physical feeling tone like physical unpleasant sensation, is a mental experience. I'll read pieces of this article:

"Pain isn't always a pain. Sometimes it can actually feel good. People experienced pleasure during a painful stimulus if the stimulus turned out to be less bad than they were expecting. The researcher said, 'It's not hard to understand that pain can be interpreted as less severe when an individual is aware that it could have been more painful. Less expected was the discovery that pain may be experienced as pleasant if something worse has been avoided.'

To see how people perceived pain, researchers hooked participants up to a device that applied variable levels of painful heat to their arms. At the same time, researchers measured their brain activity using magnetic resonance imaging scans. In the first scenario, participants either experienced a series of slightly or moderately painful stimuli—about as painful as grasping a slightly too hot cup of coffee—or no pain."

In this scenario, participants rated that painful experience of the warm contact as unpleasant. They described the experience as unpleasant. In the second scenario, the participants experienced either a series of that moderate pain or a more intense pain. On a screen, they were warned which kind of pain was coming. The moderate pain was the same as the moderate pain in the first experience that they had rated as unpleasant, yet participants rated the moderate pain as pleasurable in the second scenario, when the alternative was the intense pain.

During the moderate stimulus in the second setup, participants' brain activity also showed less activation in the pain region of the brain and more activation in the region associated with pain relief and pleasure. So it wasn't only their report—the brain actually felt it as pleasurable. The researcher said the likely explanation is that the subjects were prepared for the worst and thus felt relieved when they realized the pain was not going to be as bad as they had feared.

Mental conditions and expectations can condition how pain is felt, how that stimulus is experienced, whether as painful or pleasant. The same measurable level of heat, the same level of "pain" applied to the arm, yet a completely different experience. The feeling tone, as Greg pointed out the other day, is not in the object. It's in our experience. It's created by our mind and is often created based on expectations, views, ideas, and beliefs. It's not as simple as saying that thing is always pleasant or that thing is always

unpleasant.

Getting familiar with feeling tones is really helpful in terms of exploring this process of the mind that reacts to feeling tone. We need to become familiar with the feeling tone itself, because we so quickly react to it. Exploring it in sitting, in walking, in our daily activities—we can begin to recognize that certain sensations are unpleasant. We may simply notice something as an itch, for instance, but not really notice the quality of the itch, the unpleasantness of it, and what happens to that unpleasantness.

When I've really explored what an itch is, it has a kind of zing quality to it. It's like one tiny spot on the skin that zings and then stops, then zings again and stops. The unpleasantness of it feels unpleasant in that moment, but the unpleasantness comes and goes.

Likewise with pain—often there's a shifting landscape, different sensations arising and passing. We create a whole block around it, looking at it as one solid thing. But if we start to be curious about what's actually unpleasant here, we sometimes find that certain sensations of pain, even in our sitting, aren't quite what we assumed. Maybe there's a little twinge in the knee, and this is where we can learn from that pattern of reactivity. If we notice the unpleasantness, maybe we discover that it's not so unpleasant right now, in this moment. But what our mind has done is pick up the rest of the sitting and project the entire sitting where that pain is getting steadily worse. That's what we're reacting to.

Being curious about what the sensation actually is and what its pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral quality might be—this is the practice. We can notice pleasantness in our sitting too, perhaps the physical pleasantness of the breathing. The feeling tone is most easily seen at first in the physical realm, in the physical sense realm. Our skin in particular, our touch sense, seems very attuned to this quality of pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral. It's a really easy place to begin exploring, to really recognize it.

Playing with this in our daily activities, in our yogi jobs, in eating—just seeing that there's a steady stream of experience, and every single experience has pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral qualities to it. We can begin to be curious about that flow. Washing dishes, for instance. Maybe we have the idea of it as an unpleasant thing, but as you're standing in line, noticing: what's unpleasant here? Is the actual standing unpleasant? Maybe there's a little ache in the back that's unpleasant. Okay, so that's unpleasant. Then you get up to the place where you're actually washing the dishes and you put your hands in the water—maybe it's a fresh thing of water and the experience is actually pleasant. Just seeing how this flows: pleasant, unpleasant, pleasant, unpleasant, neutral.

If we see that flow clearly, then we may not immediately leap to the reactivity.

And in this exploration, it's really helpful—and somewhat interesting, I think—to begin to notice what our habitual responses to feeling tone are. We may have somewhat different responses at different times. Different people, for instance, may have more habitual relationships to pleasant and unpleasant. For me, when I experience something unpleasant, I would get stuck to that unpleasant thing, trying to push it

away. It would be like I was glued to that unpleasant thing, trying to figure out: How do I get rid of this? What do I need to change? What do I have to do? What do I have to figure out here? So there would be a stuckness to the unpleasant thing. The aversion was experienced as being stuck to that unpleasant thing.

A friend of mine said, "Gee, when I experience something unpleasant, immediately my mind goes, 'Oh, let me find something pleasant.'" It just unsticks from the unpleasant and goes to greed immediately. It starts searching for something pleasant. That's a different strategy: ignore the unpleasant, find something pleasant. Just don't look at that elephant in the room. And so we can begin to see what our habitual strategies are for being with feeling tone.

And then there's the feeling associated with mental experience. This sometimes can be more subtle, although certain kinds of feeling associated with mind states—for instance, happiness—we tend to recognize as a pleasant experience. Anger, often unpleasant. Fear, often unpleasant. Calm and ease, maybe pleasant, maybe somewhat neutral even. There's a little less of an obvious feeling tone with ease.

So everything in our mind, all arisings in our mind, have a feeling tone. It can be interesting also to explore—both in physical feeling and in mental feeling—how feeling tends to change over the experience of it. Sometimes this can be surprising. At one point I began to notice, I was curious about the feeling tone connected with anger on one retreat. I was experiencing a tremendous amount of anger, and so I got very familiar with it, pretty much noticing the unpleasantness of it. But then at one point I began really seeing just the very beginning, just the very beginnings of the arising of anger. And to my surprise, it was really pleasant. It was just this beginning—a sense of warmth and fullness and power. It was a sense of aliveness. That quickly flipped into pressure and heat and unpleasant. But it was so interesting to see how the feeling tone at the beginning—my mind was kind of recognizing, "Wow, that may be some of the hook to anger." It's that initial feeling of aliveness and power that quickly flips.

So we can start to see this. Not only do emotions have feeling tone, but thoughts can have a feeling tone as well. Often thoughts may have a feeling tone based on an emotion that they're connected with. So for instance, a thought like "that person doesn't like me"—the thought itself might just be a neutral thing. There were certain points in my meditation where I saw certain thoughts that were habitually experienced as unpleasant. At one point I came on retreat right after the Twin Towers attacks, and on retreat there were a lot of images from that experience, that situation, coming up in my meditation. Typically the experience was unpleasant. And yet at a certain point, the mind, in seeing some of those images, just saw them as images. That felt a little odd because there was no feeling tone—it was just neutral, neither pleasant nor unpleasant. It felt a little odd to have that content not be landing in a way.

But then in a few more moments there was the recognition of the meaning of those images. And the emotional response was not that of aversion but really of compassion. So the image itself still didn't have a flavor of pleasant or unpleasant, but the meaning of the image was touching the heart with the recognition of suffering and compassion. And so thoughts may be kind of neutral themselves, but then

they quickly bring in emotional tones, beliefs, and views that have feelings. So the thought that somebody doesn't like me—we might have a feeling of rejection that feels unpleasant.

And this points to something really important about feeling tone: beliefs, views, and thoughts are a primary shaper of feeling tone.

What we believe, what we think about—that shapes how we receive experiences as pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral.

In fact, the commentaries to the Abhidhamma have a teaching around feeling tone that I don't know if I believe actually, but I found it really interesting to hold as a question. The Abhidhamma commentary says that in terms of our physical senses, the touch sense of our skin can be pleasant or unpleasant, that it's just very attuned to that pleasant-unpleasant quality. But our other four physical senses—seeing, smelling, hearing, and tasting—the commentary says that the initial contact is neutral, that any pleasant or unpleasant experience we have in those other four physical senses is a result of something going on in our minds. Some view, some belief.

We might be able to touch into this around seeing. We go outside perhaps and see a beautiful flower. I was appreciating these flowers—they're beautiful, and the sense of them is pleasant. The beauty and the pleasure of that. But what's happening really at the first contact is that there's just color and form in the eye. Very occasionally in my meditation, I've looked out of a window or something and there have been no objects. It's just been color and form. It's neutral. Color and form is neutral. It's when they become objects, when we see them as things that we have associations with. I have associations with flowers as beautiful—some flowers as beautiful. There's a flower that sometimes appears in meditation halls that has a very strong scent, and it's very hard for me to be near. I see that flower and it's not so pleasant because of that association.

So curiosity around exploring this has been a big part of my own practice. When there is something in the physical realm that I'm taking to be unpleasant or pleasant, I get kind of curious about it. Where is the pleasantness actually? Where is the unpleasantness?

One night I was having difficulty sleeping. Often when I'm having difficulty sleeping, I'll just meditate. So that evening I got up to sit in the middle of the night and was sitting there, just being aware of my experience. There was this quiet little tapping, kind of scratching sound that came and went. When I noticed, heard that tapping or scratching sound, my experience was: I don't like that. Unpleasant. That tapping sound is unpleasant. For a while I just worked at it, looked at it that way—unpleasant sound is happening.

Continuing to explore it, as I looked at the experience, when that tapping sound happened I noticed there was tension in the body. The tension is not the tapping sound. The tension is unpleasant too. At that point there was still the sense of the tapping being unpleasant, the tension being unpleasant.

Then at some point in hearing the tapping sound—this went on probably thirty, forty minutes, coming and going—there was just a quick rush of fear through the body. That was startling. I hadn't seen that actually before. I hadn't seen that there was just this subtle flush of fear through the body. The fear was clearly unpleasant. As I began to notice the fear with clarity, the next time the tapping sound happened, I realized that the tapping sound itself was neutral. The experience of the fear had kind of imputed or put its unpleasantness into the sound.

This kind of thing happens a lot in our experience. It's very similar to how the expectation of something being more unpleasant creates conditions for it to be experienced as unpleasant. The state of our mind will affect the pleasant, unpleasant, neutral quality.

So curiosity about when you're experiencing a reactivity—if there's a persistent reactivity, a persistent aversion—it can be really useful to explore what is actually unpleasant here. What is the mind actually reacting to? What is it responding to?

Most of our reactivity actually comes off of mental thoughts, beliefs, views—a mental unpleasantness, rather than a physical unpleasantness. Now, in terms of the touch sense, that's not necessarily as much the case. Again, you fall down, you hurt your knee, you cut yourself with a knife—there is physical unpleasant sensation there. But a lot of what we react to is, "Oh, what am I going to do? I've cut myself with a knife." So begin to be curious about it. If you're experiencing a reactivity, in particular Carol Wilson gave the instruction: if you're experiencing aversion, there's some unpleasant experience you didn't notice. So what is it? What was that unpleasant experience? What is the experience? What is the unpleasantness there? Sometimes it can be surprising. If you're hearing somebody rustle in the hall and you're experiencing that as unpleasant, it's probably not the sound itself that's actually unpleasant. It's more likely to be an idea about somebody disturbing my practice. So that curiosity—what actually is happening here?

At one point, after I'd heard Carol give this instruction about if you're noticing a reactivity there's something unpleasant that you've missed, I was doing some walking meditation in the upper walking room here and it was pretty full, pretty crowded. I tended to notice a lot of unpleasant and a lot of aversion in walking meditation in general, so this was not an uncommon experience for me. As I was doing the walking meditation and kind of feeling like I've got a pretty narrow lane here, but pretty okay with this, somebody else came into the room and started walking next to me. I got even more squished. And boy, the aversion went through the roof.

Remembering Carol's instruction, I got curious. Okay, what is unpleasant here? I cycled through the senses. It was pretty clear—okay, there's no physical contact, it's not physical unpleasant. Check, that one's not the one. They weren't making sound, it wasn't unpleasant sound. There was no unpleasant smell. Taste was not an issue. So I went through all the physical senses and realized, okay, it's not in the physical realm. There must be something going on in the mind.

I didn't see anything in particular that was unpleasant in the mind that I was averse to. I just felt averse there. So I was just walking back and forth, keeping my mind attuned to what's going on in the mind. And then I saw a thought. The thought was, "They're weird." I was kind of like, "Huh, well there's a thought." I still didn't quite get it—I didn't quite see the connection between that thought and the aversion yet. And then on the next pass through, there was this explosion of a thought: "They've got bare feet and it's freezing cold out." That was my mind's justification for "they're weird"—that they were in bare feet and it was cold out. Cold to me. My experience was cold.

In that moment of recognition, seeing that explosive thought helped me to see that there was reaction to the thought "he's weird." There was fear about "he's weird." And the fear was what was unpleasant. That whole complex of reaction was based in "they've got bare feet." The mind just saw it was ludicrous. There was not really a basis for the reactivity once it was seen.

Once it was seen, then the next pass in walking meditation, it was just this well-wishing: *May you be happy.* I didn't try to do that. It's just what happened. And so this exploration around feeling tone can help us to see how this whole complex of reactivity unfolds.

The second part of this sutta talks about a different aspect of feeling tone. It uses a kind of funny word for us. It talks about worldly pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral, and unworldly pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral. It says: when feeling a worldly pleasant feeling, one understands, "I feel a worldly pleasant feeling," and so forth. When feeling an unworldly pleasant feeling, one understands, "I feel an unworldly pleasant experience."

So what is this worldly and unworldly? The word being translated as worldly is *sāmisa*, which basically means something like "connected to the flesh." This refers to pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral experience connected to our sense realm. The unworldly—sometimes the worldly, the *sāmisa*, is translated as "of the flesh" or "carnal," sometimes as "not connected to the path," or it's pointed to by some translators as our ordinary kind of pleasure. The unworldly kind of pleasure, *nirāmisa*, is often translated as "spiritual pleasure" or "connected to the path." These are feeling tones that come about as we practice, that tend to be connected to the path of practice.

The Buddha is pointing to the usefulness of understanding the difference between feeling tones that are ordinary, related to sense experience, and feeling tones that are related to practice. This was a major understanding in his own practice. At one point early in the night when he sat down under the rose apple tree, he remembered back to states of concentration that had spontaneously arisen when he was a child. He had been practicing a lot of ascetic practices at that time, basically believing that unpleasant experience would support the mind to let go of the body in some way. And that night he remembered those states of pleasurable concentration and is said to have thought, "Why am I afraid of that pleasure which is not connected with this movement towards grasping? Why am I afraid of that pleasure that's connected with concentration?" Then he is said to have asked the question: "I wonder if this kind of

pleasure, this kind of happiness—maybe that's part of the path." And in that reflection, he is said to have realized, "Yes, this is part of the path. This kind of happiness and pleasure is part of the practice."

That completely shifted how he practiced. He began being curious about this distinction between these different kinds of feeling tone. This was an important understanding in his own practice, and I think that's why he includes it here—this understanding of the difference between these two.

The ordinary pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral feelings are connected with sense impressions, connected with bodily sensation, with ordinary sense contact. This includes thoughts that relate to sense contact. The taste of a meal may have pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral sensations to it. The thought of the taste of a meal may have pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral sensations to it. That is also the same kind of worldly pleasure.

Now again, he's pointing to a distinction here—the kind of pleasure that is worth moving towards, or the kind of feeling tones that help us recognize: Am I headed in the direction of the path? Or am I getting caught in more ordinary kinds of pleasure? And yet the instructions are still very simple. They are: just notice. Is the pleasure worldly pleasure? Worldly pain? Worldly unpleasant? Is it unworldly pleasure? Unworldly pain? Just noticing that distinction.

This unworldly pleasure really is the pleasure associated with the path of practice: states of concentration, insight, the happiness of giving, the pleasure that comes with knowing you're engaged in ethical conduct. There's delight and joy that arises as you realize the heart is aligned with ethical conduct. There's the pleasure of being present. This one can be kind of interesting—it can be so similar sometimes that we might confuse it or mistake it for the pleasure of sense pleasure. As the mind gets more present and aware, we can go outside and it's like everything is sparkly sometimes. Really beautiful. A very pleasant experience. We might think that's the worldly pleasant, the pleasure of the senses.

But I think it's more connected to the pleasure of being present. Because in that state we can look down at an oil stain on the driveway and be like, "Wow, that's amazing." There's a difference—that pleasure of being present and available for what's arising.

And then there's the pleasure that comes with concentration and the pleasure that comes with insight. We can be noticing aversion, being with physical unpleasant experience, and having a kind of delight in the seeing of it. Have you noticed that? Sometimes we can see that. It's kind of interesting to have this experience of both "Wow, there's aversion happening" and yet "Wow, it's so cool to see it." There's a space around it. There's a sense of delight in the engagement, in the practice.

This is the kind of pleasure that comes with the path of practice, which the Buddha said is not the kind of pleasure we need to be afraid of. We don't need to be afraid of any pleasure as long as we're mindful of it, actually.

One thing to point to quickly, because I've been emphasizing the unworldly pleasure—and there's a lot of

that which does happen for us as the mind settles, as there's connection with experience, as concentration develops, the mind can move into many states of happiness, of ease and bliss. And yet, unworldly feelings are not always only pleasant.

There's one text that describes in particular what happens around seeing the impermanent nature of experience—how that, depending on what's happening, depending on how the mind is meeting it, can unfold differently. It's interesting. When recognizing the impermanence, change, and fading away of sense experience, one sees as it actually is with proper wisdom that sense impressions, formerly and now, are all impermanent—joy arises. That's pleasantness arising with the recognition of impermanence. Sometimes we can have that, the sense of seeing the arising and passing of experience, and it's very joyful.

Other times, when recognizing the impermanence, change, and fading away of sense experience, one actually sees as it actually is with proper wisdom that sense impressions, formerly and now, are all impermanent—one generates a longing for supreme liberation. There's a kind of disenchantment with sense impressions, and this experience can be felt as unpleasant.

And when recognizing the impermanence, change, and fading away of sense experience, one sees as it actually is with proper wisdom that sense impressions, formerly and now, are all impermanent—equanimity arises. Equanimity does have a kind of neutral feeling tone.

So this is pointing to the qualities of unworldly pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral experience. And through all of this, the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta suggests simply to recognize what kind of feeling is happening. Simple. When it's a worldly pleasant feeling, we know it's a worldly pleasant feeling. No judgment around it in the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta. And in fact, elsewhere in the texts it clearly says that clearly comprehending feeling of any kind, worldly or unworldly, is liberative. It leads us to being able to understand and let go of the ways our mind clings.

The simplicity of this practice of noticing the feeling tone and seeing all of the ways that the mind creates reactions, responses to the feeling tone—this is such a crucial process to see. The key in terms of helping us understand how suffering comes to be is this: what we see is that the response to feeling tone is created by our own minds. It's optional. It is a construct of our own minds that we react. It's motivated by that underlying belief.

But when we begin to see through that underlying belief—that having to get pleasant and needing to get rid of unpleasant is the way to go—we see that that's just delusion. We see that the whole of our suffering has been constructed. The mental reactivity has been constructed by our minds. The mind starts to let go of it, letting go of that movement from feeling to craving. The craving releases.

And then we are in a position to respond with wisdom, with compassion, with love, with generosity to what's happening. Not be in a reactive mode, but a responsive mode.

So let's just sit for a moment.

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