Feeling Tone (Vedanā) - Retreat at Spirit Rock

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I'm really appreciating hearing the frogs right now, watching these clouds, the sunset earlier. Just appreciating this land, the space that we're in together. It's truly such a gift to be here together—a rare gift, a rare opportunity. And it's been so wonderful meeting with you, hearing about your practice. Such an appreciation for your practice. Everyone is so engaged. It's really a privilege to sit in this seat and witness this unfolding. So thank you for your practice.

I'm going to continue with reflections on the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta tonight. We've been exploring mindfulness of the body quite a lot, but also touching on some of the fourth foundation—the hindrances, the Four Noble Truths—and using those as practices, as experiences to notice. Today, we'll reflect on the second foundation of mindfulness: the mindfulness of feeling tone, vedanā.

This is the simple aspect of experience of whether there is pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral experience arising with whatever is happening. As a second foundation of mindfulness, in some ways it feels a little like a bridge from the body to the mind. The first foundation of mindfulness is clearly mindfulness of body. The third foundation is mindfulness of mind states. And feeling actually lies somewhere in the middle, in that it's accessible through bodily experience.

Every physical experience—sight, sound, smell, taste, touch—all of our bodily experience is associated with a feeling tone. Contact of touch may be pleasant, unpleasant, or neither pleasant nor unpleasant. Contact with the ear, the same. And so through our bodies we can begin touching into this aspect of experience, this pleasant, unpleasant, neutral aspect of experience.

But this aspect of experience is also associated with every mental experience that arises. Every thought, every mood, emotion, mind state also has a feeling tone. So this feeling tone is understood to be a universal aspect of experience. Every single moment of our experience, this feeling tone is present in one of these three flavors.

My understanding of vedanā is that it is actually defined as a mental experience, even when it's associated with physical sensation. Vedanā is, we could say, mind made. I'll get to that a little bit more in just a minute. I wanted to say that because it's a nice bridge in a way to help us begin to be curious about a mental quality, a mental factor in our mind, a mental process in our mind—this process of whether experience is being felt as pleasant, unpleasant, or neither pleasant nor unpleasant.

The Sutta instructions about this are, I think, the shortest section in the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta. Mindfulness of mind states is just a little bit longer. It's a very brief section, and I'll read to you the first part of it. But first

let me remind you of that definition section that we explored right at the beginning of the retreat with respect to this foundation:

"One abides observing feelings as feelings, ardent, fully alert, fully aware and mindful, setting aside desires and discontent for the world."

And how does one do that? That is the question the Buddha begins this section of the Satipaṭṭhāna with. "And how does one abide observing 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 goes on to elaborate a little bit more, and if I have time, I'll go into that elaboration. Let's just start with that. It's a really simple instruction. Not a lot extra to it. When feeling a pleasant feeling, we understand, "I am feeling a pleasant feeling."

This is that pointing back to understanding experience as experience. Pleasant experience is arising in this moment. Unpleasant experience is arising in this moment. And it's understood as experience rather than as a problem, something to fix or change or hold on to.

So the Sutta describes for this mindfulness of feeling a very simple non-judgmental awareness. When feeling a pleasant feeling, one understands, "I feel a pleasant feeling." When feeling an unpleasant feeling, one understands, "I feel an unpleasant feeling." It doesn't say, "and try to fix it." It just says one understands that. That's a really simple non-judgmental awareness of this experience.

And yet, as with many of these very simple instructions, the Satipatthana Sutta as a whole is encouraging us to explore the entirety of our experience through what I'd call a few simple perspectives. This is one of those perspectives through which we can explore our experience. Every single moment of experience, this is arising. And so any moment we can be aware of this aspect of experience in this simple way—really simple way.

And yet the feeling tone itself is an aspect of experience that, until we come to retreats and hear dharma talks about it, we are very unlikely to be interested in experiencing as an experience in this way. Really unlikely to be recognizing, "Oh, this is an unpleasant experience. That's what it's like to feel an unpleasant experience." Most of the time we are going to be trying to fix it or change it or escape from it in some way, find something else to be with, flee from it into fantasy or whatever. We are not trained so much in becoming aware, in knowing this quality of mind.

It's actually a pretty subtle quality, although once we become attuned to it, it's mostly subtle because we haven't really thought to pay attention to it. But once it's pointed out to us that this is a really useful aspect of experience to pay attention to, it actually becomes pretty easy to recognize, at least in certain areas of our experience. Part of this exploration this evening is to attune you to this quality, to attune you to this

experience.

Feeling arises as a result of contact with the world—contact with the sense bases contacting their sense objects. For our five physical senses, there are the physical sense objects of the world that make contact. The eye receives sight and there's contact with the eye. The ear receives sound and there's contact. I read a section of a sutta this morning that speaks to this: "Based on the eye and sight, along with eye consciousness, the meeting of the three is contact." With the eye and sight, eye consciousness arises. The meeting of the three is contact. The next piece that the Buddha pointed to is: "With contact as condition, feeling arises." And so this is with every sense experience.

With our minds too, there's the mind door—the aspect of our minds that receives experience—and then there are mind objects: thoughts and emotions and mind states, moods, beliefs. These also contact the mind door, and there's a feeling tone at that point of contact. The feeling tone is a conditioned arising in dependence on that contact.

Often what happens with this contact and the feeling that arises is that there's a very habitual, almost nearly automatic response that is also deeply conditioned. And it's more deeply conditioned than something we learn from our parents. This seems to be—it's not hardwired into us as human beings, but, well, I was a computer person, so I'll call it firmware. Hardware is the actual hard components of a computer. Firmware is what you program into that hardware, the particular things that hardware can do. You burn it in. But you can burn something else in there too. It's more like that level: when we experience something as pleasant, we tend to like it and want it. It's human. This is a human response. It's not something we learn culturally. It's not something we learn from our families. It is a human response. It's actually more than human—it seems to be a living being response. When there is something pleasant, living beings tend to go towards that. When there's something unpleasant, living beings tend to move away from it.

In our human experience, this tendency to move toward the pleasant and away from the unpleasant tends to be accompanied by greed for the pleasant and aversion for the unpleasant, and it happens really quickly. Even before the greed or the aversion fully forms, there may be a subtler kind of response—when there's something pleasant, we like it. It's not quite full-on greed, but there's a preference. When something's unpleasant, we don't like it.

That's the real firmware level of our experience. But it's not hard-coded into our system to automatically like and want something just because it's pleasant. It is optional. There is this possibility of knowing pleasant experience as pleasant experience without having any inkling of leaning toward it. It's possible to experience unpleasant experience as unpleasant experience and just be completely balanced, with no tendency to pull away.

This is equanimity—this non-reactive mind, a mind that can remain balanced no matter what comes: pleasant, unpleasant, or neither pleasant nor unpleasant.

But this very human response the Buddha calls an underlying tendency. It's an underlying tendency for us as human beings to want to move toward the pleasant, to want to move away from the unpleasant, and to be disconnected from the neutral, unaware, ignorant of neutral experience.

And yet the Buddha points to something remarkable. In one particular sutta that many of you have probably heard about, he says that a person who is awakened, somebody who is completely free, somebody who has that non-reactivity, someone who is free of craving, will still experience pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral feeling.

This is something to recognize. Freedom doesn't mean freedom from unpleasantness. The Buddha clearly says this in this sutta—that people who are fully awakened will still experience pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral. And he says the ordinary person, the person untrained in this path, also experiences pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral experience.

So what's the difference between these two?

He says that when an ordinary person is touched by a painful bodily feeling, they worry and grieve. They lament, beat their breast, weep, and become distraught. They thus experience two kinds of feelings: a bodily feeling and a mental feeling. It is as if someone were pierced by a dart, and following that first piercing is hit by a second dart. That person will experience feelings caused by two darts.

This tends to be what happens to the ordinary person with an unpleasant experience. They don't like it, feel put upon, feel like the world is against them. Why me? So the aversion is another experience that arises in conjunction with that unpleasant experience. Now you have not only the first unpleasant experience, but you also have the aversion, which is itself an unpleasant experience.

Have you been noticing that?

I like what Bhante said this morning about multiplying, because that's what this extra reaction does to the painful experience. It's not just adding one plus one to equal two darts. It's more like multiplication, many-fold. The mental reaction greatly exacerbates the feeling of unpleasantness, which is why we then feel aversion to the aversion. Because we see how unpleasant that is, and we want to get rid of it. But that adds another arrow—a third arrow.

This is our habitual way. This is how the Buddha says an untaught or ordinary person responds to feeling. With the unpleasant, we tend to become averse. With the pleasant, we tend to hold on. That also has pain to it—it's a little more subtle in some ways, although when we really start to turn toward the experience of that wanting, we feel the suffering of that too. We feel the unpleasantness of that.

The sutta continues: "But for a noble disciple, when touched by a painful feeling, the noble disciple does not worry nor grieve and lament, will not beat their breast and weep nor become distraught. Only one kind of feeling is experienced, a bodily one, not a mental feeling. It is as if someone were pierced by a dart

but was not hit by that second dart."

So he points to this as possible for us. He's saying in this teaching that this nearly automatic leap from feeling to reacting is optional. It takes training for us to begin to see—first of all to recognize the pleasant feeling and see the greed, to recognize the unpleasant feeling and see the aversion, to see that the reaction to feeling is happening as a relationship to the feeling.

That's part of what we explore. As we start to see that there is unpleasantness, and that the unpleasantness and the aversion are different, that the pleasantness and the greed are different—this is really useful to recognize. For instance, if you're experiencing a physical pain in your body, very often you might notice the aversion to that.

When you are curious about what the aversion is actually relating to—what is the unpleasant thing that the aversion is in relationship to?—sometimes we see that multiplying factor of aversion and how much more unpleasant it makes the entire experience. We see that what we're actually reacting to is a small twinge, and it has proliferated into a huge idea: "I can't keep sitting here anymore because I'm not going to be able to walk at the end of this forty-five minute sitting, and I'm going to have to go have surgery on my knee." The mind has just gone out.

So seeing what the actual unpleasant experience is can be really useful. We begin to notice the difference between the unpleasantness of the first experience and the unpleasantness of the aversion—and notice that they're different. Notice that they're different things.

This practice of mindfulness of feeling begins to help us do that: to recognize the actual experience of pleasant and unpleasant and neutral. The first thing that's useful, I think, is to begin getting familiar with feeling tone, attuning yourself to this quality so that we can have this recognition of these things being different. Before I started meditating, I don't think I knew there was a difference between hating pain and pain. They just seemed completely the same thing. And so we can start to explore these qualities of experience.

The easiest place to explore feeling tone is related to bodily experience. In our sitting postures, in our sitting, in our walking—just being curious about whether the experience is pleasant or unpleasant. You might feel some pleasant sensations associated with breathing. You might feel unpleasant sensations associated with an itch, tightness, or pain. Just being curious about that.

Right now in your experience, what's the most obvious experience in your physical body? Whatever's most obvious may have some kind of flavor of pleasant or unpleasant or neutral. With the most obvious experience in your physical sensation right now, see if you can tune in to pleasant or unpleasant. How about picking another one? Just the next most obvious. Is that one pleasant or unpleasant? Or neutral—maybe neutral, could be. How about another one? Pleasant, unpleasant, neutral.

So how many of you, in those three, felt that each of those three experiences was the same kind of feeling

tone? A few of you. That was my experience too. And that actually points to another piece: some of us tend to have a particular habitual tendency of orienting toward a certain flavor. Sometimes it's talked about as almost being a personality type.

If you walk into a room you've never been in before, just do this mind experiment for yourself: What is the first kind of thing you're drawn to? When you first came into this room, what was the very first thing you noticed? For some people that might have been, "Gee, the front of the room looks pretty messy." For some it might have been, "Wow, look at this space! Look at that ceiling, it's so beautiful." For some it might have been, "What's going on here? Where do I sit? How do I get a cushion?"—kind of looking around, not quite so sure about what to do.

We tend to have certain flavors of patterns and habits in our mind. Some people are more balanced, equally spread between greed, aversion, and delusion. But many of us have a particular flavor that is more predominant. For my mind, aversion was definitely the predominant flavor. And with that predominant flavor, the Buddha offers a succinct version of conditionality in his teaching: whatever one frequently ponders, that becomes the inclination of the mind. And so this mind—boy, it was really pondering aversion a lot, and that became the tendency. What my mind tended to do when it walked into a new space was look for something to be averse to.

It would seek out the unpleasant. It's almost like my mind would orient to the unpleasant and think, "Okay, if I can fix all the unpleasant things, then I'll be okay." Somebody else might have more of the motivation of wanting, of greed, and that person might be drawn to what's beautiful in a room, looking for where the pleasant is. So we do have some tendencies there that are useful to recognize.

This exercise that I just did with you, one of my teachers did with me. I did it for a little bit longer than you did, and he was instructing me to just notice the next thing, don't choose, just whatever arises—make it choiceless. After that experience, he asked, "Well, what did you notice?" And I said, "I don't see how that could have been choiceless. I was trying to do it choicelessly, but everything was unpleasant. I know that the entirety of my experience is not unpleasant, but that was everything the mind landed on."

That was a huge learning for me—to see the orientation of my mind, its habitual tendency to orient to the unpleasant. So this can be a useful reflection and exploration for yourself. Do you have a tendency towards one of these? Almost a preference to fuel or fulfill the underlying tendency of greed or aversion or delusion?

So we explore in our physical experience this pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral. Another great place to do this is in between times—just beginning to pick a few times in the day. In mindfulness practice, we're not particularly trying to find experience, and yet with certain practices it can be useful to take some time to orient towards a quality or experience that we haven't had much familiarity with, in order to gain some familiarity. So it can be useful to spend some time during the day being curious about this particular aspect of experience, just to familiarize yourself with what it's like to touch into pleasant, unpleasant, and

neutral.

A great place to do this is in eating practice. Just noticing the flavors, the tastes as you put food in your mouth—is the first sense of it neutral? Pleasant? Unpleasant? Just curiosity about it. How does it change? Doing your yogi jobs, there's probably a great stream of pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral going on there. Just attuning to that, getting familiar with the experience. And it's really helpful to start noticing our habitual relationship to the feeling tone.

So as you're doing your yogi jobs, for instance—"Oh, this is unpleasant, this part's unpleasant"—and then the constriction, the tightening, the aversion, the pushing away, the wrinkling of the nose at extra food in the pots that you have to scrub. Just the experience of the unpleasantness and the relationship to it. Beginning to recognize the difference between those.

It's also useful to explore and get familiar with the feeling tone associated with our mental experience. Every experience has a feeling tone associated with it—thoughts, moods, emotions. Something like sadness might have an unpleasant or heavy quality to it. Joy, a pleasant quality. Grief, unpleasant. Fear can be unpleasant. Anger, perhaps unpleasant.

Although in doing this exploration for myself around anger, I was exploring on one particular retreat, watching the arising of anger. The mind got very attuned to the experience of anger. This was my anger retreat. I was really watching it every day, many times a day. I would see a thought in my mind and feel the anger in conjunction with that thought. Largely the experience was unpleasant—it was pretty clear that anger was unpleasant.

But then one time I got to see the very beginnings of anger, just the moment of "they done me wrong, I'm right." And that experience at the very beginning—that was pleasant. That was a real shock to me. It almost immediately shifted; it only lasted a split second that it was pleasant. This feeling of—it was like a feeling of power and engagement. A welling up of energy towards a kind of protecting of this being in some way.

There was a pleasant quality to that. It lasted about a split second before it became pressure and heat and unpleasantness. But the learning there—it was kind of the big aha. *Oh, that's part of the hook.* That's why my mind keeps going for this anger over and over again. It likes that little split second of feeling powerful.

This can be eye-opening as we explore how feeling tone changes. It's not static. It shifts from pleasant to unpleasant to neutral, to more pleasant, to less pleasant. It's very dynamic.

Emotions perhaps more obviously have a feeling tone associated with them. But thoughts, views, and beliefs also have feeling tone—and it may be neutral, neither pleasant nor unpleasant. Although thoughts and beliefs may seem like neutral things in the mind, they have a very powerful shaping effect on our experience of feeling. They're one of the key conditioners, one of the key aspects determining whether we experience something as pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral.

There was a study done about the experience of pleasure and pain. Subjects were exposed to either a non-painful experience, a slightly painful one, or a moderately painful one. They were told beforehand—given a little flash indicating which they would experience first. When the moderately painful sensation came, they reported it as unpleasant, and their brains confirmed this through EEG monitoring.

Then came the second part of the experiment. Now the alternation was between moderate pain and much more severe pain. Again, subjects were warned what was coming. This time they reported the moderate sensation—which they had previously called painful—as pleasant. And the experimenters were surprised by this result. They expected subjects to report it as *less* painful than the severe one, but they did not expect it to be reported as pleasant.

Their hypothesis was that the warning created a kind of expectation, a moment of relief in the mind: "It's not going to be so bad this time." That view, that expectation, that anticipation—which is a mental experience—shaped their experience of the painful sensation as pleasant. And not only did they report it as pleasant, but their brains responded as if it was pleasant.

This is a very important thing for us to understand. Pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral are created and shaped in our minds by our expectations, by our views, by our thoughts, by our beliefs. The feeling tone is not in the object. It's not inherent in the object. The same experience at different times might be experienced as more pleasant or less pleasant, as pleasant sometimes and painful sometimes.

So this becomes a real exploration for us around what is happening in our minds when we're experiencing feeling tone.

Sometimes in this exploration—around hearing, for instance—there's an interesting teaching from the Abhidhamma. It's not a sutta teaching, and I offer it with some caution because I don't know that I completely believe it. But the Abhidhamma says that the bare experience in our non-tactile senses—sight, sound, smell, taste—is neutral. Any sense of it being pleasant or unpleasant, a sight being pleasant, a sound being pleasant, arises because of an idea in the mind.

Now, again, I don't know if this is really true. But hearing this teaching has prompted me, when I notice I'm taking a sound or a sight to be pleasant or unpleasant, to get curious. What is the actual physical experience? And what is the mind attributing as unpleasant?

For instance, you're sitting in a room and you hear a cough or a sneeze. The sound itself—it's just a sound. It's not physically painful. It's airwaves hitting the eardrum, a particular vibration understood as a sneeze or a cough. The mind, understanding it as a sneeze or a cough, has some views about that. Quite likely, if you experience the sneeze or cough as unpleasant, it's because of those views rather than the actual experience of hearing itself.

This has been a very interesting investigation in my own practice—a lot of learning, a lot of understanding

about how our minds work through exploring this particular aspect of experience with a little bit of investigation.

I would say the vast majority of our reactivity, when we're reacting to something with aversion or greed—the vast majority of the time—it's not about something actually in the world.

It's relating or reacting to something in our own minds.

That was another big "aha" for me—watching the mind be averse to somebody doing walking meditation nearby. I decided to go through the senses and try to figure out where the unpleasantness was. This was an instruction that Carol Wilson had offered in a talk on aversion. She said, if there's aversion happening, there's something unpleasant in your experience. What is it?

So I'm doing walking meditation and this person's walking next to me. Okay, it's not sight—the person is not disturbing my eyes. They're not making noise, so it's not sound. They're not touching me, it's not that. I'm not smelling them. I'm not tasting them. Okay, it's got to be something in the mind.

I finally did get to that—it had to be something in the mind. But I didn't see what it was in the mind. I didn't understand. I couldn't see what was unpleasant. I was really curious. I was like, well, what is unpleasant here? So I just continued to do the walking, kind of curious about what's unpleasant.

And then suddenly this thought erupted: "They're weird." That's a thought. I still didn't quite get it. After another exploding thought of "They're in bare feet and it's freezing cold outside," I realized that this was my justification for thinking they were weird, and that the whole aversion was related to this subtle, almost unconscious relationship to that feeling of this person being weird that I hadn't even seen consciously. And then to see that the whole thing was based on bare feet—it was just so silly that the mind let the whole thing go. The aversion disappeared, and in the next pass I was just wishing the person well, just feeling that mettā for them.

So this is a useful tool. If you're experiencing some kind of ongoing reactivity, you can apply a kind of curiosity—go through the senses. Where's the unpleasantness? Most of the time you'll find, and this was the other big "aha," it's like, oh my gosh, I'm averse to a thought. That's what the aversion actually is. I'm averse to this idea. I'm averse to something my mind made up. This is completely optional. And that's what helped it to fall apart.

Doing this kind of exploration, most of the time if you look, you'll probably see that it's something constructed in our own minds where the actual leaping-off point is, what we're actually reacting to.

Just briefly in the last few minutes we have, I want to explore this last section of the sutta, because it points to a further distinction around feeling tone that's useful, particularly on long retreat, for us to at least be aware of. Again, I offer this not as something to dive into and do. My teacher, Sayadaw U Tejaniya, when he gave teachings, he would often say, "This isn't something to do. This is information." It can go into

the back of your minds, and having this information bubbling in there, like dharma rain filtering through your system, at some point the teachings or the reflection on this might arise in your practice. Perhaps that is the time to begin to explore it.

So there is a place and a time for some exploration of this, but mostly I offer this as information and inspiration—hopefully some inspiration about how helpful this can be to begin to see this leaping point, the springboard from feeling tone into reactivity. It's a key for understanding how our minds suffer. When we can see the feeling tone itself and just know it in this simple way—"oh, this is a pleasant feeling"—often that simple mindfulness almost short-circuits the leap. We experience the feeling tone in a different way.

This further refinement on feeling brings in a distinction between worldly feeling and unworldly feeling. It goes through the three feelings.

When feeling a worldly pleasant feeling, one understands, "I feel a worldly pleasant feeling." Likewise with worldly unpleasant and neither pleasant nor unpleasant. When feeling an unworldly pleasant feeling, one understands, "I feel an unworldly pleasant feeling."

The key here is to begin to understand what is meant by worldly and unworldly. There are a couple of different ways this is translated. In various translations, Bhikkhu Bodhi uses "worldly" and "unworldly," but another version he uses is "carnal" or "bodily"—of the body—and "spiritual"—of the flesh, not of the flesh. I believe that's the most literal translation for the Pali terms *sāmisa* and *nirāmisa*.

Bhikkhu Anālayo points out that this kind of feeling serves as a help for us to distinguish feelings that guide us on the path from feelings that tend to catch us in suffering. These spiritual feelings, these unworldly feelings, are feelings connected with the path of practice. This might include, for instance, pleasant feelings associated with generosity, the pleasantness associated with concentration, the bliss of blamelessness associated with engaging in ethical conduct, the delight and joy that come when we understand and see something clearly. These are all pleasant feelings associated with the path.

Now, just because they are associated with the path doesn't mean that we can't cling to them and make trouble for ourselves. We feel those pleasant experiences in concentration, have a sitting that we call a good sitting, and then we spend the rest of our day trying to get back to it because we think that's where it's at—that felt so good, I want that back. As Steve Armstrong says, there's nothing like a good sit to ruin your day. Because we cling to it.

The worldly feelings tend to be those associated with sense experiences—the feeling tones associated with sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch, the food that we eat, and then in our mind, the thoughts about the things that we see, smell, hear, taste, touch, and consume. Those are the places where worldly feeling lands. And there's a lot of habitual clinging around that. Partly because we like the feeling of pleasant, we also tend to cling to these unworldly pleasant feelings. But they do point us in a direction. As we begin to understand or recognize the difference between this unworldly feeling and the worldly feeling, it helps us

to understand we're on the path.

Fortunately, even clinging to these things—which we will; I don't know of anyone I've ever spoken to about their meditation practice who has not done this—is self-correcting. Because we feel the suffering of it. We get the dukkha. As soon as we try to start going for that state or that experience, we're all tied up in knots again and we feel the suffering of it. So we understand that clinging to these states is not helpful. It's not to say, "Gee, I shouldn't try to get concentrated because I cling to it." It's more like, "Oh, if I get concentrated and I cling to it, I get to feel the suffering of that." The mind does begin to wind its way out of that habit of clinging. Over time. It takes time.

What I'd also say is that there's an important aspect of this unworldly feeling, particularly around the unworldly pleasant feeling: it helps us to let go of the clinging to worldly pleasant. The pleasure of concentration, the pleasure of equanimity, the pleasure of insight is so superior to any satisfaction we get out of worldly pleasant. So this is almost like a stepping stone. It helps us to let go of our more habitual ways of clinging, our habitual ways of responding and relating to the world. And then at a certain point we get to notice the clinging to this.

There's a teaching: by relying on this, abandon that. By relying on the unworldly pleasant, we can abandon the worldly pleasant. But we'll cling to this, and then we have to begin relying on something else—equanimity, the recognition of insight and understanding—to help us let go of that clinging to the worldly pleasant, to the unworldly pleasant.

Many of the feelings on the path are pleasant. And it was an understanding of the Buddha the night he recognized the path, the direction—there was the understanding: "Why am I afraid of the pleasant states of concentration? Maybe those are on the path." I think they are on the path. But there are also some unpleasant, unworldly experiences.

One of the key experiences the suttas mention is the longing for freedom. Some of you have mentioned this in your meetings, expressing it as a kind of desire. And often there is a greed associated with that—"When am I going to be free?" or "How can I get to this freedom?"

But this teaching actually points to this longing as being a wholesome, on-the-path wish. We can cling to it. We can get greedy about it. But we must recognize that they're probably tangled up—that longing for freedom, together with the greed. We can't throw out the whole thing, because that longing for freedom is keeping us on the path.

So it's time to stop. Let's just sit for a moment. Maybe when I ring the bell, you can notice whether there's pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral feeling, and whether it's associated with any idea or view.

Thank you.

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