Worldly and Unworldly Feelings

Carol Wilson · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Carol Wilson · 1:03:03

Last week I spoke about the relationship between dukkha and non-self, anatta—how they relate to one another, the ungovernability of things relating to the sometimes afflictive nature of the physical elements, the whole process of aging, decay, death.

Tonight I'd like to discuss aspects of the second foundation of mindfulness: mindfulness of feelings. In Pali it's vedana. The Buddha placed a tremendous emphasis on this particular way of establishing mindfulness. Mindfulness of feeling, of vedana, plays a critical role in understanding both how our lives are unfolding with regard to suffering and happiness, and it also plays a critical role on the path to awakening.

In English, the word "feeling" can have a wide range of meanings. At one point I looked it up in the dictionary, and feeling had thirteen different usages. It can mean "I feel a sensation," or "I feel this way about something," or "I have a feeling that something is going to happen." There's a wide range of meanings, but in Buddhism it has a very specific meaning, and I think you're all familiar with it. Vedana, as it's used in the Buddhist teachings, refers very specifically to the taste we have of an experience—that is, whether it's pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral.

Every experience we have through all six sense doors, the mind included, comes with this quality. With every sight or sound or smell or taste or sensation in the body or mind object, we experience it as being either pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. When we're mindful of these feeling tones, it begins to decondition our habitual, very deeply habituated tendency to grasp at the pleasant, to have aversion for the unpleasant, and to space out or be deluded about what's neutral.

The Buddha's instructions in the Satipatthana Sutta are extremely simple in terms of how to be mindful of these feelings. It's so simple we generally just overlook it. He said when feeling a pleasant feeling, or an unpleasant one, or a neutral one, one knows: "I'm feeling a pleasant feeling," "I'm feeling an unpleasant feeling," "I'm feeling a neutral feeling." It couldn't be more simple. As these feelings arise, the instruction is to know: this is pleasant, this is unpleasant, this is neutral.

But then the Buddha went on in the Sutta to further delineate these three types of feelings in quite an unexpected way. And it's this further delineation which opens us to a deeper understanding of suffering and of happiness in our lives. He divides these three types of feelings—pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral—into worldly ones and unworldly ones, or spiritual ones.

In this delineation, mindfulness of feelings goes beyond its simple affect. It also points us to look at the

origin of these feelings. What's the genesis of the pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral feelings? What do they arise from? This further delineation, when we look a little deeper at feelings—not simply knowing pleasant, unpleasant, neutral, but looking further at what they are based on—has tremendous implications for our lives.

As we might expect, the Buddha talked of worldly feelings arising from contact with sense objects: the ordinary sense objects of sights, sounds, smells, tastes, sensations, and mind objects. We enjoy a good meal. We feel a soft touch. A pleasant worldly feeling arises—a pleasant feeling based on a sense contact. Or perhaps we feel a painful sensation in the body, or a really unpleasant smell, or a jarring sound. That's an unpleasant worldly feeling, something unpleasant based on a sense contact. Or there's just an ordinary sight as we're walking around, seeing things that are neither particularly pleasant nor unpleasant. This is a worldly neutral feeling. This is ordinary—just the ordinary play of our lives.

Unworldly feelings are something quite different. These are feelings—again pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral—that are not particularly arising based on sense contact. These unworldly feelings arise based on renunciation. This takes a little exploration to understand what this means and what the implication is.

In Western culture, for many of us the idea of renunciation doesn't particularly inspire us. It's not a cultural value. I mean, with all the email spam you get, do you ever get a message that says "Renounce"? Probably not. But I've gotten lots of email spam for this or that: "Increase your desire"—as if somehow that's a good idea. Because in our conventional way of understanding things, we often think of renunciation as a kind of deprivation, something that might in the end be good for us but which we don't particularly want or enjoy in the moment.

But there's another way of understanding renunciation, really getting to the heart of what the experience of it is like, not what our thoughts about it are. This other way of understanding renunciation is really understanding it as non-addictiveness, where the mind is not addicted to different pleasures of the senses.

From this perspective, renunciation holds out the possibility of happiness now, because I think we can all at least have an intuitive sense that the mind is a lot freer and happier when it's not addicted to whatever it might be. The less addicted we are to the seductions of sense pleasures, the less commotion there is in the mind. Our minds have a chance to settle, to come to a place of ease. In this non-addictiveness—which is really another word for renunciation—the mind rests much more naturally in a place of spaciousness, of openness, of ease.

Just think for a moment what your mind would be like if it wanted everything that was advertised on television. With every commercial that came on: I want that, I want that, I want that. It would be like a hell realm—just that energy of wanting, of grasping, of desire, the relentlessness of it, and the inability to finally satisfy it all. In that simple example, we can see why we often mute the commercials. It's just so nice not to hear it and to have the mind be at rest.

This is what the Buddha meant when he said: "What the world calls happiness, I call suffering. And what the world calls suffering, I call happiness." The world thinks, yes, let me enjoy every possible sense pleasure—and generally for the world, that is happiness. That is what the Buddha called suffering. And what the world would call suffering—like coming to the Forest Refuge, not speaking to anybody, being in silence, all the renunciations that you have here—wiser ones call happiness.

The distinction the Buddha makes between worldly feelings and unworldly feelings—that is, feelings associated with sense objects versus feelings associated with renunciation—when we begin to see that distinction, not theoretically, not intellectually, but when we're really experiencing it in our practice and in our lives, it opens up much greater subtleties of understanding about the path and the choices we make. We get a substantially different understanding of what constitutes happiness. This is not an insignificant part of the teachings.

But it also runs counter to our general conditioning, because almost every message we receive throughout our lives tells us that happiness comes from accumulating more and more sense pleasures. This is generally where people look for happiness. They want to be in pleasant surroundings, have pleasant food, have pleasant feelings in the body. This is simply the normal way most people live. And of course, these sense pleasures do bring a kind of happiness. The Buddha doesn't deny that, and we know it from our own experience. When we have different pleasant sense experiences, pleasant worldly feelings, we do feel happy for a time.

The problem is that these sense pleasures, these pleasant worldly feelings, also contain within them hidden dangers. We might call it the downside of the pleasures. They do bring happiness—we know that from common experience. But how often are we really examining our experience carefully enough to investigate the downside, to even be aware that it is there?

Consider a few examples of these hidden dangers that we either don't think about or overlook. One very obvious example is that sometimes the pleasure itself, the sense pleasure itself, is ultimately harmful. We see this in dangerous addictions—whether to alcohol, tobacco, drugs, sex, fame, or wealth. When these addictions are powerful, we can see in people's lives how harmful they can be. That is one hidden danger.

Another, which we all have some experience of, though perhaps it lessens as our wisdom grows, is that if we become attached to these pleasant worldly feelings from any pleasant sense contact, the more attached we are and the more we believe that is where happiness resides, the more we suffer when they change—and of course they always do. So that is another hidden danger: the danger of attachment and the subsequent suffering that comes.

A third hidden danger, which usually goes unnoticed but is perhaps the most dangerous of all, is that when we're not mindful of these pleasant worldly feelings based on sense contact, we are unconsciously strengthening the power of desire and wanting in the mind. Every time we go for another pleasure and another, thinking it will bring us lasting happiness, what we're doing is strengthening the very habit of

desire, of wanting. Because the more we do something, the more likely we are to do it again. Unknowingly, we may be reinforcing this habit pattern of desire.

In the teachings on unworldly feelings, the Buddha is pointing out a very different kind of happiness, a very different kind of pleasure. Unworldly pleasant feelings are still pleasant, but they're not based on sense contact—they're based on renunciation. The Buddha is saying that with these kinds of pleasant feelings, there is no hidden danger, there is no downside. These unworldly pleasant feelings actually become the basis for our whole spiritual path, become the basis for our awakening.

And the bodhisattva, before his enlightenment—his understanding of this distinction between pleasant worldly feelings and pleasant unworldly feelings opened the pathway towards enlightenment for him.

I'll read from the text, from the Majjhima Nikāya, the Middle Length Sayings. This is the Buddha speaking, reflecting on his years of self-mortification:

"Whatever recluses or brahmins in the past, present, or future have experienced painful, racking, piercing feelings due to exertion—this is the utmost. There is none beyond this. But by this racking practice of austerities, I have not attained any distinction in knowledge and vision worthy of the noble ones. Could there be another path to enlightenment?"

So he tried the self-mortification and realized that didn't work. Then, as I'm sure you all recall, he remembered as a young child sitting under a rose apple tree while his father was doing some kind of plowing ceremony in the kingdom:

"I recall that when my father the Sakyan was occupied, while I was sitting in the cool shade of a rose apple tree, quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome states, I entered upon and abided in the first jhāna, which is accompanied by applied and sustained thought, with rapture and pleasure born of seclusion. Could this be the path to enlightenment?"

Following on that memory came the realization: that is the path to enlightenment. And this next sentence I think is really the key point: "I thought, why am I afraid of that pleasure that has nothing to do with sensual pleasures and unwholesome states? I am not afraid of that pleasure since it has nothing to do with sensual pleasures and unwholesome states."

So the Buddha is pointing out a whole realm of experience—pleasure based on these unworldly pleasant feelings, secluded from unwholesome states. And he saw that it's through this kind of happiness that the whole path unfolds.

There's an important message for us here about the role of joy and happiness on our path. Very often in hearing the teachings, there's so much emphasis placed—rightfully—on the great truth of dukkha and its causes, on the need for right effort, for heroic effort at times, on the danger of continually indulging sense desire. It's sometimes easy, as we're engaged in the path, to overlook that essentially this is a path of

happiness, of increasing happiness, leading onward to happiness. Let me repeat that: this is a path of happiness. That's the point of it. It's easy to forget at times, in the midst of one's particular struggles.

One discourse describes King Pasenadi from the Buddha's time, who himself was quite indulgent of sense pleasures. He wasn't one of the Buddha's most fervent disciples. But one time he visited the Buddha and described what he saw when visiting the Buddha and the order of monks and nuns:

"Here I see bhikkhus smiling and cheerful, sincerely joyful, plainly delighting, their faculties fresh, looking at ease, unruffled, subsisting on what others give, abiding with a mind aloof as a wild deer's."

It's a wonderful characterization of the simplicity and the joy and the ease of people who are practicing not for worldly sense pleasures, not for worldly pleasant feelings, but who are enjoying the happiness of the unworldly pleasant feelings. And after his enlightenment, the Buddha declared of himself that he is one who dwells in happiness.

Beginning to get a sense of the distinction between these two kinds of feelings—worldly and unworldly—we can see they have far-reaching ramifications in terms of the conditioning in our minds, the conditioning of our actions, and the choices we make in our lives.

In the time of the Buddha, there was a very wealthy merchant named Visākha. He lived in the ancient city of Rājagaha. Both he and his wife had realized the third stage of enlightenment, anāgāmi, non-returner. They were very adept practitioners. Soon after they had attained that level, his wife ordained and became the nun Dhammadinnā. She quickly became an arahant, and the Buddha declared her to be the foremost nun in expounding the Dhamma.

At one point, Visākha, her former husband who was still a layman, went to the now-nun Dhammadinnā with a series of questions. Visākha asks: "What habitual tendencies underlie pleasant feelings, unpleasant feelings, neutral ones?"

Dhammadinnā replies, as we might expect: desire or lust is the underlying tendency conditioned by pleasant feeling; aversion is the underlying tendency conditioned by unpleasant feeling; and delusion is the underlying tendency regarding neutral feeling.

What's important in hearing these teachings—it's so easy to just hear them on a conceptual, intellectual level, but that's not the point. It's always to hear this and reflect back: what is my experience of this? Use the words to really look at your experience. See for yourself, reflect for yourself: when pleasant feelings come, do you ever experience desire for them, wanting them to continue? When there are painful feelings, do you experience the dislike, the aversion, the resistance? The delusion, the spacing out with neutral ones? The Buddha is really talking about our experience.

So this is what we would expect from Dhammadinnā's reply: we get attached to pleasant feelings, we resist unpleasant ones, we're deluded about neutral ones.

And just as a reminder about the importance of understanding this conditioning, the Buddha said that without abandoning these underlying tendencies—without abandoning desire for the pleasant, aversion to the unpleasant, and ignorance of the neutral—liberation is impossible. This is a tremendous charge to us, and it really frames what our practice is about. We're practicing the deconditioning of these tendencies because that is what frees the mind.

These teachings, although challenging for our practice and our lives, are teachings we're all familiar with. But then Visakha, the former husband, goes on to ask the nun Dhammadina another probing question—one that opens up this whole other realm of unworldly feelings. He asked, "Lady Dhammadina, do these habitual tendencies of desire, aversion, and delusion underlie all pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral feelings?" He's asking whether, with every feeling that arises, these are the underlying tendencies for all of them.

She replies that these habitual tendencies do not underlie all feelings. They do not have to be abandoned with regard to all feelings. When the Buddha heard of her reply, he approved it, saying, "Dhammadina is wise. If you had asked me the meaning of this, I would have explained it to you in just the same way." He's giving his seal of approval to this answer.

What Dhammadina was pointing out was just this distinction between different kinds of feelings—between the pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral feelings based on sense contact, and the pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral feelings based on renunciation. This sets the framework for our understanding.

The question for us is: how do we apply these teachings? How do we apply them in our practice? How do we apply them in our lives? The challenge is that as we're living our lives in the world, we find ourselves engaged with both kinds of feelings. Many worldly feelings arise because we have all of this sense contact, and there are also times when unworldly feelings arise. It's interesting to start paying attention to the difference.

Generally in our lives, we go about seeking sense enjoyments. This is part of what our life is, especially as lay people living in the world. Even though we know their limitations, even though we know some of their downsides, still this is a big part of our lives—just the enjoyment of pleasant sense experience. And we know, in the ordinary course of our lives, that we do have aversion to unpleasant situations, to unpleasant sense experience, even though we know that aversion and resistance just cause more suffering. We have some wisdom about it all, but still these are very strongly conditioned habit patterns. We all partake of this. It's just our normal lives.

So on retreat and in our lives, we want to pay attention both to sense contact and to our reactions to it. We begin to get more mindful. There's sense pleasure, and we see the desire. There's unpleasant sense experience, and we see the aversion. A big part of our practice is becoming mindful of these worldly feelings and the reactions they condition.

But we can also practice recognizing the unworldly feelings, and this is something I think we don't often do. That's why I wanted to emphasize it tonight, because in terms of understanding our path, it's tremendously helpful to recognize and become clear about what these unworldly feelings are—the ones that arise in the course of our meditation, in the course of our lives—because this has tremendous implications for our practice.

On some level, you all do recognize unworldly pleasant feelings as being a source of happiness in your lives, or you wouldn't be here. If you were just looking for worldly pleasant feeling, would you come to the Forest Refuge? I don't think so. You'd be at the beach, or you'd be where sense pleasures abound. But we're all here, so there's some big part of our minds that already understands: yes, there's another kind of happiness, another kind of pleasant feeling different from what comes through sense pleasures. We are already attuned somewhat to these unworldly pleasant feelings.

But still, we might have some doubt. At different times we wonder: is this really going to be the condition for my happiness if I give up attachment to sense pleasures? The Buddha addressed this directly. He said—and I love this line—"Now you might think that perhaps these defiling mental states of attachment, aversion, and delusion might disappear, and you might still be unhappy." How could I be happy without desire? We might think these states could disappear and we'd still be unhappy. "That is not how it should be regarded. If defiling states—greed, hatred, and delusion—disappear, nothing but happiness and delight remain." It's the defilements of mind that are the cause of suffering, and the absence of those defilements that brings happiness.

So when we understand this, we no longer are deluded into placing our hopes for happiness in worldly pleasant feelings, because they just condition more desire, more attachment, more defilement.

Now, we may not yet be fully enlightened—possibly not. But all along the path we do experience many moments of non-sensual joy, of unworldly pleasant feelings. And I want to point a few of them out so you can begin to recognize that unique kind of pleasure and happiness that comes as we practice.

We experience non-worldly pleasant feelings in every moment of generosity. Generosity is an act of renunciation—we're giving something up for someone else. We experience the non-worldly pleasant feeling when the mind is free of stinginess, free of grasping, free of holding on. Every time we're generous, just think of times when you gave out of love, out of compassion, out of gratitude, out of respect. It's a very pleasant feeling. We feel happy, we feel joyous in those moments of generosity, and it's a very accessible gateway to happiness.

Practicing generosity is why the Buddha often began all of his progressive teachings with teachings on generosity—because it's such an easy way to connect with these unworldly pleasant feelings that bring a genuine sense of happiness in our lives. It's a very good practice to undertake.

Just as an example, it's a practice that I've really worked with over many years. One little way of

practicing it—and it's been very interesting for me to watch my mind in doing this—I've undertaken the practice, as best I can, of when I have the thought to give something, to do it. Not to second-guess myself. Because very often we have a generous thought: "Oh yes, I'll give that to somebody," or "I'll do something for that person." And then we have all kinds of second thoughts: "Oh, that's too much," or "I really want it," or whatever. We second-guess ourselves and often we just let the thought of generosity pass by.

So the practice of actually acting on it whenever the thought comes has been very powerful. Sometimes it's just little things, and sometimes it's been really big things. And never have I regretted it. You might think, "Oh, then I'll be sorry I gave that." It's not like that, because the feeling of generosity is this unworldly pleasant feeling. It makes us feel good, as well as, of course, making the other person feel good. So it's a wonderful practice to attune ourselves to this quality of mind, to what unworldly pleasant feeling is about.

We feel non-sensual joy in the practice of the brahma viharas. When we're practicing metta, or compassion, or mudita, or equanimity, there's just that simple, warm-hearted connection that's not dependent on sense contact. It's an unworldly pleasant feeling.

There's one beautiful expression of this—and of course there are many—but the Zen poet, hermit, and monk Ryokan, a wonderful, wonderful figure, in one of his poems wrote: "Oh, that my monk's robes were wide enough to gather up all the people in this floating world." You can just feel the love and compassion that he had, expressing it in that way. That's a happiness, that's a joy that's not dependent on sense pleasure, on sense contact. It's an unworldly pleasant feeling.

Sometimes we see this quality, this really beautiful quality of humanity, emerge in times of great suffering. Sometimes when there are great natural disasters or man-made disasters—like the Boston Marathon bombing—or when something terrible happens, there's an outpouring of support and generosity and love. This is coming from people not expecting anything in return, and it's not based on any particular sense pleasure. It's coming from an unworldly feeling of love, connectedness, compassion. So we know this; we can relate to this.

We feel a non-sensual joy in the following of the precepts. We're renouncing harmful actions. Again, remember, unworldly feelings are based on renunciation—so the renunciation of harmful actions. There's a joy that comes; it's the joy of non-remorse, of non-regret, when our minds are just clear. We all know from our practice, having in the course of our lives done our fair share of unskillful actions, how often they'll come to mind in the practice, and they are a cause of regret or remorse. So when we are committed to the precepts, even having done, as we all have, various unskillful actions, once we are recommitted to non-harming, there is a wonderful unworldly pleasant feeling of ease of heart.

There's the unworldly pleasant feeling of just the simplicity of being on retreat. For most of us, our lives are so complex and so busy, with so much going on.

I'm sure you share this experience, but I know when I go on retreat and that first moment of just closing the door behind me and entering into a place of silence—it's blissful. You can just put everything down.

In contrast, sometimes when I'm meditating at home, I might be sitting up in my study. It could be dark, but there's the little light on the computer, the surge protector, the printer, the router, this and that. It's like general headquarters for my life—just a reminder of how busy and connected we are.

So appreciating the unworldly pleasant feeling of simplicity, of the renunciation that comes from being in a situation like this.

We experience unworldly pleasant feeling in states of concentration, where the mind is secluded from unwholesome states. As you know, when we first come on retreat or are just getting started, our minds are often restless and agitated in their reactivity to worldly feelings. Pleasant, I like; unpleasant, I don't like. So there's a lot of agitation in the mind. But as the mind settles and becomes more concentrated, less reactive, it becomes secluded from those unwholesome states, and we experience an unworldly pleasant feeling of composure, of stillness.

This kind of happiness is much greater and much more fulfilling than any kind of worldly happiness we might experience. Dipa Ma once sat in an absorbed state for three days, and said the Buddha could stay in that state for seven days. So just think for a moment: what sense pleasure could you enjoy for three days straight? Could you eat for three days straight? Or listen to music for three days straight? Or indulge your fantasies for three days? You'd be exhausted. And we would take refuge at last in what Munindra used to call "the worldling's highest pleasure"—sleep. Because sense pleasures don't have that power.

These unworldly pleasant feelings, born of seclusion, born of renunciation—there is a purity to them. They are divorced from unwholesome states of mind.

In just the examples I've given, and I'll offer one or two more, these are all things we've touched. We may not be sitting in samādhi for three days in a row, but we've all touched the happiness of generosity, of the non-harming of the precepts, of simplicity, and of some degree of concentration. So we all have an understanding and a taste of what these unworldly pleasant feelings are about. It's important to see the difference between them and the worldly pleasant ones. And this is something we don't generally do. We generally don't make that discernment.

There's the pleasant worldly feeling of insight, of understanding. The texts say: if the pleasure and joy experienced in vipassanā happiness, which is complete with the seven factors of awakening, were divided into 256 parts—I have no idea where 256 came from—but if vipassanā happiness were divided into 256 parts, one single part of that joy and pleasure exceeds the worldly joys and pleasures of kings among humans, devas, and brahmās. So great is the joy and pleasure inherent in these factors of awakening.

We want to remind ourselves of this and also to pay attention to it, because it's so easy to get caught up in the course of our practice and overemphasize the struggles we have, or the worldly unpleasant feelings

and the dukkha that comes both from the feeling and our reaction to them. We just often miss the more subtle but also more profound aspect of these unworldly feelings. That's why I'm giving such emphasis to this tonight—so we can begin to recognize them, open to them, and appreciate them, because they are the source of genuine joy and happiness in the way we live.

It's also important to look at the unworldly unpleasant and neutral feelings. Unworldly doesn't mean only pleasant. There can be unworldly unpleasant feelings, and you're familiar with this. Often in stages of meditation, sometimes just at different times, we're seeing impermanence from a particular perspective. We're seeing the continual dissolution of things, and there's no place to take a stand. We're tuning in to the insecurity of phenomena. There are times when that can become fearful, and we can feel a lot of misery or despair in seeing that. At those times, enlightenment may really seem very far away. It feels like what Saint John of the Cross called the Dark Night of the Soul. Or there are stages of insight where, because of the particular stage we're in, unpleasant physical sensations become predominant. It's not for any other reason; it's just that in that stage of insight, that's what happens. This is an unworldly unpleasant feeling.

But these feelings, these unpleasant unworldly ones, play a critical role in our path of awakening. So again, it's important to understand them. The unworldly unpleasant feeling, rather than conditioning aversion, leads to disenchantment and disillusionment. This is something we read in the texts a lot: being disenchanted, we become dispassionate, and through dispassion, the mind is liberated.

So it's the unpleasant unworldly feelings that come in the course of practice—they're not conditioning aversion; they're conditioning disenchantment. And that disenchantment in the mind, that disillusionment, leads to dispassion. And it's dispassion which leads to awakening.

But one of the problems for us just in listening to this is that the words in English—disenchanted, disillusioned, dispassionate—don't sound that appealing to us.

"Oh, that person's really disillusioned"—we tend to think they're a little depressed. But when we look at the actual meaning of the words, it's really quite different. Being disenchanted means waking up from the spell of enchantment. We wake up into a fuller reality. We see this in many great fairy tales and myths: somebody receives a kiss from the good fairy, and the person wakes up from the slumber of enchantment.

It's very easy to see this process of disenchantment at work in our practice. Just watch those times when the mind is caught up in some desire, in some wanting. It might be for some little thing, or it might be a full-blown obsession. Pay attention to the next time the mind is caught by wanting. Notice the feeling of it. Really experience what it's like to be caught up in the wanting mind, in the mind filled with desire. We can feel the pleasant worldly feeling of it—it might have a worldly pleasant aspect. We want something desirable, something pleasurable. It energizes us. Maybe it's longing to be with somebody, or wanting a favorite food.

But then, if you can, notice that moment when the wanting disappears, when the desire passes. And it

always does. Has anybody had a desire that didn't eventually pass? Whatever has the nature to arise will pass away eventually. If you notice that moment of going from being caught in the wanting to the end of wanting, the end of desire—that's the experience of going from enchantment to disenchantment. It's as if we wake up, we're let out of the grip of something, and we experience the unworldly pleasant feeling of the ease of not wanting.

Does this seem clear? It's so much a part of my experience, because the wanting—just to see over and over again how seductive it is. Those worldly pleasant feelings, they just seduce us again and again and again. We become enchanted by them. But if we're paying attention to that moment when we come out of it, as pleasant as the wanting might have been in its own way, it's much more pleasurable to be disenchanted, to come out and simply rest in a place of ease, of openness, of spaciousness. Through disenchantment, we experience the unworldly pleasant feeling.

Unworldly neutral feelings we experience often when we're in a state of equanimity. Rather than spacing out, as with worldly neutral feelings, with unworldly neutral feelings based on renunciation, the mind comes to a place of tremendous equanimity, impartiality. There's a tremendous purity of mind at that time.

So how do we practice being mindful of all these different kinds of feelings? The Buddha in the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta gave really specific instructions, and it's simply a summary of what I've been describing: "When feeling a worldly pleasant feeling, one knows, 'I feel a worldly pleasant feeling.' Feeling an unworldly pleasant feeling, one knows, 'I feel an unworldly pleasant feeling.'" The same with worldly unpleasant, unworldly unpleasant, worldly neutral, unworldly neutral feelings.

If you've connected with some sense of the meaning of this distinction, just investigate a little bit. Explore, pay attention to the different kinds of feelings that come up in the course of a day, based on whether the feeling—pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral—is coming from sense contact or coming from renunciation.

The caution here is not to make this too complicated. It would be very easy, and I could easily imagine this happening, to spend an hour trying to figure out: Is this pleasant or is it neutral? Is this worldly or unworldly? Be watchful of that. You don't want to make this too complex, too confusing. Rather, use this as a general framework of understanding for the second foundation of mindfulness, and begin to notice the difference in your experience between sense pleasures and what we could call Dhamma pleasures. Feelings are involved with both. But see if you can begin to distinguish the difference between worldly sense pleasures and the unworldly or spiritual Dhamma pleasures. The more clearly we can see the difference, the more we can begin to make wiser choices in our lives, and it becomes much clearer what our aspirations actually are.

I'll close with a few verses from the texts:

"Just as many diverse winds blow back and forth across the sky—easterly winds and westerly winds,

northerly winds and southerly winds, dusty winds and dustless winds, sometimes cold, sometimes hot, those that are strong and others mild, winds of many kinds that blow—so in this very body here, various kinds of feelings arise: pleasant ones and painful ones, and those neither painful nor pleasant. But when a bhikkhu who is ardent does not neglect clear comprehension, then that wise one fully understands feelings in their entirety."

This is really exploring feelings in their entirety—the worldly ones conditioning desire, aversion, and delusion, and the unworldly ones leading to dispassion, leading to awakening.

"But when a bhikkhu who is ardent does not neglect clear comprehension..."

So there's something here to explore. But do it, if you can, just from a place of interest—without obsessing about it and without letting the mind get confused by it all. Simply begin to sort out this very important distinction, and see the effect of that in your practice and in your lives.

Let's just sit for a moment.

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