

VI

FEELING

The fourth spoke in the wheel of practice presented here and at the same time the second *satipaṭṭhāna* is contemplation of feeling. The Pāli term for feeling is *vedanā*, which stands for the affective tone or the hedonic quality of experience, its tonality. The term *vedanā* does not refer to emotions. Emotions are a more complex phenomenon and would find a better placing under the rubric of mental states, which is the topic of the next *satipaṭṭhāna*.

The first part of the instruction for contemplation of feelings proceeds as follows (MN 10):

When feeling a pleasant feeling, one knows: “I feel a pleasant feeling”; when feeling a painful feeling, one knows: “I feel a painful feeling”; when feeling a neutral feeling, one knows: “I feel a neutral feeling.”

The three types of feeling mentioned in the instruction are best viewed as part of a continuous bandwidth of what is affectively known, a spectrum that ranges from the most pleasurable to the most painful of feeling tones. Somewhere in the medium part of this range of felt experiences there is an area which is literally “not-painful-not-pleasant” (*adukkhamasukha*). Each practitioner needs to stake out the precise compass of this area through mindful observation. Ongoing practice of contemplation of feeling will make it clear what types of feeling tone are best reckoned as being neither painful enough to be able to lead to any aversion nor pleasant enough to trigger any desire. It is these types that can be considered “neutral”, and the range of felt experience to either side of them can go under the labels of “pleasant” and “painful” (or at least “unpleasant”) feeling.

Attention given to neutral feelings helps to avoid a dualistic distinction between painful and pleasant feelings as if these were two totally distinct phenomena. Instead, pleasure and pain are dimensions of a continuum of felt experience, with a middle section that is neither distinctly pleasant nor really painful.

FEELING AND REACTIVITY

The chief task with contemplation of feeling is to ask ourselves the question: “How do you feel?” This question needs to be asked with a sincere and genuine interest of really wanting to know. The reason

why this enquiry carries such significance is that usually the affective input of feeling directly leads to a reaction.

When experiencing pleasant feelings, the tendency is to react with desire and clinging, wanting to keep the pleasure and have more of it. With painful feelings, the tendency of the mind is to react with aversion and irritation, wanting it to stop and disappear, never to occur again. In the case of neutral feelings, the mind tends to get bored and search for some more entertaining distraction. Neutral feelings do not hold the promise of something new and exciting, hence they easily stimulate the tendency to ignorance, to quite literally being ignored.

Contemplation of feeling shines the light of awareness on these ingrained tendencies. It replaces the ignorance of automatic reaction with the knowledge of clear recognition. We train ourselves not to ignore the impact of the affective dimension of experience. This can offer substantial help in everyday situations. Having learned to be aware of the affective dimension of experience makes it easier to detect what is happening in the mind at an early stage. Such mental happenings usually start on the affective level, when a particular feeling leads to subsequent unskilful reactions and proliferations. Once mindfulness is established on the level of feeling, it becomes possible to recognize an unwholesome reaction before it has acquired full force. Recognition at such an early stage makes it possible to nip this reaction in the bud.

Moreover, if mindfulness has not been swift enough to catch things at an early stage, even at any later moment in the trajectory of the building up of mental negativity the spotlight on feeling helps bring us back to an element of simplicity in the present moment. The affective push of feeling operates during any stage of mental elaboration. Its mindful recognition offers a door into disentangling complexity. Based on this type of grounding, it becomes easier to cultivate an appropriate response to whatever is happening, on the internal and on the external level.

This remarkable potential would explain why feelings have been selected as the topic of a whole *satipaṭṭhāna*, in between the body and mental states. The present exercise in fact directs attention to a crucial link in dependent arising (*paṭicca samuppāda*). Feeling is the place where craving can arise. In a way, feeling is what makes the world go

round. But it does not have to be that way. Although craving can manifest in response to feeling, it does not have to manifest. Through mindful recognition it becomes possible to avoid the arising of craving.

The speed with which feelings usually lead to a reaction can be appreciated by imagining an earlier stage in the evolution of the human species. Picture a Neanderthal turning a corner in a jungle and suddenly seeing something ahead. Within a split second a decision has to be taken. Is this something I can eat or is this something that can eat me? The speed of the decision between fight and flight is crucial for survival. Feeling offers an important input for making such quick decisions. In the average modern-day living situation, however, the speed of such reactivity triggered by feeling can have detrimental consequences. It can lead us into ways of acting and reacting that we would not have chosen if we had allowed sufficient time for sober reflection. Turning the light of awareness on feelings, we can learn to pause with mindfulness and become aware of their impact before being carried away by our reactions.

A PRACTICAL APPROACH

In actual practice I suggest using the body scan again. During the earlier scans, the task was to be aware of the anatomical parts or the elements in the body. This was based on combining the map of our knowledge of the constitution of the body with feeling the body. With the present exercise this same feeling of the body during the scan can be used to turn attention more inwards towards feeling itself.

An example to illustrate such turning more inwards would be if we shift our attention for a moment to the experience of holding this book in our hands. Touching the paper of the book we can know the material out of which it is made. In this case, attention is directed towards the object held in the hands. The very same experience can also be taken in the other direction by being aware of the act of touching. In this case, attention is instead directed towards the hands. Similarly, with contemplation of feeling the same type of scan is used to explore that which feels the body.

To get started, at first we might do scans for individual feelings. With a first scan from head to feet we could explore in particular the occurrence of any pleasant feeling somewhere on the surface or in the

interior of the body. During a second scan from feet to head we could see if any painful feeling manifests anywhere in or on the body. A third scan from head to feet could be to discover any neutral feelings in or on the body. Based on growing familiarity with the three types of feeling, we might at times find it more convenient to combine all three into a single mode of attending to feelings. Whatever feelings we encounter during a scan, be these feelings of smoothness or roughness, throbbing or pulsing, pressure or lightness, tension or ease, or any other type, there is no need to get involved with the details of their individual manifestations. We only give importance to their hedonic tone, their affective quality. In short, we just recognize whether they are experienced as pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral.

After having done such scanning, we remain aware of the whole body in the sitting posture and of the manifestation of any feeling of these three types. With the occurrence of any feeling, we just keep noticing its affective tone.

Having explored the manifestation of feelings in and on the body, we continue by opening up the vista of our awareness to noticing any type of feelings, even those that do not have a prominent impact on the somatic level. Hearing a sound, for example, we might note the affective tone that accompanies our recognition and mental processing of that sound. The same goes for the other senses. In this way, we learn to be continuously aware of the affective dimension of our experience. Moreover, we come to distinguish more clearly if a particular feeling started on the bodily level or because of mental evaluation.

Contemplation of feelings can become a powerful tool for shining the light of awareness on mental events. This potential lies in the relative simplicity of the affective tone of feelings, compared to the comparatively more complex character of other aspects of mental activity. Trying to remain aware while the mind is engaged in some thought activity is more easily said than done, as thought easily draws us in and soon enough we find ourselves immersed in the thinking rather than watching it. Yet *satipaṭṭhāna* meditation is not something to be carried out only in the absence of thought. On the contrary, it needs to encompass all possible situations, be this in formal practice or when moving out into the world. Unless we learn in some way to remain

mindful while the mind is active, how will we ever be able to carry our mindfulness practice along into daily life? Therefore finding a way of learning to be mindful when the mind is engaged in thought is an important requirement.

Here feelings offer a convenient training ground. Due to their simplicity, feelings are somewhat like a handle that we can use to take hold of the complexity of mental events without getting caught up in them. In this way, when the mind is involved in thinking, perhaps even in emotional reactions, this need not be considered an obstruction to practice. Instead, it can become an opportunity to train ourselves in a skill of considerable importance. This is the ability to remain aware of the basic affective tone of present-moment experience. Such tuning in on the affective level provides a grounding; it can serve as an anchor that prevents our being carried away by what is taking place.

Of the three types of feeling, the neutral type is the one usually ignored. When faced with this sort of unexciting experience, the tendency of the untrained mind is to shift quickly to something else, to go out in search of some sort of distraction. The inability to just be with neutral feelings can be responsible for a tendency to dramatize whatever happens and coat experience with an overlay of likes and dislikes. Anything can serve as a building block to intensify the affective tonality of what is happening to us, be it on the pleasant or the unpleasant side, as long as it triggers the excitement of strong feelings and takes us out of the blandness of neutral ones. The inevitable results of giving free rein to this tendency are biased perceptions and unbalanced reactions, in short: ignorance is in full swing. As a way of countering this potential of neutral feelings to activate the drama of ignorance, we can make a conscious effort to remain aware of neutral feelings, no longer ignoring them.

At times, however, it can also happen that we are not able to feel any feeling, even neutral ones. In such a case we simply note that. Similar to the earlier body scans, where it was not necessary to experience distinctly each anatomical part or element in every part of the body, in the present case the successful carrying out of the contemplation also does not depend on being able to distinctly sense feelings in every part of the body. The purpose of the practice is to

understand the way feelings impact the mind. To serve this purpose, it is sufficient to experience some feelings of the different types. It is not necessary to overcome first of all any blank area in the body so as to have a totally comprehensive experience of feelings.

THE PUSH OF FEELINGS

The impact of feelings on the mind can be explored in particular when we encounter unpleasant or painful feelings. Some of these could be due to chronic pain. In such cases we simply note the feeling and move on with our scan. If such pain becomes strong, we create space around it by being aware of the whole body rather than focusing on the pain alone. It can sometimes be useful to note if there are other parts of the body that are not in pain. This helps to remain balanced.

Other unpleasant or painful feelings encountered during the scan could be simply due to the sitting posture, or else some itch may have arisen. In such cases, the practice can be more focused on the pain. The recommendation is to stay with the painful feeling for a little while, observing the unpleasant sensation or the itch together with the push that manifests in the mind. The object of observation is the push of feeling, clamouring for our attention and for a reaction to take place, for some action to be undertaken to stop the itch or unpleasant feeling.

The task here is not to sit through excruciating pain. We are not trying to turn *satipaṭṭhāna* into an ascetic practice. The task is only to stay for a short while and observe unpleasant feelings in their conditionality. We observe unpleasant feelings in order to understand how these affect the mind. This offers an opportunity for developing our own personal and direct experience of dependent arising. All it takes is noticing that push.

After the push has been noticed, we are free to take action. We scratch or change our posture, according to what the situation demands. We notice the pleasant feelings of relief and the mental reaction of wanting this pleasure to last. Needless to say, pleasant feelings can push the mind just as much as unpleasant feelings. The recommendation is only to begin exploring the push of feelings with the case of pain, as this offers an easily accessible and evident occasion for such exploration. Once understood, the push can be noticed with any type of feelings, at times perhaps even by noticing the subtle push of neutral feelings for something more entertaining.

With sustained practice of noting this push, eventually the experience of each of the three types of feeling comes with an inbuilt awareness of their corresponding tendency. Pleasant feeling tends to attract, unpleasant feeling tends to rouse resistance, and neutral feeling tends to trigger the search for something else that is less boring. Our appreciation of the relationship of feelings to the underlying tendencies deepens. This in turn makes us realize the remarkable degree to which our apparently so well-reasoned evaluations and reactions are in truth and fact influenced by the affective tone of the type of feeling experienced.

Increasing familiarity with internal manifestations of the push exerted by feelings naturally leads over to noting the same also externally, when it manifests in others. Such noting reveals the extent to which other human beings are also under the sway of feelings in their apperceptions and subsequent actions. Being able to notice such an influence can be of considerable aid in communications and interactions with others.

Returning to formal meditation practice, subsequent to scanning the body we move on to being aware of any feelings that manifest, independent of whether their arising has a noticeable impact on the body or not. Some feelings hardly affect the body at all, wherefore their mindful observation needs to take place within the realm of the mind. Whatever type of feeling manifests, the task is throughout to be aware of the affective dimension of present-moment experience. Whenever this affective experience comes with a particularly prominent push, we try to notice it.

The advantage of cultivating awareness of feelings lies in coming to know and recognize what acts as an intermediary between body and mind. Feelings could be visualized as a messenger between what happens in the body and what takes place in the mind. Or else feelings can be considered an interface between body and mind. Through the medium of feelings, mental states can affect the condition of the body, just as, through the same medium of feelings, the condition of the body has its impact on the mind (Anālayo 2013: 121f). This perhaps explains why a discourse in the *Satipaṭṭhāna-saṃyutta* stipulates the cultivation of all four *satipaṭṭhānas* for a penetrative understanding (*pariññā*) of the three types of feeling (SN 47.49). Even though these

three types are taken up in detail just with contemplation of feeling, apparently the cooperative effort made with the help of cultivating the other three *satipaṭṭhānas* puts the exploration done with the second *satipaṭṭhāna* into its proper context. This ensures that the resulting insight indeed becomes penetrative.

Feelings are conditioned and conditioning at the same time. They are conditioned by the type of contact that has led to their arising. This could be contact by way of bodily touch. But it could also be contact through another physical sense-door or through the mind-door on its own, such as when having a particular thought or idea.

The variety of feelings comes not only from the type of contact that leads to their arising. Their actual manifestations also differ. Feelings tend to affect both body and mind. But they do so to differing degrees. The felt experience of a mental state like anger has a stronger bodily component (physical tenseness, facial expression, etc.) than the feelings that arise with other mental states such as, for example, conceit.

In view of this variety, it is important to cultivate contemplation of feelings in a comprehensive manner. Contemplating only feelings that manifest as physical sensations would risk missing out on feelings that come with mental states that do not have a prominent relation to easily discerned bodily sensations. Such restricting of contemplation to only those feelings that manifest as bodily sensation would significantly narrow the scope of the present exercise and thereby miss out on a substantial portion of its liberating potential.

THE BODY AND PAIN

Nevertheless, bodily sensations are a prominent area for this contemplation. Sustained practice of the body scan with attention given to feelings reveals the surprising degree to which the body is a constant source of pain. Sitting in meditation, sooner or later bodily pain forces us to change posture. Even the posture of lying down cannot be maintained for long periods without eventually giving rise to pain and the need to turn around and change the body's position.

Aside from the pain inherent in the body when motionless in any posture, there is the irritation caused by the outside temperature. Now it is too hot, soon enough it is too cold. A constant need keeps forcing

us to adjust clothing or turn on a fan or the heating in order to prevent this body from giving rise to pain due to temperature.

Another dimension of the same predicament is the need for food and drink. So much attention, time, and resources are spent catering to what we would like to eat and what we would like to drink. Gratifying our likes, as well as creating and enforcing such likes in others, receives a great deal of attention and publicity. But the truth of the matter is that we have to eat and we have to drink, simply to avoid the pain of hunger and thirst. When that pain has successfully been addressed at least for a short while, the inevitable result is the need to defecate and urinate. Failing to do these will become yet another source of pain. From the restaurant to the restroom, all these are just facilities for pain relief.

Taking a deep breath feels so pleasant. Why is that? Because for a moment the constant demand of the body for oxygen has been satisfied. We have to breathe in order to avoid the pain of lack of oxygen.

Contemplating the different dimensions of bodily pain can also be related to the elements, the second spoke in the wheel of practice presented here. The basic pain of the body in any posture due to the pressure of the body's weight, along with the need to eat and defecate, is a form of bodily pain that reflects the impact of the earth element. The need to drink and urinate relate to the water element. The necessity to maintain the body at a certain temperature points to the fire element. Out of various bodily motions, the need to breathe is a particularly prominent example of the potential for pain related to the wind element.

Aside from its place within contemplation of feelings, the constant subtle pain inherent in having a body can become an exercise on its own. All it takes is to note the amount of time and activity spent throughout the day just for the sake of maintaining the body in a less than painful condition: sleeping, eating, drinking, dressing, washing, and so on.

This type of contemplation or reflection can lead to a notable transformation of our attitude towards the body. It not only has a rather sobering effect on the pursuit of bodily pleasures in their

various forms, it also can be of remarkable help in the case of illness. Bodily sensuality and bodily sickness are in fact two sides of the same coin. To whatever degree we become attached to the body through the pursuit of sensual pleasure, to that same degree we will suffer when the body is sick and in pain.

Another aspect of the same practice is that often the experience of the pain of disease comes with an implicit assumption that we are in some way entitled to health. Somehow it seems almost unfair that we should get sick and experience pain. Proper assessment of the true nature of the body as something that naturally gives rise to pain will help to free us of this unreasonable assumption. It is natural for the body to give rise to pain. There is nothing unfair or even surprising in this. Such understanding makes it easier to face any bodily pain with mental composure.

The physical experience of pain usually comes in combination with the mental pain of anguish and worry, caused by the bodily pain. The *Salla-sutta* illustrates this situation with the example of being shot by arrows (SN 36.6; Anālayo 2013: 120f and 2016: 27ff). When we experience physical pain without giving rise to mental affliction, we are similar to someone who is hit by one arrow only. Reacting with anguish and worry, however, is like being shot at by an additional arrow. With mindfulness present, this additional and unnecessary arrow can be avoided. The feelings experienced will quite literally be “ending with the body” (*kāyapariyantika*), rather than leading on to additional feelings caused by mental reactivity.

This can become a direct experiential approach to right view in terms of the four noble truths. Being mentally afflicted by the experience of pain is an obvious manifestation of the first truth of *dukkha*. The second arrow of mental anguish and worry arises due to craving for being without pain, exemplifying the teaching of the second truth on the role of craving. The situation of experiencing only the first arrow without any mental reactivity points to the third truth regarding (at least momentary) freedom from the *dukkha* of anguish and worry. The practice of mindfulness of feeling can serve as the practical path to achieving increasing degrees of freedom from such anguish and worry in relation to the physical experience of pain.

The early discourses clearly recognize that mindfulness offers a

powerful tool with which to face the painful feelings of a disease. A discourse in the *Samyutta-nikāya* reports that Anuruddha, an eminent disciple gifted with exceptional concentrative abilities, faced the pain of serious sickness just with mindfulness (SN 52.10; Anālayo 2013: 135 and 2016: 53). Another discourse reports the Buddha himself employing mindfulness when sick (SN 1.38; Anālayo 2016: 61). Both cases are remarkable because the Buddha and Anuruddha could instead have used their concentrative powers to suppress the experience of pain. Instead of just switching off, they both opted to face pain with mindfulness. I take this to point to the power that inheres in contemplation of feelings, in particular when these are of the painful type.

THE MIND AND JOY

In addition to noticing the subtle pain inherent in having a body, sustained practice of the present contemplation will also reveal another feeling. Fortunately this is a pleasant one. It is the very subtle joy of being in the present moment. Noticing this subtle joy counterbalances the discovery of the pain inherent in having a body. Both types of feelings are ordinarily not noticed. It takes time and practice to recognize them.

The subtle pleasant feelings of being in the present moment are easily missed because of the mind's tendency to distraction. Another cause for being unable to notice this particular pleasant feeling can be if we become too pushy and overly exert ourselves. The resultant tension in the mind prevents the subtle joy of being in the present moment from arising. In this way, being able to note this subtle joy offers direct feedback on whether we have reached a balance point between becoming too loose, resulting in distraction, and too tight, resulting in contraction. Just as a lute whose strings are neither too tense nor too loose will produce melodious sound (AN 6.55; Anālayo 2003: 38), so the mind that is in a comparable condition of balance will produce the melodious sound of subtle joy.

Once this type of pleasant feeling has been recognized, it is in principle accessible in any situation. Even the most boring chore can become an occasion for experiencing subtle joy, as long as the chore is carried out with awareness well established in the present moment. The same holds for waiting at the dentist, being caught in a traffic jam,

standing in a queue; there is no end to the opportunities for coming back to the present moment and turning what could easily be experienced as unpleasant into an occasion for the arising of wholesome pleasant feelings.

Consciously cultivating the presence of this subtle type of pleasant feeling can go a long way in countering the mind's inherent tendency to distraction. After all, the most prominent reason for distractions to occur is the mind's search for something more entertaining and pleasurable. By yoking our meditation practice to the experience of this refined joy of being in the present moment, the mind naturally tends to stay with the practice in the here and now, rather than moving off in search of something else. Therefore, I would recommend making recognition of the subtle pleasant feeling that arises from being in the present moment as much as possible a baseline for practice of the second *satipaṭṭhāna*. Once arisen, this refined type of feeling can be contemplated fairly continuously (as long as we remain mindful of the present moment, of course). In this way contemplation of feeling, besides its other manifold benefits, also yields an immediate payoff in relation to the main task of *satipaṭṭhāna* meditation: helping us to remain with awareness in the here and now. Being established on this baseline observational vantage point in the present moment makes it easy to notice when at times other (and usually stronger) types of feeling arise, which can then become the object of the mind in a comprehensive practice of the second *satipaṭṭhāna*.

A central realization that emerges from undertaking contemplation of feeling as described above is the insight into the affective potential of body and mind in the way this can be discerned on the feeling level: keeping the body still leads to painful feelings, but keeping the mind still leads to pleasant feelings. This remarkable contrast underscores the fact that it is simply much more meaningful to pursue wholesome happiness that originates from the mind than to pursue sensual happiness through the body.

Happiness is mental after all; it originates in the mind. Seeking happiness through the body is somewhat of a detour. It is much more straightforward to seek happiness through the mind by cultivating what is wholesome. It is not only more straightforward, it also stands

a much greater chance of succeeding, because to do so accords with a natural tendency of a mind established in what is wholesome to give rise to joy. Last but not least, seeking happiness through bodily sense pleasures will keep us in continued bondage, but seeking happiness through establishing a wholesome condition of the mind will instead lead us onwards to liberation.

RIGHT VIEW

The realization of how our quest for happiness should best be directed is a matter of right view. Rightly viewing things provides the all-important orientation for pursuing a course of action that can indeed lead to lasting happiness.

Right view in the form of the four noble truths involves a shift from the first two truths, concerned with the recognition of *dukkha* and its cause, to the third and fourth truths. These are concerned with the recognition of the possibility of being free from *dukkha* and the way leading to such freedom, which is the noble eightfold path. This shift from the first and second to the third and fourth truths progresses from what is negative to what is positive. The two dimensions of contemplation of feelings just described involve a similar shift. This shift progresses from the realization that there is a subtle pain inherent in having a body, the alleviation of which is the motivating force behind much of our activities, to the recognition of the subtle joy of being in the present moment. Such parallelism supports a point made already above, in that contemplation of feeling offers a door to make right view by way of the four noble truths a matter of direct personal experience.

WORLDLY AND UNWORLDLY FEELINGS

In addition to the recognition of feelings as being pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral, the instructions in the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta* proceed to another distinction. The way this reads in the original gives me the impression that the entire instruction involves a two-step procedure. The first stage just requires recognizing the three basic affective tones. This has been the topic explored so far. Once some degree of familiarity with this type of practice has been acquired, the second stage comes into play. Here are the instructions:

When feeling a worldly pleasant feeling, one knows: “I feel a worldly pleasant feeling”; *when feeling an unworldly pleasant feeling, one knows: “I feel an unworldly pleasant feeling”*; *when feeling*

a worldly painful feeling, one knows: "I feel a worldly painful feeling"; when feeling an unworldly painful feeling, one knows: "I feel an unworldly painful feeling"; when feeling a worldly neutral feeling, one knows: "I feel a worldly neutral feeling"; when feeling an unworldly neutral feeling, one knows: "I feel an unworldly neutral feeling."

The distinction between worldly and unworldly involves Pāli terms that more literally translated distinguish between feelings related to the flesh (*āmisa*) and those not related to it. I take it that this distinction is meant to introduce an ethical dimension into the practice, which can function as a lead over to contemplation of mental states. In short, worldly feeling of the pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral types arises when the mind is with lust, anger, or delusion. Unworldly feeling of the same three affective types comes with a mind that is at least temporarily free from the influence of lust, anger, and delusion.

In a way it would have been more straightforward to speak just of wholesome and unwholesome feelings. Yet in its general usage the distinction between wholesome (*kusala*) and unwholesome (*akusala*) has a close relationship to intentions and intentional activities. Feelings, however, are not themselves a matter of intention. Whereas perceptions and volitional formations relate directly to intention and are amenable to mental training, feelings and consciousness are more the result of the situation created by perception and volitional formations. This basic difference could well be a reason why the discourses relate feeling and consciousness to the sense-object, whereas perception and volitional formations are related to the sense-door (Anālayo 2003: 204). In other words, feeling and consciousness are more on the receptive side of experience and thus less amenable to the direct influence of intention. This might explain why, instead of the more familiar distinction between what is wholesome and what is unwholesome, for contemplation of feelings the less common distinction between what is worldly and what is unworldly has been employed.

The introduction of the distinction between worldly and unworldly feelings can be further appreciated in the light of the Buddha's own progress to awakening. According to the *Mahāsaccaka-sutta*, during the period of his asceticism the future Buddha experienced excruciating pain, yet such pain did not overwhelm his mind. Similarly, when cultivating the absorptions during the time before his awakening he was able to experience the joy and happiness of deep concentration

without his mind being overwhelmed by it (MN 36; Anālayo 2017c: 92).

In the case of the Buddha, ensuring that the mind did not become overwhelmed by feelings was an integral part of his constant monitoring of what he was doing. Such monitoring was necessary, since he was uncertain about what path and practice would lead him to awakening. Therefore he had to keep monitoring what was happening, in order to be able to assess whether what he was doing resulted in progress towards the final goal of liberation. I take it that such monitoring, in itself perhaps just the result of his practising without the guidance of a teacher, turned out to be so beneficial that, when teaching others, he decided to give it a prominent position in the form of *satipaṭṭhāna* meditation.

By monitoring the impact of feelings on the mind in particular, he developed a distinct assessment of the nature of feelings. The average attitude of the untrained mind is to pursue pleasure and avoid pain. Asceticism is based on the recognition that this attitude leads to bondage. The alternative advocated by followers of asceticism is just the opposite: pursue pain and avoid pleasure. Out of his own experience with both sensual indulgence in his youth and self-inflicted pain during his asceticism, the Buddha went beyond both attitudes. He realized that some forms of pleasure are commendable and others should be avoided. Again, some forms of pain are commendable and others should be avoided (MN 70; Anālayo 2017c: 74ff). This understanding involves a significant shift of perspective, where feelings are evaluated according to their repercussions rather than their affective tone. The discovery of this different perspective could well be what informs the distinction introduced in the instructions in the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta* between worldly and unworldly feelings.

The *Cūḷavedalla-sutta* builds on this basic distinction between a feeling's affective tone and its repercussions. The discourse presents the first absorption as an example of pleasant feelings that do not stimulate sensual desire. The fourth absorption exemplifies neutral feelings that do not stimulate ignorance. Wishing for liberation exemplifies unpleasant feelings that do not stimulate aversion (MN 44; Anālayo 2013: 127f).

In this way, pleasant feelings of a worldly type are those related to

sensuality. Those of an unworldly type are the joy and happiness of deep concentration. Even more unworldly than that, however, is the happiness of liberation (SN 36.29; Anālayo 2003: 158n9). The principle behind this type of presentation is that worldly pleasant feelings are those that lead to an increase of sensual desire. Unworldly pleasant feelings instead lead to a decrease of sensual desire. The happiness of deep concentration does indeed diminish interest in sensuality. A mind that is fully liberated is forever free from sensual desire. Consequently the joy of liberation is the supreme type of unworldly pleasant feeling.

Unpleasant feelings of a worldly type would be those arising on being deprived of sensual pleasures. Regarding unpleasant feelings of the unworldly type, the *Cūḷavedalla-sutta* describes how such feelings arise due to wishing for liberation. This goes to show that there is nothing in principle wrong with the wish or aspiration to be liberated. The recognition of not having yet reached the goal can be useful in stirring up the energy required for further progress. However, this needs to be handled properly in order not to go overboard. When such aspiration leads to depression and excessive frustration, it can turn into an obstacle.

Related to the topic of unpleasant feelings that pertain to the unworldly type are occasions when we recognize that we have failed to live up to our own standards of conduct and behaviour. It can be quite helpful to remind ourselves that such experiences are an integral part of the path. Learning to bear with patience the unpleasant feelings arisen at such times counters the natural tendency to avoid such displeasure by simply ignoring our own shortcomings. If this tendency is allowed to take its course, the final result could well be that we train ourselves to pretend that we are better than we really are. This would indeed be an obstacle for further progress. Honest acknowledgement of our own defilements and shortcomings is an indispensable foundation for being able to do something about them. Unworldly feelings of the unpleasant type clearly have their place. This does not mean that we should indulge in self-deprecation. As with all the other *satipaṭṭhāna* exercises, the task is to keep balanced. The tool for achieving such balance is always mindfulness. Mindful observation offers us feedback as soon as we are off balance.

Neutral feelings of the worldly type could be when we are at least

momentarily satiated by sensuality and our interest in further indulgence is no longer stimulated, at least for the time being. Think of having eaten your fill and being offered another delicious dish. The feelings that arise at this time will be substantially different from the feelings experienced when being offered the same delicious dish at a time when we are really hungry. The key point here is that the neutral reaction is not the outcome of insight, but rather a type of indifference that remains within the domain of ignorance.

A prominent example of neutral unworldly feelings would be the fourth absorption. To the same category belong other neutral feelings experienced during meditation or else as the outcome of insight leading to equanimity.

The contrast between worldly and unworldly neutral feelings could also be viewed from the perspective of the *Salāyatanavibhaṅga-sutta* (MN 137; Anālayo 2003: 172 and 2013: 131). This discourse describes a hierarchy of feelings to be cultivated, where the neutral hedonic tone experienced with the cultivation of insight stands out as the supreme one. In view of the tendency of neutral feelings to give rise to boredom, due to their bland nature, appreciating the superiority of this particular type of neutral feeling can help to sustain the momentum of meditation practice during retreat periods. In other words, it is in a way natural that at times the mind finds intensive meditation less entertaining and goes seeking something else to stimulate interest. Yet from the viewpoint of the teachings it is precisely the neutral feelings experienced when seeing the impermanent nature of phenomena that form the very acme in the experience of feelings; it is precisely this type of experience that is to be cultivated.

IMPERMANENCE

Having practised contemplation of feelings for some time, another feature becomes more and more prominent, which is the changing nature of feelings. Where we earlier noticed that a feeling of a particular hedonic tone had arisen, sooner or later we find that it has passed away. With this constant arising and passing away, in a way every feeling is a messenger of impermanence. Feelings are so ephemeral, they are like bubbles on the surface of water during rain (SN 22.95; Anālayo 2003: 206). They constantly keep arising and

passing away. Their impermanent nature makes feelings a convenient tool for the cultivation of deepening insight into impermanence. Through the present exercise, such insight becomes a palpable and directly felt experience. We *feel* impermanence. Feeling impermanence makes it indubitably clear that pleasure and pain do not last forever. Experiencing this directly for ourselves gradually erodes the tendency for feelings to trigger strong reactions.

Appreciation of the changing nature of feelings does require an intentional effort. In a way, with the previous body contemplation of a corpse in decay the truth of impermanence can hardly be missed. But with feelings as well as with mental states, impermanence needs to be actively encouraged in order to proceed with the practice in accordance with the stipulation in the refrain of the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta*. According to the refrain, the task is contemplating the nature of arising and of passing away.

Once we are established in that felt sense of impermanence, thoughts no longer need to be seen as a distraction from contemplation of feelings. As long as we stay rooted in awareness of the whole body and attuned to this directly felt sense of change, thoughts can be left as they are. There is no need to force them out of the mind in order to be able to contemplate feelings. If we simply leave them as they are, without getting involved with them, they will gradually lose their power to carry the mind away. Eventually they can just come to be part of a comprehensive experience of impermanence.

The same comprehensive experience of impermanence continues from sitting to walking meditation. During the actual walking, attention can be paid to the sensations related to this activity. These could be the touch sensations on the soles of the feet, the sensations in the leg, or the whole body. In being aware of these various sensations, their impermanent nature can be given special attention. In this way the felt sense of change becomes a continuous practice.

Feelings are like winds that come from different directions (SN 36.12; Anālayo 2003: 160 and 2013: 132). Just as it would be meaningless to contend with the vicissitudes of the weather, similarly it is meaningless to contend with the vicissitudes of feelings. The best attitude is to simply let both feelings and winds pass by. Both can be

left to run their natural course in the knowledge that they will change anyway.

Cultivate the mind
Like the empty sky,
Allow feelings' wind
Simply to pass by.

In terms of the wheel simile, the contribution made by contemplation of feeling to the hub of the wheel is to root mindfulness in the body even more firmly by attending directly to the felt sense of the body and by combining that with the joy of being in the present moment. Moreover, this felt sense of the presence of the body comes with a built-in pointer to the fact of change. The contribution made to the rim of the wheel is a deepening sense of non-attachment.



It is futile to cling to feelings that are so ephemeral and constantly changing. The tendency to react to feelings by giving rise to craving is undermined and progressively weakened. In particular the quest for sensual pleasures through the body discloses its meaninglessness. It is

not only pointless, but even outright dangerous. This danger becomes particularly evident when the body becomes sick and is in pain. To the degree that we have become attached to bodily feelings during previous pursuits of sensuality, to that degree we will be afflicted by bodily feelings when disease manifests.

OPEN PRACTICE

Based on the insight cultivated with the three body contemplations and the input provided by mindfully exploring feelings, we move on to an undirected mode of practice. Rooted in whole-body awareness and with the continuity of that felt sense of impermanence, we open up to the present moment in whatever way it unfolds. We are aware that “there is feeling” (*atthi vedanā*), which can take the form of experiencing our rootedness in awareness of the whole body through the medium of feelings. In this way we keep proceeding on the path to freedom from all unwholesome reactivity in relation to feelings.

When we notice that the mind has got distracted, smilingly we recognize that the mind has wandered away, and then try to identify the feeling tone. What was the predominant affective tone of the thought, experience, memory, or fantasy that led to the distraction? Was it pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral? Such recognition of the predominant feeling tone can offer support for contemplation of the mind, the next *satipaṭṭhāna*, in particular in relation to the need to discern manifestations of lust, anger, and delusion. I will return to this relationship between the second and the third *satipaṭṭhānas* in the next chapter.

From an insight perspective, an important contribution made by contemplation of feeling is to offer a direct and personal realization of the principle of dependent arising. In a way the final link of dependent arising has already become evident with the previous contemplation of death. By facing death, we trained ourselves not to react with the sorrow and grief that usually come intertwined with the experience of death. That type of training implicitly points to craving and clinging, namely to the craving not to be affected by death and the clinging to life.

Building on awareness of the mortality of the body as an outstanding manifestation of *dukkha*, the present exercise turns to a crucial juncture in the series of links that lead up to the dependent

arising of *dukkha*. This is the arising of craving in dependence on feeling. The distinct push exerted on the mind by feeling makes it palpably evident why the link between feeling and craving is of such importance. It is at this juncture in dependent arising that mindfulness can make a world of difference.

SUMMARY

The three types of feeling can be explored with the help of body scans, which should lead over to a comprehensive awareness of any feeling, including those mental ones that do not have a clearly noticeable bodily component. Noticing the push of feelings for some reaction to take place discloses their conditioning impact on the mind. Sustained contemplation reveals the body to be a recurrent source of painful feelings, whereas the mind established in the present moment yields a subtle type of pleasant feeling. Any feeling can serve as an entry door into the direct experience of impermanence.