

2019-03-25: Foundations of Mindfulness

Part 8 - Mindfulness of Feeling Tones

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SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

So, on these Monday evenings, we're in the middle of a series of talks on Buddha's teachings on the four foundations of mindfulness, the fundamental text, kind of the original Genesis, the source texts for the whole mindfulness phenomena that we have in this around the world now come from this one text really. And in this text, they have 13, kind of like 13 exercises to do. And these exercises are meant to develop a heightened sense of awareness, a heightened awareness. And awareness is so strong, that it's we know that we're aware We're not preoccupied with the things we're aware of our thoughts, our concerns, our taxes, or whatever it might be. But we are the existence. So the presence of awareness is palpable. It's visible, that visible but you know, can be perceived in the mind's eye really clear, I'm aware, wow. And then once that awareness gets that strong, that opens the door for seeing, having insight that is liberating. So the whole purpose of these exercises to move the meditator towards liberation. And so what it means by these exercises, is they have a particular purpose. And, and it's not using mindfulness in order to help us with many of the different important events, stories, situations of our life that we run into We know that mindfulness helps in all kinds of things and certainly can help us with the challenges or life that we have to think about and reflect on or something. But this mindfulness practice is honing in the attention to those that phenomena, those ways of experiencing ourselves that support this heightened awareness at the point of the practice is not to sort through the life issues we have. So almost like the life issues, you know, are put on a shelf or, or we, we see the life issues if we focus on them in a new way. So we're not really dealing with the issues, we're dealing with something much more fundamental. And that distinction is very important to see because if people are doing A mindfulness practice, and they're trying to kind of explore and deal with their personal issues. But the instructions are actually to go a different way. They can sit up attention. And, and so people, you know, there's nothing wrong Actually, it's actually very important at times in life, to use mindfulness to look at our personal issues. It's actually a very important part of life. And we grow and develop through it and sort our life out. But it's some people, I think, some people that I meet, it

seems like that's all they think mindfulness is about. And so it's all about focusing on their psychology, their emotions, their stories, what's happening in their lives in a way that is never ending. It's kind of like a labyrinth, you know, a maze once you go into certain parts of our life. And if you really go in there, you'll never come out. So it's like stepping, stepping away to look back at this all this whole, all this life we have through a different perspective. And this this new perspective, I think becomes particularly clear when we get to that the seventh exercise of the 13 which is mindfulness of feelings. Now that people, some people now get really exciting Finally, we're going to deal with the emotions and, you know, feelings, good feelings. The problem is that it's not the emotions and, and it's rather unfortunate that they're translating this Pali word *vedanā* into as feelings.

I just said, you know, in some ways, it's the most straightforward In Simple English things we could choose the word comes from the comes from the verb *vedeti*, which means to know, or to experience, the tab, direct, immediate experience, not like you had an experience of the beach today. It's like, you know, the but if you're at the beach experience of a contact of the wind against your cheek, that kind of, you know, sensory contact. And so that's what the verb refers to in *vedanā*. *Na* is, is, I think, literally mean something like a kind of like that which is known or that which is experienced. And there's many, many things that we can experience, but it's placed into particular categories, all the things we can experience and the different places in the sutras, the Buddha categorized *vedanā*, this, the things that we can know are the things we can experience directly in many different ways. But in this text of the four foundations of mindfulness, he does it in a particular way, which is, he focuses on what can be seen as the common denominator of all experiences, all the experiences we have, have one of three qualities to it. And so it's the feeling when it was referred to as feeling is this these, these three qualities that all experience can have? And what's interesting when you have something that's the common denominator, something that's common or universal to all experience, then you have a toehold into being mindful of them or paying attention to them. That that you can use in all all these different or in any You can come to any situation at all, you have this kind of perspective that you can bring to, to bring the mind to us kind of different state of heightened awareness. So it's a very powerful state this thing, this *vedanā* in this exercise as described in these, these feelings are written now, there's a distinction that's made are two general categories that are very important. And it's kind of like, if you think of, I don't know, like a walnut you know, you walnut nuts, you know, you take it off a tree and it has nut the shell around the outside, right, it's hard and many seeds have shown the outside they just protect the germ or this the real seed in the inside. And, you know, but with a walnut shell, it's really hard. It takes some work to get to the meat, they call it with the *C* that's inside. But with *Vandana* there's, it's almost like you see there's two, there's this shell, that can be known. And then there's that which is more essential inside the seed. And now the shell is what how they refer to it in the text, they call it of the flesh, things of the flesh. To produce preceding six exercises have been all about the body, mindfulness of the body. And it's mostly mindfulness of the body through the flesh through you know, the, the sensory apparatus we have that we can feel and connect to the world and we feel it and how it is in the body. And that's kind of like the shell Buddhism puts tremendous importance in mindfulness of the body and being embodied does not denote no denigration of it are very, very important. But it's still kind of a shell. And there's something like a seed something inside and, and that's called not of the

flesh. Now, it's kind of kind of a provocative that Bhikkhu Bodhi who translates many of these texts, he calls these two categories of the flesh and not the flesh, what I'm calling the shell and the seed inside. He calls it worldly and unworldly. So there's the worldly experiences. And then there's the unworldly switch would you prefer

Strange but literally the texts that literally the literal Pāli means of the flesh and not of the flesh. And, and of the flesh are those experiences that come from our, kind of, on the surface of our, of our life, and not of the flesh of those, well look more deeply inside. I like to think of them as being connected to the quality of our inner life, quality of our inner being. And, and so you know, we can go through life and we can be in the rain and cold and that's kind of, you know, maybe miserable and, but then you know, the rain stops, the sun comes out, and that's kind of delightful. And that's kind of all of the flesh that's worldly, kind of on the outside it comes and goes these things. But the deeper the real, you know, how are we how are we really deep inside? You might the surface might be kind of like, you know, a little bit bummed about the rain, but the Inside there might be very deep contentment, or a sense of well being and happiness. The sun might come out and be beautiful on this on the surface, we feel like we relax, we take over a raincoat, that's how nice it is. But if you really go deep inside, we find I'm really lonely. Or I'm really kind of sad about something. So what is it like really inside deep. And so that's what kind of we're kind of getting into what I call the quality of our inner life. And it turns out that we're the custodian of that quality. No one else can do it for us. That how we are the depths of our being, is we're the caretakers of that and learning how to take care of that learning how to be mindful of that learning how to practice in such a way that we can start caring for what's going on and, and supporting and nourishing our inner life so that it becomes your norm. nourishing, nurturing, supportive, helpful, and the end for the for the Buddhist purpose can be liberating. So this video now this feeling so it talks about these three. So it talks about two categories of feelings. Some people call the feeling tones. These things are the qualities of what we can experience that's a common denominator all qualities they can be all experiences can either be pleasant, unpleasant, or neither pleasant or unpleasant. That's about it. That's about as exciting as it gets. And, you know, it's kind of like, you know, suddenly the room gets quiet and don't you know, like a pleasant, unpleasant or like, you know, that's pretty funny. Interesting and you know, you know i'd rather have rapture or rapture is pleasant. This is boring, pleasant, unpleasant, neither pleasant or unpleasant. You know, this is like getting complicated for, that's unpleasant for you. I've known people and I've done this, where I go to into situation maybe that's socially quite complex. The dynamics in this party are difficult. The noise in the store, they're somewhere is just like, you know, complicated and difficult. And, you know, trying to find our way trying to make sense of it, trying to find our peace with it. And then stepping back and realize, wait a minute. This is just an unpleasant situation and to simplify it like that, gives a toehold gives a perspective to relate to it, oh, it's just unpleasant. I don't have to go into all the details of who did what and who said what and the conditions that brought it up. It's just unpleasant. And the stress that I feel of being in this difficult situation is mostly a reaction to how unpleasant it is. Instead of trying to analyze situation or trying to hear the ideas, keep it really simple and experience it as the unpleasant aspect of this complicated situation. The unpleasantness is much more simple. It gives us

a toehold to be present for it to see it without getting swept into the complexity of the stories and all these things. It's just unpleasant.

The same thing, it's something that's intensely pleasant. Why would you want to step back and just, you know, set you know, once it's pleasant, you want to just kind of indulge it. But indulging in something, it's certainly fine in some ways, but it's not conducive to cultivating this heightened liberated awareness. And this heightened liberated awareness is really special to have. And so even in a very pleasant situation, someone might say I don't want to get swept up in that, oh, it's just a pleasant situation, as opposed to enamored with it or enchanted with, it's just a pleasant situation. And we said in that in that space, the mind kind of wakes up. It's not kind of caught in it. And the degree to which we can avoid getting caught in what's pleasant. We develop the capacity to also know you're caught in what's unpleasant. So it's actually a very, very important thing to become aware of. And this boring thing of pleasant, unpleasant and neutral, kind of long mouthful, even say turns to be one of the Buddha's most important teachings, one of the most important teachings of Buddha. And the part of the reason for that is that it lays at the Genesis at the nexus of so much of our life. Turns out it's rather humbling to realize how much of our life is constructed on our reactions to the basic, pleasant and unpleasantness of experience. The Buddha describes how a whole whole complicated religious philosophies have their Genesis in someone experiencing something as pleasant or unpleasant. Probably political platforms and political points of view, started with someone experienced something this is unpleasant, and I had to get rid of it. And now I have to have a whole political philosophy to explain why. Or something is pleasant for the Buddhist and Alesis is that pleasant, unpleasant, or fundamental to our reaction and construction of ourselves in life and the world we live in. And if we can get a handle on this, if we can see how we react, the moment of contact in the present moment, we can actually see the experience of pleasant and unpleasant and not be swept up into the reactivity to it and the constructive aspect of the mind, the story, the story making to the mind, then we have a chance, better chance of cultivating this heightened awareness that we're looking for here in mindfulness practice. So, the Buddha said that, so he said, The instructions are when things are pleasant, know them as pleasant. When things are unpleasant, know them as unpleasant and when they're neither pleasant nor unpleasant, know them as such as that either pleasant or unpleasant. So some people think Find this instruction phenomenally helpful. And I know some people, not for me, I find it helpful but I don't make it my primary practice but I've known people who really have taken this in and really helped them get concentrated, help them get mindful, help them be free of their experience to really stay and see this experience in this kind of way. But then it goes on. After it says this introduces those three types of feeling that's the common denominator to all experience. And then he says that when there's a pleasant experience of the flesh, when knows it's a pleasant experience of the flesh. When there's a pleasant experience, it's not of the flesh is deeper crisis, which deeper inside one knows that to be a pleasant experience, not in the flesh. So what's going on here? I think it's there's a transition being made in this text so bear with me a little bit here. So there's 13 exercises. The seventh one is the midpoint. And, and so I think that whoever constructed this text very carefully constructed the midpoint of it to highlight something important. And the midpoint in the midpoint, there's this transition from, of the flesh to not the flesh from the shell, to the kernel inside. And so

there's a movement away from what can be called of the body now, to that which is deeper inside. And the first step of that is the feeling tone.

And then we'll see next week, that the next exercise has to do with mindset. dates in mind states now we're really getting down into the quality of our inner life, how we really feel what's goes on. And to be able to kind of tune into mind states is to know that, you know, now beginning to care for this inner quality. And then after that there's five more exercises that have to do with understanding how our mind states are influenced by particular mental factors and getting really deep down into the mind and how we get how we get caught, entangled, knotted up, and how we get unnoted how we get free, which is, you know, all all elements have to do with this depth of our, what I call the inner quality of being. So there's this wonderful tradition almost like a movement here, from the body to That's which is more, I wouldn't call it mine that's keeps my mind a little bit on the surface, but they kind of the inner quality of how we feel how we are. So sometimes this knot of the flesh is called it's, it's, it's those feelings that are related to the practice that we do. As we meditate, there are a series of upwelling, emotions, sensations, feelings that arise from the practice itself. We're not getting a massage, we're not getting good food where they're not depending on the weather. It's dependent on the capacity of the mind to let go temporarily, of worldly concerns. And to begin, in that letting go deep, letting go to be able to develop concentration and stillness In peace and a certain kind of inner joy that can well up and it wells up. It's kind of like it's welling up for no good reason, except that we're getting concentrated. So that's for some people that's a revolutionary kind of experience to have. Because for some people until that time, they're always been dependent on something in the world being just right and getting having the right flavor ice cream, you know, or hit, right whether or they're being with the right people or not being with the wrong people or, you know, something has to be something has to be lined up and you know, and, and our happiness and well being is dependent on the conditions of the world. Then it's little bit like if we're all constantly shifting and changing the conditions that are around us, we can always have it just right Get that sweet spot where we're just happy. It's kind of like shifting the deck chairs on the Titanic. As it's going down, you know we're all going down. So is shifting, you know moving around or constantly shifting that which is very impermanent. It just doesn't stay the same. I had to I saw this in myself today. I was kind of uncomfortable for a while today, then I was comfortable. And then I was uncomfortable. And then I was uncomfortable some more. And then it was uncomfortable some more. So I went and had food. I had lunch, and after the lunch, I thought that was good, but then maybe I ate too much or something, but I felt like drowsy and so I didn't like being drowsy. And so then I went to lay down take a 10 minute nap, but I woke up not so contented. So what am I gonna do then? So then I went for a walk. And that was nice except it was raining then was nice, except my pants got all wet. You know he was going on and on right the conditions of the world. And so and so you know, sometimes you just go from one and but to deploy to discover and have a sense of deep inner well being, that it's not dependent on the conditions of the world is a phenomenal thing to do. And then to realize I don't have to, I don't have to always be changing the conditions, adjusting everything to be happier. Well, I just had to kind of tap in to this inner way of being

and be the custodian ever the caretaker right. How is it that you know? So we learned that when we started meditating, to start meditating and learning slowly over time, to let go of the concerns of the day the stories that were caught up in the quiet let go of our self self preoccupation. Like over self representations that the stories of who we are me myself in mind that we swim in and, and be able to let go temporarily our concerns for the world and settle into some deeper sense of simplicity, steadiness, stability, peacefulness, joy, happiness, even oddly enough, you know, various kinds of love. And to it's one of the one of fantastic things of this kind of this deep inner quality, it's below the shell. That is that the idea that we can have forms of love, that have no object. Most love has an object, you know, like a person You know, I'm so in love with that person. And which is nice maybe or not. But the, but to have this feeling of love welled up that has no object, no person, no thing, not even ourselves is just a radiance of love. We have all these wonderful capacities of this if we tap in under the show to this inner quality of being that can well up from the inside, independent of the conditions of the world around us. And then to be able to tap into that and carry that with us through the world is one part of the art of this practice. So first the exercise is to know just simply know the experiences is pleasant, unpleasant and neither pleasant or unpleasant. And as we tune into that level of experience to To be able to use that to study to be aware of how we react to that. And there's sometimes a term very frequently instantaneous reactivity. To us, but the things are pleasant or unpleasant for Rico we go for or against. We like it, we don't like it. And it's possible to kind of see how that reactivity happens to the pleasant and unpleasant and stop doing it. It's possible to settle back and just let that pleasant be pleasant, with no reactivity, no holding on no leaning towards it, and the unpleasant to be just the unpleasant. One of the benefits of that and that capacity to just be free in the middle of pleasant unpleasant, is that it's possible to have joy together with pain. If we're reactive to pain Caught in the grip of pain and reacting and pushing and wanting a differently. There's no no room in the psyche for joy. I've had intense pain and very intense joy at the same time. Mostly in meditation, where it kind of things are simple enough that you can kind of navigate through that. The select recommend it for you through this week, is as you go through your life. Try to keep it so simple that you just tune in to the pleasant and unpleasant quality of what's going on. And see how that can be a mirror, to your reactivity, to your preferences, your likes and dislikes, your ways of going for and against and ask yourself do I need to like or not like this? Do I I need to be for or against it. Do I need to go towards the pleasant and hold on to it? Do I need to react pulled away from the unpleasant? Is it possible What's it like to just be there breathing and stable and steady and right in the middle of it? Oh, this is an unpleasant situation.

But then then the exercise goes a little deeper. So I've been saying that once we get a sense of this pleasant, unpleasant and neutral, then it's possible to begin distinguishing the pleasant and unpleasant. That's kind of more of the shell more of the flesh, more more kind of, has to do the vicissitudes of life. From the kind of deeper, not of the flesh, not of the world, according to Bhikkhu Bodhi these deeper kind of spiritual some people translate a spiritual feelings that can begin bubbling up and arising that are they're independent of the vicissitudes of life. And can you kind of tune in and notice that for yourself, have you noticed how some things that are pleasant are just because the weather's a certain way and other things are just seem to be connected some deeper root inside of us

things that are unpleasant, are they are they of the world or they connect to something deeper inside of us? The they say that the unpleasant experiences which are not which are not of the flesh, this is kind of a deeper place than what how that's explained for is is that unpleasant feeling that can come when we're disconnected from the goodness inside or when we unpleasant feeling when were you Really want to practice we really want to tap in to this deeper roots inside of roots to see this essence inside of us want to tap into it, want to practice it, we would like to move in the path of freedom, but we can't. And that's frustration, that that disappointment that yearning which is unpleasant. The tradition calls that's an experience of the flat or not of the flesh. That's unpleasant. But we can pursue that we can practice. When we can engage in, in, in meditation, for example, or being on the path of practice. Then, that's when these not of the flesh this deeper wellsprings get tapped into and bubble up. And what do you know about these deep wellsprings, wellsprings inside of you? What do you know about goodness and well being and peace are so Think beautiful that resides in your inner in the quality of your inner life. That's worth pursuing worth developing worth protecting, worth acknowledging. It's worth giving time to and allowing it to grow and nourish and develop that you want to incubate it. You want to sit on it and be with it and allow it to kind of develop and grow this nano to flesh, this inner quality stuff. It's for some people, it's quite, quite fragile. Some people hardly ever tap into it. They don't even know it's there. And occasionally we kind of happens by accident. And it can easily be be lost because we're so easily swept up into the big concerns of our life. But how do we stay close to it and incubate it. How do we stay close to it and allow it to nourish and grow and develop? become strong is kind of the task. But one of the ways to do that is to recognize it. Oh, this is not other flesh, this is this inequality This is so. So. So I'll repeat something as I end this little just is. I find that quite remarkable that in this exercise, the Buddha is simplifying. What we focus on in being mindful to this, there's no story, there's no analysis, there's no, you know, complicated ideas. It's just this radical simplicity. Is it pleasant? Is it unpleasant or neither? And that's so much can come out of that. It's really a kind of a doorway or a gateway into a tremendous amount of depth in this practice.

So we have about 10 minutes. And I don't know how clear I was with this. And so if you would like to ask any questions, you're welcome to or if you have testimonials about practicing with these vedana, these feeling tones, they'd be nice to hear.

Gil suppose you've had an opportunity to be generous, and you can see that your generosity is doing some good for someone. And that feels good. Maybe you didn't even get thanked but but just knowing that You've done been helpful, feels very good. Would that be more with that kind of happiness? Or pleasant feeling be more of this world or dinner? Would you say? So I find that

as a pure form of generosity and that and there's upwelling good feelings inside is that of the flesh and not of the flesh. I suspect that's not the flesh if it's really pure in a sense, you know that. You know, so, you know, I could be generous to someone and I hope everyone noticed that was really good. people noticed how generous I was. Boy, that was great. No, not that. Not that. Yeah, probably.

I mean, there's there was gonna be like a feeling there yesterday.

So it feels has some depth to it. Okay, that was my question. Okay.

One of the traps. I get into Mine is.

Imagine a situation. And I can turn that into this very painful experience for internally. It's not it's not going to happen. It didn't happen. It's not going to happen based on fear. If I imagine a certain situation, I can imagine which way it would go either good or bad. Then, you know, in that moment, I suppose if I were being mindful, it would be to label that pleasant or unpleasant.

Or just stop the thinking altogether.

That'd be nice. Yeah, maybe if you saw it saw the fantasy that you're making up the imagination you making up as being something unpleasant, then you you might not seem to things might happen. You might either might say this is so unpleasant. I don't need to bother with this. I've done it so many times. I know where it's going. It's not This unpleasant insist pullback and let go if you can. The other thing that might happen that sometimes is more more useful and more realistic, is because it's not so easy to let go. Is, is then we can see, oh, this is this is unpleasant. Why am I chasing it? Why am I staying and you know nying at it and then you might see the attachment you have or the fear you have or the emotion that's propelling it. So, sometimes that's simplicity of just seeing pleasant unpleasant that can help us look at the reactivity or the drive we have this connected to it.

So when you feel something not of the flesh, like a good feeling of contentment or well being, you suggest you can just stay with it and enjoy it like they are in Meditation.

Yeah, you can, the idea of enjoying it is a little dangerous because that kind of attachment in it. I think that, but it's also enjoying maybe as it says kind of word that straddles two sides, you know, it straddles indulging, and just allowing it to be there. So we've kind of allow it to be there and appreciate it. But we don't indulge in it.

Okay, like I find that I could let it be in parameter that when it's not that be looking for it, you

know, so if it if it's there, yes, let it be, but appreciate its presence, value it without being attached to it. Because if we don't acknowledge it and appreciate it, it's it's easy to overlook it and get caught up in other things. So we We want to kind of nourish that and allow it to be there. But we can kind of take some of the life out of it if we're to actively indulging in it. Or you know, this is great, this is the best. This is just very simple, just feel it can be with it. It actually gets actually, the paradox is that to have some degree of concentration and focus and have these good feelings well up, they actually get stronger if you don't indulge in them. indulging in them kind of makes it worse. It makes you kind of

take some of life or some of the squeezes them a little bit. So if you really want to indulge don't thank you.

isn't a part of the idea of meditation practice. To learn to not label things as as good and bad, I'm trying to reconcile this with, with now sort of bringing a more continual presence to Hey, is what I'm experiencing. Is this good? Or is this batteries as neutral?

I think that meditation practice, at least in this Buddhist tradition, does involve making some learning to make distinctions. Good and bad are so vague and unhelpful, that probably not useful to do that. But it's useful to distinguish between what is healthy and unhealthy. And when it's helpful and not helpful. So there are distinctions there are useful. So if you know that it's not helpful to be lost in fantasy, then you can then you know, it's not helpful. So I actually like this. If you know it's helpful to focus on the simplest simple, pleasant, unpleasant experience and that keeps you present and keeps you kind of free like, untangle these things. Then we can pursue that. So there's distinctions being made that are different than good and bad. And I don't think I used the terms good and bad today. It was a pleasant and unpleasant and pleasant, unpleasant or a little bit more almost like inherent in the experience. So I'm sitting here right now, and I put my foot on top of my, my right foot on top of my left ankle. And it's actually a little bit unpleasant. You know, I would actually say it hurts. But you know, it, you know, but it's unpleasant and, and, and then but then I've had my way I'm sitting here, you know, leaning on my left arm and stretching and that feeling of stretching is actually pleasant. I'm not I'm not manufacturing unnecessarily. I'm not like, you know, making a value judgment on it either one is I'm not saying one is good and one is bad. The ankle thing is not on the things good and bad, it just is just unpleasant. The stretching of my arm. It's not good or good or bad. It's just it just points but that's pleasant. And so and i'm not making that up, whereas good and bad we're making up. Okay. So maybe one more over here. You can go to the corner.

So one of the things you offered was or suggested we could offer was testimonials. I have a testimonial to working with unpleasant feeling tone. Um, shortly after I sat a very long retreat. I was hospitalized for a period of time and ended up needing to get a lot of blood pressure And yeah, lots of being poked as a pin cushion. And I very quickly came to get really curious about the experience of having blood drawn and being poked. And it's now a very pleasant experience to watch what those sensations are like and to watch them change. So it's both awareness of feeling tone and of impermanence and of change changing experience it's not static it's different every time and that like investigation that curiosity and yeah watching it shift has just bought so much enjoy. I would have never thought that it was the I enjoy it so much.

I like this. I love what you're saying. And what I'm assuming here thinking is that the you know, when if we experience experience something as being pain, painful or bad or something like that, we simply kind of like miss it. It's very reductionistic sometimes to be able to have careful mindfulness see that all the different aspects of it. And the details of it. Some of those details start becoming pleasant and

interesting. But in addition, what happened to you was the investigation became pleasant. And this idea that we have this power of attention and looking more deeply and being curious about things, then we start becoming free of the event pleasantness or unpleasantness. And we have we tap into this beautiful quality why this is interesting. It's unpleasant. Let's take a look. Let's take a look as pleasant. Close enough.

Yeah, so yeah, that's

right. Great. So I hope you have a few experiences that are pleasant or unpleasant this week. So you can you can have something to study

If you're lucky enough, there'll be a few. So thank you all.