

Sunday Dharma talk

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September 07, 2025

Keywords: satipaṭṭhāna, anupassanā, viharati, vedanā, jhāna, yoni, mindfulness, clinging, pleasant-unpleasant, abiding

Up until now, the instructions and the teachings have concerned the first foundation of mindfulness, the first way of establishing awareness. I like to call it establishing awareness because we're engaging our attentional capacities to develop our capacity to be present here and now, to understand and work with the forces of distraction, and to some degree to have them fall away, sometimes because they no longer receive attention. We no longer are feeding them, participating in distracting thoughts. Sometimes because we see through them. We see their emptiness, voidness, insubstantiality. We see that they are not what they promise.

I would imagine the only reason we spend an inordinate amount of time with thoughts is that somehow there must be some promise in them, some authority that we invest. And so we start seeing that many of the distractions we have are not as good and not as healthy, not as beneficial for us as waking up here in the present. And so slowly the capacity to be awake, to turn on the light, slowly the ability to be resting in awareness, more than doing awareness, begins to grow. This morning I introduced observation, *anupassanā*. And the way that this term, *anupassanā*, is used in the suttas, it always refers to a practice or way of being. When the practice, when mindfulness, when awareness is well established, and at times when the practice is starting to mature...

And then mindfulness starts having its own life in us so that we don't have to do it so much. But it does us. It's here. It's not going anywhere. And it's more and more allowing ourselves to rest in, abide in awareness. And so there's a transition for at some point we've established enough present moment awareness that observing phenomena becomes salient.

But the way that the text describes observing, the real verb is not observing. The real verb is abiding. One abides, observing. And here too, this word abides is used in the suttas only

when in relationship to really mature states of mind. When practice is strong, our sense of presence is here, and there's very little tendency or no tendency to wander off. The interest in the present moment is strong, but not willed, in a sense it just is.

And so one abides. I love this expression to abide, to dwell, to rest. Occasionally in the suttas, this word... *viharati* also means to live. It's the same word as *vihāra*. That's the place we dwell. Place, *vihāra* is where we va, *vihāra-ti*.

So to dwell, to abide, here, where the present moment is home, to be at home, here, now, in the body, in our experience. And so I think in English, maybe we get a little bit more sense of the value or the strength of this word, *vihāra*, di, abide, if we do think of it as being home. And so something, we're no longer fighting ourselves, no longer divided with ourselves, no longer powerful forces to be other places and other times. Right? No longer the power of commentary and fantasy and judgments that separate ourselves from ourselves. And we find that we can let up, let go, relax, settle into here, into this body, into this place, and abide.

And that quality of abiding then characterizes the observing. The observing is part of abiding. So that too is not really a doing. And why do they call it observing? This using the organ of sight as the metaphor for it. One way I understand it is that it's because normally when we look at something, we don't actually touch it.

We don't try to manipulate it with the eyes, usually. We kind of see it and allow it to be itself. We see it as it is, and we can just... The simplicity of seeing, it doesn't interfere. The simplicity of seeing before the thinking mind has gotten hold of the object. And seeing, for people who can see... who have working eyes.

Generally, it can happen much of the time without a lot of effort. Sometimes in a seemingly with no conscious effort, willful effort, seeing just happens. And there are some times when it really feels relaxed, sitting at the edge of a river, or the beach watching the waves, and it just feels so calming. And there's something about the gentle flow of water that helps free up the eyes in their sockets. So the eyes begin to float and move. I'm fond of these diagrams, I guess.

They have these instruments that measure the movement of the eyes and translate it to with a pen onto paper so you can see how the eyes move. And it's all over the place. Until then, I was pretty confident that not my eye. My eye isn't so restless. When I look at something, I look. But in fact, the relaxed eye, relaxed gaze observation, the eyes float.

It floats around the edges of an object. It looks at the sutta, bent, edges of it, the inside, it kind of moves around, floats around. And so flowing water here at IRC, sometimes the fluttering

of the leaves, if you sit and just watch the fluttering of the leaves, and just let your eyes roam over the canopy, over the trees. It can be very relaxing for the eyes, and very relaxing for the inner life. So this idea of abiding, observing... has these qualities of relaxed, easeful, floating, but really at home here. And for what purpose? What is the purpose of all this?

Just to have a pleasant hanging out at home? I could have stayed home. So the refrain begins with abiding, observing... And it's a progression. The whole sutta is all about a journey. It's all about unfolding and evolving, a maturing, a growing of something.

And here it's this ability to abide observing. It leads to a time when we are not dependent or clinging to anything in the world. But here again, they use the word abiding. One abides, not dependent or clinging to anything in the world. And the word abides is really important here because you're not going to always abide. If you're really hungry, starving, you kind of depend on food.

And so people say, what do you mean? This liberation not depending on anything? We, of course, we depend on things all the time. Yes, but it's possible to discover a way in which the mind, the heart is set free. So it can abide, not dependent. It can abide and not clinging to anything.

The heart comes home to itself. The heart lets go of itself. So every... section of the *Sati-paṭṭhāna Sutta*, every instructions, kind of is followed by this refrain that begins abiding, observing, and that ends with not depending or clinging to anything in this world. And so there's a transition from the instruction given, the practice that's given, to this abiding. In a kind of similar way, there's a transition from the first foundation to the second.

And it's kind of a big transition because in the first foundation, there's a beginning of focusing on sensations, but the instructions there are not so detailed. But after we've realized that we're not a corpse, what a revelation. I hope you remember from two days ago that you learned that you're not a corpse. You have life coursing through you. You have sensations. Sensations are one of the primary evidence that the life force, the life electricity, is coursing through our nervous system.

Helping us to be alive and have information we need to find our way and manage in this world. And so now there's a, with the corpse as a background, now there's a deep dive into the world of sensations. And the deep dive is what's similar to it with the abiding, observing, The transition is that we're no longer, the mind keeps getting simpler and simpler. And at some point, what's important is no longer what the sensations are, what the experience is that you're with, what you're sensing or feeling or knowing. But the mind has gotten so simple

that now it begins being attuned to something kind of within each experience.

Something that is deep, that doesn't require the cognitive ability to recognize. This is warmth, this is cold, this is pressure, this is movement, this is tightness. These are all sensations we can know for sure. But as we kind of enter into the world of those sensations deeply, as we go open up our arms metaphorically, and this, what is this? Get closer, get stiller, gets quieter. We don't see it so much as pressure or tightness or hot, cold, but we see it as experiences which are changing all the time, that are appearing and disappearing, shifting and changing and morphing.

And what somehow stands out in the mind is not what the sensation is, but the process, the activity of the sensation, which is the coming and going, the shifting and changing, appearing and disappearing. And so it doesn't matter if it is pressure, tightness, smoothness. It doesn't matter if it's a sound or if it's a smell. Somehow with the mind as it abides, quiet, and is no longer interpreting or naming or recognizing the experience, but it's seeing the process. Just like maybe if you were looking at a river and flow by. After a while, you're just completely maybe absorbed in the flow, and then as the river disappears in your mind, all you're aware of is the movement of the water, movement of the waves coming and going.

So that's so... In the refrain, abiding, observing, arising and passing, shifting and changing. As we move from the first foundation to the second... It's a similar movement where now I'm translating *vedanā* as sensations. We've done this amazing kind of complicated dance in Western Vipassanā movement, and calling it feelings, and then to know it's feeling tone, because it's just, with *vedanā*, how things are pleasant and unpleasant. And we kind of tie ourselves in knots sometimes trying to explain this.

But *vedanā* simply means sensations. But what we become aware of now is not the sensation. We're going deeper in, a deeper dive into it. And what begins standing out is that sensations come in three flavors. It's pleasant, unpleasant, or neither. So we're starting to, again, go deeper into the characteristics, the qualities of something.

On one hand, the refrain, it's the inconstant changing nature of something. And the second foundation, it's whether the sensation has within it, and the characteristic in some way pleasant or unpleasant, or neither. This has a tremendous value for us. It's a lot of wisdom, a lot of understanding come from this, because part of our relationship to the world sometimes is not very sophisticated. Sometimes it's as simple as, if it's pleasant, I want more. When it's unpleasant, I want to get rid of it, or I want to get away.

And people might have phenomenally brilliant... political, religious, emotional philosophies

to explain, justify getting or getting away. But sometimes it's just that. We don't like something, and so we build justification for not liking it and pushing it away. Build justification for having it. So if we quiet down just see the simplicity of pleasant and unpleasant, And right there, we can sometimes see the reactivity, the clinging that arises, the resistance that arises, the wanting, the not wanting, the movements of the mind, the tightening up of the mind.

And then, you know, when I was doing my long Vipassanā retreat in Burma, when I saw this one day with great clarity, it's, I just kind of blew me away. Both that it was possible to see it so clearly, and that some of this was so simple. I saw an object, I recognized what it was, I felt the pleasantness of seeing it, and then I wanted it. Like I saw those three steps, boom, boom, boom. And I think in the past, seeing the object and wanting it were one and the same, inseparable. They happened together so fast or something. But to see it that clearly.

And then when I saw that I wanted it, I saw that in the same kind of way, because with clarity, it didn't occur to me to do anything about it. That didn't occur to me to act on that desire or let the desire go anywhere or builds justification. I just, wow, let it be. And I was kind of in awe. So we can learn a lot about ourselves about our relationship to the world, how we live independent on the world, dependent on things needing to be a certain way or wanting to be a certain way, and how there's clinging in relationship to the world by seeing our reactivity to the basic experience of pleasant and unpleasant.

And part of Vipassanā practice is to learn to be comfortable with discomfort. I don't think the apassanā practice has any value if we don't learn that lesson, to be comfortable with discomfort. I mean, there's a human tendency to want to just have it comfortable all the time, and it's just a straight, beautiful, linear line, straight slope to it, depending higher, going deeper, whatever your metaphor is. To better and better and better and more and more pleasant and blissful and floating in clouds and just living in ecstasy and the first time I had a lot of ecstasy, joy, happiness before meditation. I had a wonderful summer, one summer, it just like was so ecstatic. And then I came to a logical conclusion What was that? I'll never be depressed again. This is it I have it made. That was the summer, end of the summer, and that fall I was more depressed than I'd ever been in my life. It didn't take long.

So I think that a very important part of this practice is to work, practice with things that are unpleasant. And to find our ease, find our peace, understand our reactivity, understand our for and against how we make it more complicated and has to be. So one of the tasks here is to learn to be comfortable with discomfort. If you're only free when you're comfortable, you're not really free. You have to be free when things are uncomfortable as well. And so one of the things sooner or later, It just might happen, accidentally, that you're sitting on retreat

and you have physical pain. It does happen. There's reports occasionally. And rather than seeing it, rather than being alarmed, one of the things which is really important to do is to bring a lot of care, maybe even love, care to the pain. And learn how to sense it and feel it well.

Really know how to recognize it. And. I believe that generally, if you're really mindful, really sense, feel physical pain carefully, you'll know the difference between pain which is going to cause injury, it's harmful, and pain which is not. If you get the signal this is a danger, change your posture. Don't sit with it. If you're not sure, change your posture. Don't sit with it. But if you have this clear, this is not a danger signal, then maybe practice with it for a while. See if you can understand your reactivity to it, your beliefs around it, how you're not free in a relationship to it. See if you can find freedom in relationship to it, equanimity.

And partly it's a good thing to do because it's a kind of sometimes a good object of concentration. Right? Because you're not going to be distracted if it's painful enough. Okay, I guess I have to be here. But if you get too discouraged, meaning you don't want to come back to the next sitting, then probably you shouldn't sit for the pain. You're not obligated to. You have to have some wisdom about it, understanding of what the effect is and what the impact on you. And if it's really discouraging, demoralizing, But remember, you don't have to sit with pain. I would have tried to try not to. If you have some kind of chronic condition, sometimes that's hard. But the idea is... But what I'm saying here now is there's value, tremendous value, in being mindful, sensing, knowing pain. Unpleasantness. And there's tremendous value in knowing pleasure. Pleasantness.

When I was as an end student, there was no... Nothing was ever said that you shouldn't have pain. But I never got the message that it's okay to have pleasure. And that's one of the great things I learned through the Vipassanā practice, that there are healthy forms of pleasure that come with a practice. And there's ways of relating to that. So we want to see what our relationship to pleasure is. Are we dependent on it? Are we clinging to it? Or are there ways to abide observing pleasure, not depending on it and independent of it, not clinging to it?

And the little carrot for why that's good is that that actually can... support the growth of meditative joy, happiness. It's a really good condition for the healthy meditative, healthy kind of well-being to grow if we can abide observing it, making room for it, without clinging, without shutting it down, or complicating it. And it's part of the onward leading nature. There's a way in which the meditative pleasures of that can arise, the joy of being really here and engaged in a wonderful way with the present moment, delighted to be alive in this way, can help guide us to greater freedom, can help guide us to a simpler and simpler way of being, simplicity of

being characterized by freedom.

So the engagement with mindfulness of pleasant and unpleasant And according to this way I'm interpreting the *Satipaṭṭhāna*, begins right away for most of us. But at first we're just sensing and knowing and finding our way to it. But at some point, when we're ready, we're no longer seeing it so much from the point of view of the kind of sensation it is. But rather we're seeing... the characteristic of the sensation from the point of view of is this pleasant or unpleasant. And mostly when that happens, not as an exercise, but it happens when the mind is focused, calm, clear, settled, without a lot of concepts, this movement.

From seeing the mountain in the distance. It's quite appropriate driving across central California to be getting closer to it and seeing details, maybe not seeing the top anymore. You know your mountain is there. You see parts of it. To go into the depths of the mountains and come to some place, you get out of the car and you see the trees. You see the trees. The lake in the distance, the river in the distance, then you go closer and closer and maybe you go next to the river and you're so happy to be in the river and so nice and shiny. But then after a while you rest, And you're just there. The idea is a river, the name of the river disappears. You don't think about the name. You don't think about anything about the river, except you notice how it's constantly flowing. Or maybe you go for a dip in the river, and it's just the right temperature. So you either feel... refreshed, wonderfully cool and nice, or it's ice cold in this era. And the only thing that you know about the river, the river, then it's, it is cold. The concept of the name of it, how big it is, and how fast the current is going, all these other kind of things just drops away, just how cold it is. But there's a way in which the mind gets simpler and simpler, more connected, more closer in, and so start seeing it that, It's kind of a natural way, the pleasant and unpleasant of it. And it's possible to know it. And that's the verb that's used in Sutta. One knows a pleasant sensation. It's a pleasant sensation. One knows an unpleasant or painful sensation is a painful sensation.

But I think I just love... that we have the marrying together, the yoking, the coming together of knowing and sensing. Rather than naming two different things, it almost become the same, almost become joy, it almost become in harmony, they come to meet each other. Sensing and all the benefits of sensing carefully in the body, and knowing. Knowing what we're sensing, knowing it pleasant and unpleasant. That's simple. So that's all very nice, maybe, but it gets even more interesting.

And this is where in the *Satipaṭṭhāna*, there's a huge transition, a huge pivot, or a huge door is opened up. The Buddha opens this door through his teachings like here, now, now you're ready for some whole other dimension of what the practice can be about. He makes a distinc-

tion between two ways that we can feel pleasant and unpleasant sensations. There are two sources for it. One source is those pleasant and unpleasant sensations that are associated with the surface senses, the skin, the flesh, external sounds coming to the ear, smells coming from the outside. So it's all the surface senses by which we take in the world.

And in certain kind of way, the surface way of experiencing... You know, they say that the stomach is just inside of the stomach is just outside inside of us. You know, it's just a cavity that makes a direct conduit from outside of us, outside the mouth to the other area. So we can kind of sense kind of externally, right, we're kind of a simply or a surface-y even some of the other aspects of the human body. So there's a surface sensations, and then there's the deep sensations, something that the Buddha calls, that I translate as profound sensations. The Buddha calls it not of the flesh. Some translators have tried to call it spiritual, Some people have tried calling it unworldly, which sounds creepy to me. And, you know, and I've tried translating it as sensations of the flesh and sensations not of the flesh, but that does not very appetizing things. And that's the literal translation from Pali. So my preferred way of translating is more an interpretive translation, is surface sensations and profound sensations.

And that goes along with a whole other way in which the Buddha also distinguishes between more surface-y ways of being and profound ways of being. Very important for the Buddha was that when it was described as when he was ready for his awakening sitting under the Bodhi tree there's one description of what happened there for him where he started asking himself contemplative questions about suffering where does suffering come from where does attachments come from where do these things that Where do they come from? What are they? What's the source? And so he went to do the dependent arising backwards to understand. And this is what led to his first experience of awakening. But the important thing was he was doing a certain kind of contemplation. He didn't have a completely silent mind. He was in deep meditation probably. But there was a way of thinking... that was not surface thinking. And the way he describes it is, he says it's the mental activity, the way of thinking, mental activity, mental constructions that we make that arise from the *yonī*. And the word *yonī* means, for humans, it means the womb. It's a biological reference point for someplace deep inside That is, where something can grow, gestate, evolve, develop, that can bring forth a profound way of thinking, of understanding, of guiding. The contrast to that is that way of mental activity, mental constructs, which are not of the *yonī*. And those are the mental constructs that arise out of the activity of the mind, that arise out of clinging and grasping. That often, the way the Buddha describes it, has the nature of becoming accumulated. For the Buddha, we accumulate clings. We normally just don't have some incidental one or two. But

we have layers and layers of things we cling to, resist, hold on to, because we have this strong tendency to crave or to have ill will, hostility. So we grab on and we create these bundles of mental constructions that we then hold on to the whole bundles. A lot of things that people identify, this is who I am, it's just a part of that collected gathering of bundles of clinging. But that's what's not of the *yonī*. That's on the surface. So whether it's sensations, or whether it's deeper operating systems of the mind, there's something here profound within us. Yes. Something natural, something that we don't construct as an engineering project, something we don't make up. The reactive mind makes things up. Some people call it fabrications, concoctions. The deep mind grows something. The deep mind has a way of, when it does think, maybe non-verbally, considers, understands, guides, questions. It's usually about this present moment experience, about what's happening now, in a way that feels very satisfying. It feels as a rightness to it. It doesn't divide us. It doesn't add to more clinging. It's wholesome, part of the whole, as opposed to what is unwholesome, which is not part of the whole, which divides the whole. And so the Buddha makes these distinctions, whether it's sensations that are profound or on the surface, whether it's ways of mental activity, operating systems we have that are from the womb or from not of the womb, wholesome and not wholesome. Yeah. And so, this is the most important part of this second foundation of mindfulness.

So the Buddha makes this transition. He says, first, first know what's pleasant and unpleasant. Know the pleasant and unpleasantness of your experience. Get established there. Get to know it. Get to know it in a relaxed way, in a simple way, non-reactive way. Learn how to sense... pleasant, unpleasant, neither. Learn how to know it, simply, calmly. Let it be part of the learning how to rest in the present moment. Abide here. And then begin to distinguish between those sensations that are more the surface, more worldly, more part of how we get stimulated, and the nerves get stimulated from the world around us, to what gets awoken and flows from deep within, where there's a wellsprings of goodness, wellsprings of wholesomeness, wellsprings of pleasure, of goodness, of contentment, well-being, joy, happiness, And some of that comes from in meditation practice, from being in harmony with ourselves, being unified in ourselves. But this idea of harmony, to be in harmony.

So we're gathering our capacities for knowing, for sensing, for relaxing, for observing, for recognizing... for understanding, clear comprehension, as a way of beginning to say yes here. Let's say yes to everything. Let's include everything. Let's not live divided. Let's not say this is okay and not okay for the purposes of awareness. Let's not have that tension or that separation. Yes, here. Let's... And let's gather ourselves. And part of harmony is all of who we are.

It begins to be together for the same purpose. We're often, we have so many different parts of our human ecosystem that sometimes they're working at cross-purposes or centrifugal forces outwards. One of those is thinking. Your intention might be to be here, present, and mindful. Your thinking mind has a whole other agenda going on. It might be an hour before lunch. Your intention is to be really here and present for your breathing. Your mind wants to talk about, you know, think about your annoyance with your boss at work, the resentments. Your physiology is screaming for lunch. Right. But then before you came to that sitting, someone cut you off in line for the tea we earn. And now you're left over, feeling kind of vibrating a little bit for the injustice of that. And so all those things are operating all at the same time, swimming. And, you know, part of us is thinking about the past, what happened to the tear, and part of us thinking about work, part of us thinking about in the future, and lunch, and part of us thinking about, who knows, part of us is engaged with our physiology and the hunger. And part of it is we have this mood left over from... They are, say, the great Dharma talk. You know, it's so inspired. All these things are operating, but they're all, you know, not together. They're all taken care of. They all have different objects, different concerns. To come into harmony, the unification is to begin saying, here, come here, all of you, all of me, come here, come here. Let's be in this together. Let's sit with a body here to be with a posture, to be with a breath, to be here. Let me take a posture that supports being here. Let's have maybe the breathing be the gathering place. So my intention is to be with a breath. If I'm going to be thinking anyway, let's think about the breathing. Let's see if I can think about it in a enjoyable, calm, supportive way. The Buddha had this deep thinking from the womb. What in the world is that? Maybe I can kind of, is there some way I can think that comes from, that feels profound? Not the profound thoughts, but the source of it. Maybe a source where we really care a lot, deep caring. Yeah. Bhikkhu Bodhi translates this word *yonī* in his recent translation as careful, careful attention. And if I'm going to go along with him and his choice, I'd like to call it caring attention. And so where does the source of care deep inside? Hostility doesn't care. Greed doesn't really have that deep sense of care and compassion. Where's that? So start gathering. Our care goes to being present. We understand we have some wisdom of why we're doing this. The inspiration. Yes, this is really useful. I'm inspired. The mood, the emotions. And so as we tune into this, there starts to happen. The harmony starts to create a sense of goodness, sense of rightness. Ah, this is good. I'm here. This is right. This is good. Good. I'm no longer so caught up. What a relief. What a relief not to be lost in thought. And then there can be sensations of this, like come out of this harmony, this focus that are kind of like the cat purring when you pet it. Staying with the breath, staying with the experience, coasting. Sensing, and then feeling the well-being that comes, the joy, the happiness, feeling

the goodness of this gathering together. And so a lot of the... And so then it's even easier to be motivated. The gathering happens more and more. Just, oh, this is good to be here. Settled, present. And... And so one of the primary representations of these deep sensations, not of the flesh, of this kind of profound sensations, are in fact the sensations that come from concentration, from *jhāna*, the kind of sense of well-being that supports a unification. Because our ability to sense is really good. And when that happens through vipassanā practice or with vipassanā practice, Then the practice is called wet, wet vipassanā. When it does it without that well-being, it's called dry vipassanā. I think wet vipassanā is really useful because more of who we are is included. There's more of this unification, inclusion. Yes, the whole body is... can be sharing in this well-being, and all the benefits of the whole body being part of it makes often the practice a lot easier. It's more rewarding, it's more feeling of rightness. Yes, here, I'm home, this is good. So there's not this deep sense of sensing, so when we start getting quiet enough, unified enough, still enough, at home enough here. And I emphasize when that's enough, when you're there, at some point it becomes natural to be more attuned to how things are pleasant and unpleasant. And it takes a deep attunement to feel this deeper source, this profound source of of well-being, this profound operating system, this profound place where goodness, wholesomeness grows, flows, moves, expands. And to sense it and feel it when it's there, don't dismiss it when it's there. It's there to support you. When it's there, it's part of the caring system that cares for you. and allow something deep, more to this depth, the caring depth we have, the mammalian caring depth that cares, that grows.

So I hope that this talk doesn't radically change what you do, but I hope this talk encourages you to... to really settle into the practice you're doing, and settle into yourself doing it. Come home, be at home here in the practice, moving towards an abiding, a resting, that's supported and sustained by knowing, sensing, observing. And as you find yourself more at home here, Then perhaps you'll begin first very subtly, start feeling there's something really good happening here, some well-being, some pleasure. That's not happening because the food was good or the temperature was perfect or you put on a really soft, cozy t-shirt, but something that's growing from some sense of wholesome depth within. Let it grow. Keep doing what you're doing. But let that well-being be the guide, the support to keep opening, keep settling, so that you discover this very profound way in which our inner life, our heart, our womb, given a chance, will care for your well-being. It's a profound form of care, caring attention. And to end with a very simple summary of the whole talk, so you don't have to remember everything else, the whole talk can be summarized by trust the practice. Thank you.