

Daylong Sit 3

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Oh, what I'd like to say is that I hope some of you have had some experience in your life of walking into some location that felt really peaceful or calm. There's a small forest grove in a place I like to hike in the hills here, that somehow, in the grove of redwood trees, I go in there and it just feels so still and calm and peaceful. It just feels like something inside my body shifts and changes. I've been in rooms. I've been in cathedrals where, going in from a busy street, going in there, there's a calm that settles. It's a very calm and peaceful place.

So it could be a place. It can be an occasion where you felt peaceful and calm. And chances are that the sensation of peace and calm is not a very particular sensation. It's not like you can put your finger on it and say, here, this is where it is. It's something that's more diffuse through the body, through the mind, through the heart. And so it's not because some particular sense door is being stimulated. It's somehow experienced more as spreading through the body in a more subtle way than, you know, someone putting their hands on your shoulder, which may or may not be welcomed.

So there is a whole slew of inner sensations which are not in a particular place, but have the nature of being more diffuse. And then there are sensations which are very particular, that have a bit, you know, you can really tune into them, feel them almost like sometimes even like pixels of sensations in that place, really closely attentive. And so some of the more subtle sensations that are more diffuse are things like calm, peace, sometimes a kind of joy, a kind of happiness and well-being, a kind of equanimity. It might be a feeling of confidence or trust or faith that somehow doesn't have a particular spot, but does feel like it's somewhere within. So all these things that I'm naming somehow can fit under the category of being pleasant. Now there's a certain kind of pleasantness and pleasure involved in them.

And there are other kinds of widespread inner sensations that are unpleasant. Like if you're angry, or if you feel really sad, or something also is very spread out. As meditation continues,

at some point it's actually beneficial to start gently, not very strongly, not with expectation or something, not denying other things, but to see that also there might be some deeper pleasant sensation, something that's more diffuse, very quiet, so subtle and quiet that if you have a really good fantasy to think about, you won't feel it because you're distracted from it. It requires kind of a very quiet mind to be able to really be there. And it might be connected to breathing. Sometimes people will feel that there's a sweetness associated with breathing, or a feeling of goodness or beauty associated with breathing.

Maybe not with the direct sensations of breathing, but the influence of something diffuse that spreads beyond the edges of the sensations of breathing into the body. So what I'm talking about is not necessarily easy or always going to be there to experience, but it is part of the skillful use of pleasure that's part of Buddhist meditation practice. So let's see if there's some way to give you, in this meditation, a little bit more sense of that. And even if you just follow along with your imagination, it might be useful.

So to think that the meditation begins as you adjust your body into your meditation posture. To adjust your body in a way that's mindful, careful, caring, careful. And then if there's a way to take fuller breaths that's pleasant for you, that you enjoy doing, gently take those fuller, deeper breaths, extended breaths, feeling how it feels good to do it. Don't do it too much, just enough. Relaxing as you exhale, and then letting your breathing return to normal.

And is there, in how you're breathing, in the experience of breathing, any pleasure or something you appreciate? And for the next little while, just hang out there with your breathing, settling in, being connected, reassuring the thinking mind. It's okay. You don't have to think so much. To be aware of breathing is to be aware of things that change, sensations that change. Maybe to be aware of the movements of the chest or the belly.

And you also be aware of ways, places in your body where there's more stillness or stability that maybe highlight the movements of breathing, or for which the movements of breathing highlight the stillness that's also here. And as you exhale, just relax, soften the body into the stillness, into the inner stability. There is a subtle pleasure that's diffuse, soft, maybe very quiet, the pleasure of calm, peace, stillness, or the pleasures that somehow flow or glow from the breathing itself out into the body, allowing the pleasures to support a quiet attention to breathing, breathing with the pleasure, breathing through it, so the mind can feel reassured enough to become quieter and more sensitive to the inner life. There might be the surface concerns and activities of mind and body. And as you exhale, follow the exhale to the end, as if you're dropping below the surface to the more subtle depths within, and feel and sense what is there under the surface as you breathe.

What are you breathing with, breathing through, in terms of pleasure or deeper emotions, deeper feelings? A very subtle pleasure is the pleasure of not interfering with anything, not building a self with it, not judging it, not using it as a way of defining yourself. The subtle pleasure of non-identification, non-clinging, pleasure of allowing things to be alone, to be themselves.

Oh, and this fairly well-known discourse, instructions the Buddha gave on mindfulness, usually called the *Four Foundations of Mindfulness*. The second foundation has to do with sensations, to really be attuned and connected deeply to this sensation body, sensations that we have. And there the instruction is to know whether they're pleasant, unpleasant, or neither pleasant nor unpleasant, with the idea that there's only those three options for sensations. So of course, other sensations come with other characteristics, but that's one of the characteristics. Is there some degree of pleasure, some degree of discomfort, and neither of those two, and you're just kind of neutral in some way?

And it's seen as being a very important teaching because a high degree of reactivity, a high degree of the ways we're motivated in our life, has to do with response to pleasure and pain, comfort and discomfort, what's pleasant and unpleasant. And sometimes it's really amoeba-like, that we go towards the pleasure and pull away from what's uncomfortable. And sometimes, because humans are more sophisticated than amoebas, it can come with rationalizations, it can come with stories, it can come with all kinds of complicated justifications for it, and why it has to be this way. Or we pile on top of it all kinds of complications and second arrows that make it even more pleasant than it is because we're fantasizing pleasant thoughts, or worse than it is because we're reacting with hostility and anger and fear and make up stories that are unpleasant for it.

But to start seeing the simple reaction of being for or against pleasant and unpleasant, and be really simple before the added layers are added on, is very, very meaningful, very significant mindfulness practice. Because it's possible to see it so clearly that we don't give in to the reactivity, the reaction. We can see the reaction and we let it be because we understand, oh, that's pleasure and there's the desire to want more. I don't have to get on that train. I don't have to get onto that, pick that up. Just let it go through. Let the desire go and just be with the simple pleasure.

If it's unpleasant, we get on the train of, it has to, we have to fix it. This is terrible. I'm doing something wrong. We don't have to do that. We can just let it be simple. And as I'm very fond of saying, if you're free only when you're comfortable, you're not really free. So that part of this mindfulness practice is learning how to be present for what is unpleasant without

reacting, without needing to do anything about it. Just very simply be present for it.

And believe it or not, there could actually be pleasure, even joy, together with what's unpleasant. Not in the unpleasantness, but there's a pleasure in the mind or the heart that it can hold that spaciouly and equanimously, not get pulled into it. So for some people who do mindfulness practice, this teaching on pleasant and unpleasant is like a lifesaver. It's like this is, they get it simple, it's direct, and they use it all the time. Like I use it sometimes in situations where things are really complicated socially, and I'm concerned and upset and challenged by it. And then I step, metaphorically step out of it in that moment, just get the whole picture, and just say to myself, wow, this, the whole shebang here, is unpleasant.

And I know how to be with unpleasant. It's kind of like then I break out of the trance. So this complicated story of who's doing what and what's happening here, I just see, oh, it's unpleasant, the whole thing. And let me just be present for the unpleasant and keep it that simple. And that gives me some freedom in the midst of this social chaos that allows me to see it more clearly or participate in a wiser way. So there's many ways that this is useful.

What's less known is the Buddha goes on in this teaching to say that not only is there what's pleasant, unpleasant, and neither pleasant nor unpleasant, there's two major categories of pleasant, unpleasant, and neither. And it's useful, he doesn't say this, but that's the implication, it's useful to be able to distinguish between these two different categories, or two different ways of pleasant and unpleasant. And he says one of them, in my language, is surface pleasure, what's pleasant and unpleasant on the surface, and what is pleasant and unpleasant profoundly, deeply within us.

And what I mean by the surface is pleasures that are stimulated by the surface senses being triggered. So, you know, if someone brushes, or you brush, velvet across your skin, it might feel pleasant. That's a surface, clearly on the surface of your body. You might see a beautiful sight with your eyes. It's really pleasant and you like looking at it. But the experience is coming from outside, bringing the pleasure. You might hear music that's coming from outside. It might feel profound, but still it's coming from outside and stimulating the hearing mechanisms.

And there's also thinking that, in the Buddhist analysis of it, is kind of coming from outside. If you have a lot of discursive thoughts, a lot of fantasy thought where you're making up a lot of things, making up the past, which when remembering the past, a percentage of it is made up, thinking about the future, that's all made up. That's more surface thinking. And there could be pleasure from that. There can be discomfort from that. And what happens to some people is they navigate their life on the surface. And that's the only place that they

know about.

So either some people are all about pleasure and comfort, and so they're navigating that. And many humans are involved in focusing on pleasure, what's pleasant and unpleasant, more than they realize. And probably many people in the United States buy, you know, have cars they don't have to have. They could have a more unpleasant car. It would get them around. But they buy a car that's pleasant to be in. A house, they could buy a house that has an extra room, or pay more for it because it has a nice view, because that's pleasant. Clothes, we buy clothes, we don't, you know, you can just buy simple clothes cheaply, but then you want the most pleasant clothes, most pleasant clothes to look at, to feel, to look at, or to use to represent you.

So it's a big part of human life. What this Buddhist meditation is, is the ability to feel more and more the profound sensations that we have. And sometimes these profound sensations are called spiritual sensations in this category of the surface and the profound. And one translator translates the two as worldly and unworldly. And I find that a little bit odd. You know, the profound ones are unworldly, but they're not being stimulated by the world. They're arising from deep inside.

And these are things like feeling some kind of pervasive peace, just feeling really peaceful, contentment, pervasive contentment, a sense of ease that might happen there. And sometimes these things don't occur very often in people. People have difficult lives. But there might be something, sometime, where, ah, this is good. Where somehow we can drop our guard, sometimes we can drop our anxieties, somehow we feel reassured, we're settled, and ah, this is good. Maybe going for a walk in the park after, and just sitting on a bench and spending time watching the kids playing around, and after a while you notice that you feel kind of content to be there.

There is joy, there is compassion, there is happiness, there's loving-kindness. All these are kind of profound emotions, profound feelings that are welling up from deep inside, that don't depend on what the world is feeding us, coming to us. And don't depend on what we're thinking in the discursive mind. If we're navigating our world in the discursive mind, conversational mind, and trying to make everything happen there, we miss, not only we miss these deeper sensations, deeper pleasures of life, but also we are missing out on profound ways of thinking. Just as if there are profound sensations, there are profound sources of thought and ways of thinking that really feel qualitatively different, or peaceful, to have these thoughts from deep inside than in the agitated or busy or spinning thinking mind.

And so this ability to begin getting quiet enough, settled enough, and being present for our

sensations allows us to start feeling and sensing the deeper sensations, the more subtle sensations that are more pervasive and fluid, that arise from our goodness, arise from being settled, arise from inside, not because there's something outside stimulating them. And the classic example of this in Buddhism is the experiences of joy and happiness that come from concentration, concentrated meditation. This is understood to be this inner spring that begins flowing from the inside out. And those are very pleasant.

But I also feel that there's a feeling of integrity, feeling of wholeness, feelings of rightness, feelings that sometimes can be called tender, sometimes can be called soft, sometimes can be called glowing or flowing. But they provide, they come and there are sensations that come out of us feeling whole, the wholeness of us, that we're not divided and not in conflict with ourselves, not separated from ourselves because of our preoccupations and concerns. And these deeper sensations provide very important information for us for how to live a wholesome life, how to live a meaningful life, how to live a life that allows for something profound within us to guide us in what we do.

So the distinction, this ability to sense and feel deeply, one of the purposes of mindfulness is supported when you can recognize a distinction between these two different ways of sensations. If you don't know those two, then you're not going to be able to prioritize one over the other, or find a greater interest in the deeper ones, the profound ones. And the way forward, at some point in doing mindfulness, is with the support of these deeper sensations.