

Freedom With Thoughts: Guided Meditation on Vedana

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June 27, 2026

Keywords: *vedanā*, feeling tone, mindfulness, clinging, breath, thought loop, pleasant, unpleasant, neutral, meditation

So I hope you had a fruitful walking period. I'm going to say a few words before we start the sit, and then I'll guide the first few minutes of the sit.

So many of you are familiar with the Buddhist teaching of *vedanā*, or feeling tone, which is the simple way our experience either registers as pleasant, unpleasant, or neither pleasant nor unpleasant. When we're not mindful, the tendency is to cling to what's pleasant and to push away what's unpleasant. But what we often don't realize is that our thinking itself has a feeling tone as well. Thoughts such as worrying, judging, regretting, they usually feel unpleasant. Whereas thoughts of gratitude, appreciation, anticipation, or thinking of loved ones may feel very pleasant. And some thoughts may have very little feeling tone at all. You know, "I wonder what that noise is over there."

During this meditation, we're not interested in the content of our thoughts, as in becoming familiar with how they feel when they arise, if they're pleasant or unpleasant. I'm bringing this up not to make it a project. "Okay, now I'm going to really look for it." But just to kind of have that in the background of the mind. If you find yourself caught in some kind of thought loop where you're thinking about something a lot, is it pleasant or unpleasant? It brings an objectivity to it, and it lets you see much more easily if you're going to be clinging to it or pushing it away.

So go ahead and take a comfortable but alert posture, allowing the eyes to gently close. And beginning again with a few deep breaths. And with each exhale, allowing the body to relax a little more deeply into the cushion or chair, into the support of the earth beneath us. And whenever you're ready, allowing the breath to return to its normal rhythm.

Just getting a sense of the whole body sitting here. Allowing the attention to gently meander throughout the body, noticing and releasing any obvious tensions, or just softening around them. They're simply arriving here.

Now finding the breath within the body, allowing the attention to rest on the actual sensations of breathing, into the felt sense of the breath. Settling into the rhythm of the breath, resting in this body, in this breath, in your home. You might notice the mood or atmosphere of the mind. Is the mind tense or relaxed? Is it tired or alert? Calm or agitated?

Is it resistant or accepting? Is it scattered or collected? Simply noticing what's here. What's the mood or atmosphere of the mind? No need to change anything.

Now returning attention to the sensations of breathing, allowing each breath to come and go in its own way, and maybe briefly noticing the feeling tone of the breath itself. Does it feel pleasant, unpleasant, relatively neutral? Just noticing if other compelling physical sensations arise, perhaps briefly noticing their feeling tone as well. Pleasant, unpleasant, neither, just simply knowing.

For the next several minutes, giving some attention to the feeling tone of our thinking. If any persistent or compelling thoughts become obvious, see if you can notice their feeling tone. Are they pleasant, unpleasant, or neither? And it may shift from moment to moment. But simply observing these feeling tones, without becoming carried away by the content of the thought or by the reactions to the thought.

Each time we recognize a thought and meet it with mindfulness, we weaken the tendency to get caught by it, allowing it a little more ease and spaciousness. And if no significant thinking is present, simply rest with the breath. No need to chase for anything. If the mind has drifted, gotten lost, gently welcome it back home.