

Satipaṭṭhāna Home Practice for Session 5. May 20, 2026

In this last session five, we looked at the second Satipaṭṭhāna of vedanā. Vedanā is sometimes translated as “feeling,” but more accurately as “feeling tone.” In other words, it’s not feeling as ‘emotions’ nor is it sense sensations, but rather it is the immediate reaction to our experience; the *seeds* of emotions, in terms of “This is pleasant” or “This is unpleasant”, or “This is neither pleasant nor unpleasant. Those feelings that we would say are neither pleasant nor unpleasant are identified as “neutral”.

Vedanā are low-level components of experience. They happen immediately after the senses contact a sense object. They are very important, though. As the Buddha taught in his teaching of Dependent Origination, which describes how we come to cling to and identify with our experiences, vedanā is a weak link in that chain. By seeing clearly whether an experience is pleasant or unpleasant, we can be prepared for the fact that a pleasant experience can lead to clinging, and an unpleasant experience can lead to aversion or hatred. Neutral vedanā lead to delusion or confusion about what we are experiencing or to just ignoring it. Because vedanā arises and passes so quickly, they are also perfect for observing and gaining insight into the nature of impermanence. Mindfulness of vedanā is a beautiful tool for exploring causation as well. The vedanā are the seeds of what grow into a complete emotional reaction.

It is becoming more evident as we move through the four Satipaṭṭhāna that these different realms of experience are not separate but come together and influence each other. For example, let’s say you hold the view, (foundation four) based on your past experiences of eating, that you do not like cauliflower. If you walk into a room where someone is cooking cauliflower, your first experiences would likely come through the sense of smell (body, foundation one). The initial vedanā (second foundation) might be neutral if it’s actually the taste of cauliflower that you don’t like rather than the smell. Then as perception kicks in, (foundation four, one of the aggregates) and you recognize that the aroma is coming from that particular vegetable, then your unpleasant memory of past experience (a mental fabrication from the fourth foundation of mindfulness) causes unpleasantness to arise which is a new unpleasant vedanā coming from the mental experience of the memory. The unpleasant memory may influence the neutral vedanā that initially came from your first whiff of the aroma of cooking, so that now when you smell cauliflower cooking, an unpleasant vedanā arises from just the recognition of the aroma itself! I have to laugh at myself as I read this back. It sounds so complicated! It’s not really. Just think of Vedana as our initial reaction to experience.

Worldly and Unworldly Vedanā

In the two paragraphs that describe this second satipaṭṭhāna, the Buddha says that the yogi knows a feeling to be a (pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral) worldly feeling or a (pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral) unworldly feeling.

I have found the best explanation of “worldly” and “unworldly” to come from Joseph Goldstein’s book, [Mindfulness: A Practical Guide to Awakening](#).

Joseph explains that worldly vedanā are directly related to the senses. So a pleasant sight, sound, taste, smell, physical sensation, or mental/emotional input triggers pleasant worldly feeling tones; likewise for unpleasant and neutral sensations.

An unworldly feeling tone generally comes as a fruit of practice, particularly as a result of renunciation. The indented sections below contain some quotes about *unworldly pleasant vedanā* from Joseph's book. These are examples of where we experience unworldly happiness in daily life or in formal practice:

In our Western cultures, the idea of renunciation doesn't always inspire us. We tend to think of it as deprivation, something that might be good for us in the end, but is not that much fun now. But another way of understanding renunciation is as nonaddictiveness to sense pleasures. From this perspective, renunciation holds out the possibility of happiness now. The less addicted we are to the seduction of sense pleasures, the less commotion there is in the mind. We experience greater ease and simplicity of living. Imagine what it would be like if the mind wanted everything that was advertised on television. We would be in a constant state of dis-ease, wanting this, wanting that. I think this is why we all prefer commercial-free programming. In the words of one Tibetan teacher, we learn to rest our weary minds. The Buddha highlighted this understanding when he said, "What the world calls happiness, I call suffering; what the world calls suffering, I call happiness."

Generosity

...[we] do experience clear times of nonsensual joy, the unworldly pleasant feelings. We experience them in times of generosity, when we are renouncing mind states of greed and stinginess. Think of times when you were generous with someone, giving something out of love or compassion, respect or gratitude. Practicing generosity is an easily accessible gateway to the happy, unworldly feelings based on renunciation, and it is the reason the Buddha usually begins his progressive teachings speaking of generosity.

Love and Compassion

We feel nonsensual joy when we practice qualities like love and compassion. ...Sometimes we see the best qualities of humanity emerge in times of great disasters, where there is an outpouring of generosity from people all over the world. We can feel the purity of those mind states. People aren't giving in order to get anything back for themselves, and they are often moved to give more than they might have under more normal circumstances. In this response to suffering, there is the purity of a spontaneous, compassionate response, which brings its own kind of happiness.

Renunciation associated with morality.

We feel a nonsensual joy when we practice the renunciation involved with following the precepts. We renounce harmful actions, and this renunciation brings the unworldly pleasant feeling of nonremorse. And even if we've done unskillful actions in the past—as we all have—there is a certain strength and confidence and happiness from the moment we make the commitment to nonharming.

Renunciation of voluntary simplicity.

We feel pleasant unworldly feelings on retreat, in the renunciation of our familiar comforts. We begin to enjoy the beauty of simplicity.

Renunciation born of seclusion from the hindrances, leading to concentration.

We experience the nonsensual joy of unworldly pleasant feelings in states of concentration, where the mind is secluded from unskillful states. At first our minds are often restless and agitated, jumping from

one thing to another, reacting to the various pleasant and unpleasant feelings that arise. At a certain point, whether for short periods or sustained ones, the mind settles down, resting easily on the object of attention, carried on the current of mindfulness. There is an ease and pleasure here much greater than that of our usual sense delights. There's a greater sense of unification.

Unworldly joy, born of wisdom and “clearly seeing” the nature of things.

We experience an even higher nonsensual joy in the various stages of insight and awakening. Here it is not the absorption in the unworldly pleasant feelings of concentration, but the special happiness of clear seeing — that is, seeing deeply and vividly the changing, selfless nature of all that arises. And as insight practice matures in various ways, there is an even more refined kind of happiness.

We'll close by just touching on unworldly unpleasant and unworldly neutral feeling tones. An unworldly, unpleasant feeling tone may arise, for example, during meditation practice, as locked-up sorrow or anger is released. Regarding neutral feeling tones, *worldly* neutral feeling tones often arise from the perceived blandness of the object. The objects are not stimulating or interesting enough to be felt as pleasant. *Unworldly* neutral vedanā can be a result of what is considered wholesome “dispassion” or “disenchantment”, and may mature to become equanimity.

Practice

1. During a sitting or walking practice, just label each experience as pleasant or unpleasant for part of that practice time. After you get the hang of it you can add a neutral label. Vedana arise quickly, so don't try to follow each one. For example, if your mind wanders to a memory, note if that is a pleasant or unpleasant memory before you return to your anchor. If you are irritated that your mind wandered, label that irritation unpleasant. If a sensation in the body or from the senses comes into awareness, can you label that?
2. Consider keeping a pleasant event and unpleasant event log this week. This will be less detailed than what you do during meditation, focusing on daily events, like a phone call, a task, an email, a conversation, an experience of hunger, or of being too cool or too warm. You could list pleasant events on one day and unpleasant events on another. You could keep a running list or just reflect back at the end of the day in a journal. Which list is longer? According to the discussion above, did you notice any unworldly pleasant vedanā?