

## *Feelings Not of the Flesh*

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When you read the Satipatthana Sutta, the discourse on establishing mindfulness, it's easy to miss the fact that it's an incomplete description of right mindfulness. But actually, the Buddha announces that fact right from the beginning. He gives the formula for right mindfulness—keeping track of the body in and of itself, ardent, alert, mindful, putting aside greed and distress with reference to the world. And then the same formula for feelings, mind-states, mental qualities. But the questions he asks and answers in the sutta deal only with a small part of that formula: What does it mean to keep track of something? *Anupassana* is the Pali word. As for the other parts of the formula—“What does it mean to be alert? What does it mean to be ardent? How do you put aside greed and distress with reference to the world?”—those aren't covered at all.

It's good to keep this point in mind, because sometimes you read the sutta and it seems like it's telling you just to be aware of whatever comes and whatever goes, and just leave it at that. The question of ardency hardly comes up at all. You see this particularly in the treatment of feelings. It sounds as if we just watch feelings come and go. But when the Buddha describes how feelings come and go, they don't just come and go on their own. The mind takes the potential for feeling and fabricates it—in other words, turns it into an actual feeling.

So there's an intentional element in all your feelings. If you miss that fact, you're missing some very important insights. This is one of the reasons why, when we do meditation, we're very consciously trying to give rise to feelings of pleasure, feelings of well-being. In the Satipatthana Sutta, the Buddha calls these feelings not of the flesh. They don't come on their own.

He talks about pain not of the flesh. He doesn't define it there, but you look elsewhere in the Canon and you see that it means reflecting on the fact that there is a deathless goal, and you're not there yet. That's a pain that the Buddha actually recommends that you develop as motivation for practicing. It may be painful, but it's pain with a hope. Most pain is hopeless and serves no purpose at all. But this pain reminds you that there is an escape. The pain there is simply in the fact that you haven't gotten there yet. The hope is in the fact that you can. This provides motivation to practice.

As for pleasure not of the flesh, that's the pleasure of getting the mind into right concentration. That's something you develop. You do it through focusing, say, on the breath, and then talking to yourself about the breath. How does the

breath feel? Is it too long? Too short? Too fast? Too slow? What would feel good right now? As the Buddha says, you try to give rise to feelings of pleasure, give rise to a sense of refreshment or even rapture, and then you let that spread throughout the body.

Now again, that's not going to happen on its own. You have to do it. The image that Buddha gives is of a bathman. Back in those days, they didn't have bars or soap. They had a bath powder, which was like flour, and they'd mix it with water and make a kind of dough, and then you'd rub the dough over your body. A good bathman preparing the dough would mix it in such a way that the entire ball of dough was moist, with no dry spots, but the water didn't leak out. That means that you have to knead the water through the dough the same way that you'd knead water into bread dough.

So there's work to be done. This is something you do, you give rise to, you develop. Then, once you develop it, the Buddha says that you try to maintain it. So when you find a comfortable way of breathing, maintain it. Stick with it. Be very sensitive to what feels good right now.

You can ask yourself: Which parts of the body tend to be most sensitive to what feels good as you breathe? They tend to be down the front of the body, in the area of the heart, sometimes in the area of the throat. But notice where you feel it most clearly. Then keep the breath coming in and going out in a way that makes those spots feel really good.

This may require that you change the rhythm of the breathing every now and then, because the needs of the body will change. What feels good for a while won't feel good after a while. Ajaan Lee's image is of a cook fixing food. If she fixes the same thing day after day after day, her boss is going to go look for a new cook.

So keep on top of what the body seems to need and what the mind finds interesting and enjoyable.

This is something you develop. You work on it because you're trying to see the extent to which you do create your feelings, through the act of attention. Normally, as we go through the day, we have an instinctive way of focusing on some feelings and not on others. Some people have a tendency to focus more on pains, some people have a tendency to focus more on pleasure, but it's all very unconscious, and the extent to which we play a role in giving rise to feelings gets buried. When things are buried like that, you're not going to gain any insight.

This is why the Buddha teaches meditation in such a way that you're consciously giving rise to feelings so that you get sensitive to this process. The techniques that simply say, "Well, watch whatever comes up," tend to deny the fact that you're actually playing a role in creating what's coming up. It makes it

seem like you're just an observer. This applies both to meditation techniques that focus on developing mindfulness and insight, and those that focus on developing strong concentration.

There're some that say, "Well, just sit with whatever comes up, and the concentration will come on its own. You won't be doing anything." That's making you blind. If you don't admit what you're doing, how can you gain any insight? After all, insight, as the Buddha said, is insight into the process of fabrication. Fabrication is the way we shape our experience, and if you deny that you're fabricating anything, then you're not going to see anything.

So take this as a test case: To what extent can you create a sense of well-being that feels good for the body, feels good for the mind? Learn how to maintain that. There are a lot of lessons that come from the maintaining. As the Buddha says, settle in, indulge in that feeling of well-being.

Now, this doesn't mean that you let go of the breath. If you do that, then the cause of the concentration will blur out. Your attention will blur out. It'll feel nice and it's comfortable, but you're not really sure where you are. When you come out of it, sometimes you wonder, "Was I awake? Was I asleep?" It's called delusion concentration. As the name tells you, you're not going to gain insight there. You indulge in the pleasure in the way of a person who works and then quits his job to enjoy the wages that come from his work: If you stop your work just to enjoy the wages, there comes a point where the wages don't come anymore.

So focus on what needs to be done to maintain a sense of well-being. You get clearer and clearer on what it means to fabricate a feeling. You also get clearer on the things that come up in the mind that would pull you away. As the Buddha said, there's no strong concentration without discernment.

One of the things you're going to learn how to discern is how not to fall for the thoughts that come wandering through the mind, telling you that "You've had enough just sitting here doing nothing but breathe. Think about this, think about that." Or, "This is getting boring." We're not here for entertainment. We're here for the sake of learning how our mind puts things together, because the way it puts things together causes us suffering. As long as we don't see clearly what we're doing, as long as we do this in ignorance, there's going to be suffering. If you learn how to do this with knowledge, you can turn it into the path.

So learn to generate these feelings not of the flesh. Care for them. Look after them, because they're an important part of the path. Think in terms of the analogy of the raft. They're part of the raft that takes you across the flood. As long as you're on a raft in the middle of a flood, you hold on. You don't let go until you get to the other side.