



This document is an extract from the full chapter which is available for download in the table via this [link](#) and is intended for use by participants of meetings.

## The second Anchor of Mindfulness – feeling our way to freedom

### Reading the subtle currents around our raft

#### Tuning into raw experience

*“Feeling is one of those mental factors... every conscious experience has a feeling-tone, pleasant, painful or neutral.” ~ Ven. Nyanaponika Thera*

*"The cure for the pain is in the pain." ~ Rumi*

‘Feeling tone’ refers to the bare, immediate ‘affective’ quality of an experience, arising the instant there is contact through the senses (including the mind). It is the simple, pre-verbal quality of pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. This feeling tone arises before complex emotions, stories, judgments, or conscious thoughts take shape. Every conscious experience is accompanied by one of these three feeling tones. Gotama (the Buddha) describes the practice simply:

*“... when a practitioner is feeling a pleasant feeling, they understand ‘I am feeling a pleasant feeling’. When a practitioner is feeling an unpleasant feeling, they understand ‘I am feeling an unpleasant feeling. When a practitioner is feeling a neutral feeling, they understand ‘I am feeling a neutral feeling’”.*

Gotama also distinguishes between bodily and mental feeling tones, which helps

us to see, for instance, how a bodily ache can be met without adding mental distress, or how mental anticipation can be pleasant even before anything touches the body.

### **When are ‘feelings’ not ‘feelings’**

Lots of people find the concept of ‘Mindfulness of Feelings’ very confusing – equating ‘Feelings’ as emotions. But ‘vedana’ is more subtle than simple emotions. In this chapter and workbook, ‘Mindfulness of Feelings’ means ‘feeling tones’ – the immediate pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral *‘flavour’* that accompanies every physical and mental experience (including thoughts and memories). Feeling tone is *not* the raw sensation (like warmth or pressure) and *not* the emotion (like anger or joy). It’s the quick, simple tone that often shows up first.

---

### **Self-reflections**

Use these self-reflection questions to notice feeling tone early and remain independent, not clinging.

- ★ In past behaviour, what patterns of pursuing pleasant ‘Feeling Tones’ are evident? What observable consequences followed?
- ★ Which unpleasant ‘Feeling Tones’ have been met with harmful compulsive or reactive behaviour? Where are the associated sensations known in the body?
- ★ When craving is present, what underlying ‘Feeling Tone’ is discernible – pleasant anticipation, unpleasant restlessness, or another quality?
- ★ Identify a neutral ‘Feeling Tone’ that went unnoticed today (for example, the feel of a doorknob, the texture of a chair). What does this suggest about the current focus of attention?
- ★ How does observation of a ‘Feeling Tone’ alter the relationship to it? Is there a shift from “my feeling” to “a feeling is present”?
- ★ What new, skilful means for cultivating wholesome, pleasant ‘Feeling Tones’ are you cultivating?
- ★ Recall a time when a simple, everyday pleasant ‘Feeling Tone’ (for example, warmth of the sun, taste of food) was sufficient. What supports the cultivation of more such moments?
- ★ What ‘Feeling Tone’ is present now, and what is the earliest bodily sign that

reveals it? Where is it known in this body?

- ★ When a pleasant ‘Feeling Tone’ is present, what grasping tendencies are noticed? With an unpleasant tone, what pushing or escape tendencies begin? With a neutral tone, is drift or steadiness apparent?
  - ★ Track the arising, peaking, and passing of a strong ‘Feeling Tone’. How long before it changes on its own when it is simply known?
  - ★ Which ‘Feeling Tone’ most often precedes unhelpful choices? What single kind next step most reliably moves you away from harm when that tone is present?
- 

## Journaling prompts

The following prompts invite deeper personal engagement and connect the practice of ‘Mindfulness of Feeling Tones’ to the lived experience on the path of healing. Keep entries brief, regular, and try impersonal phrasing (for example, ‘a tightness is being noticed’).

- ★ **Investigating disconnecting habits:** From a place of compassionate awareness, what could you write about the habit patterns that lead to disconnection? What might the pleasant and unpleasant ‘Feeling Tones’ that fuel these habits reveal if given a voice?
- ★ **Exploring an unpleasant sensation:** Describe a moment this week when a strong unpleasant sensation (for example, tension, anxiety) was present. Journal about how it was known in the body, what thoughts arose, and how behaviour unfolded without turning to patterned reactions.
- ★ **Mindful eating:** With one chosen food, explore pleasant ‘Feeling Tones’ using all the senses. How does this experience differ from eating without awareness?
- ★ **Weather report:** Record an inner ‘weather report’ today by naming ‘Feeling Tones’ as clouds, rain, sunshine, or fog. How is this weather being observed without the attempt to change it?
- ★ **Gratitude / Happiness:** Recall a moment of gratitude or genuine happiness this week. Journal about the bodily qualities of this pleasant ‘Feeling Tone’, and note how it differs from a ‘high’ or fleeting pleasure.
- ★ **Goodbye letter – setting a new resolve:** What words may be offered to the old pattern of aversion toward unpleasant ‘Feeling Tones’? What new skilful intention arises to take its place?
- ★ **‘Feeling-Tone’ Log (60 minutes):** Every few minutes, record the dominant

‘Feeling Tone’ and the cue that preceded it. Add one sentence on how the tone shifted (or did not shift). What patterns are evident by the end of the hour?

- ★ **Neutrality:** Consider one neutral moment. Did this moment turn into a restful moment or did you drift into craving or aversion? Note the context and what allowed neutrality to become rest rather than drift (or vice versa). Conclude with one sentence on using neutrality as a quiet refuge.
  - ★ **Body versus mind diary:** For two stressful events, record the bodily tone (ache, pressure, heat) and the mental tone (unease, tight anticipation). Did seeing them separately reduce reactivity?
  - ★ **Ninety-second wave:** During a strong ‘Feeling Tone’, time the span from first noticing to first easing while breathing steadily. What phrase or posture supported steadiness (for example, ‘steady here,’ ‘I see you, Māra’)? How might this be repeated?
- 

## Remember to remember

Our raft is sailing toward freedom, but the waters are often choppy, filled with the storms of pleasant cravings and unpleasant aversions. Without a strong anchor, we can easily be tossed back into the destructive currents of habitual patterns. This chapter has shown that the most powerful anchor one possesses is one’s own awareness of ‘Feeling Tone’ – the simple, bare feeling tones of pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral. By learning to observe and name these fleeting sensations without judgment or automatic reaction, a vital space is created between the feeling and the impulse to act.

Remember to remember that we are not our feelings. We are the ‘one’ who can observe them. Each time a feeling is noticed and the choice is made not to be driven by it, the anchor is strengthened. The old habit of craving is replaced with the new habit of wisdom. This is not about fighting feelings; it is about ‘Befriending’ them. It is in this simple, gentle act of awareness that we find the true power to steer our raft with purpose and compassion, forging a path to lasting freedom. Feeling tones are signals, not commands. This anchor steadies our raft for the ‘Five Defenders’ that follow this chapter.

*“If things go wrong, don’t go with them.” ~ Proverb*

*“An emotion is your brain’s creation of what your bodily sensations mean, in*

*relation to what is going on around you in the world.” ~ Lisa Feldman Barrett*

RAFT to Freedom © 2025 by Dr Cathryn Jacob and Vince Cullen

is licensed under Creative Commons

Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International.

