

Week 6 — Developing Equanimity

Equanimity means to develop a sense of non-attached caring for everybody and everything. In Buddhism there are two terms used to describe this concept: *upekkha* and *tatramajjhata*.

Upekkha means to look over, or to be able to look without being caught. It can also refer to refer to a spaciousness from seeing the bigger picture of a situation.

Tatramajjhata means to stand in the middle of things, and it means to retain balance. The strong presence of inner calm, well-being, confidence, vitality, or integrity can keep us upright, like ballast keeps a ship upright in strong winds.

You may be familiar with the section from Rudyard Kipling's poem 'If', or the Desiderata by Max Ehrmann. These poems talk to this sense of equanimity – this sense of balance.

Equanimity is characterized as promoting neutrality toward all beings. It is manifested as the quieting of resentment and approval. It is not a cold-hearted non-caring, but rather an equal caring of all creation.

Jesus talked a lot about something very much like equanimity:

- Matthew 6:25-34. Consider the lilies of the field
- Matthew 7:1-3. Judge not, lest you be judged.
- John 18:1. Peter, put your sword away. Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?

The Apostle Paul says in his letter to the Colossians:

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.” (Colossians 3:15)

We can practice equanimity by studying the ways that we get caught. Instead of pursuing the ideal of balance and nonreactivity directly, we can give careful attention to how balance is lost and how reactivity is triggered.

How can we develop this? One way is to develop the characteristics of mind that encourage equanimity to develop.

- **Integrity.** When we live and act with integrity or virtue, we feel confident about our actions and words. Do we practice compassion in our lives? Are we ethical in how we engage with people?
- **Faith.** While any kind of faith can provide equanimity, faith grounded in wisdom is especially powerful. We need a degree of confidence that we can engage in a spiritual practice.
- **A well-developed mind.** Much as we might develop physical strength, balance, and stability of the body in a gym, so too can we develop strength, balance, and stability of the mind. This is done through practices that cultivate calm, concentration, and mindfulness.

- **Well-being.** It's helpful to cultivate and enhance our well-being. It is all too easy to overlook the well-being that is easily available in daily life. Even taking time to enjoy one's tea or the sunset can be a training in letting in well-being.
- **Wisdom.** Wisdom can teach us to separate people's actions from who they are. We can agree or disagree with their actions, but remain balanced in our relationship with a person. Or we can understand that our own thoughts and impulses are the result of impersonal conditions. By not taking them so personally, we are more likely to stay at ease with their arising.
- **Insight.** Insight is a deep seeing into the nature of things as they are. It is seeing ourselves in connection with the Universal, as millions of individual cells, constantly regenerating, from atoms that were once star dust. That we are just a part of the world, not the centre of it. That while we have the gift of an aware self, that we are just part of God's good creation.
- **Freedom.** Freedom comes when we begin to let go of our reactive tendencies. We can get a taste of what this means by noticing areas in which we were once reactive but are no longer so. For example, some issues that upset us when we were teenagers prompt no reaction at all now that we are adults.

- GIL FRONSDAL

Exercise – Enemy Friend Meditation

Think: It is never enough to achieve my own happiness, rather I should seek happiness for all beings, including myself.

Visualize that you are surrounded by all sentient beings, with your mother seated to your left and your father to your right. In front of you, visualize an enemy; someone who dislikes you or wishes you harm. Behind you, place your dearest friend; the person to whom you are most attached. To the side, visualize a stranger; someone for whom your feelings are neutral.

Think: There is no reason at all for me to be attached to and help my friend or to hate and harm my enemy.

Every thinking and aware being seeks pleasure and wants to avoid suffering, just as I do. This is nothing special. If I were to strive for only my own self-peace, there would be no reason for me to have been created human. Even an animal can strive for this. The various animals have the same aim as many highly educated people--self-happiness--and also create many negative actions, such as fighting with and destroying enemies, cheating others with political actions, all in the pursuit of their own happiness. The main purpose of being human is to strive for and achieve higher aims--to bring every sentient being to everlasting happiness. This is something no animal can ever do.

When I consider myself as the centre, the 'I', there is a discrimination from the 'other'. This is a delusion. We are in fact all of the same god-creation. But this 'I' delusion is the source of all misfortune and unhappiness. Attachment to self, causes attachment to my own happiness.

Anger is caused by greed and self-attachment and makes me discriminate against whoever disturbs my happiness, producing the enemy.

Attachment creates the friend, who helps, and determines the enemy, who hinders.

Ignorance labels those who neither help nor hinder as strangers.

Anger makes me hate and harm the enemy;

attachment makes me cling to and help the friend; and ignorance makes me see the stranger as having a permanent self-nature.

By acting under the influence of these negative minds, I lead myself into difficult and suffering situations.

Attachment creates danger and suffering for myself and others. The whole earth is in danger of exploding. Attachment offers no peace and brings only suffering.

The three objects of friend, enemy and stranger are false and have been labelled incorrectly. The current friend, enemy and stranger have not always been friend, enemy and stranger. Even the enemy of last year can this year become my friend and yesterday's friend become my enemy today. It can all change within an hour and does so because of attachment.

If you try for a moment to befriend an enemy, he will become your friend. The opposite occurs if you treat a friend like an enemy. Therefore, the wise, understanding the impermanent nature of temporal relationships, are never attached to physical possessions or reputation.

If enemies are always enemies, they can never become friends. Similarly if friend is always a friend they can never become an enemy or a stranger. Yet we know that Enemies can become friends, and friends enemies. Attachment and our long-established patterns of behaviour predispose us to see the world in this distorted way.

Therefore an enemy is a most precious gift, one who is our best teacher.

The enemy is the object of my practice of patience, which helps me overcome my anger. I should not hate this enemy, who brings peace into my mind.

The enemy is infinitely more precious than any material possession. He is the source of all my past, present and future happiness. I should never hate the enemy. Any possession can be given up for his peace.

An enemy is my greatest need, the source of all beings' enlightenment, including my own. The enemy is my most precious possession. For his peace I can give up myself.

From now on I must never hate or harm the enemy or any other being.

The enemy harming me mentally and physically is under the control of his negative mind. He is like the stick that someone uses to beat another. There is no reason to get angry or to retaliate by harming the enemy. It is not his fault; just as the pain I experience from a beating is not the fault of the stick.

If I had clear wisdom I would see that harming others out of hatred is harming myself out of hatred. Obviously, I should not harm others.

Now let's recall Matthews 5:43-48, where Jesus is teaching:

"You have heard that it was said, ^a'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' ⁴⁴ But I say to you, ⁱLove your enemies and ⁱpray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ ^kso that you may be

sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and ^lsends rain on the just and on the unjust. ⁴⁶ ^uFor if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? ⁴⁷ And if you greet only your brothers, ^z what more are you doing than others? Do not even ^uthe Gentiles do the same? ⁴⁸ ^aYou therefore must be ^pperfect, ^aas your heavenly Father is perfect.

The enemy is merely a concept created by my hatred, just as friends and strangers are concepts created by my attachment and ignorance. I should not believe the distorted perceptions of my negative mind.

If I investigate with my wisdom eye, I will never find my attachment's friend or my hatred's enemy anywhere, neither inside nor outside their bodies. Wisdom tells me that these are merely names.

For all these reasons, I can now clearly see how foolish and nonsensical I have been in my life.