

Equanimity Week 1
From David:

All of the quotes in bold are from the Buddha.

Equanimity: Abundant, Exalted, Immeasurable, without hostility and ill will.

Equanimity is the last of the brahmaviharas, the abiding places of the sublime heart, and it includes all of them and more. It is present in every wholesome state of mind.

All of the paramis strengthen the heart. We reflect on our own generosity, our own virtue, our own lovingkindness, discerning wisdom, energy that supports goodness, resolution on truth, patiently renouncing what cannot satisfy. Our minds become calm and steady with these remembrances, and mindfulness can deepen to a more peaceful and quiet place. We have been studying and practicing what is positive and protective of the mind. As we remove the harmful and replenish the warmth and clarity, our hearts and minds become stronger and less easily shaken. Through all these skillful practices we can let go more and more into liberation.

Not apart from relinquishing all do I see any safety for living beings.

The eight worldly dharmas are as relevant now as they were in Buddha's time. As it was for people in the year 220 bce, the year 710, the 15th century, and all through human history, all of our suffering is included in this simple list of eight unfortunate tendencies: desires for praise, gain, reputation and sensory pleasure and aversions toward blame, loss, infamy and pain. All those people of ancient times who wore who knows what, were much smaller than us, led much simpler lives without technology, running water, electricity and controlled temperatures----they cared deeply about what somebody or some group thought of them, about whether or they succeeded or failed in their endeavors, and craved whatever was considered nice stuff at that time. Rage at neglect, blame, social abandonment, and inequity show up all through the Bible. The little specks of stardust of a person or a group in our mind, whose opinion of us can swell or sink our heart, is unknown to the vast humanity that has existed throughout history as well as today (and what is beyond humanity). And she / he or this group was unknown to us not so long ago, and will be, at most, a faint memory in the future, just like the specks of dust of persons or groups whose praise we craved for in grade school, junior high, and the changing specks of dust all through our lives. What deception we perpetrate on ourselves! The same can be said about the material things we so desperately wanted that have come and gone, without leaving any mark of lasting happiness on us; the dolls, bikes, collections, toy trains, purses, cars, and the variety of triumphs and defeats throughout our lives.

This kind of sensible reflection can deponentize these destructive energies, as can perceptions of light, good will, ease, peace, perception of death, happiness in just being awake, and more. A perception of warmth and space can relax the claustrophobic mind. It is important to find your own resonant reflections to penetrate and relax these harmful deceptions. It is apparent and

easy to see they do not make any sense, yet they have caused such pain and lamentation to all humanity now and through all human time.

We can cultivate and firm up the brahmavihara states, our potential for good will, gladness and kindness. We can focus on supportive states that reconfigure negative perceptions---like remembering some heart opening generosity to you or from you; remembering a good friend or someone who has treated you kindly; remembering someone who has seen into you, someone who liked you and wanted to be with you; remembering someone who understood your difficulty, your misery. We can gladden our attitudes with thoughts of our good fortune, our good health, that we can breathe easily now, we can take in and eliminate food now without pain or hindrance, we are conscious now, we are alive. I am so appreciative of these people who have come into my life. Look around you. I am a volunteer chaplain at a hospital once a week. It didn't have to be this way. Gratitude can dispel our gloom and despair.

The Dalai Llama said, "I try to treat everyone as an old friend." We reconfigure our aversive perceptions by seeing into the plight of the other, the powerful struggles she faces, how it would be to be her, and we yield to nonharming and perhaps compassionate connection. It is not difficult to see good in another person. Primal sympathy warms and opens the heart.

We ride through and attempt to come to terms with our own unique version of these eight worldly difficulties all through our lives. Chogyam Trungpa said, "What gets reborn are the neuroses." They are inevitable for all human beings. However, we are not helpless victims. We have agency. With a balanced mind we can see the suffering our attachment to these conditions brings to us, and ride through them with some measure of impartiality. When we feel exhilarated with our success or in despair over failure, we can turn toward those feelings with equanimity, rather than feeding the reactivity. The great Korean Zen Master Hsu Yun (who was enlightened when he was 56 and lived to 120) called equanimity "the long enduring mind." We don't abandon our feelings, but with wise evenness we understand the deception of the condition and respond in a more balanced way.

Balance and impartiality does not mean we are distant, unfeeling and inhuman, the far enemies of equanimity. We feel the suffering of these eight tones in the body, the roller coaster of hope, fear, happiness, sadness, doubt, rage, delight, and practice holding these calmly without running away, running toward, blaming, attacking, and especially shaming ourselves for feeling or thinking them. With steadfastness we feel "...the constant throb of worry and care like the thumping of the bass in a jazz quintet..." (Bikkhu Bodhi), grief, loss, our own stressful twisted mentalities and unskillful intentions. We allow the full brunt of these to saturate, and as we meet them with unconditional awareness, we allow the impact of them to defuse and diffuse, and become part of a non conceptual stream. We use all the skills we have acquired through practice that are relevant to our own unique conditions, and the conditions of others.

Equanimity supplants the dominant tone, allowing us to live with ease and balance, not overwhelmed in reaction to the inevitable ups and downs of life. Ram Dass said something like,

“I have the same neuroses now that I have had all my life. The difference is, they don’t bother me as much anymore.”

**Praise and blame, gain and loss, pleasure and sorrow, they come and go like the wind.
To be happy stand like a great tree in the midst of them all.**

As a solid mass or rock is not moved by the wind, so a sage is not moved by praise and blame.

The more we taste the value of impartiality, and knowing the importance the Buddha gave to it, the more we want to return to it, even for a short time.

Whatever has the nature to arise is of the nature to pass away...When the mind does not cling, the mind is not agitated. Seeing when the mind is not agitated it personally experiences Nibbana.

We see the arising of the vicissitudes, and perhaps more importantly, the passing away of them. Everything is changing. Nothing lasts long enough to call it a self. Our mind can become attuned to that, the empty selfless nature of it all. Conditions come together and disappear. Ajahn Jumnian advises, “At some point the mind becomes so clear and balanced that whatever arises becomes seen and untouched with no interference. One ceases to focus on any particular content and all is seen as simply mind and matter, an empty process arising and passing away on its own. A perfect balance of mind without any reactions. There is no longer any doing.” We can incline in this direction, participate in this.

Equanimity is much broader than positive emotional reactivity. It “suffuses love, compassion, joy with a vastness that includes all.” (Joseph Godstein) “In the cherry blossom shade there is no such thing as a stranger.” (Kobayashi Issa) It is the steadiness, the evenness, the staying with through ups and downs, receiving and allowing my own and others processes. It unhooks perceptions from intentions and responds wisely to conditions. Quietly, this can be done, this feels right, this does not feel good, don’t follow that, this is kind. We strengthen and widen this muscle against the push of feelings and intentions. The subtle refinements of being are cultivated. We do this on a personal level and a social level. We see the mistakes our children or loved ones are making, and with connectedness and compassion we have to allow them their own journey. (Would you have wanted someone to interfere with your journey?) They are the heirs to their karma. They need to navigate their own path. All we can do is hold them with compassionate and equanimity. I see you, I recognize you, I feel you, and this is the best I can do.

Kamala Masters, in a talk on equanimity called “Seeing the World with Quiet Eyes,” (a nice description for equanimity), describes a visit her beloved teacher Munindra made to her home in Hawaii. In preparation she implored all the children to be on best behavior. Everything was prepared, Munindra came, and they sat down for a quiet meal. Midway through the meal one of her sons became upset and began yelling, left the table yelling and went into his room. His

father went to his room and said, "Open your door." The son said, "NO!" Again, open your door with the same response. The father then said, "Open your door or I will break it down." "No." So he broke the door down. All the while Munindra was sitting at the table with his hand on Kamala's arm. He said simply to her, "This is the law."

We navigate our own journey, changing our habit patterns and the course of our lives, by not reacting to what comes up in outer events and inner events with aversion and despondency, but with clarity, kindness and wisdom. We grow these qualities, and an infinitely spacious mind. This is what we can do, where we have influence. With timeless awareness we recognize turbulent emotions, and allow them to self liberate.

Goethe: "I have come to the frightening conclusion that I am the decisive element. It is my personal approach that creates the climate. It is my daily mood that makes the weather. I possess tremendous power to make a life miserable or joyous. I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration. I can humiliate or humor, hurt or heal. In all situations, it is my response that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or deescalated, and a person is humanized or dehumanized."

Someone asked Suzuki Roshi what is it like to be enlightened? He responded, if you practice sincerely, that is almost as good. With kind attention we calmly allow conditions to arise and vanish. Buddha describes the shore of the sea, gradually sloping, inclining toward vast depths. Seeing the world with quiet eyes.

There is no higher happiness than peace. Equanimity gives us a taste of that.