

2010-08-01 Social Equanimity

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SPEAKERS

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Last week I talked about equanimity and only scratched the surface of the topic and would like to today continue on this theme of equanimity. And today I'd like to talk about social equanimity. Last week I talked about using meditation practice as a laboratory for discovering how to be economists to be nonreactive. How to be even minded how to be, keep the awareness open. equanimity is a state where awareness stays open, balanced without being hijacked by our thoughts, our reactions, our feelings. You know, think awareness doesn't get contracted. Sometimes it's all too easy for awareness to get lost in Our thoughts or concerns or preoccupations, we're always aware, but we're not aware that we're aware. And awareness gets lost gets connected. And there's something very significant about when mindfulness is strong when awareness is strong. There's almost as if I don't say exactly the same as, but it's almost the same as you know that you're aware. You're aware and you know that you're aware, someone asked you were you aware? So yeah, I'm aware, that sense of presence is very strong. And that sense of awareness is stronger than anything that's going on around you. Or when you are done not to deny anything or push anything away. But the awareness is like almost like this larger power, this larger reality, this larger presence, this larger event, that that because it's larger than anything that's within it. It doesn't get pushed around by the various things that go on or life events of our lives, concerns worries. equanimity is considered to be one of the most sublime and beautiful states in Buddhism. It's kind of considered considered behind the crown jewel of practice. And, but because partly because of that, it's also one of the most difficult ones to understand for one thing, but also to experience to develop. And when we talk about equanimity, there's plenty of times that people protest and people worry about equanimity is that indifference? Is it you know, maybe it's not okay to be equanimous you're supposed to be interested involved in and worry about things properly. And so, today, I want to talk about social equity. Meaning that equanimity we have in our relationships to other people. And an equanimity we have in the relationship other people have towards us. And the primary place in the Buddhist tradition where this kind of social equanimity is discussed, is as one as is as one of the Brahma vihara is one of the sublime abodes and these are four states of mind are for emotional states or for attitudes that are so closely linked to love Buddhist idea of love. There has to do with the primary social emotions that Buddhists cultivate or develop or celebrate. And the first is loving kindness. The second is compassion. The third is sympathetic joy, and the fourth is equanimity. And the first three, that loving kindness has to do with a simple wish that someone else be happy. It's a beautiful thing to cultivate to have it close close by so that it's already almost like a habit that you when you encounter someone, when you think of someone that your instinct, your impulses, it'd be really good if this person can be happy or safe or healthy. And wouldn't that be nice? And, and it's a kind of, it's a kind of happy love. It's a kind of a happy producing kind of goodwill that we have for others. It said that this goodwill of loving kindness is the foundation for these other three for compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity.

And it morphs into the others depending on the circumstances. So if you encounter someone who is suffering, that goodwill morphs into compassion, Where the wish is May they be free of their suffering, may their suffering come to an end. And, and that's a beautiful wish that human beings have, that when we encounter someone else, there's almost our empathy connects to their suffering, we almost feel it sometimes kind of like our own, there's kind of a closeness to it, like a close connection to how we take it in. But rather than being a victim to that suffering, rather than being oppressed by it or troubled by it, there's this beautiful instinct or feeling or attitude of compassion, wanting that person to be alleviated from that suffering, and perhaps in that wish, doing something about it. The third is when the goodwill encounter someone who's having a good time, they're happy. They're having success, then the that goodwill transforms itself into what's called empathic or sympathetic joy, appreciative joy When you're happy at their happiness, or their success, and that also comes along that attitude comes with a kind of a wish. And that wishes may their happiness continue. So the first three of these, the four most social emotions come with kind of the attitude comes with kind of a wishing kind of a hope thing or kind of a intention that that's something continue or be a certain way. So the first is may people be happy. Second is, may they be free of their suffering. And the third may they be made their happiness continue. The fourth was equanimity. Now, it's very important to hear that this is also kind of a love a kind of very positive, emotional state. That is also a morphing or transforming of this goodwill. And, but it's a kind of goodwill that we can have When it doesn't make sense to continue with the first three. So for example, we might wish that someone not suffer. But they continue to suffer. And there's many reasons for that. And even even if we go in and try to help them, the ball we can, sometimes our help doesn't make a difference and they continue to suffer. Sometimes it's because the choices they make, and you could see, you know, that they're just kind of digging themselves, their their own grave and the choices they make making very stupid choices. But they seem to not be able to not make them and you've tried to help them you've stepped in many times, but they keep making those choices. A very common area in families with this many family people struggle is around addictive behavior within the family, someone's alcoholic or a drug addict or some other addictive behavior, and they've been helped many times intervene many times try to be helpful, but it just seems to be not helping give the person money that didn't work. You know, give them a place to stay that didn't work, you know, they bring the problems home with you, to them to you. There's many, many problems and so eventually, you know, your person is going to find themselves going losing your job losing all kinds of, you know, ending up in the streets, not talk to parents, who have children, adult children ended up living on the streets because of the alcoholism. And they tried everything they could to try to intervene and help make a difference. But they just couldn't, you know, finally said we had to kind of just wash our hands of our son, because it just wasn't nothing else was working. So there are times when you know, terrible things happen to people. And our wish that they be free or they're suffering is a beautiful wish, but it's not a wish that's going to make a difference. There are times when people have success. or happiness and use your wishes may that happiness continue. And they make foolish choices. And those choices, they obliterate their happiness, their well being. And then we might wish them happiness, loving kindness. And again, things happen in life. They make choices in their life, that as much as you wish them to be happy, it doesn't happen. You know, they make choices that takes them the other direction. So you still care for them.

But it doesn't make sense to continue wishing, wishing, wishing were something which is not going to happen. So then, the fourth form of goodwill is equanimity. And equanimity here means doesn't mean we stop caring. But it means that we stop feeling responsible for them. We start getting caught up The drive or the need for something be different. I think of this kind of equanimity as a kind of beautiful kind of acceptance of a situation that maybe shouldn't, you know, you would say maybe shouldn't be accepted. But it isn't a situation that's being accepted are the actions that are being accepted, but it's the person. I like to distinguish between actions and people. And people make their own choices. And

we might feel those choices are the wrong ones. Or they might events might happen in a way that maybe they're, you know, it's unfortunate, but it's possible to meet people and have our awareness open, non contracted available, present, to meet them with respect with a sense of care, but not being pulled into their world. And entangled or codependent is called sometimes now entangled in that world to stay economist and balanced but also essential. of seeing that you're there. repeatedly in my Buddhist practice life, I've encountered people who have treated see me in that way. And it's been very meaningful for me to feel their acceptance or the equanimous acceptance of me. It's you at times where I thought I was in big trouble. I thought you know, this normally I thought people were gonna really be judge me be angry with me reject me, or whatever. There were times and things I did. Maybe in scale of things, they weren't that bad. But I thought for sure I was gonna be kicked out of the monastery.

And, lo and behold, I was just met and just you know, sometimes nothing was said was recognized what happened but nothing was said in that in that acceptance, equanimity. It was You know, I certainly could take stock of what I've done. But it was very meaningful that I wasn't being personally rejected for things I've ever done. Or the story of when I've told maybe too many times of when I was 14, taking my father's car for a joyride, and crashing into a bulldozer and so then having to call up my father at work and say, you know, your, your, you know, your car. And, and I thought I was going to be in big trouble. You know, in terms of he was getting angry with me and, and what he did was he said, Well, what happened to the car? And he says, you still drive? And they said, Yes, but we can't open the right hand door and he said, okay, Want to see what you can do about it? And I look at it when I come home. And that was it. And now maybe you think a 14 year old has more serious consequences and that grounded, maybe getting a good yell. I don't know what. But I think that was such a powerful lesson for me. He knew that I was terrible. He knew that I had he was clear. I think that I, I got the point I got the lesson I did. I didn't need any more lessons. And there was an equanimity, this acceptance, you know, let's take care of the situation. And that was a very powerful lesson for me about taking responsibility but also about about certain kind of acceptance or certain kind of something. Or when I was in a monastery in Thailand, the first monastery I was in, I was following a schedule that the abbot had given me And, and one day I went, I didn't follow the schedule, but went for a little walk around the monastery kind of casually at the time I was supposed to be meditating. And lo and behold, who's walking around monastery also, but the habit and and, you know, my usual operating mode is to feel guilty, nothing back then. You know, if in doubt be guilty and so, you know, it was the worst possible scenario because, you know, not doing the schedule and, and remember this beautiful thing, right, he was maybe 50 feet away or something and we were kind of walking perpendicular to each other. And he turned and looked at me, it was far enough away. It was like that, like he was gonna greet me or anything. But he clearly looked at me saw that I was there. And, and it was just kind of open awareness was almost like I was a tree there, it was like nonreactive usami. It just didn't, it didn't didn't agitate him at all didn't concern them at all. And I felt that it was just kind of I felt this acceptance there was more than just acceptance, it wasn't active was just, I was just there. And it was very healing for me, because of this tendency to feel guilty feel bad to judge myself to be the kind of the first thing that first instinct that I would have to just be seen without any judgments without any reactivity without any just seeing I felt like I was seen really deeply by him in some deep way. So how do we what is it what is that attitude that we can have towards situations which You're not going well. situations in the world around us with other people where it's appropriate and significant to have that kind of tab equanimity, to have this accepting awareness, open awareness, balanced awareness, even minded awareness, whatever you want to call it. Now, one of the reflections that is given for this kind of equanimity is not a wish. Remember the first three forms of goodwill are, are come with a wish May you be happy may be free of suffering, may your happiness continue. The fourth is not a wish, because it only makes sense to have equanimity when wishing is not going to help

for all my wishes, you know, you So, the fourth reflection is not is not have made something happen but rather is this and this is a very I think Very strong statement that's meant to be reflected and considered, debated with struggled with wondered about studied. So the statement goes like this. beings are the owners of their actions, the air to their actions, their words or actions his karma and, and actions doesn't quite capture the full meaning of the word karma. Another way of saying it, beings are the owners of their intended actions, they're intentional actions, beings are the heirs of their intentional actions. So another way some people like to say this and in America as they say

I care for you But the choices you make are your own. And so we see that people make all kinds of choices maybe for themselves, not our choices, not the choices that make sense to us doesn't even seem smart. And so how do we grant people leave people alone? And their capacity to make their own choices? Or how do we not take responsibility for the choices they make? In many number of religions is considered very significant to grant people almost as a sacred rite or some sacred dimension of life, to grant people, their own free choice to allow people to choose for themselves. And in Buddhism, that's also there that of granting exactly the right word, but there's a there's a deep understanding that people make their own choices. And some people make choices which are not so wise and sometimes their choices People make play out years and years into the future. People do start living a life with that seems to work when they're in the 20s 30s and 40s. But it's a life when they turn to be 70 doesn't work out anymore. And some of the choices they made early in life are choices that lead in the direction that you know, wasn't good after 4050 years for them and then they end up kind of, you know, destitute or struggling or something. So, what is it about that reflection that beings are the owners have their own intentional actions beings are the owners of it are the heirs of their intentional actions, that helps with equanimity that helps us not get entangled in it. So, what do you think of that? So I'd like to hear from you what is it about that phrase that is helpful so if you could pass it over to Charlotte, you have a statement or a question, Charlotte. Because this is the time for, not for questions. But rather I'd like to hear from you guys. Why do you think that statement is helpful? Yeah, I kind of wondered. So I think let's come back to you and you're the editor. let's let's let's wait to the end. Because I think it's very valid, probably valid, what you have to say and important to talk about maybe why it's not helpful. But I think we'd start laying the ground by talking about how it's helpful.

So another mic, can go

I think it helps me because it's a reminder of what I can do with my wishes versus the other person what the other person is doing.

A little bit more so.

Because I may wish that they'd be happy that their happiness continue. And that may not go anywhere, despite all my best wishes. And when my wishes don't go anywhere, then it's kind of I have to accept that. They're going to do their own thing in a way.

Yeah. Great, thank you.

I think

if people are responsible for their own choices, and we give them that, and we don't try and interfere with that, if we can't help anymore, how best for a person to develop and find their own way towards enlightenment.

So then they have to take responsibility for themselves more clearly,
for their own life.

Some people don't take responsibility for themselves until they're given that left left alone. So how are we here? Can you

I think it's helpful because if, if the wishes haven't done any good, if you don't accept their actions for what they are, you just end up torturing yourself. So it's a continuation of suffering, but now the suffering is your suffering.

And this is a way to help alleviate that suffering.

And what are some of the triggers for you to suffer when someone else is

well, you know, He said that there's empathetic joy, it becomes empathetic pain. You know, and all the things you mentioned before guilt, you know, what about what have I done to contribute or what have I not done. And it may not be the life that you choose for yourself, but this person has chosen it for them and at some level they have to recognize the pain that they're causing other people because you've tried everything and it can't. It hasn't helped so far.

So maybe maybe they're only going to learn when they reach rock bottom or when to go to learn when he experienced the consequences. Thank you.

I have two people with whom that's helpful. I second with the lady just said that applies to my relationship with my 19 year old son.

I've used up my three wishes.

equanimity is That's what's what's left.

The other is that I have known a person who lived that way in his professional life. And that person is very great inspiration to me in this area.

Beautiful. Thank you.

Couldn't you also look at it as

sort of a commentary on the limitations of your ability to understand whether an action in long run is positive or negative, in the sense that crashing your car to the old into the bulldozer when you're 14, probably in the long run is actually a really great lesson than a good thing. Yeah. And as I've gotten older, I've found that I'm wrong a fantastic number of times, but seriously about whether or not something is good or bad. I mean,

I just have

really doubts about my ability to understand, to know that when I see it, Mm hmm. And if you're wrong a lot, or if you don't know, when you see it, then they own it, and they live with it. And you're really in no position to meaningfully evaluated or to pass judgment on because you're just gonna be wrong.

I think what you're saying is very wise. I think that

making mistakes, experiencing suffering, are all part of life, we can't avoid it. And to not understand that everyone has to have their share of difficulties, struggles, mistakes, is certainly is going to be it's going to prevent equanimity to be there. But we understand that to some degree, this is part of life and everyone has to contend with these kinds of mistakes, struggles, whatever, and that is possible to learn and there's a path through it, to freedom to liberation to maturity to a wide are alive.

That mistake or that suffering is the only way

to that statement. So for example, I, you know, I it's hard to you know, I find it very hard to be a parent. You know, it's sometimes hard to be economists know it because partly because your parents have to choose to some degree for their kids. But here's a story of my son, I had a teacher who had a problem with anger. So should we have taken out of the class or the school? What What should our role be? Should we go in there and insist this the school fire the teacher should be now What should we do? You know, it's not good to have teachers yelling at their kids in anger in class when there's really teeny. And on the other hand, another consideration was, you know, if we protect him too much from life, he's not going to Learn how to work with people. He's already a little bit he's a little bit protected environment already. And so it's kind of protected school in many ways. So maybe it's important to be around people who are angry periodically growing up to learn how to contend and work with it. And our role as parents is not to protect them from the anger, but but certain certain the way the economist about it, but to show him and teach him other skills of how to be with it. So the equanimity that allows people to struggle to go through life and have difficulties and that's part of important, important part of any life is to go through that I think what you're pointing to right behind you there. So okay to ask a question.

My question is,

you pursue you presented equanimity as a thing you do after you give up on the ever three and I'm wondering if they can be done at the same time. Yes. Because I honestly believe there is I try towards equanimity. And I feel that sometimes there was a fee involved here, the empathetic joy or the other side of it, because of the compassion they're trying to fix and correct at the same time. You know, I'm still trying to be a quantum. And I do sometimes I

have a little tension between those desires.

Like your comments on that. Yeah, I don't know about tension between them. But I think there are times when a situation is so clearly requires different approaches, different attitudes, that they're quite different from each other. But I think that with, with, for example, the loving kindness you could wish or compassion, it can be infused with equanimity. I mean, you can. If equanimity is non reactivity, the wish can be there, but the need for the wish to be fulfilled, is not there. You know, there's no need, there's no demand, no sense of responsibility tied into it. Just kind of kind of very open and free and clean that way. I think that as people as my practice develops and grows, one of the things that grows is a greater and greater sense of equanimity of balance and capacity not be pushed around and caught by all kinds of things. And so then our emotions or feelings or relationships are mixed with this equanimity, much more and more, this balance or this openness or this clean, clean, unreactive kind of approach. Some

people are worried that's indifference. But I think it's actually allows for the other emotions to work more cleanly through it, like a clean channel. So here

Good morning. Are we still in a session where we're reacting or were commenting on the previous in to my non native speaking ear? I like to clarify if I heard the statements correctly, so it says, beings are the owners of their actions, heirs to their actions or karma heirs as an H Er, yes. Okay, so I heard it correctly. I'm not

a native speaker originally either, so I can't I have trouble with some words. And here is one of those. I just can't say it right. So I apologize. No, no,

no, I thought it was my ears. Not you know,

it's one of those things, but some people make fun of me. I've learned to be equanimous about it.

So, so the first statement, I understand, but it's it's the second part of the statement that I like to respond to. beings are errors to their actions are karma. And that particular part of I'm saying resonates with me because I was born outside of this country and for the first eight years, I was raised in a very different environment. And I remember as a child, the adults around me highly emphasized as they were raising me that I, that I be kind to towards those who are around me and towards even animals and plants. So being kind was was a quality that they expected and culture to culture to culture nurtured and cultured within me. And, and the way they explained to me was that in this world, there are a lot of sufferings, and I didn't understand sufferings as a child, but I believe them and it was through my kind actions kind thoughts kind behaviors a kind reactions. to things that, that I could alleviate some of their sufferings, and more than that not to cause more suffering towards others. And it was also through kind behavior and kind reactions and thoughts that I produced kindness and goodness in others who were receiving this kindness or kind thoughts from me.

So,

so I grew up very,

I guess, in a way.

Good.

And then then my family came to this country and I spent my years teenage years and college years in this country. And then I realized in being in a very competitive world, that being kind to the way I was brought up and was raised for many years, ain't gonna cut it in this country. So for the past six years, I came to IMC and then there's lesson on being kind and being compassionate and it's almost as if I am now being brought back to the childhood years and the way in the way I was taught to think and behave. So, I just want to say that that particular part of the same that you have just told us, brought me back to those years and resonated with me.

So, we say that, so far in the meetings of the owners of our karma, our air air store karma is that that the choices we make sets in motion a variety of chains of cause and effect that can play itself out in the short term in the long term. So if you act kindly, that senses motion, something very different than the way Then if you act mainly, and some of those things can come back and right away, and some of them might come back in 2030 years, and so perhaps you set foundation in your youth for kindness. And so

that's still there. It's the President's it's been it's, it's still may be a habit or an instinct or, or an understanding that you have that's quite deep. And so and because of that, that that seed was planted, perhaps now later in life, it's it's sprouting in the wasteland of

Yes.

I wanted to comment that as a paid professional helper, yeah. Had I known what about equanimity earlier on in my life, I think I would have avoided a lot of self inflation, a lot of self deflation and a lot of burnout.

Thank you. So here in the front

from the fourth of the five remembrances, we could use the language I am the beneficiary of my deeds. Also, yes.

It's no

thank you for your compassion. So now Sure, like do you want to

know what my issue is?

Um,

it's not my issue sort of shift as we were talking about this. So you have a situation. I think equanimity when you look at. There's great injustice in the world. There's things like child trafficking. There's a lot of suffering

of children say.

So you can use that phrase in those situations, I think you still have to use equanimity. When you're sort of looking at the world and saying the whole world is heir to its deeds, but you can't look at the individual in certain situation, or I can and say you are heir to your karma,

I tend to agree with you. There are 10 there's a tendency in some areas in Buddhism to be very kind of absolutist ik about this karma thing. So you know, if someone is born into a horrible situation or a young child is taken into, you know, trial, child trafficking, trafficking grabbing to well that's their karma. And, and because of what they did in their past lives and all that, and I just just doesn't, doesn't compute for me it actually But what it seems to do to some of the Buddhists who have that it's not dismissing it or think in western ears, at least, it's often karma is often looked at as they're responsible. And in fact, the way it functions I've been told or seen in some of the Buddhist countries in Asia, is the saying it's your karma. This happens. It's not that you're taking responsibility, but allows for a certain kind of equanimity, maybe it's not the right word here, but a certain kind of people still care and they tried to get involved and do something to change situation. But it's more like, I don't have to say it exactly. But it's more like, this is the way things are. And as much as we're maybe horrified by some things, there's a there's, there's not this extra contraction and that around it or tightness or resistance or kind of This shouldn't be there. But it's there because of causes and conditions. Now let's see what we can do about it. Traditionally, the Buddhist teachings on karma has not been a teaching to excuse things or explained things away. It's been the emphasis has always been teaching on karma, given how things are now,

how do we now respond better? How do we make it better the situation? And so I hope that we don't use this kind of teaching as a way of ignoring injustice in the world. But we use a teaching equanimity so that we don't lose our cool when we're fighting and justice. So we can stay even balanced. And Steve

pikiell I think you should

talk about with the four Brahm of horizontal have near and far enemies and one of the near enemies of equanimity is in difference, right? So one

has to be really

sensitive but also look at it

you as an individual, you see some injustice and you can go well, it's their karma. But if you look at people's motivations behind that they see the greed aversion to the whole situation, they don't want to act on it. And you're creating karma for yourself, you have to, you're giving an opportunity to either be compassionate, take compassionate action, or loving kindness or some skillful action. So you'll always have that choice in your end, too. So it's not like being indifferent to the world.

And I think that the remember that equanimity is the fourth of these four, right? So it really builds or is founded on the other, the other three. So you know, when you see injustice, hopefully, some of the earlier ones kick in first, you know, compassion, care, and, and when the compassion doesn't work, where we can't doesn't you know, then perhaps, we use equanimity to protect ourselves, protect the compassion. From being, you know, causing undue suffering and distress for us. So finally, it's time to stop but I wanted to also point in another direction. Two other things. One is this statement that beings are

beings are the owner owners of their actions the beneficiaries of their actions. You know, it helped us suppose to help bring equanimity. But you could also direct it towards yourself. You are the owners of your own karma. You are the beneficiary or the hair. So, no you don't, you'd always benefit from your karma. That's the problem and you can always and you know, that, and so how, how is it that saying that statement to yourself, reminds you to have a certain equanimity The consequences that you have to live through, you make choices that have consequences. And then how do you how do you how do you stay patient with those consequences? How do you stay equanimous realizing I have to accept this, and I have to live with this now, and, and be present and open and not defend myself I won't hide from it and won't run away and won't get angry and lash out at someone. This consequences a consequence that I have to now just be with because this is the result of actions and choices I've made. So that's a whole topic in itself, but I think it's a very important one for this social equanimity to have happen. And then finally, what I tried to do here today, but having you guys talk and all that is to emphasize want to make the point that this is an investigation, exploration into this topic, that we it's not sound like a done deal like now I understand how it is, but rather than to explore You know, how is it that we can be economists what is equanimity in this situation? How do we understand responsibility? How do we understand who has lives, the consequences in our relationship to it? And as we investigate and explore these kinds of things, and invest investigation, exploration shifts, the center of gravity of where our preoccupation is out of preoccupation out of reactivity into those mental functionings that support equanimity that support, open awareness that support a freer awareness. The very capacity to question to explore, to investigate, try to understand better is one of those things that helps make that shift from being lost in our reactivity preoccupations to stepping out of it, and finding a wise way of

being with this world of ours and hopefully to live in the middle of our world with a degree of freedom. So I hope this gives you something to explore. And if it doesn't, then I'll be economists