Equanimity Practice

Andrea Fella · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Andrea Fella · 29:12

In this formal equanimity practice that we'll be doing, which Bhante introduced yesterday, we typically start with a neutral person—someone for whom there's not a lot of relationship, someone we don't know much about. That's the place where it's easiest to hold that balance of mind. Then we move to a benefactor, a dear friend, and then a difficult person. It is said in the commentaries, my understanding is, that the self is the hardest to wish that balance of mind for, to have that sense of equanimity for.

And I would say that what we are doing in our Vipassana practice, our mindfulness practice, is an equanimity practice. We are cultivating that capacity to have equanimity for whatever arises in our hearts and minds.

So allowing yourself to find a posture that feels easeful, comfortable. And the attention—allowing the attention to just take in how you are in this moment. Can there be a sense of allowing how you are to be just as you are? What we've been doing in the mindfulness practice.

Perhaps begin by recollecting or reflecting on how helpful it is, what the benefit of a mind that is balanced and non-reactive is for the world, is for relationship, is for the planet. Maybe appreciating the capacity or the possibility of that, even if we're not really feeling it. Just bringing to mind the value of that non-reactivity, of that balance of mind. Perhaps sensing into what a gift it would be, what a gift it can be, to bring a peaceful heart into our relationships, into the world.

And perhaps you can touch into even just a little bit from that reflection of the value. Maybe you can taste just a little bit, a sense of okayness.

We'll begin with bringing a person to mind, a neutral person, perhaps a person you've been working with over these weeks as a neutral person. Bringing that person into mind and expressing or connecting to these phrases of wisdom. I'll offer a few different ones, much as Bhante did yesterday.

"You're the owner of your karma. Your happiness or unhappiness depends upon your actions and choices, not upon my wishes for you."

Or another flavor: "I care for you but cannot make your choices for you."

Or another flavor: "I wish you happiness and ease and understand that your journey is your own."

In connecting with these expressions of wisdom, these thoughts of wisdom, and holding this person in mind—this is not simply a mental exercise. Expressing that phrase of wisdom in connection with that

person, take some time to feel with mindfulness how it lands in your heart, in your system, to express that wisdom. "I care for you, but I cannot make your choices for you."

At times there may be an okayness with the neutral person, perhaps a sense that it feels resonant, feels like there's an alignment with that. That may be just the beginning flavor of equanimity in relationship to that being, that person.

With the neutral person there also might be a little bit of a sense of, well, do I really care about this person? And so maybe a tiny bit of disconnection. Noticing that, not to judge ourselves for what our relationship is to this wisdom. The job of the wisdom is to draw out its opposite, where we are in a rub with it. And so if you feel any kind of resistance or clinging or holding or pushing, that too, that too can be there.

Connect with the being. Express the wisdom phrase and feel how it lands with mindfulness—to make that wish.

Allowing yourself to bring a benefactor, someone for whom it's easy to connect with without a complicated relationship but with a deep sense of care. And connecting to the expression of wisdom: "You're the owner of your karma. Your happiness and unhappiness depend upon your actions and choices, not upon my wishes for you."

And again, reflecting, touching into how it feels to express that in relationship to this being. Holding this being in your mind and this expression of wisdom. It may feel different than with the neutral person. Feeling into how it is. Connect to the being.

Express the wisdom and feel how it lands. Perhaps bowing to your benefactor internally, then letting go and bringing a dear friend into your heart.

Really in this period, we're just going to get a flavor with each being of perhaps some of the differences, some of the places of stickiness that happen as we explore expressing this wish for different beings.

Bringing a dear friend into mind, bringing the relationship into mind here really, where there's closer connection. I sometimes would just envision as if I was really sitting right in front of that person, the feeling of that.

And then: *I wish you happiness, but I can't make your choices for you.* How does that feel, to express that wish for this dear friend? Or dear one, perhaps. A dear one in your life—maybe a relation rather than a friend.

If there's a struggle or difficulty, a strong kind of difficulty that comes up, sometimes additional wisdom reflections around just the vastness of change and the uncontrollable nature of experience and the conditioned nature of experience for all of us might support a little more space to hold what arises in relationship to the dear one.

Sometimes in this exploration, especially with those we are closer to, the realities of the relationship, what's actually going on in their lives, can kind of bubble up. It may be that there's particular suffering or particular happiness that's happening for somebody. And so sometimes the flavor of the heart in making this wish can begin to shade towards compassion, metta, or sympathetic joy. That's okay. All four of these Brahma Viharas really connect as the heart opens with this equanimity.

Connecting with the dear one: *I care for you, and I understand you have your own journey.* Perhaps acknowledging, bowing internally to your dear one. Thanking them for this participation.

And letting your mind connect with someone for whom there's a little bit of rub—a being with whom there's a challenge or difficulty. Seeing if there can be a sense of connection and an expression of the wish: *You are the owner of your karma. Your happiness or unhappiness depends upon your choices and actions, not upon my wishes for you.*

Again, feeling into how it feels internally in your heart to express this wish. Sometimes there can be, with a difficult person, a little bit of a tone in offering this phrase—a little bit of blame or judgment. Just noticing that if it happens. Exploring the possibility of a little more neutrality there, expressing it as wisdom. And as with other Brahma Vihara practices, if one particular being is too triggering, let go of that being. Connect again to a place where it's a little easier.

Letting go of this person or being, and letting yourself connect with yourself. Perhaps just in the experience of sitting here. Being with yourself. And connecting with this expression of wisdom in relationship to yourself: *I too am the owner of my karma. My choices and actions shape the unfolding of my journey. My happiness or unhappiness depends upon my choices and actions.* Feeling into how that lands, to make that wish.

And for the last minute together, connecting to the wider world: *All beings are the owners of their karma. Their happiness or unhappiness depends upon their choices and actions, not upon my wishes.*

May the goodness of our intention towards wisdom be a condition for the happiness, well-being, and freedom of all beings everywhere. May our wholesome actions, wholesome movements of heart and mind, ripple out and touch all in the world. May all beings know peace.

Thank you for your willingness to explore this equanimity practice for this entire month—or two months, having been here for a month or two—really exploring this possibility of a heart of peace. As was said last night, the fact that you're even in this room is an amazing thing. The heart of goodness. There's so much goodness in this room. So much. Let yourself soak it in. Soak in your own goodness and the goodness of this field.

May it serve the planet.

Thank you.

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