Turning The Mind Towards Equanimity

Sharda Rogell · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Three-Month Retreat (IMS 2007) · 54:58

We began the equanimity practice last week, and I wanted to explore a little bit more on equanimity—not so much from the Brahma Vihara or the heart quality, but more from equanimity that is associated with insight and understanding, and how understanding the nature of things can help the mind come to a balance of equanimity. This equanimity is the mind that is not reactive to things, the things of this world, inner and outer.

The particular area that I want to explore today is really understanding, again—we've talked about it a lot over the weeks—that ultimately no thing or experience is going to bring us any lasting fulfillment. It's something that we need to hear again and again. We hear it so many times that no thing or experience is going to do it for us. But that doesn't seem to help us let go because the habit is so strong.

So I want to use a couple of the suttas from the Majjhima Nikaya and explore how the Buddha actually focuses on this particular aspect of equanimity. The first one I want to look at is, for those who like references, Majjhima Nikaya 46, called The Greater Discourse on Ways of Undertaking Things. I really like some of these suttas because the Buddha taught over 2,500 years ago, and sometimes in reading them, it's as if he's speaking to the modern person—like it's the same thing that we're dealing with right here and now. It just shows how there's a certain tendency of mind that seems to have continued, and does continue, over the millennia of humanity.

This particular discourse starts off like this. The Buddha says, "Bhikkhus, for the most part, beings have this wish, desire, and longing: if only unwished-for, undesired, disagreeable things would diminish, and wished-for, desired, agreeable things would increase." Does that sound like maybe a thought that you've had perhaps a hundred times since you've been here?

And then he goes on to say, "Yet although beings have this wish, desire, and longing, unwished-for, undesired, disagreeable things increase for them, and wished-for, desired, agreeable things diminish." Now, what do you think is the reason for that? In some ways it's the million-dollar question. Why does this happen—that the things that we wish for actually seem to get further away and the things that we really don't want seem to come closer? And we find ourselves in this cycle.

So the monks reply to the Buddha. They say, "Our teachings are rooted in the Blessed One, guided by the Blessed One. It would be good if the Blessed One would explain the meaning of those words. Having heard it from the Blessed One, we will remember it." It's this taking it in and hearing it again and again. And then the Buddha said, "Then listen, bhikkhus, and attend closely to what I have to say."

The discourse goes on essentially saying that people don't know what things to cultivate and to follow and what things not to cultivate and not to follow. This is, in some ways, the gist of the teachings of the Buddha. You hear this in the teachings, in the texts, again and again—the Buddha pointing to what to follow and what not to follow. Because he's really only interested in increasing happiness, increasing that which is agreeable. That's what the whole direction of the teachings point to: How do we have a more agreeable experience in our life? In some ways, how do we experience more sukha, more pleasure?

It's an interesting thing because you might think we're supposed to give up pleasure, to stop feeling and experiencing pleasure—but that isn't it. It's just about how we actually increase the pleasure. When we talk about equanimity, there is a quality of this sweet kind of happiness in equanimity. When the mind is really balanced and still and resting, there's a quality of pleasure, a feeling tone. Equanimity is also really felt as very neutral, yet there's this sweet settledness in true equanimity.

So throughout the texts, what we read and what we study is: what things lead us to happiness, and what things lead to more suffering? And then we begin to follow and cultivate the things that lead to more happiness and stop doing and engaging in the things that bring us more pain and suffering. Sally was also talking about this the other night—about the cultivation of dana and sila and bhavana as pathways to more happiness, less suffering. We cultivate those qualities of mind.

So the teaching is on four ways of undertaking things. The first way, the Buddha says, is: "There is a way of undertaking things that is painful now and will ripen as pain in the future." He says this is like horrible or bad-tasting poison—dukkha now, dukkha later. And yet this is a path that people cultivate.

The second way is: "There is a way of undertaking things that is pleasant now and will ripen as pain in the future."

He likens this to sweet-tasting poison. Sukha now, pleasure now, dukkha later.

The third is there is a way of undertaking things that is painful now but will ripen as pleasure in the future. And he likens this to horrible or bad-tasting medicine—this healing medicine. Dukkha now, but sukha later. Painful now, but pleasure later.

And then the last way is there is a way of undertaking things that is pleasurable now and will ripen as pleasure in the future. And this is likened to sweet-tasting medicine. Sukha now, sukha later. I think this is really what we're looking for, right?

So he has these wonderful similes for each one. I'm going to use the similes and then talk a little about how this is relevant for us.

The first one, with dukkha now, dukkha later: "Bhikkhus, suppose there were a bitter gourd mixed with poison. And a man came who wanted to live, not to die, who wanted pleasure and recoiled from pain. And they told him, 'Good man, this bitter gourd is mixed with poison. Drink from it if you want. As you drink

from it, its color, smell, and taste will not agree with you. And after drinking from it, you will come to death and deadly suffering.' Then he drank from it without reflecting and did not relinquish it, didn't let it go. As he drank from it, its color, smell, and taste did not agree with him. And after drinking from it, he came to death or deadly suffering. Similar to that, I say, is the way of undertaking things that is painful now and ripens in the future as pain."

The way the Buddha makes the simile, it's just kind of ridiculous. The man is told that if he drinks he's going to die, but he drinks it anyhow without reflecting, without reflecting on the consequences of that particular action.

So how does this reflect for us? How can we understand this for ourselves so that we can gain some understanding from it? I'll just say a few things about it.

Clearly, this is the suffering that leads to more suffering. And it really happens through the compulsion of habit. It's just a habit—doing things again and again without deep reflection on the consequences of that action. What's going to happen if I do this thing? In this particular one, dukkha now, dukkha later, the person is already in a place of pain and then acts out of that pain and causes more suffering.

One place we can look at this is really around the five precepts, these beautiful guidelines for our practice. We can see how acting against these precepts is not only sometimes coming from a place of suffering, but certainly causing more suffering and harm and pain in the world. People are killed out of people's suffering, and that brings about more suffering, not only for the person who was harmed, but for the person who committed the crime.

Stealing, taking things—when people take things, thinking that somehow it's going to make them feel better, somehow there's some kind of gratification that's going to come from that. But actually it doesn't work. There's pain in the beginning and there's pain at the end for having done something that is harmful.

Speaking with anger—how often we're in pain and we actually want to hurt, the intention to hurt somebody that we feel hurt by. And then afterwards feeling more pain from the action that we did.

Sometimes we might think that we have purified ourselves in such a way that this doesn't affect us so much anymore. And yet I can remember a time, some years ago, earlier in my practice, when I decided to really focus on the precept of speech. As a practice, I decided I was going to really look at my motivation for speaking, look at the intention before I spoke. I actually took this on as a practice for a couple of years because I really wanted to understand what was the motivation for the things that I was saying. Where was it coming from?

I remember in the very beginning, as I started to explore my intention and motivation, I was horrified to find out how often I actually wanted to say things because I wanted to hurt somebody, because I had felt hurt by them through some kind of anger or some kind of devious, confused conversation—so unclear in myself around my motivation when I started to look at this.

Until we really investigate more deeply what is the motivation, what is the intention behind our actions, we may not really understand where we're acting from and what our motivation is. Again, without reflecting, the man who drank the poison—without reflecting he didn't let go, he just drank the poison, and he died.

Sometimes I hear from yogis how angry they are at the other yogis here. Now, this isn't going to come as a surprise to you, I'm sure, because that's what happens. We're living in a small community and people cut in line or they may rub up against us in ways that aren't very conscious or take food when other people haven't had food. And we see this and we get really angry about it.

It's like, well, why aren't people more conscious, more sensitive? And so we're acting out of our own suffering through the anger, and then we sit and meditate, and what happens? We just feel the pain of that. Nothing's changed. Nothing's come about through our own agitation and anger. We just sit with it, and we feel it more so. It doesn't work. It doesn't help. It's not the way. It's not the thing to cultivate.

Or when we become envious of what others have, we feel all this envy, all this coveting. What good is it? Where does it go? It's just pain that brings about more pain. Somehow we think all this is going to make us feel better somehow, in some kind of confused way, but there's no possibility of any equanimity, any balance of mind, unless we begin to look at this more carefully—look at our motivations, our intentions, where we're coming from, and what the impact is on the other and also on ourselves.

So the first one: dukkha now, dukkha later. The second one: sukha now, dukkha later. The Buddha says:

"Suppose there were a bronze cup of beverage possessing a good color, smell, and taste, but it was mixed with poison. And a man came who wanted to live, not to die, who wanted pleasure and recoiled from pain, and they told him, 'Good man, this bronze cup of beverage possesses a good smell, good color, good taste, but it's mixed with poison. Drink from it if you want. As you drink from it, its color and smell and taste will agree with you, but after drinking from it, you will come to death or deadly suffering.' As he drank from it, its color, smell, and taste agreed with him, but after drinking from it, he came to death and deadly suffering. Similar to that, I say, is the way of undertaking things that is pleasant now and ripens in the future as pain."

This one is pretty obvious, I think. Again, how we act out of our own compulsive habits and engage in behavior that eventually leads to more pain for ourselves and maybe for others too. The obvious example is indulging in sense pleasures without much reflection on the consequences of our indulgence. One that we can see pretty clearly for ourselves is if we indulge in too much food—not only the consequences of the pain in the belly from overeating, which is so uncomfortable, but if we're sensitive and we've been meditating for a while, we can also see how eating too much food can dull the mind so we're not able to concentrate or see so clearly. So it has consequences in that way.

When I was reflecting on this, I remembered that we just had Thanksgiving a few weeks ago, and I was

remembering when I was here in the early days on a three-month course and they had the Thanksgiving dinner. They put everything out. I think they did that this year too—they put out the pies and the ice cream and everything at the same meal. They stopped doing that for a while, but I see they did it again. And I remember I just couldn't control myself. I ate so much at that Thanksgiving meal. Everything was just so delicious, and the desserts—I couldn't not eat dessert on Thanksgiving.

And I was in so much pain. I think I was in pain for a couple hours before my belly started to find some relief. It was just total indulgence in the pleasure. Sukha now, but dukkha later. Really, really painful. It comes from the delusion about where true happiness really lies. Somehow my happiness was really in that Thanksgiving meal, and I wasn't in any kind of balance of mind, not any kind of equanimity. I was in complete grasping and indulging and attachment, and then the consequences of that.

We can reflect on this too when we think about the pleasure that sometimes somebody could get from breaking one of the precepts—the pleasure from breaking a precept of sexual conduct, causing harm to ourselves or another person by engaging in a relationship that we shouldn't be engaging with for one reason or another. And yet there's a pleasure, the same way—the grasping onto the pleasurable aspect but not really reflecting deeply on what's going to happen in the future. It just hardly ever works out. We hear these stories over and over, how much pain is involved in these kinds of relationships where people get involved with people they shouldn't be getting involved with.

Or the pleasure that we can get from intoxicants or substances—the immediate pleasure, and yet the pain that can come, the immediate pain from the effect on the consciousness, on the mind state, but also the consequences in our life when we do these sorts of things.

Again, I was reflecting on this, remembering back to my early college days, eighteen, nineteen years old, when it was just the thing to drink a lot of beer or alcohol and just get drunk. There wasn't any thought about it. It's just what people did. And it was horrible, just horrible. I didn't have the Dharma back in those days. I didn't have any way to really

think or reflect on what I was doing. Just sukha now, but so much dukkha. We see this with people's addictions and compulsions, the fantasies that we get involved in—yes, pleasurable, but what is this bringing about? Is this bringing any real long-term well-being?

What's really wonderful about the teaching here is that there's really no kind of right and wrong, no bad or good. It's just common sense. The Buddha is simply saying, take a look. If you want—and in the similes it says—drink it if you want. It's not like, "don't drink it," or that it's something really, really bad. It's just, "yeah, drink from it if you want. The color or the smell will agree with you. You'll die, but..." When I read these texts closely, there are such subtleties in the teachings. There's nothing wrong. It's just: do you want happiness in your life or not? And if you do, this is what you have to pay attention to. So pragmatic.

So the third one: dukkha now, sukha later. Suppose, the Buddha says, suppose there were fermented urine

mixed with various medicines—and they actually used this for medicine—and a man came sick with jaundice. And they told him, "Good man, this fermented urine is mixed with various medicines. Drink from it if you want. As you drink from it, its color, smell, and taste will not agree with you. But after drinking from it, you will be well." Then he drank from it after reflecting—a little wisdom came in here—he drank from it after reflecting and did not relinquish it. As he drank from it, its color, taste, and smell did not agree with him. But after drinking from it, he became well. Similar to that, I say, is the way of undertaking things that is painful now and ripens in the future as pleasure.

So here's the turning. It's the suffering that leads to the end of suffering. Suffering that leads to the end of suffering. And I think this is really obvious to us here because we can see it in our meditation practice. We can see it right here—that our practice is hard a lot of the time. But you keep going. We keep going. We keep going. It's painful. It's dukkha. But we know that there's going to be favorable consequences. This is going to lead to happiness and well-being.

Sometimes when I'm doing interviews with people and I'm hearing about how hard it is—and some people not really wanting to continue, or starting to get distracted, losing their focus—I feel like a cheerleader sometimes. It's just like, keep going, keep going, keep going, because I can see and I know what's really happening as one makes a commitment in this way. All the seeds that are being planted in this good practice, even though it's painful.

So this is so important to see in the context of these teachings of what to cultivate and what not to cultivate, because this is really how we break our habits of mind, how we bring about transformation—going into the difficulty, going into the dukkha, allowing the dukkha, because we're turning this around. We're turning the suffering around in our lives.

I remember when I was sitting a retreat on the Big Island in Hawaii with Sayadaw U Pandita, who was leading a retreat there. A group of us were there—Carol was there, Joseph was there—and he was really encouraging us to just sleep for four hours. I had never really practiced that way. I mean, I need my sleep. But four hours—do you know how little sleep that is? And yet I really, really wanted to do this. And it was so hard to get up, to first go to sleep, to stay up long enough and then sleep for four hours and then wake up. I mean, I would keep—sometimes four and a half, maybe sometimes five. I really tried to work with it. But it was really one of the most painful things that I did. I made a commitment that I was going to stay in the upright position for twenty hours, or nineteen. I tried. I tried. Nineteen and a half.

And I was rooming with two other women, and they were like warriors. The alarm would go off, and they'd get up. I was just dragging myself out of bed, thinking, "Oh, well, they're doing it. I have to do it." It was really, really hard—one of the hardest things I did.

But actually, I learned so much about the mind state of sleepiness, tiredness, and dullness. To the point where I actually don't have that much resistance to it now. It's like, okay, that's just another mind state. I had so much resistance to it in the beginning, and it really shifted things around for me in that respect.

And of course, it contributed to the deepening of concentration as well, which was the whole point. But it was a powerful teaching to go through that pain in that way.

And we do that. Many people here are doing this, sitting with mental pain and physical pain, just saying, "I'm going to sit with it. I'm going to be present. I'm going to stay here no matter what because something's happening. I'm cutting through." Carol was talking about this too with vigilance of mind, working with the difficulties of mind, not turning away. We've talked a lot about this, and yet also knowing how to balance our energy so that we're not pushing too hard, not pressing down too hard, but finding a balance of mind to keep our practice going.

This dukkha now, sukha later really is about renunciation and restraint—the practices of renunciation and restraint, which really means keeping to the five precepts. We keep to the five precepts because these hold us, these are guidelines for us. Or many of you are using the eight precepts as a way to work with overindulgence or habitual tendencies to greed or craving or aversion. Or the monks and nuns who are here with us, practicing the Vinaya, the rules of the Vinaya, and all the renunciation, all the restraint that goes into that kind of life—the inspiration they are for us in this regard.

So we look at ways we're breaking habits. There was one person who came on this retreat and went cold turkey on her cigarette addiction. Had smoked lots of cigarettes and then just said, "Stopping." The pain, the dukkha of that, really, and to sit in meditation and go through that. And yet knowing that the consequences, the benefits that are going to come from that are going to bring so much sukha, so much that is agreeable. This is what brings the balance of mind, this equanimity of mind, as we start to work with the habits that throw us off into our painful states of mind.

And then the last one: sukha now, sukha later. This is the sweet one, isn't it? The Buddha says, "Suppose there were curd, honey, ghee, and molasses mixed together. And a man with dysentery came, and they told him, 'Good man, this is curd, honey, ghee, and molasses mixed together. Drink from it if you want.'" Isn't that beautiful again? Just "drink from it if you want." You don't have to. You don't have to make yourself well. Drink from it if you want. "As you drink from it, its color, smell, and taste will agree with you. And after drinking from it, you will be well." Then he drank from it after reflecting and did not relinquish it. As he drank from it, its color, smell, and taste agreed with him, and after drinking from it, he became well. "Similar to that, I say, is the way of undertaking things that is pleasant now and ripens in the future as pleasure."

And so primarily, that which is sukha now and sukha later is following the Buddha way, following the Buddha's teachings. There's pleasure. We gain the pleasure from our practice, even though at times there's dukkha. The intention, the motivation to take responsibility for our own happiness, for our own liberation—that's sukha. Sukha there. And the path points to engaging in wholesome actions that bring about sukha. So we're actually practicing—Sally was talking about it—we're practicing generosity from a place of happiness. I want to be generous.

I feel happy to be generous. And then the consequences of that generosity bring more happiness—the cycle, the circle of happiness. Or if I'm practicing kindness, metta, compassion, out of a place of happiness, then more happiness comes back. Or if I'm practicing truthfulness, wanting to speak truthfully, being careful of my motivations and intentions, what comes back is more happiness.

The Buddha says when we feel happy, then we abstain from things that are going to bring about more pain and suffering. Happiness brings about that will, that intention, that motivation to abstain, to not do things, because we're reflecting. We're being thoughtful. We're taking our time. We're not just acting in our old habitual way.

It becomes a kind of effortless quality of being where we're moving from our happy heart, our generous heart, our compassionate heart. It's an effortless cycle that begins to take form. And this brings equanimity of mind, this balance of mind.

The Buddha felt that this was such an important teaching—these four ways of undertaking things—that he said it can dispel darkness. This is a quote from the Buddha about this. He says, "Just as in autumn, in the last month of the rainy season, when the sky is clear and cloudless, the sun rises above the earth, dispelling all darkness from space with its shining and beaming and radiance, so too the way of undertaking things that is pleasant now and ripens in the future as pleasure dispels with its shining and beaming and radiance any other way, any other doctrine."

Really understanding what's happy now and happy later—we're being asked to reflect on the choices that we're making. It's all about our choices, moment to moment. And even though we're here on retreat, where many choices that we usually have in our daily life have been removed, still every moment is a moment of choice. Every moment. Am I going to go this way? Am I going to go that way? Am I going to do this? Am I going to do that? Am I going to have the cup of tea? Am I going to continue my walking? Am I going to go for my nap? Or am I going to sit upright? Am I going to speak out of this anger I have towards my partner at the yogi job? Or am I just going to feel it and stay with it and see if I can bring some balance of mind?

This is daily life practice. This is what we're being asked to do—bringing this mindful attention, this sati-pañña, wise mindfulness, wise attention to what we're doing moment to moment to moment. This is what begins to bring about deep transformation.

Oftentimes it's not very clear what our motivation is, or how we're moving, or what choices we're making, because our habits are so conditioned. And they take control a lot of the time. So it's only when we're present, only when we're mindful, and we can pay attention to what we're actually doing, that we can begin to make different choices.

A lot of new age or mainstream spirituality talks about making different choices, but it's right here. Every moment that we're present, we have a choice to continue to operate on automatic with our habits that

could lead us to more pain, or to turn it around, to do something differently.

I've worked a lot with asking myself this question in my own practice: If I continue doing this, is this going to lead to more pain or is it going to lead to more happiness? This is a question I really work with a lot. If I sit at the computer for another fifteen minutes to try to get this done, is this going to lead my mind to be more balanced, or is this going to lead to more agitation and suffering? It's right there—this choice, which way am I going to turn?

Unfortunately, from a very early age, we're told to take sweet-tasting poison regularly and told that it's going to be sweet-tasting medicine. "This is going to be good for you. Do this, do that, have this, take care of this. This is going to make you happier." The sukha now, but really dukkha later, for a lot of the time.

I brought this little article that I got from USA Today a little while ago because it's so extreme in terms of the messages that we're getting, or the drink that we're getting, you might say. It goes like this. The title is "The FAA Seeks to Keep Billboards from Space." And it goes like this: "The Federal Aviation Administration filed proposed regulations to ensure that it can enforce an existing law that prohibits obtrusive advertising in zero gravity."

The FAA notes that objects placed in orbit, if large enough, could be seen by people around the world for extended periods of time. For instance, outsized billboards deployed by a space company into low Earth orbit could appear as large as the moon and be visible without a telescope. Big and bright advertisements might also hinder astronomers, the FAA warned. However, the FAA currently lacks the authority to enforce the existing law.

So this is how far out things are getting. Drink this. Billboards in space, advertising the next Botox or whatever wants to be sold. It's extreme—I just had to bring the most extreme example. But all of this, you have to admit, is pretty extreme. And all of it just continues to perpetuate staying on this wheel of samsara, this wheel of getting and having and becoming, without deeper reflection.

Stephen Batchelor says that samsara is like being on a wheel in a hamster's cage. There is a sense of never having moved on. We keep finding ourselves back at square one—a life of frustration. Do you have a sense of that? Where are we going? Is anything really changing? Everything is changing, but is anything really changing?

Our mind is perpetually searching for something, buying into the message that these things, these experiences, are going to bring us some kind of completion, some kind of happiness, some kind of fulfillment. We're on this treadmill going round and round, searching for some kind of refuge from our agitation, from our restlessness, without knowing that this very running on the wheel is what's causing the restlessness—this searching, seeking, wanting.

And we can see how our mind can slip off into some kind of imagined refuge: our fantasies, our plans, what we once had, regrets about what we've lost. Something that's going to make us feel more secure,

comfortable, or at ease. And the mind goes round and round and round.

You might see it here on retreat. You have your fantasies, but also fantasies about food and the gratification it's going to give us. Or our clothing—the kind of clothing we wear, the kind of zafu we're sitting on, all our paraphernalia around our zafus, the benches and chairs, our cups and dishes. It just goes on and on—all these things that are going to do it for us.

So finding this balance of mind, this equanimity, this stillness where we let go—the Buddha says that we need to develop our mind. We need to develop our mind to learn how to control it so that we don't get so pulled into the agreeable attributes of things or the disagreeable attributes of things. When we start to understand how the mind gets pulled in, this is how it can begin to find some balance, come to a place of equilibrium. Otherwise, the mind gets glued or stuck to objects that are essentially empty of any kind of substance.

This perception of something being solid or real—we stick to it. And because there really isn't much there, that thing is completely unreliable to give us any kind of lasting fulfillment, because it falls apart. Things arise and pass, arise and pass. There's not really much there. And when we get stuck on things as if they're so solid, it's really hard to let go, and our mind becomes obsessed with holding on. That's the attachment. We become obsessed with these things.

One of the commentaries says that the mind is stuck, fastened to the object like flies to a ball of sugar. If you've been in Asia, if you've been in India, that is such a great metaphor because that's what you see. In the lanes and different stalls are these flies stuck to balls of sugar, on different cookies and candies, all kinds of sweets with flies all over them. It's right from the time of the Buddha. And in places in India which are timeless, which haven't changed, it's still the same. It's just such a great metaphor for what happens to the mind.

Reflecting on this, I remembered one time on an early three-month course. People sometimes would put little chocolates and things on pillows or in cups. I don't know if people still do that—we don't hear so much about it on this side. But one time somebody put one of those small Reese's peanut butter cups, wrapped in aluminum foil. And they're wrapped so well. If you've ever had a Reese's peanut butter cup, the foil goes right into the ridges, and when you take the foil off, it's just this yummy chocolate.

I got so excited because I hadn't had anything like this in weeks. So I took it up to my room and put it in a spot, and I knew there was a certain time I was going to eat this, but I was going to wait because I really wanted to be in the right mind state. I really wanted to be able to enjoy it. It just sat there on the little windowsill, and I would look at it and covet it for a few days.

Then the right moment came, and very mindfully I took off the foil—that wonderful foil around the chocolate—and put a bite into my mouth and chewed it, tasted it. It was fantastic. Took another bite, chewed it, tasted it.

It was fantastic. And in thirty seconds, it was over. Thirty seconds. I had spent two days building up this experience. It was going to be the highlight. And it went by so fast. Wait a minute, I'm just starting. I'm just getting into it, and it's over already.

I had one of the biggest insights into anicca at that moment. It was just so apparent that this thing I had given so much meaning to, that had held so much of my happiness—it was just gone, and I was left empty-handed. It was a wonderful experience for me, showing me that I cannot hold on.

But it's not that everything is going to be unsatisfactory. It's not that there's no satisfaction. The Buddha said—or it might be from a Tibetan lama, I'm not certain—"The beautiful things of this world remain so, but the noble one no longer strives after them." Things are still beautiful, things are still gratifying, but we don't have to hold on.

So the Buddha gives teachings on how to develop our mind, to investigate the nature of things, and to train the mind so that we're not grasping onto the agreeable and disagreeable attributes. This is really what brings about an establishment in equanimity—this equanimity associated with insight knowledge, where because we understand, we're not attached or aversive or angry in the same way.

As I finish this talk tonight, I want to read some beautiful similes from another sutta, Majjhima Nikaya 152, where the Buddha speaks about this development:

"When one sees a form, a sound, an odor, flavor, a felt sense, or a mind object with the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, or mind, there arises in one what is agreeable, what is disagreeable, and what is indifferent. One understands that this has arisen, that this is conditioned and dependently arisen. What is peaceful and sublime is equanimity. The agreeable, the disagreeable, and the indifferent that arose cease, and equanimity is established."

This is called the supreme development of the faculties, or the five senses. And these similes the Buddha uses are so beautiful. Each one goes through each of the five senses and mind objects. You can hear in the Buddha's words the very feeling of the sense base itself that he's referring to.

The first is eyes and the forms that arise with seeing: "When one sees a form with the eyes, just as a man with good sight having opened his eyes might shut them, or having shut his eyes might open them, so too concerning anything at all, the agreeable, disagreeable, and indifferent that arose cease just as quickly, just as rapidly, just as easily, and equanimity is established."

"When one hears a sound with the ear, just as a strong man might easily snap his fingers, so too concerning anything at all, the agreeable, the disagreeable, the indifferent that arose cease just as quickly, rapidly, easily, and equanimity is established."

"When one smells an odor with the nose, just as raindrops on a slightly sloping lotus leaf roll off and do not remain there, so too concerning anything at all, the agreeable, the disagreeable, and the indifferent

that arose cease just as quickly, rapidly, easily, and equanimity is established."

"When one tastes a flavor with the tongue, just as a strong man might easily spit a ball of spittle collected on the tip of his tongue, so too concerning anything at all, the agreeable, disagreeable, and indifferent that arose cease just as quickly, rapidly, easily, and equanimity is established."

"When one touches a tangible with the body, just as a strong man might extend his flexed arm or flex his extended arm, so too concerning anything at all, the agreeable, disagreeable, and indifferent that arose cease just as quickly, rapidly, easily, and equanimity is established."

And this one is my favorite: "When one recognizes a mind object with the mind, just as if a man were to let two or three drops of water fall onto an iron plate heated for a whole day—the falling of the drops might be slow, but they would quickly vaporize and vanish—so too concerning anything at all, the agreeable, disagreeable, and indifferent that arose cease just as quickly, rapidly, easily, and equanimity is established."

We can begin to see this in our practice, in our meditation, and understand that a doorway to equanimity is this direct investigation into the impermanent nature of things. When we see clearly the arising and falling, when we notice our reactions to that which is pleasurable and that which is painful, and we don't follow them, we don't cultivate those reactive states of mind—the seeing of it too just appears and disappears easily, quickly, when we pay attention in this way.

So this is the medicine being prescribed for us. Of course, it isn't always sweet-tasting medicine. We know that. And yet it is medicine. This is the medicine given to us that will lead us down the path to more happiness, to more liberation, to freedom. It's not that we have to—but take it if you would like to. It's up to you.

Let's sit for a minute.

Thank you.

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