Equanimity: Being at Rest in the Storms

Susie Harrington · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Three-Month Retreat (IMS 2012) · 1:00:14

Tonight's talk is on equanimity.

You've heard equanimity mentioned in many talks because it comes at the end of many lists. You've heard a number of talks on the paramis, and equanimity is the tenth of the paramis. Greg talked last week about the seven factors of enlightenment, and equanimity is the seventh of those. The four Brahmaviharas—equanimity is the fourth. Equanimity is considered the highest mundane state that we can rest in. That is, it's not Nibbana, it's not the unconditioned, but in the conditioned realm it is the highest mental state and experience and openness of the heart.

As you can tell from these different lists, equanimity has a lot of facets to it, and it has a lot of levels for us to experience. So in many ways our practice is an exploration and an ever deepening, ever subtler understanding of the depths of equanimity. We have new experiences of it, and then we have another one, a little different one. It's like we're working our way around this wonderful many-faceted crystal and finding our way into the depths in the middle of it. I'm going to talk about some of these different facets this evening, though this isn't a definitive, everything-is-covered talk, because equanimity is quite large. It's a very big and important part of our practice.

I want to share with you a story from a trip I took a number of years ago. I went to India on Buddhist pilgrimage, and this is something I highly recommend if you ever get the chance. Many of you may already have done something like this and will recognize what I'm describing. It's quite inspiring to go to where the Buddha was born, where he was enlightened, where he first shaved his head and became an ascetic. Those places you may have heard mentioned—Anathapindika's Park, Jeta's Grove—you can actually visit these places where he gave the very first sutta on the Four Noble Truths. These are real places, and to go there is quite inspiring.

I undertook this journey with a friend. One aspect of it is that these places are all in the poorest part of India, in the poorest state. It can be a fairly difficult place to travel, hard to stay healthy, and I knew that before we went. I had heard a lot of stories, knew lots of things happened. Yet I had an amazing experience on my trip. I had the most consistent, unremitting ease and well-being. Here I was in what I was told were these really difficult conditions, and I could look around and say, yes, these are difficult. And yet there were no problems. There was nothing that overwhelmed me.

This became really apparent—and the reason I mention this is to say this is not true in my daily life. There was a contrast that was quite noticeable. Especially when I came back, I really spent time trying to look at and understand what was different. What was going on during this time?

At one point we had crossed over the border into Nepal, because the birthplace of the Buddha is actually in current-day Nepal. At that time they had enacted a new set of rules at the border: once you left the country, you weren't allowed back in for three months. What we didn't know—and the border people didn't tell us—was that there was a specific exception for people on Buddhist pilgrimage. When the people in Delhi had made this rule, they knew that pilgrims go back and forth there. But it was much more convenient for the border guards not to share that piece of information, because there was a whole side market going on—all this money you had to pay to be allowed back in, all these shenanigans. It turned out they were basically charging you for what you had full permission to do, but we didn't know that.

So we were coming back in, and one of the little things they told us we had to do was be there at the border at like four-thirty in the morning. We arrived and the border was closed. We were in a car—a local person was driving—and we pulled up with our guide, who seemed to have the situation slightly more figured out than us, though I wouldn't say he had it wired at all. He said, "Okay, follow me." We left our car and walked toward where the border was, and there was nobody there. He wandered around trying to find somebody, then left us. We were standing in this very misty, dark night, with a couple of very raw-looking street lamps. All these cars and lorries were parked along the way, empty. It was all dark. There was nobody around. We were standing next to this building. We weren't even sure if we were in Nepal or in India at this point.

There's nobody around. Our guide disappears. We don't know where the car is anymore. And I remember standing there with my friend, and we were sort of looking at each other, thinking, should we be worried? And we said, I don't think we should bother. We're not going to do anything different anyway.

So we stood there, and twenty minutes went by, and forty minutes went by. Just standing there in the dark, looking at the streetlight, looking at the lorries. We just stood there and waited to see what was going to happen. And I noticed as this was going on: this is different. This is not the way I usually behave. Usually I go and try to solve the problem and figure out what to do, but there was nothing to do. So we just stood there.

Eventually we did get through the border and it was fine. But what was different? A big difference was that we didn't have a lot of expectations of things being a certain way. We really, honestly didn't know how they were going to be. And our task, our total job, was to be present, to be mindful of what was happening, and see if there was some way we needed to respond. And if not, wait and see. There was such ease in that.

And then I come back and I'm impatient if it takes two more seconds than I want for the light to change. Where does all that expectation and idea come from?

The Buddha describes the mind filled with equanimity—and remember I said there were gradations of equanimity, so I'm not claiming that experience at the border was this—but on a higher level, he says the mind filled with equanimity is abundant, exalted, immeasurable, without hostility, and without ill will.

That sounds pretty wonderful, doesn't it? Abundant, exalted, immeasurable. That is the movement we're moving towards, this open and expansive mind.

The word *upekkhā* has a few definitions, but if you translate it straight, one translation is "to look over." It expresses this ability to see what's there without being caught. Another translation, of actually a different word that we also translate as equanimity with a similar meaning, is "to stand in the middle of all of this." To stand in the middle of all of this.

The colloquial use of the word *upekkhā* at the time of the Buddha was to see with patience, or you might say with understanding. It's often talked about as grandmotherly or grandfatherly love. Because if you're a grandparent—and I see it in people I know who are grandparents—they have a very different relationship to their grandchildren than the parents do. They've been through it. They know the ropes. And there's a kind of ease that is possible that for the parents isn't.

Other words used to describe equanimity: evenness, spaciousness, openness, unshakability, and steadiness. And then another aspect: relaxed, centered, present, clear. A sense of well-being, of confidence, of vitality and integrity. Some refer to it as the ballast that keeps a ship upright in strong winds. I like that.

There are some elements here that I want to pull out. One is that there's clarity to see things as they are—the mindfulness that we are so carefully attending to here. And there's connection, connection to what's happening. You know that *vicāra* and *vitakka*, being right there with it. And there's confidence and faith that it's unfolding as it should, in a natural way, that there is an understanding that things are playing out in a way that actually makes sense. We may not be able to figure it all out directly, but it is playing itself out.

And with this also comes a sense of peace and ease. That's often the tone. That's almost what we, in your sitting, might connect with first—noticing what's happening with that peace and ease. And then if you look back, you might be able to see that these other factors are in place: that there's clarity and connection and confidence.

You can notice this in your practice, and this is true in life as well: equanimity gives us great energy. It gives us the ability to do things. There's a confidence in our movement. There's a wonderful story about Gandhi at one point leading one of his big marches and actions, and he felt, he could feel his own wanting—

it to happen, wanting it to go right, and that it wasn't going to be okay. Not that it wasn't going to be okay, but that he wanted it very much to be okay, and there was a fear of it not being okay, of it not going well. And he said, "I can't do it." He went back to his home and sat there for days until he had the ease and the equanimity—equipoise is another word—to be able to step into it fully committed, without the clinging. As soon as we're clinging, we've moved out of equanimity.

I want to say a little bit about what is not equanimity. The near enemy is often spoken of as indifference.

And there are many different aspects to that: detachment, aloofness, holding at arm's length, at a distance. You can feel how these qualities do not have those other ones. There's not connection. There's not clarity. There's a distancing, a not actually wanting to contact what's happening. There can be a superiority, a standing above, looking down on. Remember the definition: to stand in the middle of all this. If you're standing above, you're not there. You're not in the middle of it.

I think as children many of us learn, or even as young adults, we learn a kind of false evenness. The classic answer of "I'm fine." "Yeah, I'm fine." "Fine." What's fine? Fine means that whatever's going on here, I'm not going to acknowledge it and I'm not going to tell you about it. We're not going there. It's an avoidance of our discomfort.

And we can use our spiritual practice to go there even more. There's a way we can use our spiritual practice to try to skip over what's actually happening and get to that smooth, easy stuff. I am sure—if you haven't done it yet, maybe on another retreat—but probably almost everybody here at some point on this retreat has tried to get to a place of ease and peace by skipping over whatever was happening. We so want to do that. Did it work? Probably not.

There's also a kind of numbness and dissociation that can look like something calm and easeful. Many years ago, I was a search and rescue ranger in Yosemite. There were many wonderful things about that work. It was wonderful when you found the lost kid, helped somebody get out of a bad situation, rescued somebody. But there was also, unfortunately, some stuff that wasn't very good—picking people up when things didn't go well. I had done this for a couple of years, and I remember somebody asking me, "How is this going?" And I said, "It seems fine. I'm okay. I'm doing this." Not long after that, I had a dream. In the dream, I was standing on one side, and there was a river of blood I was trying to get across. I think maybe something was suppressed.

When we're on retreat, all these places that we push away, that we don't want to face, that have happened in our lives—when we get calm, these things come up. Everything that stands between us and really connecting, really being present with ourselves, really being with what's happening, comes up. That's the practice. That's what we're looking for.

So we're in this space of peace and ease, and everything's fine, and we're there for a sit or two or a number of days, and then there's a big volcano. Sometimes the volcano is triggered by some incident outside us. Sometimes it just seems internal. We don't know, but there's this big upheaval. And that's actually a delicious and wonderful part of our practice, because what's happened is our equanimity is settling. We're going deeper and deeper, and we've bumped into the next layer of what interrupts our practice.

And this isn't always the pattern, but you might notice sometimes that this happens—that you settle and settle, and then what is disruptive, what isn't allowing you to settle deeper, comes in and we're with it. And we have to connect with that.

Ajahn Chah has a wonderful quote that you might be familiar with: "Try to be mindful and let things take their natural course. Then your mind will become quieter and quieter in any surroundings. It will become still like a clear forest pool. Then all kinds of wonderful and rare animals will come to drink at the pool. You will see clearly the nature of all things in the world. You will see many wonderful and strange things come and go. But you will be still. Problems will arise and you will see through them immediately. This is the happiness of the Buddha."

So even if you don't see through them immediately, we usually see through them eventually. This stillness, and these different animals that come into it—part of our task on retreat is to welcome them, to meet each one.

Equanimity is not a static place. It's not someplace we get to and get to stay there. It's more of a balance, a responsiveness to what's happening. The image often used is that of the surfer. Every wave is different. Every moment on the wave is different. And the trick is to learn to surf with what is happening right then in that moment. And for those of you who aren't surfers, it's not any different from riding a bicycle. It's just that we've gotten so used to riding a bicycle that we forget what an incredible balancing act it is.

Another phrase for equanimity is this: a perfect, unshakable balance of mind rooted in insight. I'm going to come back to that part, the "rooted in insight." But that balance of mind.

Here's a poem from Li Po that I like:

The birds have vanished into the sky, and now the last cloud drains away. We sit together, the mountain and me, until only the mountain remains.

There's a simplicity in this balance. Nothing has to be changed. Nothing has to be modified in the world or in us. There's a wonderful phrase: "and this too, and this too." Ajahn Sumedho has this wonderful gesture, a movement with his hand, "and this too."

Often a word that can be helpful, if we don't grab onto it too tightly, is spaciousness. There's a way that in the place of equanimity, there's room for everything to arise. We don't have to interrupt it. We can let it take its natural course. The space is really big, and it all happens within that. This non-reactive place of composure and evenness, especially in the face of stress.

So that's where it gets a little more complicated, right? Things happen that tend to rock us. As I think Sally mentioned when she introduced me, I lead retreats in the natural environment quite a bit. And one of the things I really love about doing that is that there's a lot you can't control. One of the big ones you can't control is the weather. And of course, as somebody involved in planning them with other people, you try to choose the perfect time of year and the perfect place so that the weather is going to be good. Well, you know how that goes.

This spring, I led a group of dharma practitioners to Peru, and we went trekking in the Andes. And it

rained and it rained. During part of it, we were doing a silent number of days, and I remember one day it rained a lot of the day and everybody got quite cold and wet.

And that evening we were in camp, clustered around in a little tent all gathered up. And it was remarkable to me, as I found over and over again, when you bring your mindfulness to it, there wasn't a problem. Everybody there was like, "Oh, yeah, I was really wet. Let's see, I really felt the feeling of wetness on my skin. And then there was the way the cloud moved around the rock. And then there was the thought in my mind, 'I wonder if I'm too cold.' And then there was the bird that flitted by."

It's really interesting to me, and I gained so much faith in the practice, in our capacity to do this. When I go with practitioners, people who are brand new even, and go into that circumstance, when you pay attention, it's actually not a problem. Our mindfulness can take us right through it.

The weather is such a good practice for this because there's no idea that somebody can take care of it. If your room's cold, you might have the idea that something's gone wrong and that somebody should fix it. But if you're out there and it's cold, there's no facilities manager to talk to. And I think this is really helpful for our practice. This is the way it is.

Equanimity is helpful in meeting the vicissitudes of life. The vicissitudes are the eight worldly winds. You may have heard of them. Certainly you've experienced them: praise and blame, gain and loss, fame and disrepute, pleasure and pain.

And I want to say, this comes to us internally too, right? The praise may be external and the blame internal, or they might both be out there. We don't know.

In case you wondered if this is just the way our culture is now, but didn't used to be that way, here's from the Buddha: "They find fault in one sitting silently. They find fault in one speaking much. They find fault in one speaking moderately. No one in this world is not found at fault. There has been, there is, and there will be no person who is only criticized or only praised."

Boy, we're all in for it. And I think we know that. It happens again and again. We have this incredible way that praise bounces off us like Teflon, and blame sticks to us like Velcro. But equanimity allows us to just see: this is happening, this is going by. These are the conditions unfolding.

The Buddha made a recommendation to his son, Rahula. He was giving him a discourse, and I love this. He says, "Rahula, develop meditation that is like the earth. For then agreeable and disagreeable sensory impressions will not take charge of your mind. Just as when people throw what is clean and unclean on the earth—excrement, urine, saliva, pus, or blood"—the Buddha never holds back on those words, I've noticed—"the earth is not horrified, humiliated, or disgusted by it. In the same way, agreeable and disagreeable sensory impressions will not take charge of your mind when you develop meditation like the earth."

And he goes on to say, develop meditation like the air, like the water, like space, like fire. And then these things will pass through you. They won't stick.

There's a wonderful story that relates to gain and loss that I really like. I believe it's a Nazarene story, though I couldn't find it—I've only heard it orally. There's a man who lives out on the edge of a village, and he loses his horse. It runs away, breaks out of the corral and runs off. People say, "Oh, too bad. I'm so sorry about your horse." And he goes, "Maybe yes, maybe no."

A few days later, the horse comes back, and it's got another horse with it. It was a wild horse, and he brings it in—a big, beautiful horse. People say, "Oh, so lucky!"

Now you have two horses. Maybe yes, maybe no.

Then his son is trying to break the horse. The horse throws him, breaks his leg. People say, "Oh, that's horrible! Oh my God, how can—oh, now what are you going to do?" Maybe yes, maybe no.

And then the king's conscriptors come to the town and they take all the young able-bodied men. The son with the broken leg stays. People say, "Oh wow, you really lucked out." Maybe yes, maybe no.

And you can imagine the story can continue.

Haven't you seen this in your life? Something happens which seems like it's just not going to be okay. And then—it might be shortly thereafter or much thereafter—you realize, huh, Shakespeare had it right. Much ado about nothing.

Basho says, "Since my house burned down, I have a better view of the rising moon."

There's fame and disrepute. Of course, we can think of many examples of that. All you have to do is look at the political world to see that one.

Pleasure and pain. The body is going along perfectly and then it's not going along perfectly. I love what Thich Nhat Hanh says: you're going along and then you get a toothache and then you're really upset. And then the toothache goes away. And he says, so what I do is remember that I don't have a toothache, and then I'm happy. How many things do you *not* have going on that have happened in your past? The older you are, the more of them you have. I can vouch for that.

And through it all, we just keep winding our way. These ups and downs. There's a wonderful poem by William Stafford, "The Way It Is":

There's a thread you follow. It goes among things that change, but it doesn't change. People wonder about what you are pursuing. You have to explain about the thread, but it is hard for others to see. While you hold it, you can't get lost. Tragedies happen, people get hurt or die, and you suffer and get old. Nothing you do can stop time's unfolding. You don't ever let go of the thread.

I see the Dharma as our thread. The ability to see and connect with what's happening, to be in it without being caught, without being swept off our feet. The talk about patience a few nights ago is key in this. Can you feel that? Patience and equanimity are so closely connected.

Also in equanimity is the openness, the warmth of the brahma viharas—that we are right there, that that element of welcoming and accepting is warm.

There's a story about a man who had Alzheimer's. He was living at home, and his wife was there, but he no longer could recognize people. He couldn't recognize his children and other people. It's a wonderful story of him going to the front door and opening the door. It was actually one of his kids, and him saying, "I don't know who you are, but please come in."

I love that. May we be so—to welcome, no matter who shows up at the door. There's always room.

Equanimity gives metta its steadiness, the ability to continue to hold that potential for safety and wellness and happiness for ourselves and for others. You can feel if you just do the metta without any equanimity, you're going to get discouraged, right? Because it's not always there. Metta is about the potential. And we have to be willing to be with the way it is, even while we offer the metta.

Equanimity is an absolutely critical support of compassion,

A number of years ago, we were doing another retreat on the north coast of California—this only happened one year. We were walking up the coast, and there were all these baby sea lions up on the shore. At first we thought, "Oh, isn't that wonderful? Look, they're so cute." And then we started to realize they were really sick. And then we saw a couple that were dead. It was just heart-wrenching.

We see in other beings and in other people immense suffering. And it's equanimity that keeps us from becoming overwhelmed, getting lost in the sorrow. As Nyanaponika says, it gives us an even, unwavering courage and fearlessness, enabling compassion to face the awesome abyss of misery and despair. It's equanimity that keeps us from falling in completely—to actually care about each one of those sea lions, to be willing to connect, and yet to not fall down, to not be unable to move on. We have to have the equanimity.

One way I think of it is that great compassion has equanimity in it. You've seen the picture of Quan Yin, the embodiment of great compassion. She has one tear falling from her eye, and one foot is out in front of her, getting ready to help. But she's not collapsing—the compassion is stable and upright. This is equanimity supporting compassion.

And joy, too, needs equanimity. Without it, when we encounter other people's joy, we can fall into clinging and covetousness. We lose our balance, unable to see it as the natural unfolding of conditions that allowed it to happen. We can take joy in it, but we mustn't get caught thinking that's the way it always has to be, clinging and holding to that.

In our practices of the Brahma Viharas, one of the things we're really working toward—as you've moved through the friend, the benefactor, the neutral person, and the difficult person, this expansion of each of the Brahma Viharas to include all beings—is cultivating this aspect of equanimity, of impartiality, of including everyone, every being.

Bhikkhu Bodhi says, "The perfection of equanimity is the attitude of impartiality toward desirable and undesirable beings and formations, dispelling attraction and repulsion, accompanied by compassion and skillful means." An attitude of impartiality, accompanied by compassion and skillful means.

We start out small in our world. We start with affinity for our family, for those close to us, our friends. And a big part of our practice is this expansion—out into the tribe, out bigger across the world, and to other species. We're stretching. We're developing our capacity. A lot of what we're doing when we sit here on the cushion is developing our capacity, expanding.

It's like we all go along in life with a certain bandwidth in which we're comfortable and okay functioning. And then when we go outside that bandwidth—we get too hungry, we get too tired, things don't go the way we want—our reactivity shows up, and things don't go so smoothly. A lot of what we're doing when we practice is expanding the bandwidth. The mind of a Buddha has no limits to that bandwidth, to its capacity.

That's why it's like rowing a rowboat across a lake. You go out and get in the rowboat, and it's peaceful and calm and beautiful. You row across, and it's lovely. You come back and say, "Oh, it was a great sit." Then you get into the rowboat the next day and the wind is blowing against you and the waves are high. You get about partway across, become exhausted, and get pushed back to shore. You say, "Oh, that was a disaster." Which one did you actually get stronger in? What helped you build your capacity, your willingness to step out into the wind and rain and waves?

That's why we tell you over and over again that those sits when it's rough—something very important is happening there. To be willing to sit through that is to broaden our capacity. We see that we can meet our suffering and know that of others.

The last aspect I want to talk about is the wisdom piece, the "rooted in insight" part of the phrase. Fortunately, I can talk about this rather quickly because you've heard so many Dharma talks pointing to this. This quality of equanimity is not an emotional emptiness. It's actually a fullness of understanding. And fundamental to that fullness of understanding is the understanding of karma.

Here, equanimity has the characteristic of promoting the aspect of neutrality—that impartiality I was speaking of. Its function is to see things impartially. Its manifestation is the subsiding of attraction and repulsion, so aversion and greed subside. Reflection upon the fact that all beings inherit the results of their own karma is the proximate cause.

In order to have equanimity with what happens, with what's going on, we have to see that things are

unfolding in a lawful way, that causes and conditions are playing out.

The second aspect of being rooted in insight is the understanding of not-self — not taking anything as I, me, and mine, not taking it personally. We can't even take our equanimity personally.

There's a wonderful quote in the Suttas of Ananda asking the Buddha why some people attain Nibbana and some don't. The Buddha speaks about having abandoned I, me, and mine, about people who have gotten to that point. Having done that, "thus she obtains equanimity, welcomes it, and remains holding to it. As she does so, her consciousness becomes dependent on it and clings to it. A bhikkhu, Ananda, who is affected by clinging does not attain Nibbana." Once again, as Joseph would say, it does not matter to what you do not cling — even equanimity.

So how do we get there? How do we cultivate this? You're doing it. You're already doing it. Equanimity is an emergent quality. It comes out of our practice. We can cultivate it in the Brahma Viharas, which I'll speak about briefly, but even there it's an emergent quality that arises from our mindfulness — the moment-to-moment mindfulness. And it emerges as we move from resistance to receptivity and responsiveness. Each of you has seen yourself do this, either over the long term in your practice, or even if you've been sitting for a shorter time here on the cushion, that movement from reactivity.

I want to read you a little story called "Golfing in Calcutta." The story is told of a golf course in India. Apparently once the English had colonized the country and established their businesses, they yearned for recreation and decided to build a golf course in Calcutta. Golf in Calcutta presented some unique obstacles. Monkeys would drop out of the trees, scurry across the course, and seize the golf balls. The monkeys would play with the balls, tossing them here and there.

At first, the golfers tried to control the monkeys. Their first strategy was to build high fences around the fairways and greens. This approach, which seemed initially to hold much promise, was abandoned when the golfers discovered that a fence is no challenge to an ambitious monkey. Next, the golfers tried luring the monkeys away from the course, but the monkeys found nothing as amusing as watching humans go wild whenever their little white balls were disturbed. In desperation, the British began trapping the monkeys, but for every monkey they carted off, another would appear. Finally, the golfers gave in to reality and developed a rather novel ground rule: play the ball where the monkey drops it.

That's a good rule for life, isn't it? Play the ball where the monkey drops it.

We can study all the different ways that we are reactive — the ways we build the fence, or we try to trap the monkey, or we try to trick it. This is how we learn about our reactivity. And then, as we learn about our reactivity, we can drop some of that and come more and more to a state of acceptance and responsiveness to what's happening. We can give careful attention to how our balance is lost, where we get confused, and how we might be able to respond differently in that situation. Equanimity is giving up our attempts at control and instead of controlling, being with what is and responding skillfully.

Ryōkan has a wonderful poem:

Without desire, everything is sufficient.
With seeking, myriad things are impoverished.
Plain vegetables can soothe hunger.
A patched robe is enough to cover this bent old body.
Alone, I hike with a deer.
Cheerfully, I sing with village children.
The stream under the cliff cleanses my ears.
The pine on the mountaintop fits my heart.

It's a great feeling, I think, and I believe that a lot of poetry really points us to this state of being. Because equanimity isn't something we acquire or own or can hang on to and keep. It's a way of being. It's a way of interacting, connecting, opening our heart, living in the world.

I want to end by reading you a story that I think is a wonderful example of... we can sometimes think of equanimity as very silent and dour and solid. I think it's something else — much lighter, much lighter.

This is from Ian Baker's book *The Heart of the World*, and they're hiking in the Tibetan rainforest:

"Today was particularly bad for me as the rain would not let up and the leeches were relentless. At one point I counted twenty-two of them sucking on me at the same time..."

Sloshing along the muddy trail in the pounding rain, I came upon a large slimy log that had fallen chest high across our brush-choked path. In my agitated state, I viewed the log as a menacing obstacle that was clearly separate, in my way, and against me. With no way under or around, I jumped stomach first and slid over the top, regaining my balance on the other side. I was infuriated at the mud and decaying mush that seemed to have covered the entire front of my body. Rubbing off the crud, I cursed the log and the goddamn rain.

It was my brother Todd who suggested that we wait and see how the lama would handle this formidable impediment. Surely this test would break him. Hiding off the trail, we peeked through the underbrush just in time to see him trudge up to the log. Ever smiling, he took a couple of steps back and tried his jump with a running start. With not enough momentum, coupled with a portly belly, he slid back down on the same side of the log and landed on his back in a large puddle. Shaking his rain-drenched head, he burst into spasms of uproarious laughter.

Staggering to his feet, he repeated the same maneuver with the same results no less than three times. With each collapse back into the puddle, his laughter grew stronger and louder. On his fourth attempt, he made it over the top and slid headlong into the muddy puddle on the other side. Again, the laughter was knee-slapping. Continuing to chuckle, he wiped himself off as best he could, lovingly patted the log as though it was a dear friend, and proceeded up the trail smiling.

Todd and I just stared at each other.

Let's sit for a few minutes.

Without desire, everything is sufficient.

Since my house burned down, I have a better view of the rising moon.

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