Equanimity: Balanced Radiance of Mind

Winnie Nazarko · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Three-Month Retreat (IMS 2012) · 1:05:12

Good evening to you all.

This morning when Joseph was taking questions and he closed out his answers with a description of equanimity and what it was—a really great compressed description of it—I had a good opportunity to watch my mind, because my talk tonight is on equanimity. I watched this little blip of irritation arise in the mind. He's talking about my topic. He's taking my talk. We went back into the teacher room afterwards, and Pascal says, "Joseph, you took Winnie's topic"—which he's always sensitive to. Either that or he's trying to stir something up.

After thinking about it for a while, I realized there's plenty to be said on this topic. Plenty to be said.

Let me start with this image of someone who's a master surfer. This being is in constant, balanced connection to the continually changing movement of waves and water. They're not rigid. They're very fluid in how they move, completely responsive to the wave on which they ride. Sometimes when this is really working, there's just a oneness to the whole experience. This to me is a good image for equanimity. It gives a bit of an understanding on a kinesthetic level of what's being talked about here.

The word equanimity in English refers to a state of connected, accepting, balanced openness, relaxed centered presence, clear non-resistant allowing, spacious stability.

If we're going to take this word equanimity and look for it in the Buddha Dharma, it basically comes up as two different words, which are closely related to each other. The first one, which you may be familiar with, is *upekkhā*, meaning balance of mind, non-reactivity, equipoise. Equipoise is one of my favorite words for this aspect of mind. Equipoise—equa, equal; poise implies a certain kind of uprightness, a certain kind of centeredness.

The other Pali term used to describe this state is a long word: *tatramajjhattatā*, meaning to stand in the middle, a kind of inner stability which is not thrown out of balance. Again, it points to centeredness.

This equanimity has many associations with it. When I define something, I always like to say what it isn't—something you might think it is because it seemingly is similar or close to the meaning of the word, but really is not within the boundaries of what's meant by *upekkhā*.

Equanimity is not suppression. Suppression is when there's an attempt to deal with an arising state or experience by stuffing it down, denying it, tightening around it. It's a form of fear or aversion, not wanting to let something in. One version of this that you might think is sort of like equanimity but really isn't:

when the mind experiences something and it doesn't like it, or it's feeling overpowered by it, and the mind goes—this is often the thought too—"I'm not going to react. I'm not going to react. I'm not going to react."

Another thing that could get misunderstood or confused with equanimity is apathy or indifference. This is where we really don't connect with the experience but kind of withdraw from reality in a defeated or deluded manner. The kind of thought that often goes with this is, "I don't care. It doesn't matter. It's all right. It's all arising and passing away. It's okay. I don't mind. I see it's impermanence of all things." You see, there's a tone. Or sometimes it's more like the "hell with it" tone: "Yeah, well, it's all *dukkha* anyway, right?"

Bhikkhu Bodhi, who is a well-known Theravadan monk, a wonderful scholar and translator, offered some comments on this confusion of *upekkhā* or equanimity with indifference. He said there's often a mistaken inference from people who are not well-schooled in Buddhism, and particularly some of the early Western translators, the early connectors with Buddhist texts, where they translated *upekkhā* as "indifference." This would mean that when you're practicing *upekkhā*, you're practicing to be detached and unconcerned with other beings.

He says this is really an incorrect understanding, and that instead *upekkhā* is an evenness of mind, unshakable freedom of mind, a state of inner equipoise that cannot be upset by gain and loss, honor and dishonor, praise and blame, pleasure and pain. *Upekkhā* is freedom from all points of self-reference. It's indifferent only to the demands of the ego self and its craving for pleasure and position, not to the well-being of one's fellow human beings.

When you think about it, his interpretation makes perfect sense. He's saying we're not indifferent to others—or to ourselves either.

We're not indifferent to our own deep well-being. We simply don't indulge certain habits of mind that are deluded. But it's understandable that upekka does not in any way wipe out or blot out or eliminate care and concern. When you think about the Eightfold Path, the second step is wise intention, which includes renunciation, but it also includes the commitment to developing a mind of non-harming—meaning a mind that is filled with metta, or loving friendliness, and compassion, karuna. And the Eightfold Path is like a hologram. You have to read any part of it in light of the totality of it.

Another point that supports Bhikkhu Bodhi's saying upekka is not indifference to others is the position of equanimity in the development of the Brahma viharas. If you think of how you learn them, metta or loving friendliness is first, then compassion, then empathetic joy, and the last thing that's learned is equanimity. So the mind is oriented towards the first in particular. Other aspects of that mind of goodwill are developed and primed through the practice of compassion and the practice of empathetic joy. And then equanimity is added, bringing a kind of balance, a kind of stability, so that the mind does not get carried away with the desire to control things that can't be controlled, given the nature of how things are. In other words, it helps keep those practices from turning in the direction of codependency.

On this topic of what equanimity means, there's another thing that sometimes comes up for people, which is: well, if you get all equanimous and you don't have any preferences anymore, does that mean you just get kind of indifferent and passive? The mind of "oh, whatever happens, just let it happen. I'll just lose any motivation to make a choice, take a stand, exert initiative, make something happen, set a limit."

The answer is that no, that's not what it means. Shinzen Young actually has a brilliant way of discussing this point. He says equanimity involves non-interference with the flow of subjective sensation. Apathy implies indifference to the controllable outcome of objective events. Thus, although seemingly similar, equanimity and apathy are actually opposites. Equanimity frees up internal energy for responding to external situations. By definition, equanimity involves radical permission to feel and experience things as they are, and as such is the opposite of suppression. As far as external expression of feeling is concerned, internal equanimity gives one the freedom to externally express or not, depending on what is appropriate to the situation.

So what you lose is reactivity, not wisdom.

That's the clarification piece of the talk. So then we get the question: equanimity in relationship to what? The short answer is everything. Everything that arises and passes away, meaning all conditioned things.

Let's talk for a bit about why this is of value, trying to ground this into something practical and graspable by the mind. Why is equanimity of value?

We live in a world where we have limited ability to choose what we experience. Is this not true? Have you noticed this? One way to look at it is to say that the eight worldly winds are always blowing. Gain and loss, pleasure and pain, praise and blame, fame and ill repute move through our lives again and again. We can't select out the parts of these dualities that we prefer and have only that. Things are always changing. All experiences have the characteristic of anicca, or impermanence. Thus we're always being presented with loss and with new experience. These are all the result of causes and conditions over which we have limited control.

If we're going to go back to our surfer image, we would have to say the waves of experience come as they will, and that our happiness and well-being is aligned with learning how to surf these—not in trying to hold on to them or push them away in any way. Can you fight the ocean? Can you fight the ocean of samsara?

Consider: if we struggle against what's painful or unpleasant, we suffer from aversion to what we're experiencing. If we struggle to hold on to what's pleasant, we suffer from greed. But if we're free from the struggle of aversion to what's difficult, we don't suffer, even though what we experience may be painful or unpleasant. Instead, the experience is known for what it is, and it passes through our awareness without destroying our peace of mind.

This is equanimity.

If we're free from the struggle to hold on to what we like, we're able to connect with and allow the pleasant without becoming unhappy when things change. The experience is known for what it is and passes through our awareness without destroying our peace of mind. This is equanimity.

When we're balanced, centered, and present, we experience the mind state of equanimity. In this state of balanced clarity, we have the maximal ability to act and choose in wise, skillful, and effectual ways which promote our well-being and the well-being of others.

So that sounds good. How do you do it? How do you learn? How do we learn to surf all those different waves that arise in the course of an hour, a day, a retreat, a lifetime—so many different possible ones?

There is a key to this: a mind that's busy noticing—which is another way of saying mindful—is more in touch with things as they happen, more in touch with reality. Non-distracted connection with the wave is key to learning how to surf.

Let's talk about that point more specifically and how it can be cultivated in insight meditation, better known as vipassana, which is the primary practice we're doing here.

The first experience with meditation can be something of a shock. It was shocking to me, anyway. One of the first things you have to come to terms with when learning this kind of meditation is that the instructions encourage you to accept unpleasant and difficult experiences as valid meditation objects. For many people—most people, perhaps—this is very counterintuitive, because you don't usually turn to meditation wanting more of what you've already got. The way of thinking is typically: I want more happiness, more peace, more well-being. I want some light, some love. That's where we want to go when we start—someplace like that.

So the instructions are given to open in a non-preferential way. But because they're so counterintuitive, we have a hard time truly grasping what's been said, and we forget it again and again. It's very common in practice for people having difficult or unpleasant experiences to think something is wrong—either they're doing something wrong, or the practice is wrong, or the instructions are wrong, or some combination. But that's not necessarily the case. Equanimity is developed through a process that connects with, not rejects, any and all experience. We learn to connect with the waves of experience—the pleasant ones, the unpleasant ones, and the neutral ones—equally.

When I was writing this talk, an image came up representing how the mind tends to relate to things: being a kid on a swing on the playground. The swing set with its little seat, the two ropes or chains, swinging back and forth. The mind is very much like that, especially in its untrained state—constantly swinging between wanting things and not wanting things. That one looks good, that one looks bad. I like this, I don't like that. This is what's going on all the time.

Usually we don't see that we ourselves are propelling this swinging back and forth, that there's something about how we're relating to this movement of mind that we're missing. It's our way of being on the swing

that's keeping the whole thing in motion. And it's a pretty wild ride.

Do you remember being a kid on the playground playing on the swings? Maybe somebody comes along to help, and then, as often happens with children, they start giving it a little twist, and you're spinning. Maybe you're kicking high and it's going wild. It gets bigger and bigger, a little scary, and then you want to stop but it's going too fast. You're dragging your feet trying to slow down, or maybe you bail out entirely. It can get really wild in there—really wild in the mind.

But as we practice, as we go along, we get a little better at centering on the swing. We get better at figuring out how to stay on it without holding the chains for dear life or worrying about falling off altogether. Now we're more just riding it as it's happening, not adding to what's happening.

And when we no longer add to what's happening, what occurs? It stops. At a certain point, that energy of reactivity wears out. And then it's just plumb center.

The practice of continuous application of the same kind of attention to all things arising and passing away gradually decreases reactivity in the mind.

We're saying there are a number of different ways to describe the field of practice, to speak to the point of what kind of thing we are noticing in this particular way. We describe it in different ways. We could say it's the four foundations of mindfulness and what arises within there. We could say it's the six sense doors, the five aggregates—everything that arises within these fields. These are all different ways of pointing the mind, different ways to connect to everything.

Have you noticed that? If you really look at the categories and you really pay attention to them, they translate everything. The breakdown gives you the different categories, but it means everything, all the time. So we're asking the mind to do the same thing in the same way regardless of preference, in relationship to what we directly experience—whether we like what we're experiencing or not.

You may notice if you go into interviews with the teachers and they'll say, "What's going on? Tell me about your practice. What's happening?" If you go into a large story about what happened two weeks ago, and then you're talking about what happened yesterday, and then you're talking about something you want to do when you leave, the teacher probably says something to you like, "What's happening now?" Which is cluing you to the fact that the orientation is to the immediate present in doing this practice. It's now-oriented. That's the place of practice.

So we maintain this view of continually knowing what is predominant as much as possible. We use other instructions—other techniques may be given, other instructions may be given—in order to maintain balance in the practice or to regain stability, to strategically regroup. But the main thing that's going on is as I've described. Basically, the instruction is to bring the same kind of attention, mindful investigation, to everything.

Now of course the mind isn't used to doing this because our practice has been the swing practice. It's not used to doing it and it doesn't really like the discipline of not wandering off. So things are stormy and uneven. You come in and you tell the teacher, "I had this storm come up and I was at the breath and then I got really angry and then I wasn't mindful of the breath and then I felt discouraged and then I felt disgusted and then I felt whatever it is."

So then the teacher is probably going to say to you something like, "Okay, could the mind be with the arising of that hindrance of anger?" Listens, listens. "No? Okay. Can the mind be with the rejection of the anger? No? Okay. Can the mind be with the sense of anguish that it can't be with the rejection of the anger? No?" And talking to you and working with you, we'll keep going until we get a yes—no matter how far out in terms of metacognition is necessary in order to restore some sort of mindfulness to this whole proliferation of difficulty around the experience.

So the basic instruction counsels the mind to regard and treat everything in the same way—know it mindfully, investigate all the arisings in the mind—the exception being strategic regrouping.

You'll notice this isn't a strategy of repressing reactivity. Usually the instruction is: turn the mind towards the hindrance. You have a hindrance, turn the mind towards the hindrance. Pay attention to the hindrance. Investigate the hindrance. So you don't need to sit and clamp down and tell yourself you're not going to react. When reacting is there, reacting can be known. That's good practice—to know reacting when reacting is present. And there's a gradual development of the capacity to do this, involving growth in calm and concentration. Gradually the mind learns to be awake and present more continually, regardless of what it's experiencing.

Take for an example the arising of a big emotional storm. When the mindfulness has some momentum with it and there's some concentration, and the investigation piece is taken to heart, the mind starts to be able to station itself in the present, station itself in the now, and notice: what is this storm? What is it? There's the arising of anger. There's a thought. That's unpleasant.

There's the image of a person. There is a body sense of unpleasantness. There are sensations in the body. There is heat. There is tightness. There is churning. There is a feeling of fire. There's the impulse to get up. There's the judgment of self. There's the unpleasantness of that experience.

It's like you've stationed the mind in the present and it's giving a play-by-play of what's right there on top, what's most predominant, and it just stays there. It just stays right there in the present, right with it. This is happening, this is happening, this is happening—getting stronger, getting stronger, getting weaker, getting weaker, getting tired, getting tired, getting sick of it, getting sick of it, getting pissed off, getting pissed off, getting mad at the teachers, mad at the teachers, wanting to go home, wanting to go home, sadness, sadness, crying, crying, tears, tears, warm, warm. Done. Over. Peace. Oh, relief. End of suffering. Whoa, what a ride.

So the mind starts to see that there are many different events and experiences happening. It starts to see more per period of time, I guess would be one way to put it. And as the mind gets more concentrated, it starts to see other things too. It starts to notice how the struggle for control creates suffering, and that letting go of the struggle for control ends suffering.

It also starts to notice the three characteristics. Everything is sort of the same. I mean, it's all different—it's different every moment—but it's kind of the same in certain key ways. It's all impermanent. Because it's impermanent, it's unstable and cannot be relied upon. It's dukkha. And it's not under my control. It's not self. Pleasant, unpleasant, neutral. Big storms, periods of tranquility. Events that have a lot of "I" in them. Events that have no "I" in them. The three characteristics are there universally, and the mind starts to see it.

When the mind starts to see how suffering is created in the mind, it also begins to realize that poised non-resistance—knowing in that kind of way—is the way to go. Because that approach ends the struggle of fighting with things that can't be controlled. Then it becomes easier and easier for the mind to start treating things in an equal fashion. With that, preferences loosen and the hindrances abate, they weaken. Investigation and the rest of the seven factors of enlightenment strengthen, and it's easier to be with things as they are.

When the mind is able to just rest in knowing, things present themselves exactly the way they are. And because the mind can accept things as they present themselves, because they must be that way, it can see them more clearly. This is the process where equanimity perfects mindfulness.

We're not going to go too much more into the seven factors of enlightenment because that's a whole separate talk. But this general description of how equanimity is strengthened in the mind is something that you can see for yourself if you pay attention.

Bhante Gunaratana describes the process of developing equanimity through the practice of vipassanā like this: "Once you see that all the components of the body and mind in the past, present, and future are impermanent, unsatisfactory, and selfless, something remarkable happens. Equanimity arises regarding all conditioned things. Your mind looks at everything with equanimity—wholesome, unwholesome, physical, verbal, mental, good, bad, or indifferent. It's all the same. It is beingness. It is simply reality."

Your viewpoint is imperturbable. You realize that all those wonderful thoughts and feelings are constantly changing on a very subtle level. Those terrible ones are constantly changing too. A very deep letting go can occur—the arising of peace that passes understanding.

And this state that he describes, peace that passes understanding, is a state that's known in many different spiritual traditions. If you think of equanimity developed to its furthest point, to the point of this peace that passes understanding—or high equanimity as it's called in our tradition—this is an experience where the mind is completely present, completely open, clear, lacking in resistance of any type to what's

experienced. And in lacking resistance, it is lacking in suffering. There's a kind of radiant quality in the mind, a deep stability.

I can remember having this state arise at one point when I was on retreat. And my subjective experience was, "Wow, I can't believe I was ever disturbed by things—they're really not a big deal." I told you about my martial background in the earlier talk. The image that came up in the mind to demonstrate this was a sense of being in an airplane flying above where any kind of gun or cannon could shoot it down. It was like you could see the flak exploding, but it wasn't even in range. It wasn't like it wasn't there. Things could happen. Things did happen. Things would arise in the mind. They would pass away in the mind. It was pleasant, unpleasant, neutral—it was all equally fine. And the mind was very lucid. So it's not a zoned-out kind of peace. It's a complete pliancy of mind. The mind, the knowing, and what is known are one thing with no friction.

So this is part of how this can go. The Buddha had a much deeper experience of this kind of state on the night of his enlightenment. If you remember some of the traditional versions of what happened there, he had taken the seat under the Bodhi tree with the resolve not to get up no matter what happened, no matter what he experienced. "Let my flesh and bones dry up before I get up from this seat, before I have attained this opening which I seek for the benefit and well-being of all." So he took his seat.

Part of what happened after he took his seat was he was assailed by the armies of Mara. This is how it was described—the armies of Mara. This is put in the form of what I, as a Westerner, presume to be an image or a fable, kind of like me being in the airplane above the flak guns.

His experience was that he's sitting under the tree and he has first the forces of aversion towards him in the form of fire being directed at him, arrows being shot, the sound of armies clanking their spears on their shields coming towards him, weapons of torture—all this. They're trying to create fear in his mind. He said, "I see you, Mara." And the arrows turned into flowers and fell harmlessly around him.

And then the second appearance of Mara was an appeal to his instinctual drives, shall we say. Seductive members of the preferred gender approaching him. "Gautama, aren't you awfully lonely under the Bodhi tree? You're such a good looking man." You know, the usual. But he saw it. So this was the appeal to desire, to wanting to connect in that kind of way with another human being, the satisfaction and pleasure of that. And he said, "I see you, Mara." And they disappeared.

And at this point, the challenge comes. Mara said to him, "Here you are sitting under the Bodhi tree. You say you're not going to get up till you attain what you have practiced for."

"Who do you think you are?" A familiar voice, perhaps.

And it is said he put his finger down, touched the earth as a witness, asked the earth to testify to his right to be in that seat. He asked the earth to witness the purity of his intention and the many lifetimes of practice to develop the perfections of mind that would allow his mind to open to the great understanding

of the unconditioned—and how to teach it. And it is said that the earth shook in witness.

So this equanimity—we have these tests to our equanimity as part of this practice. It can be very seductive and alluring to believe that the arising of these kinds of experiences is a sign of something that it isn't. So do not be deceived.

That's about equanimity cultivated in insight practice, with the additional comment that in insight practice you can know this either as a primary experience, as a state—like I described my experience that one time when it was a highly developed state—or you could know it as a mental factor present in knowing something else.

What would that be like? If you have an experience of something pleasant arising in the mind and you see it as unpleasant, the mind is okay with it being unpleasant. Maybe you see it as unpleasant and there's even a reaction in the mind to it being unpleasant, but the mind is stable in seeing that and allowing it. In other words, it's not reacting to its own reactivity. It's seeing it, seeing the whole thing, able to hold the whole thing. That's an experience of equanimity in practice.

You've all had many experiences of this. How do you know when it's there? At least in part, because the mind has let go of resistance to what's happening. It's become a kind of "okay mind"—this is the way it is right now. Oh, this is aching. This is unpleasant. Oh, this is restlessness. This is unpleasant. Restlessness is like this.

In addition to the way of working with insight practice that inevitably develops equanimity—it inevitably develops equanimity if you continue—we can also cultivate equanimity through the practice of equanimity as a Brahma Vihara. I'm not going to say too much about this because we're going to get a chance to do the practice next week or the week after.

But as I said earlier, this is the fourth of the Brahma Viharas, and this brings in the wisdom element. You start by training the mind, or inviting the mind, to stability and calm, presence. Consider the value of stability and calm in the body and mind. Then, after inviting that, you start offering phrases to beings in a selected order, starting with someone who's fairly neutral. Interestingly enough, that's where you would start with equanimity.

The felt sense of equanimity might be there, it might not be there when you start doing the practice. You set the intention, you invite it, you offer the phrases, you carry the image or the felt sense of the individual, you invite the arising of this. If it doesn't arise in a way where there's a felt sense, that's okay. That's not a problem. You're planting the seeds of intention for the future arisings of the state when the conditions are right for it to be there.

All of these Brahma Viharas, when you're working with them, are of course conditioned states—meaning they're impermanent and temporary, conditioned like everything else. And that's just fine.

These are relational practices. If you looked at what's happening with the Brahma Viharas on a neurological level, yes, you may be intending to invite and create this state. It's a very skillful invitation for this state to be present. When the state is present and the seeds for its future arising have been planted, you're setting the stage for more frequent, spontaneous arising of this state.

Neurons that fire together wire together. There is a biological thing happening here too. You're saying, "I'm going to run this circuit. I'm going to run this set of connections—turning the mind in this way, having this kind of thought, holding this kind of image with this kind of intention. Let's get this one going. This is a wholesome one. Let's get this one going for a while."

If you look at the equanimity phrases, a classic one is: "All beings are the heir to their karma. Their happiness or unhappiness is dependent on their actions and not on my wishes for them." And you can see right in how that's phrased the wisdom aspect of equanimity. It takes the big picture.

It understands impermanence. It understands conditionality. It's informed by an understanding of both the brightness and shadow of this conditioned realm.

Another way to phrase equanimity practice could be: *May I learn to see the arising and passing of all things with equanimity and balance. May I be open and balanced and peaceful.*

A third way to cultivate equanimity is through jhana practice. Jhanas are states of very deep concentration that can be trained in a number of different ways, but usually are entered into using the breath. This particular jhana I'm talking about is the fourth material jhana, which has two elements to it: one is one-pointedness of mind, and the other is equanimity. Over time, if the mind develops a lot of concentration, it can actually learn to be absorbed into this state where the only experience is basically the experience of the state itself. That's kind of a specialty of meditation—developing concentration in order to be able to use it in insight practice, although these very concentrated states do have some interesting qualities in and of themselves.

The last way to train and practice this state of equanimity is parami practice. Equanimity is one of the paramis, or perfections of mind. Here we're practicing developing equanimity in regard to the eight worldly winds that I talked about earlier: praise and blame, gain and loss, honor and disrepute, pleasure and pain.

Let me tell a story here—a bit of a story on me.

I left retreat once after doing the three-month retreat. While on retreat I didn't have a job. When I came off retreat I still didn't have a job, but the difference was I didn't have any money either. Some of you may resonate with this. I didn't have a job for a number of months, and it was getting scary. Finally I got an interview and was hired as the executive director of a nonprofit organization. This organization had a lot of strengths, but it had its issues, as organizations often do. And it was housed in a typical nonprofit setting, I must say—those of you who work in this sector may appreciate this. The place used to be

temporary housing for people working on government manufacturing during the Second World War. Then after that it was a tuberculosis hospital. Then a number of nonprofits moved into these buildings that looked like old, decrepit barracks.

This was my celestial abode.

I was the executive director. I had only been hired about two weeks. Part of the process of being hired involved going through an interview with the board of directors, and the board had its rocky areas. There was one woman in particular who was older than the others, probably in her mid-seventies at the time. She was very accomplished, very intelligent, had a PhD—really had been a pioneer in science during an era when there weren't a lot of women who did that, or were allowed to do that. She had been involved with this organization for years. She had really carried it, been the one responsible constant person, and she felt a tremendous sense of ownership. Different people would come on the board, some serious and some not, but she was very serious about this organization, which had a role in the community of feeding low-income people. She took it very seriously.

She was a bit of a curmudgeon. She had high standards. She wanted things to be right. One day she came to the door of the barrack-slash-TB-hospital in which we were residing, and somebody on staff who was a smoker had put a butt can out by the front door—you know what a butt can is? Kind of a tubular thing where you put cigarettes in.

Right by the front door. And it was nasty—I mean, it was *nasty*. She had seen that and was so upset by it. She came in, picked it up, walked down the hall to the receptionist's desk, and put it right on top.

The receptionist, a very mild woman who had experienced other interactions of this nature and who desired to preserve her job, was just horrified by this: "This damn thing shouldn't be out there!"—right on her desk.

Meanwhile, a committee meeting was going on in our one conference room, where a number of other board members—including some of the perhaps less serious and responsible ones—were gathered. They ran over time. They were in there goofing around. It was the only room that could be used, and she was there for another meeting. She stood waiting. She had a bad hip. Five minutes, ten minutes, fifteen minutes—they're still in there, screwing around. She starts to feel really angry, really disrespected, and she starts letting loose with the verbal.

Well, I think we must have had sailors in that barrack at some point, because the language would have peeled the paint right off the walls. And some of it was directed at me. She was saying all of this in front of the receptionist, who by this time was totally freaked out. She came running down the hallway—I was in my office and could hear her feet—and said, "So-and-so is here, and she's really upset. She's *really* upset."

"Okay, I'll be down."

"No, she's *really* upset." Her eyes were big.

"Okay, okay." This was my second week on the job. I needed this job.

So I went down there, walking. I was close enough to retreat that I was still in the body. I could feel my feet touching the floor. Mindfully walking. I watched the arising of the knot in my stomach, because I could start to hear it now, and I could hear my name being mentioned. I think it was a failure of oversight with the conference room schedule or something like that.

I got down there and she was going off. She turned around, looked at me, and I said, "Oh, what's the matter?"

She gave me the whole thing, complete with swear words. And then she topped it off: "I'm too goddamn old to be doing this shit!"

I don't know where it came from, but somewhere from the time on the cushion, out of my mouth came—in this gentle tone—"Gee, that's funny. You don't talk like an old lady."

She looked at me, and I thought for a moment, *Oh, she's going to kill me.* And then she laughed. She laughed.

After that, it shifted. It became a different relationship—we became friends. She became a real ally of mine on the board. She would back me up, protect me. When she got mad, it wasn't at me, which made me happy. And when she died, I gave her eulogy.

So there you go—the benefits of equanimity.

My wish for you all, then, is that you may find in your time here that capacity of mind to open in a spacious and balanced way to what arises, without preference.

Learning to see and know the swings of mind, the reactions of mind, within a larger poised space of trust.

May the merit of our practice benefit all beings.

Thank you for listening.

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