

# Upekkhā - Equanimity

Bhante Bodhidhamma · DhammaBytes · 13:40

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*Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sambha Sambhodassa Namō Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sambha Sambhodassa Namō tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhassa* — Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

So, I want to finish the four *Brahma-vihāras*, the dwelling place of the gods, the highest. They represent the highest mental states that we can develop, also known as the illimitables, in the sense that there's no definable end, there's no definable quantity with which you can develop these things. It's as great as the mind is.

So I want to finish with equanimity. We've done compassion, love, and sympathetic joy. Now equanimity is number four, and it's in a sense the most important. It's the highest quality of all really, the highest attitude that we can develop.

First of all, let's just say how you establish it. I always think it's best to establish it in a standing posture, but you can do it anywhere really. First of all, getting contact with the body, the sensations of the body. You can go up the body or down the body, it doesn't matter, but actually getting contact with the inner part of ourselves — the body, feelings.

And then to, as it were, launch your attention outwards, become aware of everything around you, what you can hear, what you can see. And then to bring them together and recognize that it's all just one mass of sensations. It's all one mass of perception, sensations, feelings. The dividing line doesn't have to be so sharp. And then you just sink into that. And that's your present moment. That's what you know. Just sink into it.

And in that state, by being completely present to the present moment, that in itself is the aim. So you're not trying to achieve anything beyond that. That's equanimity. You're just with the present moment. Completely receptive. The body's still. The heart calm. Just for a moment the mind's silent — to a point anyway. And this attitude of just receiving. That's your basis really. Openness.

To do that, often you have to be a little courageous. But I think we also have to understand that when we're like that, our contact with reality is not being distorted by emotional values or by concepts. So it's a really important practice to lay this ground of complete openness.

You can see how that then is quite easy — from that point of view, say in the sitting posture — to bring up the enquiry, to bring up that sense of curiosity. And because it's coming from the base of that equanimous openness, that receptivity, then the curiosity is not being distorted by some sort of preconceived ideas,

prejudices, emotional states.

In daily life, just entering a room — just for a moment, receiving the room. When you enter a shop or a supermarket, just stand there for a moment and just receive it. Instead of always beelining in, just receive the fullness of it, the atmosphere, everything. When you enter into a house, just get a feel of it. Same with people. You meet somebody and there's always this rush towards them rather than just receiving them. It only takes a moment. It's just you receive the fullness of them. And not only how they actually look and that, but just catch what they're giving you.

I walked out of the gate and Jim, who sold the house to us, was at the road. He was with his daughter, Liz, whom I know, and their two children. And as I came out, I looked up the road, just stood there for a moment, before making up, and I could see there was a lot of negativity coming towards me. They were quite upset with me because I hadn't looked after the water, which they think has been our responsibility. And it's just receiving that, and then making sure it doesn't distort how you're going to receive them — otherwise it's just going to backfire. I approached them very slowly. I went towards them rather than expecting them to go towards me, and then just really had a conversation about the water. But if you don't — I find that if you don't do that, you very quickly get caught up in other people's states, and it begins to spiral.

It's the same with a meeting. You walk into a meeting — it's just for a moment. It only takes a moment. But it's to do with the attitude. So it's the same with the country. It's easy to do with the country, isn't it? You walk to the top of the hill and you just open up. You just receive the countryside. So we can do it in certain places. But you can do it on the bus, on the train. Driving a car and you stop at the lights — just receive the situation. So it's this constant effort just to drop into the present moment as it's being received rather than as you want to receive it.

I think once we get into the habit of it, you just get in the habit. It just naturally happens of just looking, just listening, just feeling.

Now the important thing from the conditioning point of view, spiritual point of view, is that of course we can see what mood we're in, because remember, it's not just receiving outside, it's receiving inside. So you can catch the mood you're in, you can catch the attitude that's coming up, the irritation — specifically the negative ones, because you don't want to get embroiled in them. And just that moment of equanimity where you're standing apart from allows you just to be able not to get involved in any negative state that is within us. And by doing that, you can always put it to the side. That's not suppressing it. Suppressing means that you don't want to see it. You do want to see it, but this isn't the time. It's a completely different attitude. You just put it to the side and then you raise the goodwill.

So that's important in terms of not getting caught up in old conditionings. And remember that the less we get caught up in old conditionings, the more they're dying out. If you don't use them, they just die out.

And the other part is intention, because if you are still, you can see your intention coming. And the great thing about seeing that is that you can see whether it's wholesome or not. You've got just that little bit of space so an intention doesn't come up and just hijack you — you find yourself murdering somebody. Heavens above! So by seeing an intention, you've just got that moment whether you want to empower it or not. It just gives you that little bit of control. And that's how you get this feeling of being in control of your life and not being taken by our emotional state and others, other people.

So it's developing a heart free of aversion and fear — not wanting to receive, afraid of receiving — and a mental state which is impartial. It's not caught up in partiality, in prejudice, in liking or not liking, and hopefully not in delusion because you're seeing your thoughts. You can see the thoughts and just not getting caught up in them. So you can see it's a sort of passive state of wisdom, a passive state. And out of that passive state then something active arises. From a point of view of our life, this allows us to meet the vicissitudes of life with a little bit of the old equanimity.

So the usual ones that's in the scriptures are gain and loss, honor and dishonor, happiness and misery, praise and blame. So if the good side comes — the gain, the honor, the happiness, the praise — you don't grab it, you don't seep into it. Everything that rises has to fade away, yeah? If it's on the dark side, you don't go so down with it. It doesn't depress you so much. You can keep aloof.

So these reactions that we have of being happy and sad, delighted, despair, disappointed, gratified, expecting, fear, expectation, fear — all that begins to, although it's there, you're not getting caught up in it. There's a sort of evenness. Because you're not getting caught up in it, it's not developing. So these things are always going to happen to us, but our position now is that we don't get conned by them, don't get hijacked.

And the other thing about equanimity is because of that ability to be open, to be aware of these little things that are going on in our minds, the subliminal things, it helps us not to fall into the subtle enemies of love, compassion and joy. So you can see attachment, you can see where the attachment is manifesting. But if you're caught up in it, you don't see it. You just find yourself behaving in a way which is using the other person. I mean, that's what attachment is.

And the same with compassion. So compassion's subtle enemy is grief. You feel pity for, you feel sorry for somebody. That's not necessary. It's coming from a rather conceited place, actually. Compassion is just the desire to help. But it doesn't mean to say that you can't feel the other person's pain. You can contact the other person's sorrow, but you don't have to feel sorry for them. You can actually be with somebody who's in a...

I remember at the funeral of my aunt, years and years and years ago, and I was with my cousin — we were about 18 or something — and we went off to another part of the seminary, sat on the bench together, and he just wept his eyes out, and I could feel his pain. I could feel it in my heart, I remember feeling it. But I never felt sorry for him. Funny enough, I don't know why. I just thought actually I was happy for him

because it seemed to get it off his chest.

And the same with joy. Joy slips into this over-excitedness where you're really trying to just make yourself joyful, trying to get the best out of your ice cream. So what equanimity does, it just keeps that on an even keel. And one begins to appreciate these beautiful states of mind in their more pure states. They don't get frazzled by these other little parts.

So all in all, this equanimity is quite important. Important to develop. It's important in the sense that we begin from when we're equanimous, even-minded, when we're still like that, we can see very clearly, much more clearly what's going on — what's going on around us, what's going on inside us. And that allows us to be more in control of our lives. Hopefully leading to greater happiness.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you be liberated from all your suffering, especially from any lack of equanimity, sooner rather than later.

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