

# 2010-08-02 More On Equanimity

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## SPEAKERS

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So this evening I would like to talk about equanimity. It's a theme that I've been teaching about some last couple of weeks and it's on my mind. And it's a very beautiful quality, to have internal quality, quality of hard quality of mind. That is considered to be the pinnacle of for the Buddhist kind of emotional spiritual life. And it is sometimes seen as the penultimate stage of practice before experiencing awakening. equanimity is a great lubricant, a great supporter for life helps our life in dramatic ways. It's kind of the crown jewel of Buddhist Practice. And equanimity comes from practice with practices we practice mindfulness practice, meditation practice, concentration practice, in variety of ways equanimity becomes a strong factor. And it was one big surprise for me as my practice deepened, to discover this equanimity, the Buddhist talk about discover what a powerful emotional state can be. And as a powerful state has deeply satisfying it is it's very closely akin to a profound state of peace. And if you can have the most beautiful states of peace that you've experienced, that liquid equanimity, strong equanimity is very closely connected to so that's satisfying. Many people don't know what equanimity is, or if they think they know what it is. Its people often will have a reaction to it. That maybe it's not such a useful thing, because maybe it's a form of, of religious belief. sanctified indifference. And so it's not really so, you know, or it's kind of not caring or it's aloofness or, you know, if we're, if we're equanimous, then we lose part of ourselves, you know, their emotional exuberance or strong emotional life or feelings are all kinds of things though they can't be there when you're acquiring this, right. So people, I don't know if I want that equanimity stuff. And but it's a beautiful state. And it's well worth becoming familiar with and exploring. It's both a state and a practice. So the idea of practicing mindfulness, together with equanimity is a very important part of mindfulness practice. How can I be present for whatever's happening? in a way that's equanimous? So equanimity? What is it? It's sometimes understood to be a state of non reactivity So, the automatic habits of being reactive for and against things does not break when we're economists we might have ideas that this is not appropriate this, but we're not. There's an actual reactive, reactive feeling, or lashing out or, or tightening up or resistance. I like to think of it that our presence, whatever that is, our presence or awareness or attention or mind or heart doesn't contract, or doesn't tighten up, in, in, in relationship to whatever is happening. When we're economists. We might have the evaluation This is not useful or this is a good thing to develop and cultivate. But whatever that evaluation is, it there's no waves in the mind, the mind is not agitated because of it doesn't get restless because of it doesn't get dampened down because of it, but rather stays open and clear. And in a very beautiful way. acronym equanimity is a as a quality is not just a quality of mind. It's something that involves going strong all our faculties, seemingly so it's, you know, certainly involves is the mental side of it. I like to think of it, there's a hard side of it, where it's feels like a very deep kind of emotional state. It also involves our body and a variety of different aspects of our body that support that kind of active display equanimity. I think there's something quality that comes out of all our different when all the different functionings of our being function harmoniously, well strong to support us so that

the forces of reactivity, the impulses to be reactive, fear, self centeredness, egotism, anger, hostility, desire, greed, don't kind of get the upper hand

those resources, impulses, reactive impulses, don't shape or don't color our Presence, our way of being here, our way of being with things, our way of being attentive. We're not pushed around by things. They say that when you're economists, you're not pushed around by the four worldly winds. They're in Buddhism, the world, the winds, the winds of the world that push people around our success and failure, praise and blame and instantly different from that is ill repute and repute, good repute and pain and, and pain and pleasure that these things you know, people get caught up in this success and failure. You know, I was 12 year old son who is now beating me at ping pong. And yesterday, he beat me after intense match, and he still he went to his room and he closed his door and he I could hear him crying in there. Because he, even though he beat me, there was so many times where he felt like he didn't play up to his best ability. And he felt so bad. It was really intense for him, I guess he's very competitive character person. And so it was kind of something, you know, to play this wonderful game with him then have him kind of go. And later on, I asked him, you know, when he was calmed down and happy, and I said, I asked him, you know, well, that was, you know, that was something and is anything that, you know, you know, I think I can do that be helpful in those kinds of circumstances, what happens again, you know, what, what can we do in Australia? And he said, his request was, don't, don't talk about it.

Don't focus on it. Anyway, so success said, you know, and failure, you know, can be pretty intense sometimes if you're a 12 year old, now pure for you all the way out grown that so. And then praise and blame. There's been pointed out that there's a phenomena that when people praise us, and when they criticize us, we can get energized. It's exciting, you know, like we're geared up, we got to do something, praise and it's like, Wow, this is great. I could do more of this. And then if you get criticized or blamed for something that's also energized, energizing, you want to defend ourselves, we do something. But when something neither, neither pumps us up or depresses us or something, then we fall asleep. Because it's boring. And sometimes people who are praising us get our intention and people who criticize us get through things, but people who do neither sometimes like well go on to someone else. Kind of just kind of unfortunate kind of social phenomena. But if you if you're not pushed around by the world a wins, then praise and blame, aren't doesn't don't don't, you know, give you some extra kick that some people get addicted, addicted to. But someone praises you It's okay. It's okay. When someone criticizes you. That's okay. The Buddha once said, they'll blame you. they criticize you if you talk too much. They'll criticize you if you talk too little. And they'll criticize you if you talk just a moderate amount. No one is no one in this world is free of criticism. So of course, that's very helpful for a Dharma teacher. Wondering how long I should talk for I can't win. So the You know, that was worldly wins. Comfort and discomfort, pain and pleasure. It's also something that certainly it's pasta, it's fine to avoid pain or fine to kind of enjoy your pleasure. But some people get pulled around by these things get very reactive, if they feeling uncomfortable, sometimes concluding something is terribly wrong with themselves, or their pursuit for comfort and pleasure are so powerful that people lose their not only equanimity or their calm or tranquility. But sometimes people lose their lives. It's very intense, the people's tremendous addiction sometimes to to pleasure, the avoidance of something that's uncomfortable and deliver wise life, I believe is it involves a capacity to be present for things that are uncomfortable, to be present for things which are very comfortable, very pleasant pleasurable in a way that we're not pulled around by the nose by them, we're not kind of in under their control, but rather we can experience them as they are. And be economist, be balanced, be even minded being centered or whatever you want to call it. And then, you know, see what needs to be done, see what's wise, whether it's appropriate or not appropriate or whatever.

Yes.

Yes, so the question is, it sounds as if when someone is economists, they're not dead, but they, they're let go of their, their ego. their ego is dead, which sounds like a good thing. Now one of I think that's a good point because one of the primary triggers for agitation for restlessness for reactivity has to do with our self centeredness has to do with our self referential concerns has to do with our sense, sense of self, the way we want to represent ourselves to the world. And so we get caught very quickly by that. So someone who has managed to free themselves from being attached to self image will find themselves naturally much more economists in the world, because they don't have that trait, that particular trigger. And so but you know, you said first thing sounds like they're dead. I mean, I thought I thought you were going to go a different way. I thought, you know, I thought, No, no, that's not that's not a criticism of you. But many people kind of hear that teachings equanimity and feel like oh, that's kind of like, you know, not really someone who's really alive or the You know, there are some of you know that TS Eliot line that says something like, teach me to learn how to be to care and not to care. And right now I care a little bit about the air conditioner which is on. So I think that with all equanimity, I'm going to ask you, especially if you could push the down arrow or I guess the up arrow up arrow, Up arrow maybe 80 here so because it's not good, it's close on me and not good for it. But I could do that and keep magnanimity but but you know, it's, it's, it's, it's okay to be economists and change things. Right. So. So, in the, my balance wisdom of sitting here, it's feels like it's good to do something about this wind blowing on me. So Teach me How to care and not that care how to do both, I think so how to care about what's going on. But not to care about how it affects our self image or whether people are gonna praise us or criticize us or whether people like us or not like us are all the different ways that we sometimes we care about the wrong things, we care about things which are going to cause us a lot of suffering, a lot of distress, a lot of agitation, a lot of contraction. So how to how to not care in a certain way, but at the same time to care, at the same time to be present and interested and available to offer what the world needs of us. So in that regard, that one form has many form, Buddhism has actually many forms of equanimity. So it's kind of like they say that it takes a while to turn off so his weight they say that I don't know if it's true, but you know that Eskimos have a lot of different words for snow. So Buddhists, Buddhists have a They don't have a lot of words for equanimity but they have a lot of meanings for equanimity. There's different kinds of equanimity. There's one list of seven different kinds of equanimity. And, but one of the, one of the important forms of equanimity is a social emotion, social attitudes that people have to each other, that I consider to be a form of love. And it's one of the Divine abodes that begins with loving kindness or goodwill. It's a form of goodwill. It's a form of goodwill or love we have when we can't, we care about someone so they'd love is there. But you know, our what we wish for them or how we want to help them doesn't help. They people make choices for themselves that are maybe harmful, and we've helped them we've supported them, we've advised them whatever, and they don't they still go out and do whatever stupid thing they're going to do. And, and so then we, you know, what, what do you do? You kind of leave them alone. Sometimes you have to leave people alone to make their mistakes and learn from them. And

you. You know, for me, one of my Achilles heels has been my sense of responsibility for people that I'm responsible, I'm responsible, I got it, you know, it's up to me. And so I've had to learn not to take so much responsibility for other people. So teaching equanimity has been very important for me to realize that people make their own choices. And the choices they make have consequences. And they're responsible for that consequences, not me. And so I might wish you'd otherwise I might still support them and help them but I'm not responsible for the choices and the consequences. And I have to leave them alone with with that particular part of it. And it's often called sometimes called, equivalent to grandmotherly love or to be gender balanced. grandparents love Because it says that a grandparent loves the grandchildren. But because they're a grandparent, they've already raised kids. So they've

seen it all in their in the kids. So they don't get anxious the way that first time parents get anxious. for first time parents, every scrape is like, Oh my god, let's take him to the hospital they use, she scraped her knee, grandparents, so kids scrape their knees all the time. You know, we'll you know, we'll care for them, we'll clean it and put a bandaid on it. But this is not something to, you know, be so upset about or anxious about. And so some of that comes from experience that we learn to experience how kids are and what they go through and, and kids are kind of dramatic. Some kids, you know, and it's amazing how all of human all of Shakespeare can be concentrated and you know, in five minutes in a few To a five year old. And so you know, you know, so you know, the kid says, to the parents, you know, I love you and I want to marry you. And then five minutes later, I hate you. So that's pretty dramatic. But if you're a grandparent, you've seen all that, you know, so you care and you do what you have to do. So I emphasize this because it's kind of the grandparents love their kids, supposedly, but they're not caught up in the drama of the situation and same way, so to care and not to care at the same time. So how do we learn that? How do we learn to be economists in different situations equanimity is meant number of different ways. equanimity is very closely connected to wisdom, to having wise understanding, but different situations. So in order to become economists, if that's the If you're reactive, and when it's not helpful for you, then it's helpful to explore and understand the situation better. And when it's social issue, then there's a phrase given for equanimity practice, which is a very powerful phrase. And you don't have to believe this phrase, but to for it to become a wisdom phrase. It's a phrase to grapple with to explore and to see how it's how it might be true, rather than reacting to it firsthand, but you know, how is this how does this work in this situation? And the phrase goes, beings are the owners of their actions. beings are the beneficiaries of their actions. So beings are actually more technical and translating to English should be beings are the owners of their intentional actions. beings are the beneficiary of the IRS. I hairs of their of their intentional action. So how is it that helps us to be economists to realize that people own their own the consequences of their own actions. So it's what I said earlier, you know, I could wish you otherwise I could wish better for you, I could support you and help you. But I leave you alone, in your choices you make, and the choices you make, you're going to have to live the consequences, and I can't live them for you. And, and that helps us to feel some sense of responsibility, or not to get too entangled in ways which are not appropriate. And so keep us as economists. Now one of the you know, to care and not to care as to things can go on at the same time. It's possible to have your heart broken and remained economists. So being economist doesn't mean that you don't have a deep feeling for what's going on. It means that you don't, you don't contract you don't tighten up you don't resist you don't get agitated, don't get restless. It's quite something to stay open, relaxed, present

nonreactive at the same time as having your heart broken, to feel some deep sense of sorrow or sadness over something that's going on. But what equanimity helps you do is to stay present in a useful way. Even if your heart is broken. It also helps you stay present. When there's all kinds of things going on in life. There's a lot of emotions that can come through us a lot of things that can happen. And equanimity is not a substitute or not a dampening down necessarily, of the human tendency to have feelings and responses to all kinds of things. mean generally people are calmer and less reactive. But there's something very beautiful about equanimity becomes a place for a cleaner channel for our emotional and mental life. I remember once being on retreat, and I was doing walking meditation retreat, and I had my walking spot in this big hallway and so I was happily doing my walking meditation back and forth being equanimous and peaceful minding my own business. And then I saw someone coming down the hallway you know, just starting to wear doing slow walking meditation. I don't know where he was going, but I didn't pay much attention until he was standing in my walkway and then he was doing his walking meditation in my walkway. And then oh, no, this is gonna be a game of chicken here or something. You know, slowly slowly kind of walking towards each other and who's gonna blink first. And, and, but the thing was that I felt all this anger surge up in me. But the anger didn't stick

anywhere. The anger just moved through me and kind of dissipated. It felt like my mind had Teflon on it. It just kind of moved, you know, just kind of, because the mind was so economists and nonreactive mode, I still had the reaction, but the reaction didn't have any effect on me. It didn't kind of I didn't tighten up or resist or, or close down or decide to do anything. And it was quite beautiful to experience that clean channel to the anger coming then just going to not feel like the anger had to be to become anything. It didn't have to affect me in any way didn't have to push me around or make me act in any way or continue thinking anyway, just just there he went. So I think of equanimity as being a great support for actually a deeper cleaner, fuller life, then the lack of equanimity. There are times when when we have all kinds of feeling some of the maybe not so even so helpful to have where equanimity is very helpful because we feel it more fully. And you see it more clearly. And sometimes the stronger feelings we have that maybe are difficult for us, don't need us to fix them don't need us to judge them. They just need us to be a clean channel for them. So they can process themselves they can move through us and free themselves, rather than us to do it. And part of the difficulty we have is strong feelings, emotions, sometimes is not that we have them, but rather the ways in which we resist them or attach to them or attach to something in relationship to them. Are we caught up in beliefs and ideas about them, and we get complicated or relationship. But the equanimity is one of the ways that allows things allows us not to be bothered by things. Not, you know, just not caring part, but also to be very respectful of it, and whatever's going on to offer them to offer at our presence, so that we can learn from it and let it kind of move through us. So, one of the ways of developing equanimity is wisdom. So to, to explore, you know what's going on here and one of the other wisdom statements or questions, approaches that internal equanimity to social equanimity has to do with this question that the statement that people are the owners of their own actions that is kind of more personal for yourself is why is it worth sacrificing your ease? For this situation here? So say you're moderately, moderately easeful at ease, calm or settled in your life, and then something stirs you up. Something agitate you. Why are you wise, what's so important about this situation? What's the trigger? That that you wrap your mind around? That it forces you or kicks you into an agitated state. Why is it what what why is it important to worry?

Right now? Why is it for what's what's so significant to what's happening right now that you get restless? What's so significant right now that you feel distressed about situation? And so part of the wisdom kind of approach to this is to ask that question and explore it. Because chances are, that when you get agitated or triggered in a deep way, that you haven't really understood some of the words what the actual trigger is. And to go back and question it isn't explore it is one of the ways to come back and find a wise approach technicity another approach to equanimity is it or anything that supports equanimity is to understand or to have available to you a inner practice. contemplative practice and mindfulness practice, Buddhist practice our practice that helps you meet life from a deeper resources, a fuller understanding from freedom from love from caring, from whatever practice and helps you along those lines. Because then you always have something to do. There are situations we find ourselves in where the external world we don't even know what we're supposed to do. It's the whole thing is distressing. It's difficult. It's challenging. Maybe there's no hope. Maybe it's a hopeless situation. Sooner or later, chances are most of you will find yourself in at least one hopeless situation. And you can't really, you know, nothing's going to work nothing's going to help your dying anyway. You know, you know, most of you will and, and so In those kinds of situations where you can't do anything about the situation, you can still do something about yourself in this situation. You can turn around and have a practice that helps support you to find the place of balance to find a place of peace, to find a place of wisdom to find a place of love, to find, you know, have this inner practice that helps you find your way so that you don't become burdened or troubled or bothered by the situation you're in. I know, I know, people who've gone to into surgery and reported back and said, You know, I've been to surgery a few times. But once I learned Buddhist practice, it was a whole different thing because in the past, I went into surgery, and I was just a victim. There's nothing I could do I just like was laid laid there in the jersey



and just have to wait for these people to do something and hopefully wake up. And I was the kind of thing you know, dependent on these people, the surgeons and people but once I learned the practice of loving Kindness or following my breath or anything, then suddenly I felt like I had something I could do that was helpful. And I hide away and I didn't feel like I was just kind of a passive recipient of people doing things to me. And it felt empowering. So, you know, rather than feeling helpless, the practice gives you something that you can do that can be helpful. So in a variety of ways, if you have a practice, and you have confidence in that practice, that's a great support for equanimity. Because then, you know, you bring that with you, you know, you have some you can do, you're not a victim, you're not lost. You're not, you're not, you know, it's never a completely hopeless situation. Because you can always, even if you know, if it's hopeless out there in the world or externally, you always have something here you can do. The Buddha gave a very dramatic analogy. That when something like this if you're trapped inside this huge, enormous metal, but a huge like this huge cliff. wall that's moving in from the east. And moving in from the west, there's another big, massive wall. And moving in from the North is a big massive wall and from the south as a big massive wall, it's coming in, coming in, coming in coming in, it's gonna crush you. That's pretty hopeless, right? I don't know where he thought about this 2500 years ago. But the idea is even then the Dharma even then the practice

can support you and help you. Now, it's hard in that kind of situation because like, you know, people get so frightened. But that's one of the functions of Dharma practice, if you're a developed practitioner, is to learn to work without fear and have something to do with the fear you've got, you can practice with it. So as soon as you have confidence in the ability to apply practice and situation, then you're not going to be a victim to a situation, and then it's easier to stay balanced. Stay calm, where economists and the situation. I'm not saying it's easy, but it's easy. So that's confidence is a very important quality. And hopefully you don't have these big walls coming down at you. But, you know, you could have a flat tire on the freeway. You know, that's bad enough, right? And, and you realize that you no longer have your spare. So that's pretty hopeless. Yeah, you have to do something. But even there you can practice even there you have something you can do to help deal with that situation and wiser way. Maybe realizing you're actually can take care of their situation better if you're equanimous than if you're running around your car nervous and the middle lane in the freeway or whatever. The other thing that brings equanimity is, is a well developed mind. So one of the functions again of Buddhist meditation practice is to develop the Various strengths of the mind. So those strengths are there. So like you said, you'd go to the gym to have a well developed body. And that's well developed body gives you this kind of stability, physical stability in certain situations in life you go about. So when you come to the here, the gym at corner of Hopkins and birch, the IMC gym. You know, we're one of the things that's going on here. Even if you don't think you even do anything, if you don't want to, is your if you're doing this practice, if you're noticing when the mind drifts off and you come back to your breath, over and over again, that develops and strengthens a variety of different quality factors of the mind. One of the things that develops is it develops a strength of your capacity to let go. No thing develops your capacity to be concentrated. And as these two capacities become stronger and stronger, they lend themselves to a greater and greater sense of equanimity. With time the concentration can get quite strong. And that's strong capacity for equanimity, carries over into daily life carries over a certain calm balance. equanimity, where it's a lot easier, much more difficult to be triggered, right things around us. Someone can say something that normally you get agitated or upset by. And because of your strong concentration, strong, balanced state of mind. You can hear it and it doesn't strike anything doesn't impact anything it doesn't. There's no hooks in your mind to kind of latch on to you have this wonderful, beautiful Teflon mind that maybe that's a terrible analogy, but maybe a better analogy would be better analogy would be like a completely pure, beautifully peaceful flat Lake talk, where it's so peaceful and calm that you can do two things. You can skip the stone really far lots of skips doing a lot of skipping with my little kids lately. And so, you know a slider it is less ripples there are two further you can you

can skip, it just skips along the surface. So when the mind is equanimous things kind of skip off, and rather than sink in to you, but also when the mind is when the when the pond is really flat and still and tranquil, then you can look over into the pond and see your reflection. And so the same thing when the mind is economists that you can see yourself so much better. When you're a quantum Miss, you're much less likely to be unbiased observer yourself, because human beings are have tremendous capacity for self deception, and part of the forces of self deception, our desire, aversion, confusion, delusion. Fear many things that kind of come into play ego is, is a big thing of self image self idea. And so when the mind is a quantum Miss, you have much better chance to see how these reaction forces work, or they're not going to work at all. And so you see yourself much better. Maybe you see yourself in some depth, you know, like you look in the bottom of the lake, when the when the lake is flat and clear. So when you have a green empty, you can see yourself very deeply.

So I think that equanimity is not at all a state of indifference or a flat state or boring state. But it's a very deeply satisfying state because as stronger that equanimity is, the greater the depth of connection we have to ourselves, the greater its fullness, or the depth is a good word. I feel more profound or Fuller. The feeling or sense of What's here sense of presence is and allows us to do this very, I think very important thing that I hope we all learn is how to care and not that care how not to care and care at the same time, not one or the other. So those are my thoughts this evening on equanimity. And its insistence in sits in part a wisdom, practice, you might consider this week to do some reflections on your own on this topic, equanimity. And especially if many of you don't use the word maybe much in your vocabulary is to kind of consider what this word might mean for you and how it might play out and experiences in your life when you've had equanimity. And also, I'd recommend that you find someone this week, some other some friend or some other person and have a conversation you know someone somewhere tomorrow at the bar it's probably the wrong thing to said. You know, it could be a stranger in a park or you know, anywhere that that you ask them if you could have a conversation with him, but Aqua dimity explore the topic with them. And this because the more you kind of reflect this in this wisdom topic, the more you'll become wise about it. That's what I recommend. So, thank you