

# 2011-06-26 Perfection of Equanimity

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

equanimity, people, perfections, wisdom, balanced, mind, clinging, develop, buddhism, caught, means, world, person, compassion, aversions, ways, cultivated, monk, important, anger

## SPEAKERS

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The topic today is the perfection of equanimity. And it's the last of the 10 perfections that we've been slowly covering over the last some 10 months or so. And the perfections for those of you who are new are 10 qualities that grow as a person does mindfulness practice does Buddhist practice and there are 10 qualities of mind apart, that can be cultivated as we do the practice. So they both are in a sense the fruit of practice, and there's something that are actively developed. In different people will choose different things. Some people don't focus on developing them actively, but will allow them just develop on their own to some degree. And some people will actually pick up different these qualities these 10 and worked on it for a while focus on it in their lives for a while. It said that that these 10 paramis perfections are a wonderful way of bringing the practice of Buddhism into daily life. And so if you want to develop Buddhist practice, certainly being mindful in daily life is useful, meditating everyday is useful, but to look and see how you can cultivate these and data life is very helpful. So these 10 are generosity, integrity or more virtue, renunciation, capacity to let go. Wisdom, effort, patience, truthfulness, determination or resolve, loving kindness and equanimity. So it's possible people will take these one of these qualities for a month or something and see, you know, how can I make generosity more part of my life or how can I just reflect on it and act on it and generosity. Both a, it's very important quality of these perfections that makes them a perfection is not generosity and so forth in and of itself. But when these qualities are connected to to other things, when they're either connected to liberation, because they help us become freer, or they're connected to compassion, because they help their, they help us in our compassionate care for the world around us. And I think it's quite beautiful, that each of these 10 qualities can be seen as doorways to liberation. And as expressions of compassion. And what I find beautiful about it is that it means that you don't have to think about think of liberation and compassion is two different things. Or two different tracks. Maybe it's better to say, like, I'm angry, I'm gonna go on the liberation track forget this compassion stuff. Or I'm gonna you know, I'm you know, this liberation stuff is selfish. I'm going to go in the, you know, care for the world track. But actually the two can go beautifully together and be cultivated at the same time. So today The topic is equanimity. It's the last one. And in number of lists where equanimity appears in Buddhism, it's often appears last. Because it's considered to be the crown jewel of Buddhist practice. It's last partly because it's one of the last things that's matured or fully developed. In the course of developing Buddhist practice. It said that when equanimity is quite strong, it's closest thing a person will, closest approximation a person can have of what final liberation is like the final release. It's like, sometimes it's called a pseudo Nirvana. And because it's so beautiful and has a lot of same qualities, the word equanimity I don't think a lot of people use it in their active vocabulary. Maybe some of you do. But I think it's you know, it's kind of people kind of know what it means, but it's not that often used. So, there are other more colloquial words in English that express this nicely, that maybe could be substitutes or expression we often use or not everybody but much more often used in popular English is to be balanced. People say I feel imbalanced, or I need to find some balance. So the idea of being balanced in one's life. The other one

is being centered. You know, I kind of blew it in because I wasn't so centered. And so I think I need to be centered before next time I go do this. So then we do things to get centered. steadiness sometimes people have it, you know, you know, that person was really steady. You know, just steady parent is steady at work always steady, always. reliable and steady unruffled.

is another expression to be you know, all kinds of things can happen at work or in family or in life. And some people are not so ruffled by it, their feathers are not ruffled, which sometimes I think refers to their conceit is not doesn't get aroused. They don't get kind of huffy about something. But I think it just asked me to unruffled means just they don't get disturbed by what goes on. They just stay calm in the middle of it all. Sometimes when we use the word equanimity, some people are not very quantum most about hearing that in Buddhism, because it lends itself in some people's minds the idea of indifference of being somehow aloof and delayed because they don't people are somehow not been reactive. They kind of held themselves back aloof or been indifferent. You know? It's all okay you know, and they don't kind of It's kind of not seems to be not good not caring, if you're economist means you don't care. And I've been told by a number of people, that they in their family of origin, that the way that care or love or they familial connection was kind of established or made was by worrying together. And if you didn't, if you didn't worry about the other person or worry, then how do you know how could that person know that you loved and cared? And so worried then becomes very important. And so people sometimes have strong conditioning to react in all kinds of ways or if you don't worry, then you're kind of aloof or not there for me completely. The idea of equanimity in Buddhism is not meant to be aloof or indifferent. unfeeling, in fact, it's meant to be a very strong feeling. It's kind of like an emotion or kind of like a feeling that is really sublime. Really beautiful. For people who experience strong equanimity will report that it's one of the most beautiful things beautiful feelings, emotions you can experience as opposed to some kind of you know, you're just kind of dull and blank and kind of unfeeling. In so they kind of the definition of equanimity in Buddhism is that it means that you don't get caught up in attraction and repulsion, attraction and rejection, the movements of being for and against which are so strong in the mind. Some of it's appropriate and some of it's not. But whether it's appropriate or not. The movement to desire for something or move away from something out of aversion is often something that we get hooked into very quickly. So it's kind of automatic, and authority sometimes of our one thing things and not one Think things reacting to things can be quite strong part of the function of equanimity is to have the balance or the relaxed nisour the openness, the wisdom, to not get caught up in the in the desires, the aversions we might have the force and against doesn't mean we don't have desires and aversions, but they don't have the upper hand. They don't they don't run us. We can see it arise and in a clear mind, and we can have the wisdom then to decide, should I act on this or should I not? So we're not, we're not the slave of the impulses that arrived within us. So equanimity also, there's many kinds of equanimity in Buddhism. And it's kind of I don't know if it's like, I don't know if it's actually true. But you know, there's the cliché that in the Eskimos in Alaska have, you know, a lot a lot of different words for snow and we have only one eye have more than one ourselves, but I guess they have a lot more. And because they live in the snow and so they, they differentiate in all the ways that we don't. So, Buddhists to live in the snow of equanimity. And, and so Buddhists differentiate between all kinds of different flavors and aspects of equanimity.

One aspect of equanimity is that it involves a certain kind of way warm hearted connection to other people. But a warm hearted connection we don't get caught up in the force and against, we don't get caught up in the preferences. That person was someone else. We don't get caught up in discouragement and elation, depending on those relationships. And that's why in the list of the paramis, these perfections it said that equanimity follows loving kindness, goodwill, the friendly Because it perfects loving kindness, isn't that beautiful. So rather than kind of removing you from the world loving kindness and making you somehow in different economists, that actually perfects it and one way they

perfects it is that then your loving kindness can be impartial, then you can have your loving kindness be equal leave apply to all beings, rather than just do the people you feel close to in some way. So, there are two, maybe three ways of looking at this Buddhist equanimity that I want to mention today. One is IQ or how equanimity comes about. One is it comes about from wisdom from understanding. The other is it comes about from the inner qualities that get developed the inner strength inner capacities that get developed. And the third is it gets developed By practicing equanimity by through the practice itself. So, wisdom is very closely connected to equanimity. And in fact, the Pali word for equanimity is upekkhā and Pekka oupa reflex means kind of like above or from a distance. And the QA part comes from the word to see. And so it's sometimes translated as to have an overview of a situation to be able to step back and look at the bigger picture of the situation, so that we're not kind of pulled into it or caught by it. And so, what are some of the ways of wisdom were waves I think some overview situation. One is, in terms of interpersonal life, is to have the wisdom that helps us not to react to the interpersonal things that go on. There's a story of the Dalai Lama. Or I've been told, you know, that dilemma is often you know, people, many people, in our circles in the West think he's the greatest, you know, but there are people in the world who think the opposite. And who's reviled and treated as an enemy and all kinds of things. And when he's asked about this, he says, it doesn't bother him, because he knows himself well enough, that he knows his own intention. He knows his intention is clean, is that his mind is, you know, he's nothing to regret or feel bad about. And so, he takes refuge in, fall in, in kind of the purity of his own mind, rather than take refuge in the criticism or the praise that other people provide him. Many people live very, very actively concerned with how other people praise them or blame them. And some people have spent out quite a bit and do a tremendous amount of social gymnastics to avoid one and gain the other some way. And one of the ways of the wisdom is to realize that maybe praise and blame is overrated. And then what's what's better rated. What's more important is the inner purity, the inner goodness of your own mind, or your own ability to track your own mind. So you can be responsible for what you act on in there. And then people can play it can blame you, but you know that you have nothing, nothing to be blamed for. There's a fun I think it's a fun story that maybe it's worth saying again, some of you are new to Buddhism, perhaps new enough that this old Buddhist story of, of there was a monk in Japan. I think I'm not sure who Who is either hot Quinn or real con or somebody in the 1700s who was a village monk,

and one day and a teenage girl, teenage woman in the village out of had a baby, baby gave birth. And she was pregnant and she was gonna give birth and, and she was been pregnant by one of the teenage boys in the village. When she was asked by her parents, you know, who's the father? She wasn't going to say, you know, and get her boyfriend in trouble. So finally she said the monk and so when the baby was born, the parents came to the monk with a baby and said, This is yours. And his response was, is that so? And he took the baby and cared for the baby. And then after some time, probably not too long. The teenage girl has some change of heart and so she Went to the parents and said, you know, it's not really what I said. And so then the parents went to the monk and said, it turns out you're not the Father, give us the baby back. And the monk said, Is that so? And then the monk back, the baby back. So, certain kind of equanimity, equanimity, of not getting caught up in blame, praise in gain and loss is considered a very important aspect of a wise life and Buddhism. So, having the wisdom to understand what is important in life and what is not important. I'm sure that many of you already have cultivated a fair or have a fair amount of equanimity around things that other people in our society don't. And you know, each of you can choose your own favorite thing, but just Generally people who come to IMC, you know, generally don't seem to be too caught up in wearing suits and ties and, you know, fancy expensive clothes. And I think that this population people tend to come here tend to be much more equanimous about or not so concerned about the clothes and the kind of way that some people in society can be. though perhaps you're so concerned about it, you figured out the right dress for IMC and you know, once and so when you go home, you quickly change.

Another piece of wisdom, a very important wisdom teaching in Buddhism. It's meant to help us to have more equanimity or balance is especially connected to their goodwill. Or caring feelings for other people, is to appreciate that other people make their own choices, and therefore are responsible for the consequences of those choices. And rather than us feeling like we're responsible, it's been one of my Achilles heels is my sense of responsibility. I'm responsible for other people's happiness or whatever. And so I have had to kind of learn a lot about how that works for me. But it's teaching that the understanding that the teaching of karma in Buddhism has a lot to do with appreciating that people make their own choices, their their own agents of choice. And if they keep making the same poor choices, it's their responsibility to sense the consequences of that. So you might care a lot for a person, you might try to help the person but if you can't help them or your health doesn't work, because they keep making choices that are not not, not healthy or appropriate. Then you don't you don't get you don't succumb to despair or anger or to discouragement or some, some feeling you said, You stay balanced, you don't get pulled into that world. You have done what I could do. You've made choices here. So you know you'll have to live those consequences I care about you offer support, I can, but I'm not going to follow you down that into that. That dungeon I'm not gonna follow you down in there.

When we can't, when we can help someone we help, we can rejoice with them and we rejoice when we can share and their good fortune we share in that good fortune. But we can win when they kind of do things that we can either help in or rejoice in or support, then having some balance. being centered is a very important part of our love, our capacity to love. And I like to think of it as goodwill or Because in love and goodwill, we're available. We don't shut anybody out. We're always available, you can come back here to me. But if you keep making these choices, then you know you're gonna have to do this consequences. They've got the consequences, but I'm always here ready for you to receive you when you come back from jail. or wherever you know, whatever your where you going.

In other very interesting wisdom teaching in Buddhism, that supports equanimity is is encapsulated in a one sentence teaching the Buddha gave and I love this little one sentence. And I love it because it's a good sentence is good teaching to debate argue with struggle with try to come up with exceptions. See if you could come up with a better answer, you know something, there's, you know, to kind of really work with and that's the sentence. nothing whatsoever is worth clinging to. So are you worthy opponents for that statement? Take that up and see nothing whatsoever is worth clinging to. And then see if you can come up with something. Well, yes, maybe some things but I got a really good one. You know, I think I need to cling to x y&z and Z. And then really look at it deeply. Is it really the case it's really for your best interest to get attached to cling to what you think you need to cling to, it's important to cling to are there are there alternatives, other ways of taking care of yourself and take care of things without clinging and grasping. It's kind of like people who come to me and say Anger is really important. And without anger, how am I going to fight for justice? And it is a beautiful thing to fight for justice. And you know, there's things that need to be incense stopped or changed in life. But is anger the best motivator to act in the world? Are there alternatives? And I would like to believe I believe that a better alternative that can be as passionately engaging of our energy interact with is, is compassion. That we can if work compassion can be the motivator rather than anger. And I think it has better consequences in the world, if we come from compassion runs from anger. So to look at the statement, nothing whatever is worth clinging to. And if you feel that something is worth clinging to spend some time and looking is an alternative. Now the connection with equanimity is that the loss of equanimity comes from clinging clinging resisting Holding onto some idea or something that we want strongly. So it said that the one form of equanimity comes from wisdom, understanding, having an overview of the situation, some understanding that shifts our perspective on it. The second kind of connection, or what brings about equanimity is inner inner strengths that get developed. Kind of like if you if you go maybe I don't know if



it works, well example, but you go to the gym and you work out. And some people find after working out in the gym, they feel stronger, and they come out and they just feel more balanced more in their body or rooted somehow know, like, heavier or stronger or something. And so you're you're more able to withstand some of the some of the disruptions of daily life a little bit better because of that strength and stability that comes from exercise. So the same thing with a mind, if you practice if you develop yourself, like you develop yourself, you know muscles in the gym, if you develop your mind, then you develop these strengths and capacities within. And so the idea of being balanced, is a second meaning of equanimity type of balance would be centered. So be balanced, so that no matter what happens to you, you can keep your center someone you don't have a lot of wisdom about, you know, don't if someone praises you or someone criticizes you, you don't have a lot of wisdom about how to relate to that. But you're so relaxed and balanced and centered in yourself, that it doesn't really strike you very much doesn't push you over. If you know you're bigger than the state bigger than you're kind of bigger than the statement. So the story in my book, a monastery within Where the abbot says, some people know if a fly lands on an ant flies usually bigger than ants, it's a big deal for the ant. But if the fly lands on an elephant, it's nothing for the elephant. Elephant hardly notices. So the Ibis says,

You know what? Who are you? What do you want to be? Do you want to be an ant or an elephant? You'll have a lot of problems in your life. If but if you relate to your problems like an elephant, you'll have a very different relationship to them, if you develop them, relate to them like an ant. So you can develop and cultivate inner strengths, a sense of bigness, a sense of power, a sense of efficacy, that difficult things can occur to you and you have a confidence you have stability, you have lots of space and room in your mind. So some of this balance comes from having strong mindfulness, the strength of mindfulness creates space and room in the mind. So you can see clearly what's happening as they happen. And if you can see things as they happen, then it's a little bit more difficult to get blindsided by the feelings, desires and wishes you have. You can see it arise, you can see it be there. And you can see you have choice but whether to get picked up, pick it up or get involved in it. So as mindfulness gets stronger and stronger, there's a greater slope and more space or room in the mind, to be to not react, and that gives birth to equanimity, not reacting, not being for or against. Part of the balance then is to be balanced between over exertion and under exertion in practice. Be over enthusiastic about practice, or under enthusiastic about practice. Some people swing between them. Or this is the best thing. Boy, I can't wait until I get you know, you know, I tell everyone about how wonderful practices I'm just gonna go gung ho. And then we go gung ho into practice for a while, five, six minutes. And it's not going as you know, as well as we expected it to. He's got all this, this is terrible. This is a drag. This is impossible. I can't do this. You know, why should I even bother? I think it's Buddhism is overrated. And, and so then we get discouraged. We don't make any effort. But part of the function of balanced is not to be swayed by the for and against, not be over enthusiastic and not under enthusiastic but kind of a matter of facts that hold steady in at all. So as practice develops, there's all these stronger, these qualities of heart of mind, that get developed that become strengths. So, confidence, effort or inner strength, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom, all get developed and strengthened. And as they become stronger, there's more equanimity. The third aspect of developing equanimity is practice itself, where we kind of limit like the second one, but where we do get reactive. We do get caught up in force it against, but we take it on to look at that, to investigate it, to become familiar with it. Because one of the really the wisest ways of becoming economists is not to hold yourself in some economists way balanced way, but rather to study how your unluckiness to study how you're reactive to become really wise about how your anger gets triggered really wise about your relationship to, to desire to really look at all this and study it. And once you and if you, even if you get caught, it's a huge difference between being caught and studying it versus just being caught. So the practice is to look and study what's going on here whereas I get caught by things, what do I believe in at all? As we kind of step back and look at it that way investigated, then we can question some of the things that go on within us. We can shift our

perspective perhaps, we can step back and discover that we are not our desires, we are not our aversions and most important, we are not our thoughts. And one of the most useful ways of developing equanimity is to And one of the wise ways, especially in meditation is to begin to step away from living in our thoughts. stepping away from holding on or reacting or living with whatever thoughts your mind can produce. And your mind can produce many, many thoughts and just allow them to arise. But don't do anything with them.

Sometimes the mind is very claustrophobic. Where the mind the Outer Limits of the mind that we live in, is thinking itself. You know, there's no sense of any mind beyond thinking. As practice develops. The sense of what the mind is, becomes bigger than just thinking. And there's a greater space and awareness for feelings for emotions, the most important for awareness and awareness gets bigger And bigger. And as equanimity matures, then there's a sense of purity and clarity in the mind that arises. There kind of like a clear I think of as a click, like clarity that I don't know, a great sense of clarity and clean clarity and also a great sense of vastness of vast space, you just get the vastness or openness. And as the mind begins healing vast, beautifully vast, the outer limits of the mind just almost can seem boundless at times, then the tendency to live in a cluster, fault phobic world of thoughts, has decreased dramatically. And so then you realize a thought arises, it can be the most world's most terrible thought that anybody's ever had. And it just floats up and you don't pick it up. It just kind of floats around this great big space. Or you can have the most beautiful thought human beings ever had. And you don't get all wrapped up around, it just floats up. And because you realize that the vast clarity the vast beauty is so much more beautiful and spit and valuable and satisfying than picking up the particular thought you might have. And so in that kind of freedom of the mind, of vastness of clarity of peace, no matter if things are pleasant or unpleasant, no matter if you get if you have praise or blame, no matter if things are happening the way you like it or not like it, your mind doesn't get ruffled, stays balanced stays open. As the mind stays more more balanced or centered or unruffled. There's less agitation in the mind. And when there's as the mind gets less and less agitated it's easy easier and easier for the mind to let go. And one of the primary functions of equanimity in strong Buddhist practice is to prepare the mind. Help the mind feel, prepare the mind by helping the mind feel very balanced and agitated, but also very satisfied very peaceful, feeling kind of light and joy. So, that when the mind is ready, he can let go fully the function of Buddhist practice is not to end up living in equanimous life, so much as it is to live a life that has let go. And then people want to ask well what is what is it like to be a person who has let go fully and then you can come back to the 10 perfections then Who's fully let go is not like Mr. Natural sitting in the desert, but rather someone for whom the 10 perfections characterizes how they live in the world. There's someone who is generous, as integrity, as the ability to let go, has patience, as energy as wisdom as truthfulness as determination, as loving kindness, and has equanimity

with a particular ways that those 10 things will manifest in someone who's let go fully can be rather idiosyncratic. So I don't think that it has to look what you think it's supposed to look like. Don't think that you're supposed to look like some conventional idea of what a person is like. Who knows who you will be when you're free.

So, I hope that was okay. The 10 perfections. And if it's not okay, I'll be equanimous about that. So it's we have five minutes. So those of you who would like to stay for just five minutes or so, I'll give a little update about the retreat center. Otherwise, you