

Equanimity Factor of Awakening

Gil Fronsdal

February 01, 2019

Keywords: upekkhā, upa, vedanā, Dhamma, Dharma, Buddha, seven factors of awakening, equanimity, mindfulness, concentration

And so may be quite appropriately. The theme is equanimity. And now equanimity is sometimes considered to be the crown jewel of Buddhism, Buddhist practice. And now it's a little hard. It certainly was hard for me when I was a new student to have any relationship to this concept of equanimity, let alone to appreciate how it could be treated as a crown jewel, the most valuable treasure that Buddhism has. But there is no Buddhism except for what we find in ourselves.

So how could this be one of the most valuable treasures that we possess, this equanimity thing? I couldn't have understood that. And that was something that slowly dawned on me as I practised and grew. And it's still developing. It may be never ending to appreciate this. But it's not just being, not just, it's not being aloof.

It's not being indifferent. It's not being cold and unfeeling. It's actually, in some ways, the opposite of all those things. It's being very connected and very present. It's being very caring what's going on. And it's being very, what was the third one I said, aloof, indifferent, and cold.

It's warm and light. And because it's such an important quality, perhaps, or, you know, that in Buddhist practice it's so valued, you know, there are certain areas in life where people who specialize in that area, they have an extensive vocabulary to describe all the nuances of differences, like people who study the ocean have all these different names for waves. I just know there's waves, look at the waves, but all these different names for different kinds of waves. And so these Buddhists use the word equanimity, have different, they have some different names that are equivalent, but to kind of make different, but they recognize all these different kinds of equanimity. And again, you know, it goes on and on, the different types, and it's such a rich and multifaceted phenomena.

One of the forms of equanimity is equanimity as a faculty for feeling, a feeling faculty, the same faculty where you're not feeling turns to emotions, but a *vedanā*, sense sensations. That ability we have, the senses we have to pick up whether something is painful or pleasant. Those are called faculties for pleasant faculty or unpleasant. In the same way, there's a particular faculty, like maybe there's nerve endings, I don't know where, you know, I don't know what these Buddhists, ancient Buddhists, were thinking, but they say there is a particular faculty that's able to feel equanimity. And so it's a feeling that, just like a pleasant and unpleasant you can feel throughout the body in different places, so this equanimity thing somehow can also be an embodied experience, a deep stability, a deep stillness, a deep idea of being unperturbed, unruffled with all the different things that can occur hence.

And wonderfully, luckily, the faculty of equanimity that can sense and feel equanimity can operate together with the faculty that feels pleasant and painful, meaning that it's possible to experience, that's one of the functions of equanimity, to have the capacity to feel things which are deep, very uncomfortable, painful, things that are very pleasant, and stay balanced and stay unreactive to it, not leaning towards it, leaning away from it. The pleasant experiences that we have, there's often a tendency to lean towards it and want it, to want more of it. The unpleasant things, often a tendency to lean away and push it away and to reject it. And that movement of for and against, leaning one direction or the other, wanting or pushing away, are all forms of agitation of the mind, agitation of the system that represents non-equanimity. So equanimity, the faculty of equanimity, has the ability, or when we have it, when it's strong, we feel it, then we can feel something that's painful and it's kind of like there's room for it or space for it, or it's just kind of held in nice, I don't know, soup.

And the same thing, when something is pleasant, it's just held in space for it and room for it. And we don't have to, and we don't succumb to that natural enough human tendency to be for and against, to want that and not want that. But we can just experience things. I don't really like this. I want to say that again. We can experience things and just let it be an experience.

We don't have to do anything with it. We don't have to make meaning to it. We don't have to have a preference with it. We don't have to be for or against it. And I'm talking about this rudimentary level of just sense experience as things come in through the eyes, the initial sensations coming in, sounds come into the ears. That initial just the sounds themselves, the smells, the tastes, the tactile experience, just them, just the immediacy of that, and also the immediacy of certain kinds of mental phenomena when they first arise.

The beginning of a thought, just a thought, as opposed to what the thought means and the

big picture that are part of, that's important too. But that initial, just the initial contact with experience, kind of like the nerve contact. To allow that experience just to be itself. Keep it so simple. It's not easy to do, but it's nice to know that this is one of the North Star or the direction we're going, by having this equanimity faculty become stronger. So we're not supposed to just come along and hold ourselves still, you know, and pretend to be unmoving and, you know, unshaking.

That doesn't work. Diane talked so nice yesterday about the soft mind, gentle mind. It's not just a soft mind that we cultivate in practice. It's a soft body, and the body gets softer, and so that the feeling of it, at least, and so that when the sense contact comes, it just is not there, not met by brittleness, is not met by reactivity, is not met by, you know, reactive activity. It's just there. Experience allows it to be for what it is.

And so I remember, I'll tell you the story. When I was practising in Zen, the way we meditated was we would sit facing the wall. So we sat on platforms, kind of like this size here. So you can imagine here was a person sitting like these kinds of mats, and they turned around and we turned around facing the wall. And so sometimes the teachers would walk and walk in rows, you know, proper rows, and it's all around the periphery kind of. And so the teacher would walk around, and then they often liked to adjust posture.

And so they would come up, and they gently put their hand on your shoulder to let you know they're there. And then once you knew they're there, they would somehow kind of do a little adjustment to your back. It's usually pretty gentle. Or sometimes I was the Leaning Tower of Gil, and they would come and just go like that to me. They'd put the hand on the shoulder, and they'd go, and then. So it usually wasn't a big deal what they did, but a little.

So what was interesting to me was that, oh, if I was, which I did, you know, every once in a blue moon or something, maybe some, you know, daydreaming, it was known to almost happen, and it's art, you know, daydreaming is thinking a lot, and they'd put their hand on my shoulder, I would startle. But if I wasn't involved in daydreaming, thinking, if I was just really, I was purely calm but present and not thinking about something else, they would come and touch my shoulder, and my body would feel like jello, and I would just, oh, I would just kind of, like I was still, it was unexpected, but I would just, oh, I would just kind of, I would kind of almost kind of, you know, receive it, and like jello or something.

And so this idea of not being brittle or being so caught has a lot to do with how much mental activity we have, at least it is for me, and where somehow being caught in my thoughts, or the world of thinking for me was often where I get triggered by all kinds of things. And so the ability to not be in that triggering world was fascinating to see that difference, and so to

learn to let experience just be experience. There's time for making meaning. There's times for being for and against things. There's times for, you know, you know, there's times for ego about everything, or the contexts. And I say that because, as I was thinking about giving this talk about equanimity, one of the dangers, you know, there are a number of dangers of listening to a Buddhist teacher, we should have, you know, disclaimers or banners and say caution, this talk may be dangerous, for all I know.

And one of them is that one of the dangers, one of the banners would say, caution, this talk comes with the danger of thinking it applies to all of life. And so if you're talking about equanimity, it's like, I will do my best to talk about equanimity. And we can be really into it, and like, this is the most important thing. And then people leave thinking, now I'm supposed to be equanimous all the time. This is like the way you're supposed to live, the way you're supposed to be, and this is it, you know. Don't do that.

Equanimity is contextual. There's a time and place for profound equanimity, or use of equanimity, to be equanimous. And even the Buddha talked about, he got a, sometimes in a sutta, he chastises his monks sometimes, for when he said, when there was some monk, I think, who was being criticized wrongly, I think, and the Buddha criticized the other monks and said that was not a time to be an equanimous. You should have come to your friend, your monk, your fellow monk's defence, or you've spoken up, and so clearly that was not the time to be a, quote, equanimous and let everything just be. And so I don't want to give the impression here today that, you know, equanimity is like the be all and end all, you're supposed to now be that way forever.

But I do want to give the message that equanimity is something to value. It's a treasure, something to care for, something to consider, and something to learn about how it works and how it functions, and when it's there, how to be with it and how to support it to be there, and, you know, just kind of become fluent in the language or the phenomena of equanimity. So there is equanimity as a feeling, which is kind of a fascinating faculty of each feeling you can have. And then there's also equanimity which is of the mind, that the mind can be, they use this wonderful term in Buddhist English, imperturbable. And it's translating a Pāli word of being unagitated, unruffled, not restless, unrest, the mind, a restless mind. And so some people don't like the idea of equanimity, because it just seems kind of dull.

But the idea of not being agitated, I hope, is a welcome idea. Or not being restless is a welcome idea. And then we're talking about a mind which doesn't get agitated by, so things can happen. We can have thoughts. Things can happen in the world, and they might be things we have to take care of and address, but the mind doesn't get agitated. And to have thoughts

of how to live our life and impulses of how to act come not from intuition, which is kind of vague what it's about, but come from clarity and understanding, but out of a mind that is not agitated, that's not straining or pushing or wanting or not wanting.

But it's almost like it arises out of the emptiness, arises out of space, arises out of non-agitation. And some people think you have to get agitated in order to take care of things, to know what to do. But maybe we take care of things better if we're not agitated. So anyway, there's two forms of agitation: that of the body, the senses, how we feel and take in the experiences, and then there's the equanimity of the mind. And then there's lots of other lists of equanimities in the teachings on the seven factors of awakening. The last factor of awakening is equanimity.

And the word is *upekkhā*. And this is a word that has a prefix *upa*. And then a main part of the word, the, what, you know, I don't remember exactly how to properly say what the word is, but it doesn't matter. But the main part of the word means to look upon, or to look. And *upa* means upon, or from above, or down to, or something. And so *upekkhā* has a literal etymological meaning, to look upon something.

I love the idea of a, kind of, of a bird's eye view. It's kind of a mature place. We're able to see what's there. We kind of step back. We're not in the fray, but we can step back and see what's there. I still have a very almost visceral memory of a time when I was quite, when I was about twenty or so, eighteen, nineteen, and I was in college, and I was living in a little apartment with four other college students.

We had a little living room with a little balcony with sliding glass doors. And for some reason I was out on the balcony with the sliding doors closed, and my two friends were talking in an animated way on the couch. But because the sliding door was closed, I couldn't hear what they were saying. And then somehow standing there and watching them, being animated, and not being part of any idea what they were talking about, and just watching. And I just felt so peaceful, like I felt like, wow, it's just like, just to be here and watch, and not be caught in the fray or involved.

And then I think they were having, there wasn't an argument, it wasn't like a bad thing, but it was just like a sort of step back, like you're in a, you're in a crowd of people who are arguing, and then you have to go to the bathroom. When you come back, you stand in the door and look in and, wow, look at all those people, they're yelling and screaming, and you stand there and like, wow, that's really interesting. You know, I don't know if I want to go in there. I'll just stand and watch. And so you're not caught in it. There is some kind of stepping back, and not being caught and excited.

And so this having an overview of the situation and the balance of mind, balance of mind that can come from that overview, is a little bit what's meant by this word *upekkhā*. And so in the teachings on the seven factors of awakening, it talks about, in order to support it, to nourish it, we have to give careful attention to something. So all of these factors of awakening, it's a careful attention to something that allows them to arise. And the teachings that the Buddha gave about what we give careful attention to in this equanimity is not that helpful, because he says, I pay attention, I give careful attention to that which is the basis for equanimity, period, the basis. Well then you're like, where's the rest of it, and now what's the basis?

And I like, I love it. I actually love the fact that he doesn't go on and explain what that is, because that means there are many bases, many conditions for the arising of equanimity, not just one. And each of us probably have different conditions that support us and help us to be equanimous. It's a personal thing, and this goes along with one of the things I like to emphasize, that the *Dhamma* practice is very personal. And so another one of those caution banners that the State of California prints for *Dharma* teachers: caution, this *Dharma* talk might not be relevant for you, because, you know, we're all, in some ways, we're very different from each other, and so what's suited for one person is not suited for another person.

And so it takes a lot of, you know, the real *Dharma* book that we need to study is our own book in our hearts and our minds. And how do we respond to things, and what's best for us, and what supports us to be free, and what supports us to develop and grow each of the seven factors of awakening. And so no one can tell you that. As *Dharma* teachers, I can just give you, throw out ideas, and hope that some of them are relevant. And so, you know, the idea that the Buddha doesn't specify what the condition is to focus on for equanimity puts the responsibility back to us. You know, it's kind of nice, you know, study yourself, find out what supports you.

So there are many things that could support equanimity. The Buddhist tradition puts a lot of emphasis on virtue, and I think when we live an ethical life, then we're less likely to be agitated by our ethics. And so that leads to a certain kind of equanimity. The Buddha said that you could walk into any assembly and be relaxed, not feel worried about that. So there is the equanimity of having a lot of confidence and trust in the *Dharma* and the practice and in yourself. So now, sometimes it is reconnecting to what we really have faith in or trust in, or where our confidence lies, and to call upon that in situations that normally would agitate us, so that the confidence carries the day, and so we're less likely to get, you know, discombobulated, because we have confidence.

In so many places in life, when people get upset and angry, I suspect that one of the condi-

tions for being upset is a lack of confidence in one's own efficacy, one's own ability to somehow address a situation or take care of oneself in the situation. And then sometimes it's that upsetness we spill out and, you know, think that something out there needs to be done. But to cultivate confidence and trust and faith is one of the big, important tasks of *Dharma* practice. And that doesn't come easily. It's something that sometimes takes a while to develop, sometimes a long time to develop. And for some people, *Dhamma* practitioners, that's the, I've known people for the first five or ten years of *Dharma* practice, the thing that was really maturing and developing in what they needed to do was the faculty of faith and confidence and trust.

And it was beautiful to watch that grow, and how that kind of, everything, ever so much changed and shifted and freed up just with that faculty. So to call upon confidence and trust and trust. And that's one of the beautiful things that a number of people I've talked to, and myself, comes with mindfulness practice, is that someday to be able to say that, to have a deep abiding trust when we are in mindfulness, that if I can be really mindful of things, things will work out. I don't know how. But when I'm mindful, somehow the system, the mind, the heart, the circumstances begin to shift. They seem to work out well, if in no other way, it works out well because we don't get caught in our inner reactivity.

And so it works out well in the sense that we don't harm ourselves. And there are circumstances in life where, you know, that's maybe the only thing that's relevant. Sooner or later, there's rumours that some of you will be dying, you know, I don't want to assume, and then, and so some of you'll get a diagnosis that's going to be terminal, and you'll do what you can do to try to stay alive and take care of that. But for some of you it's not going to work. And that'll be the thing that will bring you to your end sooner or later. And so mindfulness, everything can work out well because I'm mindful.

It's not going to protect you from that last, you know, passing away. But everything will work out spiritually. Everything will work out emotionally. Everything. It's phenomenal what mindfulness can do when it can hold the experience and make room, and we have confidence in that, then it's a lot easier to be equanimous and balanced. I have this practice, and this practice, I have confidence in the practice.

And then there's the equanimity that comes from doing the practice, not just having the practice, but doing it, doing the practice that cultivates greater clarity so we can see what's going on. We do a practice that cultivates greater calm and subtleness and stability, and that ability to see what's going on gives us information so we can see our reactivity as it begins. We can see some of the underlying conditions, and we don't have to kind of pick it up or get in-

volved, and we can just stay more balanced through things. We develop concentration, calm, and the calm has more room. In calm, you know, we're less likely to be triggered reactively, suddenly, because somehow, like the example of them touching my shoulder in the Zen meditation halls, you know, I was calm. And so there, you know, there's lots of room for things, and I think most of you probably have some experience of how a calm state allows you to be much more at ease in situations that you're not at ease in when you're tense.

So to cultivate practices, the new practices, that put us into nice states, useful states, and this equanimity that comes from that. There is equanimity that comes from having wisdom to understand how things work a little bit, and have street smarts, and understand that if you do X, Y follows, or to have the wisdom of understanding, you know, I don't have to take it so personally. Someone says something to you, and maybe it's extremely unkind. Maybe they, you know, they tell you to go away. But you know, it's a three-year-old, you know. Then it's, you're a three-year-old.

And you know, just five minutes earlier, they asked you if you'd marry them. And now they're like, you know, they're looking at you like you're the worst person in the world, you know. You can't take these kids so personally. And then there's people who get old, and some people who are dying. And one of the phenomena sometimes of people who are dying in slow deaths, which kind of, the chemicals begin doing something, is sometimes they take it out on the people who are closest to them, and hospital nurses or hospital physicians will know to tell family, you know, to tell them that this is coming, this might be coming, or if that happens, you know, this is a phenomenon well known, and probably it has to do with chemicals. Don't, do not take it personally.

And I've known family members who were told this, and it happened, and, oh, and so they didn't have to kind of take the usual meaning that they had for their lifetime, how they would do it otherwise. So three-year-olds, ninety-nine-year-olds, and then what about everybody in between? Is there an appropriate not to take things personally? What does it mean to take something personally? Have you ever considered that? What are you actually doing when you take something personally?

Then the kind of Buddhist, the Buddhist analogy for taking things personally, maybe it's not a good fit for all the meanings of taking it personally, but the Buddhist analogy is holding up a flag so it can be shot. So look at, you know, over here, look, and so then, you know, the bow and arrow, something like that. So that's a rather violent image. So I just like, I just tell you this, you know, taking it personally is like putting up your hand like this, and so that when the words people say or the things people do have something to hit inside of us, something

inside of us is up, and, you know, it hurts. But to not take it personally, then it's kind of like this. Nothing there, it just goes right through.

So what is it that's active? What is it that we're holding up? What are we holding on to? What are we projecting? What are we requiring when we take things personally? And so, you know, if the State of California comes and says, you know, all these banners and caution signs have to be on the wall every time I give a *Dharma* talk, and I might take it very personally, now I'm a perfectly good and competent *Dharma* teacher, and doesn't California know that, and, you know, and I get all huffed up and agitated, because, you know, I am caught up in being a good, clear, you know, proper *Dharma* teacher.

And so that, boy, the State of California just like ran right into me, and it would take me years to recover from that one, you know. But eventually I kind of, I don't have to have this identity of being, you know, a good *Dharma* teacher. It's fine to be a mediocre *Dharma* teacher, you know, even a lousy one, as long as people are helped a little bit. You know, it's fine. And so I kind of like, you know, I put that all down. You know, I don't need to be a *Dharma* teacher or to give talks, you know.

I just talk, or as long as I get away with it, I'll keep doing it. And so I don't hold a *Dharma* teacher thing. And so those blue banners come, and I go, that's interesting, they could have used nicer fonts, you know, or something, you know, just like, it doesn't hit anything. So what is it? So when you take something personal, what's actually happening? And do you sometimes hold something up, and you know that something can be hit?

And what is it, what I want to, what in the world is Gil talking about when he talks about not having anything in there that is hit, it just goes right through? What does that mean, and isn't that bizarre? And so anyway, so some of this equanimity comes from the wisdom of not taking certain things personally. And I'm sure that all of you are old enough to have a lot of wisdom around what not to take personally. I would, if I was a betting person, I'd better bet on it. All you have to do is probably compare yourself to when you were fifteen.

I know for me when I was fifteen or fourteen, many things that I took personally, that I don't take personally now, it's like, you know, I'm really wise compared to that, you know. So, I mean, you know what one of the major things when I was thirteen or fourteen that was really important and serious, that, you know, was a big concern, and had to have a lot of thought and care repeatedly, and attention and solutions, and learning ways to escape and get out of danger, and all I had to do is get a zit. Those zits, you know. But if I get a zit now, I hardly even notice myself, let alone care what you guys think about my zit. I don't take these zits so personally, and if you do have an opinion about me with a zit, I couldn't care less. I won't

even, don't take it personally if you say *Dharma* teachers shouldn't have zits, how could I, it's just like, OK.

So, you know, but taking it personally, it's a very personal thing, so I don't want to just make fun of it and kind of make silly examples. We have a lot of care, compassion for this thing, because it's personal. You know, we say, we say it's personal. You know, what I'm feeling now, or what impact I'm in, that when someone says that it's personal, I kind of get soft, and I slow down, and pay attention, and have a lot of respect and care just for that. So even though we take it personally, if maybe we can see that it is kind of unnecessary identification with something. But it often has its roots, its basis, in something that's very tender and vulnerable or caring or valuable or precious that's somehow operating.

And so another source of equanimity is a lot of compassion, lots of care, lots of love. And so to cultivate compassion, or remember compassion, compassion for others and compassion for ourselves, maybe it's easier for the mind not to get agitated and ruffled, and we can stay calmer and more peaceful, and then respond accordingly or appropriately. There is the equanimity that comes from not clinging to things, not holding on to things. And so, as the practice deepens and we learn to recognize how we cling and hold on, to let go, to let go. There is the equanimity that comes from developing strength, inner strength, and some of that strength comes from healing. So some things need to be healed, and only when they're healed can we have equanimity.

And so how do we use mindfulness and compassion, and we know, what is it, to recognize what needs healing and to care for that and tend that, so that someday that also can be a support for equanimity, as a basis for equanimity. In the seven factors of awakening, each of these seven factors has one of the conditions for the next. So when the Buddha says, pay attention to the basis for equanimity, give careful attention to the basis of equanimity, the clearest basis in that teaching is concentration, because out of concentration, concentration is a support for the arising of equanimity. And as I've said before, in these factors of awakening, these are not things we're supposed to do, but things that we somehow cultivate and allow them to grow. And this is important, because otherwise it's too easy to hear a talk on equanimity and think, I'm supposed to be equanimous, I'm supposed to kind of do this thing now and be this way, and to try too hard to be equanimous. It's a sure-fire way to be non-equanimous, or to become brittle.

So to cultivate the conditions for the soft mind and open mind and relaxed mind and spacious mind that can hold things is part of the function of concentration practice. And when the Buddha talked about the conditions that support the nourishments for the arising of con-

centration, he said, you pay attention to, pay attention to the experience of serenity that comes with concentration. There's something about the tranquillity, serenity, and peacefulness that comes with concentration that is support for more concentration. So it's kind of, but the other one is non-dispersal. Give careful attention to non-dispersal. I'm not sure what the real Pāli is, what the word would have meant, but I love this idea, at least how I interpret it, that non-dispersal means this fragmentation, that we're kind of like off in orbit, and we're scattered, and, you know, rather than being whole or held.

Everything's held together, you know. Body and mind are working together in harmony. So this feeling of being unified, non-dispersed, a feeling of serenity, is support for concentration. But these feelings of serenity, of non-dispersal, of concentration, give us a reference point for a way of being that is support for concentration and equanimity. As we have deeper feelings of ease, of calm, of peace, of sense of well-being. Just like Diane said, I like the word well-being because it's so vague.

So we can kind of concoct, maybe it's vague enough that we can find what it means for ourselves, you know, the different flavours of what it might be like. But the idea of, as concentration has developed, however small it might be, the concentration, it gives us a reference point for what's possible, and it allows us to highlight choices we have. And, you know, we don't always have choices. But, you know, it's like, you know, you've been doing now this practice for five or six days here. I'm sure you're all, so you're all calmer than you realize. So that's clear.

So it's clear to me. But it's not to you, right? That's what I define by definition, what I'm saying, you're calmer than you realize, that you don't know it, and now more settled. But you probably recognize, maybe some of you recognize you are calmer than you were before your first day or something, more settled in a way. And I say to you, you know, this has been a great retreat, but I think that, you know, we should probably take a little break from it, and we'll go down to the boardwalk, do some of the rides, and there's a bowling alley right nearby. We'll spend some time bowling.

And then we will go down to the pizza joint where it's kind of crowded, but it's OK, it's good pizza. And then we'll come back and continue our meditation. So if I offer you that as an option, I'm sorry, some of you might take it, but, you know, you might have the wisdom, well, you know, another time. But after five days of sitting and I've got into this calm, I think that probably it's better off staying here and staying close to that. And so you choose to stay close. So you know something, you have a reference point for something: oh, this is good.

This is worth maintaining, or staying close to, or not giving up so easily just for, you know,

an amusement park. And so there's a whole series of reference points about not this, I don't need to do this. Some of it might have to do with certain thoughts that arise. You've been reviewing now for forty years or fifty years this thing that happened in high school, and what he said, what she said, what they said, you know, all this, you know, and, you know, this is like the best guess, it's like the fifty-two thousandth time in the last ten years you've thought about this little incident. And you're calm and peaceful, and you see those thoughts arise, and you have your counter, fifty-two thousand and one, and you, wait a minute, maybe I don't need to get involved. Maybe just leave that one alone.

You couldn't control it, you couldn't control whether the thought arose. But getting involved, I don't need to do that any more. As the settledness gets more settled and clear, and the mindfulness becomes clear, it's not just things we've seen fifty-two thousand times coming up, but after a while it becomes things that have arisen just two or three times. To some point it might even be something that's arising for the first time, and we see, and I don't have, it doesn't even have to matter what the content of the thoughts are. We have a reference point for a sense of stability and peace and well-being and spacious attention for things that feels good. And so the equanimity comes from something arises, and it just feels so good not to get involved in that thought, no matter what it is.

And sometimes in deep concentration, it doesn't matter what the thought is. Not getting involved just feels so much better. And so there is equanimity towards thoughts. We're not so interested in them. We're not invested in them. And they can come, they can go, but we're not oriented towards them.

We're not invested in them. We're not thinking that every thought is significant, that every thought is important every time it arises, that every thought has authority. The amount of authority we invest in our thoughts sometimes is phenomenal. And, you know, nowhere have I read or learned or been told by anyone that I was supposed to give authority to every thought I have, like it's true, like it's important, like I have to listen to it. But there was a period in my life where I did that. I just assumed that if I thought it, it must be true and important and, you know, it has to be listened to or something.

And now, if a thought arises, and if it seems, if the wisdom of my mind says that's important, I'd better think that some more, then I will. But there's plenty of times, either it's not important, or it's not a time when I want to think about it. So I just let it be there. There's something better going on than to get involved in that thought. And so there's a certain equanimity then about thinking. You know, thoughts come and go, and all kinds of thoughts.

I don't have to take them personally. I don't have to believe them. I don't have to be pushed

around by them. And so thoughts arise, they come and they go. And so I coined a new word that some of you have heard me say before. So there's thinking, and then there's think-ing.

Thinking is when I put the thoughts together, association, one goes to the other, it's like I get involved, and there's, you know, it's like building this whole thing, and a lot of thinking is associated thinking, it just goes from one to the next. Think-ing is just what the mind does. Sometimes it's a little thought-ing machine, pumps out a thought. But I don't know, but if I don't react, get involved, think about it, you know, then it doesn't go anywhere. Just a thought, you know, like, you know, like soap bubbles, you know. It's like soap bubbles of mind, you know.

Each bubble comes and then it pops, comes and goes. So to see thoughts that way, whether you are close to that or not, can produce more equanimity around thoughts. So to the degree to which, at this point in the retreat, you have some subtleness, that you have some spaciousness, that you have some calm, that you have some clarity about what's happening, you are able to be in the present. To the degree to which you have compassion, care, and love, to the degree to which you have some, you know, some confidence, trust. Can you call upon that or bring caring, careful attention to that? Hold it here.

Include it as part of here, so that as you continue being present for whatever is arising, that some parts of your mind and maybe your heart can remain unruffled. It doesn't get stirred up. It doesn't lean towards or pull away, or doesn't get translated or transferred into compulsion to have or compulsion to push away. That your experience can just be. Your experience, sounds maybe can just be sounds, especially if we can decrease the bells. Maybe sight objects can just be sight.

Maybe a body sensation can just be a body sensation. Pleasant can just be something pleasant. Unpleasant can just be something unpleasant. An emotion can just be an emotion. Anger can just be anger. Joy can just be joy.

And thoughts that arise can just be thought. And I offered the first day the word OK for equanimity. It's OK. Whatever it is, it's OK, it's OK. And, you know, that word might not work for everyone. Another word that I've used for equanimity, it's whatever is happening, I add the word just in front of it, just a thought.

It's just a feeling, just a sound. And it's not the just that's dismissive or belittling of something. It's just saying it's just, that's all it is, and all it is means it's allowed to be what it is without the addition of my assigning meaning or predicting where this is going to go, what's happening, thinking about the future or taking it personally, or, you know, whatever, all these compli-

cated things we do, just let it be. In fact, I think of it, I think of this as being, equanimity itself, as something that's a way of offering profound respect to life. Maybe a kind of respect that's, maybe, I don't know, emotionally, I'm sitting here talking about it, thinking about it, feeling it. It's kind of like a respect that's deeper than deep, that's expansive, like respecting not just the planet as a whole, but respecting the cosmos, or respecting nature.

We're part of a deep respect for this process of life that we're in, that's deeper, more profound than my zits or some other things too, deeper. So a profound way in which whatever arises, whatever occurs, there's something about that being connected to the profundity of life. Whatever occurs somehow is important and respect-worthy. And so to have equanimity is not being aloof or indifferent. It's a way of allowing, a giving, of loving, respecting everything to be itself. So whoever, all the individuals that we run into, to have equanimity means to profoundly respect them as they are, as they appear, as beautiful, respectful elements of this natural world, this primordial world that we're here for.

Part of that, whatever thought we have, no matter if it's a pleasant or an unpleasant thought, a kind thought or unkind thought, to just let it be itself. We don't know what's working itself out, we don't know what it's all about. But to step back and give room and respect for something. Of course, ideally you don't act on the unkind thought. You don't speak it or something. But to see it, just like a bow to it, and it's OK, just a thought, allowing each thing to be just itself.

And guess who gets to be themselves. Profound equanimity allows you to be just as you are in the moment. And so here in this sitting posture and walking meditation, how can you have a settledness and equanimity, a calmness, an openness that can allow for a natural way of letting each thing, let you just be itself, to respect it, to allow it? And that's the benefit that comes from this deep equanimity, this ability to offer this profound respect to each thing that occurs. And so I offer that now with a talk with this. Maybe it is a little bit of a, that's when the other banner that the State of California has is, caution, this teaching should be explored, should be discovered for yourself, should be kind of, you know, don't believe it, but kind of search around and see, does anything in your life correspond with it?

So what is it, what in the world am I talking about here, an equanimity that allows for profound respect for whatever arises? Don't dismiss that too quickly, that idea. But what makes sense for you and how you explore that, and how can you kind of explore it gingerly, carefully, with a quiet mind, with a calm heart? Can you, because as the Buddha said, the equanimity as a factor of awakening arises out of concentration, arises out of a calm heart. So what you have, to what degree can you kind of explore this territory? And to what degree does it help

you to do this profound respect of all things, including yourself, supports you to get more peaceful, more present, and more here?

And so I did finally the gesture that I have for equanimity, for mindfulness, of like this, the gesture that pleases for me, that for equanimity is like this. So thank you all, and I offer this to each of you.