

Dharmette: Love (66) The Wisdom of Non-Reactivity

Gil Fronsdal

June 30, 2026

Keywords: equanimity, equanimous love, *samādhi*, mindfulness, reactivity, suffering, hostility, wisdom, presence, love

So hello for this second talk on equanimous love, the love that is manifested through a profound form of equanimity. And what I'm doing this week is kind of introducing the topic and different factors, features of equanimity to understand its elements. Okay, so that next week we can do the equanimity *samādhi* practice.

And so one way of understanding this deep equanimity, one quality of it, is that it's a non-reactivity. Things happen, and we don't impulsively tighten or lash out. We don't kind of impulsively react to what's happening. We make space, we make room, we feel, we know, we're present. It isn't about ignoring. It's about making room for a deeper response to arise that is not reactive.

And one of the ways that we're reactive is we're actually contributing more suffering. We are responsible for a fair amount of our own suffering. And it's the way that we contribute suffering to ourselves that Buddhism gives us the most ability to, mindfulness gives us the most ability to, manage better, to monitor, and to maybe let go of. And if we spend the whole time thinking that other people are responsible for our suffering, then we miss the opportunity to see how we add to it, what the mental activities are that we're contributing to. And many people don't see that difference.

So, for example, if there's something in the world, you read in the news, that seems pretty awful, and maybe even the forecast is doom is coming. And that's bad enough, that that might be happening. And then we get angry at those people who are not fixing the problem, those people who are contributing to it. And in that anger, chances are that there's a tension, there's a squeezing, there's a hostility that we're harming ourselves. To carry hostility is a leading cause of stress, closing down, limiting ourselves, getting kind of so focused on a particular way of being that we miss the wholeness of who we are.

Or if this prediction of doom, and we get so distressed, so discouraged, so frightened, we can hardly know what to do, well, now we're suffering even more. And there's no direct requirement that because the sky is falling, because doom is happening, that we are supposed to be afraid, that we're supposed to be anxious and upset and confused and dispirited by it. It may be natural enough for that to happen, but to justify that because it's natural, of course we are, of course we should be, overlooks the fact that we can actually stop and be present for ourselves in a deep, stable way, and to see, I have some choice here.

I don't have to continue with these thought trains, the repetition of the same thoughts over and over again that are contributing to this fear. I don't have to stay so tense in my heart, closing down. I don't have to be afraid of my fear, reacting to it, believing it. I don't have to be predicting futures that I don't know really what's going to happen.

And so we start kind of questioning, and we see actually we're contributing a fair amount. And maybe the world has enough suffering in it. Why should I contribute more? Why should I contribute anxiety, agitation, hostility? Why should I contribute more complaints?

Some people navigate through their social world or in their life through complaining. And there's some kind of joy, some kind of energy and camaraderie that happens with complaining and sharing complaints. But it actually diminishes the person who complains. It actually prevents some deeper wisdom to operate, deeper love and connection to operate, a deeper, more nurturing and nourishing way of living itself.

And so what happens in mindfulness practice, we start noticing the effect our mental, emotional, and physical behavior has on ourselves. And we start seeing, and maybe only in really big ways first or in subtle ways first, that we actually have some choice about how much we cause harm to ourselves. And maybe we don't need to. Why make more harm? Why have suffering happen in the world and then add to that suffering by suffering ourselves because of it?

This is not a message to be aloof or cold or disinterested. This is a message to not contribute more suffering to a situation so you can't meet the situation with clarity, with full love, with a presence, and with intelligence to take care of it the best you can. To contribute something different than more suffering, different than more hostility, different than more complaints. Something more creative, something more beneficial, something a little bit more that turns the direction in a different way, in a good way.

And so what I'm offering today is the idea that to understand the value of equanimity comes along a lot easier if we understand the opportunities we have not to make a situation worse,

that we have an opportunity to be present, to be open, to be caring, to be curious, interested, without reacting, and not to justify reactivity, not to invest in it and believe in it. That's the only way we have for responding to the world. There are better ways.

And to start feeling that even to a small degree, you don't have to agree with me 100%, but even to some degree to begin observing and seeing, I don't have to make it worse here. Because in making it worse, you're probably acting on reactivity. You're activated. You're reactivated. And there's no equanimity there.

But to learn, I don't have to be activated this way. I don't have to be reactivated. I don't have to live in this kind of churning and spinning of the heart, of the mind that's causing more suffering. There's another alternative. It's hard not to be that way, but maybe I need to meditate for an hour to settle it all out. I have some choice, maybe a meditation.

And so you don't have to want to be equanimous, but to not want to cause any more harm, to not contribute to more harm to yourself and to others, not to live in that reactive mode, means that you're not participating in the very things by which someone would lose their equanimity. And so equanimity would be a byproduct of not giving in to reactivity, not going along with it, not making a situation worse.

And so not making it worse. And this is a great practice to do when you're in a difficult social situation where things are just difficult and tense and you're hot and sweaty and grumpy, to say, wait a minute, this is the time. Let's not make it worse. Let me not say anything. If I say anything at all, it'll become worse. Let me just ask for a breathing room. Let me ask to take a little break. Let me not make it worse. Let me be quiet. Let me not say anything.

And see what happens and how it unfolds. But at least let me not make it worse. If I can't improve the situation, let me not say anything or do anything. And from the outside, I might look to someone that you're becoming equanimous. You're not getting reactive. You're being still and quiet.

And so this is one of the aspects of equanimity and the wisdom that supports the cultivation of deep equanimity, when we see clearly the disadvantages of some of the ways the mind operates, some of the ways that the heart operates, say, oh, I'm making it worse right now. I'm being reactive right now. I'm contributing to my own stress, my own distress, my own anxiety and anguish. And at least let's do the best I can not to add any more suffering to the situation. It's bad enough.

Can I, in a realistic way, be with myself, be with my hurt, be with the challenges of it, be with what's happening here, but not pile it on, not react to that, and see how valuable it is to do

that, to see how profound it is to be useful. And over time, you might see it as a profound form of love, not in indifference, not a diminishing of yourself, but a love that enhances you to have the patience, the presence, the wisdom to not make the situation worse.

And this is one of the ways that we'll begin appreciating that equanimity is a profound state, very powerful state, where we're not going to be reactive, caught in reactivity. And to know that the disadvantages of getting caught in reactivity can help us understand how profoundly meaningful it is to be equanimous, especially the equanimity which is a form of love.

So thank you very much. And you might go through the day today, maybe write it down on a piece of paper. Maybe have it with you somewhere, some regular reminder as you go through the day. Maybe in a loving way, in a loving handwriting or something. Don't make it worse. And thank you very much.