

Dharmette: Love (74) Unruffled Love

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July 10, 2026

Keywords: *upekkhā*, divine abodes, mindfulness, concentration, wisdom, non-attachment, goodwill, compassion, appreciative joy, equanimous love

Hello and welcome to this talk, the final talk on *upekkhā*. *Upekkhā* is one of the four divine abodes, or resting places in love, kind of resting in love, more than resting in love, abiding in love. And it's particularly accessible, or the place where it's most accessible most of the time, I believe, is in meditation, where we don't have to be interacting with people, talking with people, trying to understand the social world.

And sometimes we go through swings, or sometimes we are overly leaning into the situation, or overly pulling back, or somehow where the swings are a little bit too big, maybe. Sometimes wonderfully so, sometimes tragically so. But in meditation, all we need to do is stay present here without having to navigate and negotiate, and we give ourselves permission just to sit.

And one of the remarkable things that happens over time in meditation, and now this requires time, doing it every day, most days, so it becomes a thread that goes through your life, is that the idea is everything gets included sooner or later. If you only meditate when you feel happy, you only see part of who you are, part of what your life is like. If you only meditate when you're stressed or unhappy, you only see that part. The idea is to see it all. Let all of it come and be seen and experienced and be processed through the experience of meditation.

And one of the things that will happen is certain things will become familiar. Certain things will repeat themselves. So, for example, you might find that you have some physical pain. I've had a lot of knee pain over the years, especially when I was a new meditator, and it would come and go. And the knee pain in the beginning was a tragedy. It was a great drama. It was a great something to be quite worried about, reactive to, or hate my pain or feel like I had to fix it and feel like maybe I was a failed meditator to have knee pain.

But, you know, it came and went, came and went. And slowly over time, I learned a little bit how to be mindful of it. I learned a little bit how to be less reactive to it. And after a while it would be, “Oh, there's the pain again. I know how to be with this. I know how not to be reactive to it, not to be caught in self-pity. I know how to just make space for it and hold it.”

And so slowly over time, I learned how to be with the comings and goings of knee pain. And so there came a time when there was no drama involved. There was no reactivity, no getting stirred up by it. “Oh, there's my old friend knee pain. I know how to do that.” And so there was equanimity with it. And there was equanimity with care, with love, for how do we deal with this?

And so the continuity of meditation and seeing the same things come and go. And after a while, we get a sense that, oh, there's always an ups and downs, swinging, coming and going of things. And at some point, that wisdom of being equanimous, non-reactive to things, it translates to new things. In the beginning, it might be particular things we're getting familiar with, and, “Oh, there it is again. I know how to be with this, and it's not such a big thing after all. I can just ride it out and be with it.” And after a while, we say, “Oh, I think I can, maybe it's true for many things. Maybe even new things that arise, it'll come and go too.”

And so, after a while of meditation, this is one of the gifts of ongoing regular meditation, is all kinds of things come through, and we start getting a sense that we can hold it all. We can just be present for this too. This too is arising now. This too I can just not be reactive to, not spin out in thought, not try to fix, or not use it to define myself and say, “Oh, I'm a failed meditator,” or if it's going well, “Boy, I'm a successful meditator.” It's just a coming and going of phenomenon. No need to add anything extra to it.

And there's much more peace. There's much more equanimity about the comings and goings of things. And it can be a remarkable state. It's not neutral because it's vital. It's alive. It feels very healthy. It feels like, you know, it's kind of a dynamic peace. Yes, yes, clarity, yes, I'm here for this.

And this equanimity, just being with the coming and goings of things, also translates to how we love, how we have kindness and goodwill and care for ourselves, for our experience, for the world. At some point, we also learn the same thing about that. We learn that we can just love through the ups and downs of things. We might even have likes and dislikes about things. We might have to talk about difficult challenges between people. But there too, “Oh, here we go. I've been here before. I know this. I can hold this. I can be present for it. I don't have to sacrifice the kindness, the goodwill, the love.”

I know how to hold this. This is just part of the ups and downs of life now. It's not just the ups and downs of meditation. And it's possible with time, because we're not getting pulled into the drama of things, it's, "Oh yeah, I know this. This is part of the ups, part of the downs, and I can hold it. I know how to be with it." That kind of approach then gives room for our kindness, our love, our goodwill, our ability to stay present for the world, for other people, with our respect for them, with our connectivity with them, being connected with friendship and friendliness.

And it can make so much possible, a rich, heartfelt kind of connection to people, because we didn't get pulled into the drama of the moment, because we didn't get activated, reactivated by the things that come and go. It's not saying that difficult things won't come and go. It means that over time we become wiser about it. We say, "Oh, I know how to be with this." A certain kind of confidence arises, a certain kind of clarity, a strength of capacity.

And that translates to a kind of a wonderful sense of equanimity, this sense that how wonderful it is to be present, to know what's happening, to care about what's happening, but not get pulled into the drama, pulled into the reactivity, pulled into the fear, the hostility, the complaining, the blaming, the defending, the building up of self, the explaining, the kind of trying to, you know, all the kind of caught in the drama of it all.

And other people might delight in being in conflict with you, because when they're with you, you're not activated, you're present. You're not offending or closing down, you're present. You're not caught in it or reactive to it, but you're present. And over time, you might be surprised that learning this ability, learning this capacity, becomes a doorway for goodwill, for kindness. And some people might say of you that you're loving, a very loving person, but you're also equanimous. You're unruffled, but you're loving.

So this equanimous love is an unruffled love. Equanimous love is an uncompromised love. Equanimous love is a generous love. Equanimous love is a compassionate love, or generous love, or uncompromising love when things are incredibly difficult, when maybe nothing else can be done. We sit, we stand, we are with people together in an unruffled love when things become impossible.

Rather than collapsing, rather than running around like a chicken without its head on, at least what we provide others when everything else is impossible is our wonderful ability to have this wide, spacious perspective of the comings and goings of things and say, "Oh this too, it's impossible. This is what's happening. I know how to be with the impossible. I'll just be with it without reacting, without making a story." And in that space, at least in the impossibility of what's happening, we can love. And that's no small thing.

So this equanimous love is a great gift. It's a great power. And it's something to be interested in and be curious about. And one way to do that is to pay attention to other people and see if you can find the people who seem to have a twinkle in their eye, they have love, they have delight, they have care, and always have presence. They're there when things are difficult, when there are challenges, when there are situations maybe where you wouldn't have that. Recognize when that's happening, appreciate it, study those people. If you know them well enough, ask them about it.

The equanimous love, and maybe you can appreciate how this equanimous love, loving equanimity, is really the coming together of all these important strands of Buddhist practice, the coming together of mindfulness practice, coming together of concentration practice, coming together of wisdom and understanding and insight that grows in us, coming together of freedom and detachment, letting go, non-attachment, and the coming together of goodwill, compassion, appreciative joy, and into all that comes together in equanimity. It's a phenomenal thing. And it's not to be had quickly, suddenly, but rather through the continuity of practice over time, that the steady thread of practice, meditating every day, showing up for yourself all the time in mindfulness, we learn to ride the ups and downs of life with equanimous love.

So thank you very, very much. And I'll end this series on equanimous love with the wish, may it be so. And so then when I come back on Monday, we'll continue maybe for another couple of weeks, this whole long series on love, maybe bringing it to a kind of a conclusion here. So thank you. And may equanimous love, loving equanimity, visit you, arise in you.