

Notes for the Dharma talk about **Equanimity** on November 13, 2024

Equanimity plays a central role in buddhist teachings and is a very important quality in this practice.

- It is the seventh of the 7 awakening factors

Seven awakening factors: 1. Mindfulness (Sati), 2. Investigation of mental phenomena (dhammavicaya), 3. Energy (Viriya), 4. Joy (Piti), 5. Tranquility (Passadhi), 6. Concentration (Samadhi), 7. Equanimity (Upekkha)

- It is the fourth part of the Four Divine Abodes (Brahmavihara)

Love (Metta), Compassion (Karuna), Sympathetic Joy (Mudita) and Equanimity. These qualities of mind are associated with Right Intention on the Noble 8fold path.

- It is the fulfillment of the 10 Paramis (10 perfections)

The 10 states of mind, attitude and behavior that lead to peace

PARAMIS: 1. Generosity, 2. Virtue, 3. Renunciation, 4. Wisdom, 5. Energy, 6. Patience, 7. Truthfulness, 8. Resolve, 9. Lovingkindness, 10. Equanimity

- It is the primary characteristic of the fourth Jhana

There are other elements of consciousness that are important and necessary in order for Equanimity to arise. When the elements of Sati, Viriya and Dhammavicaya (Investigation) are active and well coordinated, it results in the awakening factors.

The word equanimity can be translated into two words in Pali, upekkha and tattramajjhata. Upekkha means “to look over” and is the ability to see without being caught in what we see. It is when equanimity arises from the power of observation.

Tattramajjhata, Pali

Tatra means “there”, sometimes referred to as “all these things”. Majjha means “middle”. Tata means “to stand or to pose”.

When we put it all together it is understood as “to stand in the middle of all this”.

As equanimity is translated as balance, we see that this “standing in the middle” refers to maintaining balance in the middle of whatever is happening right now.

This form of balance is developed through inner strength and stability, which is nurtured through regular sitting practice. As we develop our capacity for inner strength, equanimity follows.

Equanimity can also be understood as a protection from the Eight Worldly Winds. They are also called the 8 conditions, obsessions or preoccupations, which are four pairs of opposites.

They are: Gain and loss, Praise and blame, Pleasure and pain, Success and Failure

If we become too attached to the outcome of Praise, Success, Gain and Pleasure, then we will encounter a lot of suffering for the impermanent nature of all things. On the other hand, we may find ourselves identify with Failure, taking blame to our heart or respond to the nature of change with a sense of loss or pain. This also results in suffering, or dukkha.

It is helpful to understand, that our inner well being does not depend on these eight worldly winds. Equanimity means that we do not get caught up with what is happening around us.

The practice of equanimity may help us to identify the triggers, the causes and conditions which result in the loss of balance. The more we are able to pay attention to these internal and external shifts and changes, the more we are able to nurture and integrate present moment awareness into our daily lives, the quicker and better we are able to change course from unwholesome to wholesome states of mind.

It is useful to keep in mind that it is counterproductive to have an idealistic view of how equanimity should look like for us. This “should” simply creates more pressure, more dukkha. It is more beneficial to uncover and remove the obstacles which cloud the mind and hinder it from being in a state of equanimity.

Let's take a look at the role equanimity plays in regards of the awakening factors.

1. Mindfulness

Mindfulness is present moment awareness and has to be balanced to be effective. Mindfulness is monitoring what is going on in the mind, it is the capacity for self awareness and the guardian of wholesomeness. It means to be presently aware of what is emerging through the selfing process.

Let's take our sitting practice as an example.

We sit down to meditate and place our attention to the sensation of breathing. Sati (mindfulness), Vitakka (placing the attention on an object, sensation of breathing) and Vicara (investigating what has been focused on by Vitakka, here sustaining the attention on the sensation of breathing) are operating. Now, the hindrances are operating in the back and we are at a crucial point of our practice. When Right Effort comes into play, it is the driver in order

for the energy to be channeled towards wholesome states of mind (awakening factors) rather than unwholesome states of mind (hindrances). When Sati, Vitakka, Vicara are working effectively, Investigation (Dhammavicaya) comes into play.

This is why it is so important to set aside the hindrances first. They can be understood as energy dumps. The energy which was used for hindrances gets freed up and directed towards the awakening factors and thus wholesome states of mind.

2. Investigation of mental phenomena

Investigation has to be balanced through equanimity. When unbalanced, it leads to skeptical doubt (near enemy) or being too identified with the mind (far enemy)

Mindfulness (1.) and Investigation (2.) require Effort (3. awakening factor: Energy) to function.

3. Energy, or Right Effort is the ability to keep observing, watching our thoughts and notice when an unwholesome thought is arising or has arisen. Notice the potential of a wholesome thought to arise and make an effort to nurture that process.

When Energy is unbalanced it leads to restlessness (near enemy) or sloth and torpor (far enemy)

When the first 3 awakening factors are balanced and work effectively, *tatramajhattata* comes into play. *Tatramajhattata* is dynamic. Out of that balance, the other ones come into play and are the result of the effective "co-working".

4. Joy

Joy needs to be balanced through equanimity, because when unbalanced it leads to too much excitement (near enemy) or lack of confidence (far enemy). The joy we experience through our practice brings confidence in the practice itself as it is and helps us to maintain it.

5. Tranquility has to be balanced through equanimity. When unbalanced and there is too much tranquility present, it leads to sluggishness or dullness of the mind. When there is too little tranquility, the mind becomes restless.

6. Concentration can be understood as the stability of attention. When unbalanced the mind becomes too rigid and stuck. The opposite of that would be a scattered, loose and undisciplined mind.

Equanimity plays an important role in balancing each one of the awakening factors. However, mindfulness, investigation and right effort are the 3 factors which are necessary for equanimity to even come into play, or manifest.

Besides the benefits listed above, equanimity also nurtures our ability to be patient and supports the development of our skillset to be able to work with what we encounter in the present moment, or to say it different - with whatever gets thrown at us.