

Cultivating a Friendly Mind 2.0

Unitarian Universalist Church of Concord NH

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Home Practice, Week Eight: Aligning the Mind with Equanimity (Upekkha)

Upekkha 1: Equanimity for Easy Person and Self

Equanimity is the quality that allows all the other Brahma Viharas to exist. It is the mind state of meeting our moment-to-moment experience with radical openness to what is actually happening. This openness to things as they are allows us to see more clearly, our view less distorted by our preferences. This open, balanced quality distinguishes Metta from attached love, allows Compassion/Karuna to be sustainable, and that gives us the capacity to experience the joy and delight of Mudita.

Equanimity is lively, engaged and energetic, but also balanced. It is constantly adjusting, fine-tuning to things as they change. Imagine a surfer riding a giant wave—they may look still, but they are attuned to their present moment's experience and responsive to change,

The near enemy of equanimity is detachment. Detachment is energetically disengaged, and feels flat, lonely and isolated.

The far enemy is the untrained mind following its natural tendencies: toward craving for things we like, aversion to things we don't like, and spacing out into distraction and fantasy when what's present isn't interesting enough to us for us to be present for it.

Equanimity arises from wisdom—from understanding the truth of how things are, in particular the truth of impermanence, and the truth of conditionality or karma. Karma means action, and the reality that actions lead to consequences. All things arise based on previous causes and conditions that led to their arising.

The good news of understanding karma is that it directs our attention to the place where we can influence what happens in the future. To make it more likely for something to happen, we need to cultivate the conditions that will lead to its future arising. This is why we practice meditation—to make it more likely that beneficial qualities and mind states will arise in the future.

Karma does not mean that everything that happens to a person can be attributed to their past actions—a common misconception. There are forces at play in nature that are larger than and independent of the stream of events unfolding in our individual lives. But our lives as we experience them in the present are powerfully determined by our own habits, views and opinions, and how we relate to them. Our own intentions and actions are the place where we can have a profound influence on how our lives will unfold in the future.

Practice—Equanimity for Easy Person and Self.

Phrases: The Equanimity phrase is long; it's good to memorize it, but until you do, just keep it in front of you and read each line to remind yourself of the words:

Things are just as they are; things are impermanent.

Joy and sorrow arise and pass away.

All beings are the heirs of their own intentions and actions.

Your Joy and your sorrow depend on your intentions and actions, not upon my wishes for you.

I care about you, and I cannot prevent you from suffering.

Sit comfortably. Survey the people in your life, looking for a person for whom it is easy to maintain this attitude of equanimity, and not get off balance. Traditionally the practice is begun with a neutral person. You can also do it with a wise, admired person, someone who you know can meet their own experience with equanimity.

Choose someone to work with for this period. No need to visualize unless it arises naturally.

Offer the phrases at a relaxed pace that keeps you focused on the mind state of Equanimity, and clear on your intention to offer it to this person.

This mind state is the object we return to—each phrase points us to this mind state of balance and openness.

There's no intention to create any feeling state; just notice what arises.

After 10 minutes or so, shift to offering Equanimity to yourself, holding yourself in this view of openness to how it is in this moment, with lively engagement and balance. The phrases are slightly modified for Self:

Things are just as they are: things are impermanent.

Joy and sorrow arise and pass away.

All beings are the heirs of their own intentions and actions.

My joy and my sorrow depend on my intentions and actions, not upon the wishes of others for me.

I care about myself, and I cannot avoid suffering.

Return to the Easy person as needed, if you lose your sense of Equanimity.

Close by letting go of phrases, resting in this open space with mindfulness of body & breath, feeling the profound peacefulness of equanimity.

Formal practice: Practice daily with the recording, or feel free to guide yourself.

Informal practices:

Equanimity in daily life: Full presence/illuminating what is not usually noticed.

As we move through our daily lives, each of us sees the world based on our conditioning, highlighting some aspects of our experience and completely ignoring others. A commitment to cultivating Equanimity is a commitment to meeting the world with as much openness as possible, seeing as clearly as we can, and offering our attention, acceptance and resilient responsiveness as non-preferentially as possible. Explore how you choose to direct your attention—how you relate to people and the world around you, What are you missing? Especially pay attention to "neutral" or "boring" experiences—paying attention to neutral

experiences and people not only expands our world, but is a gift to the people we interact with, offering kindness and presence where we might have previously offered....nothing!

The Balance See-Saw: Observe yourself as you move through your day, noticing how your preferences can often guide your actions like a dog following one scent after another. See if you can relax straining towards things you like, and relax contracting away from things you don't like. You don't have to abandon your preferences, but just notice the movement of mind, how it feels, and lighten up. With relationships, observe how our close relationships would often benefit from our granting more space and freedom and respect to our loved ones, and how our difficult relationships could be transformed by more engagement, real listening, and warmth.