

Notes and Quotes for November 14, 2021 *Dharma Reflections*:

“The Four Immeasurables”: Limitless Equanimity (*Upekṣhā*)

Equanimity as an Immeasurable:

“At every stage of practice, a price has to be paid for clarity. The price is the loss of an illusion. In equanimity, you lose the illusion that your preferences and prejudices accurately reflect what is real.”

- Ken McLeod, Wake up to your Life - Discovering the Buddhist Path of Attention, 2001, p.264.

“Equanimity is absolutely indispensable. From that even plane arises the cherishing of others, of the whole world. From equanimity one may cultivate great loving-kindness and great compassion, and from these *bodhicitta* arises. When *bodhicitta* arises spontaneously and effortlessly, suffusing your entire lifestyle, then you are a *bodhisattva*. And it is said that when a person becomes a *bodhisattva*, the *devas* rejoice.

How do we do it? It’s not so easy. In fact, it can be very difficult, because some people are friendly while others are vicious. It’s easy to like some people and it’s not very easy to like others. They don’t smile back! So it has to go deeper. If we continue to judge people on the basis of appearances and behavior, the endeavor is hopeless.”

– B. Alan Wallace, *The Four Immeasurables – Practices to Open the Heart*, 2010, pp.154-155.

“Equanimity, also referred to as even-mindedness and impartiality, should not be confused with indifference, or as merely a feeling devoid of pleasure or pain. The inner quality to be cultivated here is more than a feeling; **it is a stance, an attitude**—a way of attending to others that involves neither attachment to those who are near, nor aversion to anyone who might impede our happiness. So equanimity—in the context of the Four Immeasurables—balances our perspective on others. We transcend attachment and aversion, attaining a sense of even-mindedness. This is based simply on the recognition that every sentient being, human and otherwise, is, like ourselves, seeking happiness, wishing to be free of suffering.”

– B. Alan Wallace, ***Genuine Happiness*** – *Meditation as the Path to Fulfillment*, 2005, p.149.

“The way you are now, your mind is powerfully influenced by the clinging attachment you have to friends, relatives, and anyone who brings you satisfaction, and by your hostile feelings toward whoever seems to go against your wishes.... Over countless lifetimes you have been

dragged into samsara, this vicious ocean of existence, and carried away by these strong currents of attachment and aversion....

Consider carefully what you mean by friends and enemies. When you look into it, it is obvious! that there are no such things as permanent, enduring friends or enemies...

So, if you want to travel the path to Buddhahood, give up attachment to friends and relatives, and hatred for enemies. Regard all beings with impartial equanimity. If people now seem to be either friends or enemies, it is just the result of past connections and actions. To ascribe any solid reality to those feelings of attachment and aversion, arising as they do from mistaken and confused perceptions, is just delusion...

Why do you feel attachment and aversion, and where do they come from? Fundamentally, their origin lies in the idea you have of being a truly existing individual.... The idea of being a truly existing individual is ignorance at its most basic level, from which all the other negative emotions arise.”

– Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, *The Heart of Compassion*, in *The Collected Works of Dilgo Khyentse*, Volume One, 2010, pp.229-230.

“Upekkha in Pali is often translated as ‘equanimity,’ ‘nonattachment,’ ‘nondiscrimination,’ ‘impartiality,’ ‘tolerance,’ or ‘letting go.’ The word is formed from the prefix *upa*, which can mean ‘over’ or ‘all around,’ and the root *ikh*, meaning ‘to look’ or ‘to see.’ It is the capacity to see the full picture, like from the top of a high mountain, to perceive a situation in its entirety without bias. Gil Fronsdale says upekkha ‘refers to the equanimity that arises from the power of observation, the ability to see without being caught by what we see.’ He explains,

Upekkha can also refer to the ease that comes from seeing a bigger picture. Colloquially, in India the word was sometimes used to mean ‘to see with patience.’ We might understand this as ‘seeing with understanding.’ For example, when we know not to take offensive words personally, we are less likely to react to what was said. Instead, we remain at ease or equanimous. This form of equanimity is sometimes compared to grandmotherly love. The grandmother clearly loves her grandchildren but, thanks to her experience with her own children, is less likely to be caught up in the drama of her grandchildren’s lives.

Far from being dry or indifferent, true equanimity is affectionate and offers a tangible presence, but one free of reactivity and anxiety.”

– Kaira Jewel Lingo, “How Equanimity Powers Love,” in *Buddhadharma – The Practitioner’s Guide*, Summer 2021, p.46.

“Equanimity is steadiness of mind, tranquility in the midst of whatever environment we find ourselves in and whatever treatment we receive. It is not uninterested, apathetic indifference

in which we build a wall to protect ourselves from emotional pain. Rather, equanimity is relaxed, receptive, free of fear and clinging. It allows our spiritual practice to stay on track without being buffeted around here and there by exciting new ideas or intense emotions. Without clinging to anything, equanimity gives space to appreciate everything.”

- The Dalai Lama and Thubten Chodron, Volume 5 of “The Library of Wisdom and Compassion,” *In Praise of Great Compassion*, 2020, p.8.

“Without equanimity, the other three thoughts—love, compassion, and joy—will not be immeasurable. They will contain caveats, biases, provision, and exceptions. Equanimity is an unbiased, impartial attitude that regards all beings as equally deserving of our respect and concern, our love and compassion.”

– Kathleen McDonald, *Awakening the Kind Heart – How to Meditate on Compassion*, 2010, p.103.

Possible Discussion Starting Points

1. Embodying equanimity is not equivalent with having the same relationship with everyone. Discuss.
- 2. Think of individuals, or certain classes of people (child molesters, torturers, COVID deniers, grocery store “Karens,” or whomever trips your switch) that you don’t often find yourself holding with loving kindness and compassion in your mind. Experiment with *wanting* to change your attitude. How does that feel in your body?
3. Which comes first: abandoning “the idea you have of being a truly existing individual,” (Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, above), or embodying equanimity?
4. Equanimity as an Immeasurable is not the same as being calm and unflappable. What are the nuances of meaning here?
- 5. Why might it be important for a spiritual practitioner to not be attached to family and friends? Does this concept disturb you?
- 6. How radical does it sound to “not judge people on the basis of appearance and ***behavior?***” (B. Alan Wallace quote, above). Really? Not judge people on the basis of their behavior?

7. While *equanimity* (*upekṣhā*) is usually listed as the fourth of the “immeasurables,” in some teaching traditions it is presented first, *before* loving-kindness, compassion, or empathetic joy. Why do you suppose this is the case?