

**10<sup>th</sup> *Pāramī*: *Upekkhā* – Equanimity**

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### General remarks about *pāramī* – perfections

In Theravāda Buddhist tradition we find ten *pāramī*, perfections. We do not find all ten listed as a package in the suttā. But there is one reference in Buddhavaṃsa (chap. 2), Khuddaka Nikāya.<sup>1</sup> The Venerable Sāriputta asked the Buddha at what time he has made the decision for the first time, to attain Buddhahood, and what perfections he had to fulfill in order to attain perfect enlightenment. Here he enumerates ten *pāramī*.

The ten perfections (*pāramī*) are important conditions for the complete eradication of all defilements. As the complete eradication of defilements brings about the cessation of the cycle of birth and death this is their final goal. For a student of a self enlightened Buddha, as we are nowadays, this means the attainment of Arahantship.

The perfections are the prerequisites for any spiritual progress. These 10 perfections are spiritual qualities, which one can both develop and complete in everyday life, as well as in meditation and especially in longer meditation periods.

The perfections (*pāramī*) are a useful set of characteristics to overcome egocentricity; they are a collection of noble qualities, to overcome any kind of suffering, the conditions in order to experience true happiness, in order to attain awakening, Nibbāna.

The perfections (*pāramī*) are prerequisites for meditation. Their fulfillment to a certain extent is necessary in order to gain access to meditation from the beginning. Meditation, in the sense of developing concentration and wisdom, is necessary in the Buddhist teachings in order to achieve awakening (enlightenment) or in other words to become finally free from suffering. They can become completed by meditation. The *pāramī* are important qualities that support the entire *dhmma* practice. Wisely practiced, all the perfections result in a non selfish attitude, because their basic tendency is to act for the benefit of all beings.

### Upekkhā – Equanimity in Relation to the Other *Pāramī*

*Upekkhā* is the tenth of the perfections. It is the crowning and completion of all other perfections.

It is the result of practicing the preceding nine perfections according to the common enumeration.

It supports all other *pāramī* and it is also supported by other *pāramī*. It is supported mainly by wisdom (*paññā*), renunciation (*nekkhamma*), truthfulness (*sacca*), energy (*virīya*) patience (*khanti*) and determination (*adhiṭṭhāna*).

It is following loving kindness (*mettā*), the ninth *pāramī*. Loving kindness is an attitude towards beings which one should always try to develop. Equanimity as *pāramī* is not only an attitude or mental quality towards beings but in general towards all circumstances we encounter.

Compared with *mettā* it is calmer, it is a more withdrawn attitude. *Mettā* is always accompanied by joy (*pīti*) and happy feeling (*sukha vedanā*) whereas equanimity is never accompanied by joy. It is always accompanied by neutral feeling (*adukkhamasukha vedanā*). The joy and happy feeling accompanying *mettā* could lead to attachment because of their pleasant nature, out of this reason it is good to combine these two, namely *mettā* and *upekkhā*, intentionally to strengthen both.

When one practices *mettā* in action it is also good to be familiar with *upekkhā* when the help and support to others we offer with *mettā* is not accepted or does not show its expected results or is even misused. We can sometimes be very committed to helping other people, reducing their suffering or overcoming their suffering altogether. These actions are based on compassion and loving kindness. However, if the other beings do not have the kammic prerequisites in their minds, they cannot accept the help and cannot turn their behaviour towards the wholesome. In such situations, it is important not to be frustrated or angry, but to develop equanimity. This protects one's own mind and also social relationships.

*Upekkhā* one could also see as the combination of *khanti* and *paññā*. *Khanti* is more endurance, whereas *upekkhā* is endurance based on wisdom, on knowledge and right view. The more wisdom is developed the more equanimity is the resultant attitude. *Khanti* is the forerunner of equanimity and a precondition for wisdom to arise. When wisdom grows equanimity arises.

Through renunciation (*nekkhamma*) in the sense of mental renunciation, so that the mind does not indulge in sense pleasures, but observes objects with mindfulness (*sati*) and sees the true nature

<sup>1</sup> See: Minor Anthologies of the Pāli Canon, Vol III, 1975, Pāli Text Society, translated by I. B. Horner, S. 20 ff

of things, a door is opened for equanimity to arise.

Equanimity is a support for the merit one should gain with other *pāramī*. When one gives *dāna* joy usually arises. But it may happen that the donation is not used as expected or is misused. Instead of allowing anger to arise one should be familiar with the mental attitude of equanimity, which implies the view that all beings are the owners of their own deeds. May be one gives money to a beggar out of benevolence, but one sees that the beggar goes to the nearest supermarket and buys alcoholic drinks. In this case the reaction with equanimity should arise to protect one's own mind. Or the donation we give to a monastery is used for other purposes than we intended. In these cases the attitude that all beings are the owners of their kamma is helpful with regard to our own deed, namely that we are only experiencing it because of previous deeds and also with regard to the other being or beings. The view that they are the owners of their own deeds should not be combined with joy about unpleasant experiences they may encounter, but with the wish that by experiencing the results, although they may be unpleasant, their understanding will increase. By developing equanimity the other perfections become more perfected, because equanimity does not distinguish between benefactors and opponents, it behaves evenly towards all beings.

### Word meaning

*Upekkhā* is translated into English as equanimity.

The word *upekkhā* is composed of the prefix *upa* and the verb *ikkhati*. The prefix *upa* means towards, directed towards or close to something and also expresses an approach to an object. The verb *ikkhati* means to see. This results in the meaning: to look at something. The word thus shows that it is not a matter of uninvolved indifference. *Upekkhā* directs the focus towards the beings and occurrences both internally and externally.

Its meaning is to take a balanced view after careful consideration.

*Mettā* is derived from friendship. Friendship involves a mutual approach to one another and is closer to other beings than equanimity.

Equanimity is interfering less with the beings by looking at them. Equanimity as 'looking at the beings' is therefore a rather cautious state.

There is another Pāli word that can be translated as equanimity: *tatramajjhataṭṭā*. This word literally means 'standing there in the middle'. It emphasises spiritual neutrality and impartiality and expresses an important part of *upekkhā*.

*Upekkhā* is usually translated with the English word equanimity. One could also say serenity. One lets things happen, both externally and internally, without interfering with desire or aversion. One could also translate *upekkhā* as harmony or inner balance.

### Characteristics of Equanimity (*upekkhā*)

Equanimity is not to be confused with indifference. On the contrary, equanimity is an antidote to indifference. Indifference makes the mind hard, dull and closed. Indifference is disinterested. Equanimity, on the other hand, is alert and interested in the well-being of beings. Equanimity is like a neutral observer. This sublime state of mind takes responsibility for the beings.

Equanimity is a far developed state of mind which looks on beings and things with wisdom and knowledge. It is not ignoring things around us but seeing things without spontaneous unaware intervention.

*Upekkhā* is a balanced and quiet state of mind. It is a state of mind that neither let's sorrow arise nor joy. It is neutrality or impartiality. It is peacefulness of mind. The characteristic of *upekkhā* is keeping middleness. It does not tend to any extreme. Its is based on wise attention towards all phenomena.

Equanimity is non-disturbance by controversial or provocative behaviour of other people or vicissitudes of life.

In regard to beings equanimity is the attitude of impartiality towards all beings, towards those who are dear to us and towards those with whom temporary misunderstandings or difficulties arise, or towards those who love or adore one and towards those who reject or harm one.

Equanimity is an attitude that neither favours anyone nor rejects anyone, it sees all beings as equal

and does not bind one to them. As a result, neither aversion nor desire or attachment can arise in the mind. The same applies to all phenomena. Its function is to see things impartially, to reduce attraction and aversion or to prevent them from arising.

It also includes the view of a fundamental equality between oneself and other beings. When equanimity is developed one also does not compare oneself with others so conceit cannot arise. One knows that all conditions are caused by kamma.

It makes one independent from other beings and their opinion or attitude and view and also from surrounding circumstances, may they be pleasant or disagreeable.

For final awakening, letting go as non-attachment to all beings and things is necessary, that is why equanimity is the highest and most perfect among the perfections.

Although equanimity is the peak of the perfections, the mental attitude of equanimity should also be a foundation for developing all other perfections from the beginning. This is to avoid conceit, attachment, wrong view etc. which can arise when developing for example generosity, ethics, truthfulness or also wisdom.

In MN 152 The Development of the Faculties - Indriyabhāvanāsuttaṃ the Buddha described with similes how equanimity works in the mind:

*"Just as a man with good sight, having opened his eyes might shut them or having shut his eyes might open them, so too concerning anything at all, the agreeable that arose, the disagreeable that arose, and the both agreeable and disagreeable that arose cease just as quickly, just as rapidly, just as easily, and equanimity is established. This is called in the Noble One's Discipline the supreme development of the faculties regarding forms cognizable by the eye."*

*"Just as raindrops on a slightly sloping lotus leaf roll off and do not remain there, so too concerning anything at all, the agreeable that arose, the disagreeable that arose, and the both agreeable and disagreeable that arose cease just as quickly, just as rapidly, just as easily, and equanimity is established. This is called in the Noble One's Discipline the supreme development of the faculties regarding odours cognizable by the nose."*

*"Just as a strong man might easily spit out a ball of spittle collected on the tip of his tongue, so too concerning anything at all, the agreeable that arose, the disagreeable that arose, and the both agreeable and disagreeable that arose cease just as quickly, just as rapidly, just as easily, and equanimity is established. This is called in the Noble One's Discipline the supreme development of the faculties regarding flavours cognizable by the tongue."*

Another beautiful simile about equanimity we find in MN 140 The Exposition of the Elements - Dhātuvibhaṅgasuttaṃ:

*"Then there remains only equanimity, purified and bright, malleable, wieldy, and radiant. Suppose, bhikkhu, a skilled goldsmith or his apprentice were to prepare a furnace, heat up the crucible, take some gold with tongs, and put it into the crucible. From time to time he would blow on it, from time to time he would sprinkle water over it, and from time to time he would just look on. That gold would become refined, well refined, completely refined, faultless, rid of dross, malleable, wieldy, and radiant. Then whatever kind of ornament he wished to make from it, whether a golden chain or earrings or a necklace or a golden garland, it would serve his purpose. So too, bhikkhu, then there remains only equanimity, purified and bright, malleable, wieldy, and radiant."*

Here the Buddha describes the beauty of equanimity, which he compares to the precious metal gold. He describes how equanimity should be brought to maturity. He compares this inner work to that of a goldsmith.

In Aṅguttara Nikāya 3.102 A Goldsmith - Nimittasuttaṃ, the Buddha describes in more detail the balancing of equanimity so that it becomes as smooth as melted gold. Balancing equanimity is necessary because it alone does not produce the urgency for awakening. It can also, if not refined, lead to indifference and lack of compassion. In the Aṅguttara Nikāya, the Buddha describes how

equanimity must be balanced with energy and concentration. In the parable with the gold, the fire is a parable for energy and the cooling water stands for concentration. If the goldsmith looks only at the gold, it is a simile of equanimity. When these three factors are well balanced, the result is a beautiful, balanced, malleable state of mind. Just as the goldsmith can make any desired piece of jewellery from well-prepared gold, the meditator with these three factors in balance can direct the mind to any object in a state of mind he desires.

### **Factors supporting Equanimity (*upekkhā*)**

To develop this state of mind, strong mindfulness is necessary, which means seeing things in their true nature without adding anything to them. Right mindfulness strengthens equanimity.

The Buddha expressed this relation in Suttanipata 1113:

*“Purification through  
Equanimity and mindfulness  
(upekkhāsatisaṃsuddham),  
preceding thoughts  
in the sense of the Dhamma,  
Liberation through the highest insight  
and the break-up of ignorance I proclaim.”*

In addition to the before mentioned support of equanimity through right mindfulness, wisdom is an important factor that supports equanimity. Equanimity according to the Buddha’s teachings comes about through one of the ways of wise contemplation, namely by seeing

- just body and mind,
- cause and effect and
- by seeing impermanence, *dukkha* and selflessness.

This means that we do not encounter occurrences and things without cause, but as a result of our previous deeds.

The wise view of selflessness (*anatta*) supports the development of equanimity. The more one realises the universal characteristic of selflessness in all phenomena, the less one clings to things and beings. This results in equanimity. Appearances are perceived as neither attractive nor repulsive. But in order to realise the nature of all things as selfless an equanimous mind is also a necessary precondition. That’s why this perfection has to be trained wherever it is possible. The insight that all phenomena are selfless, what means not to control, is a decisive support for equanimity.

As long as we cannot see cause and effect directly in meditation confidence (*saddhā*) is an important support for developing pure equanimity. Confidence (*saddhā*) arises only with wholesome states of mind. It becomes stronger in our mind when we often stay in wholesome states of mind.

### **Benefits of Equanimity (*upekkhā*)**

Equanimity is an important factor, to prevent unwholesome states of mind to arise, because we will always encounter people who cannot control their minds. If we do not have the ability to dwell in equanimity, we are always exposed to the moods of other beings and suffering in our mind is the result. Equanimity, what means not becoming entangled, is a protection for our own state of mind and also for that of others. Confidence and the knowledge that there is liberation from suffering is an essential support for this. The mind thus remains powerful and calm.

Real equanimity only arises from wisdom. The wise view of deeds and their corresponding results, as well as the impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and selflessness of all phenomena, leads to complete responsibility for our actions. Thus, developing equanimity is a strong support for taking responsibility for our actions. Equanimity cannot be generated by pure wanting or willing power.

The more wisdom is developed in the mind, the more equanimity arises, both towards beings and towards inanimate objects. Equanimity arises when, through one's own wise contemplation, one realises more and more how attachment towards everything beautiful and lovely and aversion towards everything unpleasant repeatedly generate suffering.

*"When touched by pleasant contact do not be enthralled,  
Do not tremble when touched by pain.  
Look evenly on both the pleasant and painful,  
Not drawn or repelled by anything."* SN 35. 94

The attitude of equanimity that all beings are owners of their own kamma, the results of their own past actions, does not exclude active actions in support of others. The view of cause and effect is not a fatalistic attitude. But the deeds are not blind reactions, but are born out of a calm, equanimous mind with wisdom.

When we are familiar with the attitude of equanimity, which includes the understanding of cause and effect, we experience less suffering after having trained this attitude well. Just as the Buddha described suffering in the First Noble Truth as not getting what we want or staying with those we don't like, who are not nice to us, we can stay in wholesome states of mind because we understand instead of being disappointed. But equanimity is also a protection against unwholesome states arising when we meet kind beings. It protects us from attachment arising. Also when we experience pain, illness or chronic diseases, equanimity out of wise observation prevents us from unwholesome states of mind and we can endure much without being depressed.

Also when we have enough property and the opportunity to give donation equanimity protects us against unwholesome states of mind. Conceit (*māna*) could arise. But when we understand that the opportunity to give is a result of previous deeds equanimity arises. Also that we have the wealth to give is kammically conditioned and as well the knowledge that giving is a wholesome action with pleasant results. The mind remains quiet by equanimity and the path to see things in their true nature is paved more and more.

In the Mahāmaṅgalasutta, the well-developed equanimous state is described as follows:

*"The mind that is not shaken  
when touched by the vicissitudes of life,  
sorrowless, dust-free, and secure —  
this is the highest blessing."*

Suttanipāṭa 271

Through the practice of equanimity, the attitude towards beings becomes equal, without favouring one or the other and rejecting others. This results in responsible thinking towards all beings.

Through equanimity, the mind is stable and cannot be shaken. This allows one to get through difficult situations without despair, fear or being involved in other unwholesome states.

The mind is clear because equanimity avoids entanglement. The mind is still and can therefore see things more clearly as they are at the moment. This can result in a constructive way of acting that is free from emotional entanglements and distorted perceptions through memories.

Through equanimity, the mind is immune to dramas that can play out on the inside as well as dramas that can appear on the outside.

Although equanimity is not accompanied by happy feelings, it can be described as a blissful state of mind because it is so calm and stable. The impartial attitude itself prevents aversion from arising. As a result, when equanimity is well developed, unpleasant mental feelings do not arise in the stream of consciousness.

AN 2. 71

*“Bhikkhus, there are these two kinds of happiness. What two?”*

*The happiness accompanied by joy and the happiness without joy. These are the two kinds of happiness. Of these two kinds of happiness, the happiness without joy is foremost.”*

AN 2. 72

*“Bhikkhus, there are these two kinds of happiness. What two?”*

*Pleasurable happiness and the happiness of equanimity. These are the two kinds of happiness. Of these two kinds of happiness, the happiness of equanimity is foremost.”*

Equanimity enables a very fine, profound perception because of its evenness.

Things that remain hidden with joy can be perceived with equanimity. Joy is agitated and restless compared to equanimity.

Equanimity is a subtle state of mind with a profound view. Subtlety makes it possible to observe very subtle phenomena in body and mind. In this way, equanimity enables an ever deeper understanding of our existence.

Equanimity leads to desirelessness and contentment.

Equanimity creates inner freedom because it no longer demands anything, not even the wholesome.

Equanimity leads to inner stability. As a result, one does not lose one's composure even in difficult situations.

Equanimity leaves the mind calm, clear and with an overview.

Equanimity gives us perseverance because we accept everything that comes our way with equanimity and mindfulness. So we can easier attain the goal of the Buddha's teaching.

How equanimity leads to the highest goal of the Buddha's teaching the Buddha explains in AN 7. 55 Destinations of Persons - Purisagatisuttam:

*“And what, bhikkhus, is attainment of nibbāna through nonclinging? Here, a bhikkhu is practicing thus: ‘It might not be, and it might not be mine. It will not be; it will not be mine. I am abandoning what exists, what has come to be.’ He obtains equanimity. He is not attached to existence; he is not attached to origination. He sees with correct wisdom: ‘There is a higher state that is peaceful,’ and he has totally realized that state. He has totally abandoned the underlying tendency to conceit; he has totally abandoned the underlying tendency to lust for existence; he has totally abandoned ignorance. With the decay of the influxes, he has realized for himself with direct knowledge, while seeing things, the influxfree liberation of mind, liberation by wisdom, and having entered upon it, he dwells in it. This is called attainment of nibbāna through non-clinging.”*

Equanimity is also one of the seven awakening factors. Equanimity is therefore a necessary equipment for awakening. For attaining awakening this factor must be very strong.

### Enemies of Equanimity

Superficially observed indifference could be confused with equanimity, that's why worldly indifference based on ignorance is called the near enemy of equanimity.

The distant enemies are greed on the one hand and resentment on the other. They are distant enemies because they are different, but prevent equanimity from arising. Equanimity is the antidote for both.

*“It is impossible and inconceivable, friend, that one might develop and cultivate the liberation of the mind by equanimity, make it one's vehicle and basis, carry it out, consolidate it, and properly undertake it, yet lust could still obsess one's mind. There is no such possibility. For this, friend, is the escape from lust, namely, the liberation of the mind by equanimity.”* AN 6. 13 The Escape - Nissāraṇīyasuttam

## Developing and Strengthening Equanimity (*upekkhā*)

One has to distinguish equanimity (*upekkhā*) as *Brahmavihārā* and as *pāramī*. The *Brahmavihārā* includes only the attitude towards beings. One can train this systematically as an attitude in daily life or in meditation as *samatha* meditation. The other aspect of equanimity is an attitude towards all experiences we encounter. The *pāramī upekkhā* includes both, the attitude towards beings and as well towards all our experiences. We can train this in all situations in daily life and as well in *samatha* and *vipassanā* meditation.

In *samatha* meditation as fourth *Brahmavihārā* one can strengthen the attitude of equanimity systematically by dwelling for a longer time in this state of mind. One takes beings, one being, a group of beings or all beings, as objects and contemplates that all beings are the owners of their own deeds. And one can wish for these beings that they may understand cause and effect.

One can also wish for oneself and others: 'May all beings accept things as they are.'

The Pāli word *kamma* means action, it is used for action that creates results. The result is called *vipāka* in the Pāli language. We are the designers and creators of our *kamma* and *kamma* shapes our living conditions and our future. It is important to keep reminding ourselves of this. So it is our own actions that shape our future. And we experience the effects of past actions in the present.

Everything we experience is the result of our own actions. If one wants to change conditions, it should be done out of wholesome consciousness accompanied by compassion and not out of aversion and subsequent desire. To act out of compassion, one must first clearly recognise the unsatisfactory (*dukkha*). One should consider well when conditions need to be changed. If one cannot change the circumstances, equanimity is necessary to develop in order to dwell in wholesome consciousness.

With the attitude of equanimity one can attain the fourth mental absorption (*jhāna*). As real *upekkhā* is never accompanied by happy feeling one can only attain the fourth absorption with *upekkhā*. The first to third absorption all are accompanied by happy feeling. So one has to practice before *upekkhā* one of the other *Brahmavihārā* (*mettā*, *karunā* or *muditā*).

In *vipassanā* meditation *upekkhā* is fundamentally strengthened. When one sees only elements in one's body and sense objects impinging on the sense bases without adding anything else and ever changing pleasant and unpleasant feelings without identifying with any phenomena and when one observes then the fast appearing and disappearing of all phenomena and understands it as impermanence, *upekkhā* becomes a habitual attitude.

The more we understand the three universal characteristics (impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and selflessness) and accept them as reality, the more equanimity arises in our minds. When our living conditions change, be it in small segments, such as in the course of a day, or in larger segments of life, such as over decades, we can observe these changes with equanimity. We know that it is reality and that we experience the laws of existence. There is no reason for fear, worry or anger and also no reason for desire and attachment.

Also when we accept *dukkha*, the unsatisfactory, as a characteristic of life through repeated mindful observation, a well-established equanimity arises. And not only equanimity increases but also wisdom (*paññā*), so that we can progress step by step through *vipassanā* towards final liberation from suffering.

Patterns of behaviour and thinking change by remaining equanimous in *vipassanā* meditation. By developing profound knowledge out of one's own experience in *vipassanā* meditation the whole mental structure changes towards satisfying states of mind instead of displeasure.

*"Herein, what are the six kinds of equanimity based on renunciation? When, by knowing the impermanence, change, fading away, and cessation of forms, one sees as it actually is with proper wisdom that forms (sounds, smells, tastes, tangible objects and mind objects) both formerly and now are all impermanent, suffering, and subject to change, equanimity arises. Such equanimity as this transcends the form; that is why it is called equanimity based on renunciation."* MN 137 The Exposition of the Sixfold Base - Saḷāyatanaṅgasuttaṃ

One can also strengthen the perfection of *upekkhā* by contemplating cause and effect in daily life as often as possible and mainly when there are challenges to avoid unwholesome states of mind, as well anger as also attachment, to arise. One can contemplate like this: 'Just because we have



body and mind that have arisen due to causes, we have pleasant and unpleasant experiences.’ This is how equanimity arises.

In the Middle Length Discourses No. 103 What Do You Think About Me? - Kintisuttam, the Buddha described several cases of how bhikkhus should behave towards others when differences of opinion arise. He gave several instructions on how differences of opinion should be resolved in a differentiated way.

When a bhikkhu has committed an offence, the Buddha makes several suggestions on how to talk about it in a wholesome way without causing discomfort to oneself and without hurting the other person. However, if one realises that it is not possible to talk and thus support the other person, he says the following:

*“Then it may occur to you, bhikkhus: ‘I shall be troubled and the other person will be hurt; for the other person is given to anger and revenge, and he is firmly attached to his view and he relinquishes with difficulty; and I cannot make that person emerge from the unwholesome and establish him in the wholesome.’ One should not underrate equanimity towards such a person.”*

Also by the contemplation and understanding of impermanence in daily life the perfection *upekkhā* is strengthened.

Equanimity is strengthened when one clearly sees all sensations in the body and all mental phenomena as ultimate realities without identifying with them. If one then realises that all these physical and mental phenomena arise due to causes and conditions, equanimity becomes even stronger. For example, contemplating a good taste or a pleasant physical sensation as the result of wholesome actions of the past creates equanimity. Similarly, when one contemplates unpleasant objects, such as loud noises, as the result of unwholesome actions, equanimity also arises. Energy is necessary to practise continuously in this way.

When we contemplate dependant origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*) or practise it with deep concentration, a state of equanimity arises in our mind through this practice. We learn or see that conditions or causes always give rise to resultant circumstances. It is a law that unwholesome behaviour produces unpleasant living conditions or unpleasant sense objects in our field of experience. Wholesome behaviour produces desirable conditions and opportunities for deeper understanding of our lives. Unwholesome behaviour is always caused by ignorance. In fact, ignorance is the main cause of suffering as the Buddha has taught in dependant origination. The more we understand this through our own investigation, the more we see conditions not as personal anymore but as general. And equanimity with the wish to overcome ignorance finally and to help others to overcome it becomes strengthened.

As we increasingly understand and accept this teaching on conditions and their laws through learning, contemplation or direct seeing in practice, equanimity arises in our minds. We know more and more clearly that nothing happens to us by chance. There is no need to get upset or even despair about unpleasant things.

Equanimity is also recommended to be practised when we find it difficult to develop loving kindness or compassion for people who are malicious or cruel to others. For most people, it is easy to develop loving kindness or compassion for the victims of cruel acts. For example, when a person is being tortured or exploited, many people can spontaneously develop loving kindness and help the victim. Also when cruel people wage wars and many people experience great suffering as a result, many people open their hearts to the victims of violence with a loving attitude. Also when animals are tortured and abused, many people take action to protect them. In such cases, it is difficult for most people, especially at the beginning of the practice, to develop loving kindness or compassion for the perpetrators. This is where equanimity offers itself as a wholesome practice to avoid falling into unwholesome states of mind as sadness or anger. One can contemplate the fact that the perpetrators will experience the results of their actions. This contemplation can then also give rise to compassion for the perpetrators of cruel acts. They produce their future suffering through power now.

In AN 5. 57 Themes – Abhiṇhapaccavekkhitabbaṭhānasuttam the Buddha recommends several contemplations one should practice every day, they lead to an attitude of equanimity:

*“Bhikkhus, there are these five themes that should often be reflected upon by a woman or a man,*

by a householder or one gone forth.

What five?

- (1) A woman or a man, a householder or one gone forth, should often reflect thus: 'I am subject to old age; I am not exempt from old age.'
- (2) A woman or a man, a householder or one gone forth, should often reflect thus: 'I am subject to illness; I am not exempt from illness.'
- (3) A woman or a man, a householder or one gone forth, should often reflect thus: 'I am subject to death; I am not exempt from death.'
- (4) A woman or a man, a householder or one gone forth, should often reflect thus: 'I must be parted and separated from everyone and everything dear and agreeable to me.'
- (5) A woman or a man, a householder or one gone forth, should often reflect thus:  
     'I am the owner of my kamma,  
     the heir of my kamma;  
     I have kamma as my origin,  
     kamma as my relative,  
     kamma as my resort;  
     I will be the heir of whatever kamma, good or bad, that I do.' ...

"And for the sake of what benefit should a woman or a man, a householder or one gone forth, often reflect thus: 'I am the owner of my kamma, the heir of my kamma; I have kamma as my origin, kamma as my relative, kamma as my resort; I will be the heir of whatever kamma, good or bad, that I do'? People engage in misconduct by body, speech, and mind. But when one often reflects upon this theme, such misconduct is either completely abandoned or diminished. It is for the sake of this benefit that a woman or a man, a householder or one gone forth, should often reflect thus ...

"This noble disciple reflects thus: 'I am not the only one who is the owner of one's kamma, the heir of one's kamma; who has kamma as one's origin, kamma as one's relative, kamma as one's resort; who will be the heir of whatever kamma, good or bad, that one does. All beings that come and go, that pass away and undergo rebirth, are owners of their kamma, heirs of their kamma; all have kamma as their origin, kamma as their relative, kamma as their resort; all will be heirs of whatever kamma, good or bad, that they do.' As he often reflects on this theme, the path is generated. He pursues this path, develops it, and cultivates it. As he does so, the fetters are entirely abandoned and the underlying tendencies are uprooted."

Equanimity is an attitude towards beings that is beyond discrimination and prejudice. It is an attitude that does not lose its balance in the face of

gain and loss,

adoration and contempt,

praise and blame,

joy and suffering,

an attitude beyond fear and hope. To develop this attitude requires wisdom, strength and alertness.

A state of mind with numbing indifference cannot produce this noble attitude.

The Buddha spoke of eight laws that rule our world. Contemplating these laws of the world (*lokadhamma*) also helps to develop equanimity:

AN 8. 5 World (1)

"*Bhikkhus, these eight worldly conditions revolve around the world, and the world revolves around these eight worldly conditions.*

*What eight?*

*Gain and loss,*

*disrepute and fame,*

*blame and praise,*

*and pleasure and pain.*

*These eight worldly conditions revolve around the world, and the world revolves around these eight worldly conditions."*

*Gain and loss, disrepute and fame, blame and praise, pleasure and pain: these conditions that people meet are impermanent, transient, and subject to change. A wise and mindful person knows*

*them and sees that they are subject to change. Desirable conditions don't excite his mind nor is he repelled by undesirable conditions. He has dispelled attraction and repulsion; they are gone and no longer present.*

*Having known the dustless, sorrowless state, he understands rightly and has transcended existence."*

From this reflection on the eight laws of the world, it follows that one should remain calm and balanced in the face of happiness and unhappiness as well as pleasure and pain in all situations in life, regardless of whether one encounters friends, strangers or enemies.

### **Examples of Equanimity from the Sutta**

The Buddha repeatedly encouraged his disciples to be equanimous. This also was the case with the former mass murderer Aṅgulimāla. He had killed many people and also wanted to kill the Buddha. The latter was able to stop him with his supernatural powers. The encounter went so far that Aṅgulimāla asked the Buddha to join the order. He practised diligently and attained arahantship. But he could not escape the result of his previous cruel actions through this attainment. He was pelted with clods of earth, broken pieces and clubs when he went on alms rounds in the village. The Buddha advised him to bear these attacks with equanimity. He explained that these were the results of his previous actions:

*"Bear it, brahmin! Bear it, brahmin! You are experiencing here and now the result of deeds because of which you might have been tortured in hell for many years, for many hundreds of years, for many thousands of years." MN 86*

The highest level of equanimity we find in accounts from the Buddha himself:

*"I would make my bed in a charnel ground with the bones of the dead for a pillow. And cowherd boys came up and spat on me, urinated on me, threw dirt at me, and poked sticks into my ears. Yet I do not recall that I ever aroused an evil mind [of hate] against them. Such was my abiding in equanimity." MN 12*

*"I lay down in a cemetery leaning against a skeleton.*

*Crowds of rustic children approached me and*

*displayed a great deal of derisive behaviour.*

*Others, exultant, thrilled in mind, brought me offerings*  
*of many perfumes and garlands and a variety of food.*

*Those who caused me anguish and those who gave me happiness -*

*I was the same to them all;*

*kindliness, anger did not exist.*

*Having become balanced toward happiness and anguish,*

*toward honours and reproaches,*

*I was the same in all circumstances -*

*this was my perfection of equanimity."*<sup>2</sup>

Equanimity as a quiet mind is the bridge to Nibbāna, the final tranquility and safety.

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<sup>2</sup> Basket of Conduct, *Cariyāpiṭaka* in Minor Anthologies, Vol. III, translated by I. B. Horner, PTS, Bristol, 2014, p. 48

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