

# Equanimity

One of the most effective ways to explain the Pali word *upekkhā*, from which we take equanimity (of even-mind/soul) as a proximate translation, is to highlight what it is not. Being unbothered doesn't quite get there; neither does being indifferent or not caring. Additionally, the static words of stability or balance do not fully allow for the sensitive, dynamic, and intimate qualities of this refined heart quality.

This boundless heart quality is best formed from what it is not, or expressed by pointing out what is not there. Equanimity is the absence of *taṇhā*. *Taṇhā* is a key co-arising feature of the built up experience of *dukkha*. One of the best translations for *taṇhā* is "demand for existence to be otherwise". Thus, *upekkhā* is non-demanding, and due to that leads to less *dukkha*.

A clarifying explanation is to compare *mettā* (kind, inviting, friendliness) with *upekkhā* (non-interfering, allowing, spacious-intimacy). *Mettā*, we can say, is the opposite of *taṇhā*, while *upekkhā* is the absence of *taṇhā*. This is worth contemplating in your own life. Note how *mettā* replaces *taṇhā* and kindly directs the heart away from *dukkha* making. *Upekkhā*, though drains the *dukkha* out of an experience, and causes all things to become more peaceful and quiet.

There are many images offered in the teachings to bring a sense of the rich heart-mind qualities of equanimity. Two powerful images are a great ship in high seas, or a healthy tree in a passing storm. These speak to us of the feeling of resilience, balancing, and deeply rootedness that we can feel when *upekkhā* is present. The ship, deeply immersed in the ocean by its heavy ballast, can ride the waves of life. The tree's flexible branches and healthy roots allow it to dance with the wind while it blows, and return to noble alignment when it passes.

Other helpful images are the archetype of a grandparent being present with their grandchildren, or of overlooking a beautiful landscape from a high point. These impress a sense of less entanglement and demand on things happening "my way". In addition, there is a soft background of dependable presence and warm love that is continuously letting go moment by moment.

Some equanimity phrases to try:

May **I / You / We**

be spacious

be resilient

be free from demands

We cannot control life, for we are all subject to multiple causes and conditions