

Upekkhā

David Dale Holmes

Of the Four Sublime States of *mettā*, *karunā* and *muditā* and *upekkhā*, the fourth and final state is the hardest to understand and to cultivate.

Narada Thera *In the Buddha and his Teaching*, 1998, expertly translated and narrated the following teaching about *upekkhā* or equanimity:

“The fourth sublime state is the most difficult and the most essential. It is *upekkhā* or equanimity. The etymo-logical meaning of the term *upekkhā* is 'discerning rightly,' 'viewing justly' or 'looking impartially,' that is, without attachment or aversion, without favour or disfavour.

“Equanimity is necessary especially for laymen who have to live in an ill-balanced world amidst fluctuating circumstances. Slightings and insults are the common lot of mankind. The world is so constituted that the good and the virtuous are often subject to unjust criticism and attack. It is heroic to maintain a balanced mind in such circumstances. (Narada 508)

“Loss and gain, fame and infamy, praise and blame, pain and happiness are eight worldly conditions that affect all humanity. Most people are perturbed when affected by such favourable or unfavourable states. One is elated when one is praised, and depressed when blamed and reviled. He is wise, says the Buddha, who, amidst such vicissitudes of life, stands unmoved like unto a firm rock, exercising perfect equanimity.

“The Buddha’s exemplary life offers us worldlings an excellent example of equanimity.

“There was no religious teacher in the world who was so severely criticised, attacked, insulted and reviled as the Buddha, and yet none so highly praised, honoured and revered as the Buddha.

“Once when he went in quest of alms, he was called an outcast by an impertinent brahmin. He calmly endured the insult and explained to him that it is not birth that makes one an outcast but an ignoble character. The brahmin was converted.

“Inviting him to a house for alms, a certain man entertained the Buddha with the filthiest language, current in his time. He was called ‘swine,’ ‘brute,’ ‘ox,’ etc. But he was not offended. He did not retaliate. Calmly, he questioned his host what he would do when guests visited his house. He replied that he would prepare a feast to entertain them.

“Well, what would you do if they did not partake of it?” questioned the Buddha.

“In that case we ourselves would partake of the feast.”

“Well, good brother, you have invited me to your house for alms. You have entertained me with a torrent of abuse. I do not accept it. Please take it back,” calmly replied the Buddha.

The Buddha did not retaliate, but politely gave back what the brahmin gave him.

“Retaliate not, the Buddha exhorts. Vengeance will be met with vengeance. Force will be met with force. Bombs will be met with bombs. 'Hatreds do not cease through hatreds, but through love alone they cease' is a noble utterance of the Buddha. The offender's character was completely transformed.

(Narada 509)

'Retaliate not. Be silent as a cracked gong when you are abused by others. If you do so, I deem that you have already attained Nibbāna although you have not realized Nibbāna.'

See Dhammapada v. 124

“Such is the advice of the Buddha. These are golden words that should be given heed to in this ill-disciplined world of today.

“Once a lady of the court, Māgandiyā, induced some drunkards to revile the Buddha so much that Venerable Ānanda, his attendant disciple, implored the Buddha to leave the city and go elsewhere. But the Buddha was unperturbed.

“Māgandiyā, a lady of the harem, had a grudge against the Buddha for speaking ill of her attractive figure when her father, through ignorance, wished to give her in marriage to the Buddha. She hired drunkards to insult the Buddha in public. With perfect equanimity the Buddha endured the insults. But Māgandiyā had to suffer for her misdemeanour. Insults are the common lot of humanity. The more you work and the greater you become, the more are you subject to insult and humiliation.

“A vile woman, named Cincā, in a public assembly, maligned the Buddha and feigned pregnancy, accusing the Buddha of having placed her in that condition. With a smiling face the Buddha patiently endured the insult and the Buddha's innocence was proven.

“In yet another case, a woman was killed by his rivals and the Buddha was accused of murder.

“His own cousin and disciple Devadatta made an unsuccessful attempt to crush him to death by hurling a rock from a cliff. Devadatta ... not only tried to discredit the Buddha but also made an unsuccessful attempt to crush him to death by hurling a rock from above while he was pacing up and down below.

“Some of his own disciples accused him of jealousy, partiality, favouritism, etc.

“On the other hand many sang the praises of the Buddha. Kings prostrated themselves before his feet and paid the highest reverence.

“Like the Mother Earth the Buddha suffered everything in silence with perfect equanimity.

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“Like a lion that does not tremble at every sound, one should not be perturbed by the poisoned darts of uncurbed tongues. Like the wind that does not cling to the meshes of a net, one should not be attached to the illusory pleasures of this changing world. Like the lotus that is unsoiled by the mud from which it springs, one should live unaffected by worldly temptations, ever calm, serene and peaceful.

(Narada 510)

“As with the first three virtues so also *upekkhā* has for its direct enemy attachment (*rāga*) and for its indirect enemy callousness or unintelligent indifference.

“*Upekkhā* discards clinging and aversion. An impartial attitude is its chief characteristic. He who practises equanimity is neither attracted by desirable objects nor is averse to undesirable objects. His attitude

towards the sinner and saint will be the same, for he makes no distinction.”
(Narada 511)

Reference

Narada Maha Thera. 1998. *The Buddha and His Teaching*.
Taipei: The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation.