# Mindfulness of Breathing (50) Equanimity Factor of Awakening (Part 2)

March 9, 2021

**SUMMARY KEYWORDS**
equanimity, mind, mindfulness, reactivity, deep meditation, awareness, *citta*, impartiality, wisdom, Seven Factors of Awakening, *upekkhā, ānāpānasati*, holistic, wholesome, impermanence, confidence

**Gil Fronsdal**

Today is part two of the equanimity factor of awakening. It is also part of the series on mindfulness of breathing.

The Buddha presented this as a path. As we stay present for our breath, we are cultivating and deepening meditation practice with a deep relaxation of body and mind. We are not simply focused on the details of our life, the particular activities of the body or mind. We start becoming aware of our state of mind – its quality, feeling, gestalt, or wholeness of awareness that can be here holding it all. This is a mature place in meditation, which we might fall into occasionally when the mind state is more salient, more prominent than the particular details of what is happening in our body or mind.

All of the above are important, but it is good to be more holistic in the practice – at some point, getting a sense of the whole – the mind as a whole, the mood, our mind state. These mind states have various characteristics when we get more and more settled – when the mind feels more whole, expansive, clear, with greater clarity and mindfulness. The Seven Factors of Awakening are part of that.

The last factor, equanimity, is part of that. When the mind is really stable in awareness, with a strong sense of being aware in this inner mind state – this healthy, wholesome mind state – awareness tends to come with a strong sense of equanimity.

Equanimity is, very simply, not getting caught in the reactivity of the mind, not being for or against things. It is a wonderful capacity. We still might be for and against things. We might have these thoughts or impulses, but with equanimity, we simply don't pick them up or get involved. They are fleeting impulses of the moment. They just pass through. They come and they go. We don't get involved.

Equanimity can lead to tremendous social good. When we do not respond socially to the world with our reactivity and our quick impulses of being for or against

things, we are more likely to be impartial. There is a healthy understanding of impartiality. We treat everyone equally. We don't treat people through the filter of our desires and aversions – leaning into wanting, or pulling back because we don't want something. We don't easily get pulled into our preferences.

The more we have equanimity – the ability to not get caught up in our reactivity or in impulses of being for or against things – our sense of justice, impartiality, and being someone who is safe for other people becomes stronger. Being for or against things might still be wise, but that wisdom builds on equanimity, on being stable and settled. It is not impulsive. There is clarity and wholesomeness in how we respond to the world.

Equanimity is something for both deep meditation and everyday life. It is a great boon for life. Deep meditation is a place where some people can feel the state of equanimity in a powerful way. This gives them a feeling for it and support for bringing it into their daily life. In the *ānāpānasati* process, the reference point for equanimity is very much in meditation.

In meditation, equanimity is what allows mindfulness to be uninterrupted – to stay here in the flow of awareness. We don't find ourselves drifting off in thoughts and coming back two or three minutes later. We don't find

ourselves getting caught and preoccupied with what's happening. We might be very attentive to what is happening, but we are not caught by it. The steadiness of mindfulness holds the course, keeps walking, keeps engaging step by step. Equanimity is what allows this steadiness and continuity of awareness.

As I said yesterday, equanimity – *upekkhā* – has a lot to do with wisdom, with having an overview of the situation. It is not acquired knowledge that we bring with us and apply, but rather something that we deeply understand as we go along.

There's a variety of things we begin to understand. One is that it is not worthwhile to be reactive, caught up in thoughts, or caught up in reactivity. It is just not valuable for us. We can feel and sense this directly.

Another is that we can have a clear sense of the impermanence of phenomena, the inconstancy of how things come, go, and change. To really understand that means we do not relate to things as if they are going to be there forever, or they are something fixed that has to be fixed.

Having a clear sense of, "This is impermanent; this is change as well," can let us sit back and be willing to be present and aware, with the wisdom not to take all these

things personally. “I am not unique. My experience is not unique.” In one way or another, all of the experiences we have had in meditation – other people have had as well.

One of the primary roles of a meditation teacher is to normalize our experiences – to make them ordinary. It’s okay and just part of the process. So we can keep coming back to equanimous, steady mindfulness, which does not get perturbed or agitated, no matter what is happening. No matter the fear, pain, suffering, or grief experienced in meditation – it is all normalized in a certain way. And one way is to not take it personally.

Different kinds of wisdom come into play to support the ability to stay equanimous, balanced, and unagitated in our experience. But also, equanimity comes from a sense of balance, which has something to do with the inner strength we cultivate. When there is strength of mindfulness and concentration, we have stability – something that holds us down and keeps us grounded, allowing us to withstand the winds of the mind, of change, the things that come and go. We develop this strength by continuity of meditation – meditating regularly, almost every day.

The mind is an instrument, which can be developed, strengthened, and trained. Not everyone develops and

trains their mind to be strong. Ongoing, regular meditation practice is not only about showing up and being mindful and accepting of stuff, but also developing an inner strength – a capacity to let go, really stay present, be steady with experience, and not wander off. We develop strength of concentration, and even strength of joy. As we get stronger and stronger, we are not so buffeted by the winds of change. We are more able to hold the course.

The ninth step of *ānāpānasati* – mindfulness of the mind – is to start experiencing and sensing that we have an amazing resource called *citta* (mind), which we want to care for. It is a reference point for well-being and wholeness. Any kind of suffering that we have is a subset. When the mind is really spacious, open, expansive, and present, and we are aware of *citta* in a bigger way, it is much harder to take our greed, attachments, lust, addictions, hate, hostilities, regrets, resentments, or fears as being all there is. They become a piece of the puzzle. They are not the whole puzzle. The whole puzzle feels more like the mind that can be aware of it all.

There can be a feeling of goodness and rightness – a great sense of the mind, an inner life that is whole. Whether or not it is completely whole or feels as

satisfying as I'm saying here, it keeps growing as we continue the practice of *ānāpānasati*.

Step ten is "gladdening the mind," feeling the satisfaction of the mind, and being connected to a mind that feels more whole. The eleventh step – *samādhi* – is "concentrating the mind" or "unifying the mind." We'll talk about that soon enough. It is what makes the mind even more whole.

This is a fantastic process. I know it's not easy to experience all the things that I'm talking about. But part of the confidence in practice is to know that you are on a good path. Part of the equanimity that comes with practice is that confidence: "This is a good path to be on. I can walk this path steadily. I can keep going. I don't have to be too concerned about how far I've gotten because I know I am on a good path. I will keep walking."

So, thank you for today. I look forward, as I do almost every day now, to coming here, sitting with you, and teaching. Thank you.