

2006 New Year Retreat

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Equanimity

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(introducing equanimity)

So equanimity, it's a word that the Buddha used a lot, it's very common and it's in all those dreadful Buddhist lists of things, it appears quite a lot. But in our common everyday usage it's actually not very common. So it's not very typical that you're walking down the street and you meet your friend and you ask, "How are you doing?" and he says/she says, "I'm very equanimous today." And even for people who've been practising for a while, we may wonder, What does it mean? What does this word mean, *equanimity*? Have I ever even had any? And we may have been practising for a while and have a vague sense what it means, and also quite some ambivalence in our relationship towards it. It's not a particularly sexy sounding word.. I don't know. We're a bit unsure.. perhaps what we really feel about it.

So the Buddha uses it in a couple of different ways and what I want to focus on tonight is the most common way that he used it. Which is to really mean something like a steadiness, a steadiness of the mind, of the heart, in the face of, in relationship to, *all* conditions, inner and outer, *all* experiences. There's a kind of stability, a kind of unshakeability to the mind, to the heart. So some.. actually it was years ago now.. I was at a party and got talking to a guy from Germany who was a meteorologist, and he specialized in the science of climate change. And he was telling me that he used to fly out to the polar ice caps and live there for a while taking measurements of the ice and this kind of thing. And they would have a base camp and they would fly out every day in helicopters to the different places where they took measurements and they would fly out over the ice and huge distances and in flying would often fly over massive flocks of penguins. And the helicopter would be coming and these penguins would hear this helicopter, the rotors, and they would look, and the helicopter would come nearer and they would look and it would come nearer and they would look, and they would look and it would go overhead, and they would look, and they would look. And the whole flock of penguins [mimes falling over backwards].. every day without fail.. of course because they have the blubber it doesn't hurt, so it's okay. So that's an example of what is *not* equanimity. Something happens in our experience and it completely grips us and we basically keel over inwardly or even outwardly, we keel over.

So when the Buddha was talking about this equanimity, he said, “equanimity in relation to what?” Yeah, everything, all experiences – but in particular to what he called the ‘eight worldly conditions’. These are: praise and blame, success and failure, gain (or profit) and loss, pain.. sorry, pleasure and pain. Praise-blame, success-failure, gain-loss, pleasure-pain – so four pairs of opposites, basically. One polarity we like, we want, we like it when that comes to us, and one polarity we don’t like. He said, and it’s without question our experience, “whoever you are it’s inevitable that you will encounter both sides of all four pairs, whoever you are.” The Buddha himself, Jesus, Gandhi, Mother Theresa, whoever, and certainly any politicians; all of us, all of us, the nature of being, in a way, is that life presents us with these opposites, it’s inevitable. How much do we wobble when there’s that movement between praise and blame and the rest of it? How much do we wobble inside? How much do we keel over? How much is our state of mind dependent on where things stand with those polarities? Just to reflect on that, how central just those four pairs are to our sense of well-being and okayness.

So it’s very important to say also that when we hear about this equanimity, part of the reason that it’s almost like a bit unattractive to us is that it can sound a bit like a sort of disconnection or not caring. So there’s something called the ‘near enemy’ of equanimity which is a quality that *looks* and maybe.. it looks like equanimity but it’s actually not. The near enemy is indifference. So sometimes we can mistake a state of indifference for true equanimity. The difference is that with equanimity the heart is still open, the heart is still open, it’s not a state of disconnection. We’re not shut down, we’re not cold, removed. Equanimity is not a dull state or a kind of greyness, everything’s just grey, the colours have gone out of life. So this is quite interesting. Sometimes also the reason we are not so attracted to the idea of equanimity is that we have come to feel and believe that our sense of some juice in life, of juiciness, is wrapped up in drama – in the drama of the self, the drama of getting or getting rid of, of some difficulty or this or that – and when that drama dies down a bit, we’re a little bit unsure if what will remain will be a bit grey or a bit boring. It’s hard to imagine that maybe equanimity, true equanimity, actually has a quality of juiciness in it.

So it’s a very.. it’s something very alive, very alive. So, steadiness with that quality of aliveness, another word might be something like spaciousness. There’s a sense of spaciousness in the being, in awareness, around what is going on, whether it’s fantastic and exciting or whatever, whether it’s difficult. That the being, the awareness, has a sense of space, there is a sense of spaciousness. Spaciousness and equanimity really go together. So equanimity basically is a state of mind, it’s a state of mind, a state of steadiness of mind and heart, a state of spaciousness.

Sometimes in life, often in life, we don’t understand very well how states of mind come about. It can seem that we go through our day, go through our life, and states of mind sort of descend upon us

out of the blue in a pretty random way. We're feeling okay and then we're just miserable or depressed, or some anger comes, or upset or something, or just the sadness. Can seem all very random. Or, it can seem as if our state of mind is completely event-based. Someone says, "You're fantastic," and we feel great. Someone says, "Actually you know.." whatever, some problem or other with ourselves, and what happens? Or there's a success or failure, whatever it is. Part of.. a huge part of the Buddha's message was that our state of mind is not either random or solely event-based. That we can actually cultivate this quality of equanimity. We can really nourish it, nurture it. So that the path has.. at least one half of the path is very active in terms of cultivating these kind of qualities, these states of mind, these qualities like equanimity, very much active. And the other part, we could say, is just about letting things be, quite a passive sense of just presence, just allowing.

Sometimes it's my experience that we're quite tentative about this active side of the path. We quite like the idea of maybe just relaxing and allowing, but when we start talking about cultivating qualities it can bring up a certain uneasiness with us. And it's very understandable. Oftentimes we come to spiritual practice because of, in our lives, we feel the pain of striving, of ambition, of driven-ness, of always trying to manipulate everything. And so we come and we hear the teachings of just letting it be, just letting it be, just sitting with it, just being with it – and it's a relief. But this part of cultivation is a huge part of the path. So we have this fear of striving and ambition, understandably, we trip up so often, we get entangled in our own sort of measuring mind: "equanimity – okay!" [rolls up sleeves], you know, and where are we.. what do I score out of ten for equanimity today? Am I moving forward or am I moving backwards? Am I making progress? The whole measuring mind comes in.

Actually as far as equanimity is concerned there is a way to measure, interestingly. So, it says, "If you can sit quietly after difficult news, if in financial downturns you remain perfectly calm, if you can see your neighbours travel to fantastic places without a twinge of jealousy, if you can happily eat whatever is put on your plate, if you can fall asleep after a day of running around without a drink or a pill, if you can always find contentment just where you are, you are probably a dog." Someone told me that was a quote of the Buddha but I haven't been able to find it in the texts.

So the point is, if we are going to cultivate and nurture qualities, can we actually hold that whole process very, very lightly, very lightly, not tie ourselves up in the knots of the measuring mind and all this. We do need to cultivate qualities; we do need to look into what nurtures these qualities. But can we just hold it very lightly.

(how to cultivate equanimity)

Okay, so maybe equanimity is a good idea. Next question, *how*.. how am I going to cultivate it?

How am I going to nourish it? How am I going to nurture this quality? And there are actually many different avenues and pathways and ways that the quality of equanimity grows in us. First, and in a way the most simplest, most simple.. is just what we've been doing today, the steadiness of being with the breath. Not to overlook the very first, in a way, the very first stages of the practice.

We're sitting on the cushion or doing walking meditation, you know paying attention to the body sensations when we're walking: something happens. Okay, something's happened, we know something's happened and we just come back, and we just come back, and we just come back. That movement of not being so pulled or so caught up in the pull of what's going on, what seems so pressing, so calling, that very movement is the beginnings of that steadiness. You can see it, can't you? I'm not going to get caught up in this, in this, in this. And it slowly comes a steadiness, slowly, gradually and not linearly at all, but gradually in the being comes a steadiness. And of course this applies to our relationship with practice as well.

So, you know, if we're at home or even here and we get up in the morning and say, "I don't know, I'm kind of tired today, maybe I won't sit." Or, "Actually I feel fantastic, I don't need to sit today." Or, "I'm a little sad and I don't really, you know.." Or whatever it is. Just the actual act of showing up, "I'm going to sit every day, I'm going to practise every day." *Just that* is a statement of steadiness. Somehow these small steps of steadiness they sort of percolate down in the being and that quality of equanimity becomes.. almost finds its way into the.. if we could say, the bedrock of the being.

So that's one very simple and straightforward way. Probably, I don't know, but probably the most common way that it's suggested that equanimity gets built is the contemplation of impermanence. So huge emphasis on this from the Buddha and in Dharma teachings. Contemplating impermanence. Seeing that things change, things are not dependable. All these eight worldly conditions, all experiences, all conditions arise and pass, they come and go, they do not last. Having.. I feel it's quite necessary not.. because we all could say, "Yeah, I know that, I know that. Of course." And we stop someone in the street and they say, "Yeah, yeah, sure." How deeply do we know it? And I feel that we need to perhaps very deliberately tune the attention in to that fact, that existential fact of impermanence.

So some of you have been practising for a while and this certainly isn't your first retreat and you know, when you've understood the basics or principles of mindfulness and presence, a possibility: all I'm interested in now, for a period, is impermanence, just want to see change, just want to see the rise and fall of things, the disappearing of things. So one goes through the day noticing, one goes through the sitting, the walking, noticing change, change. What was here this morning is no longer

here.. everything. So to see it.. in the teaching there's a great emphasis on seeing it on a very microscopic moment-to-moment level.. I'm not necessarily sure that that's any more powerful in terms of transformation to see it on the microscopic level than it is to see it just on the everyday level. The successes, the small successes and failures in one day, the small gains and losses, the pleasure and the pain, the come and go in a day.

The Pali word, the language that the Buddha spoke, one of the languages the Buddha spoke, for impermanence, is *anicca*, a-n-i-c-c-a. And another meaning, another translation of that word is 'uncertain', uncertain. So it's impermanence and uncertainty. To tune into this aspect of life. It's *incredibly* uncertain where the next piece, or moment of praise and blame is going to come.. when and where and how it's going to be, praise and blame, success-failure. What will happen in the life of the body, the next accident, the next illness; when death comes. Conditions by their very nature are uncertain. To tune the mind in to this level, this uncertainty of things. So we can contemplate impermanence on a very moment-to-moment level with sort of very keen mindfulness and this everyday level that I'm talking about, very.. every day just seeing the coming and going of these things that we get concerned with.

For me what's a really powerful way of contemplating impermanence is actually to go to a whole other level.. level of, could say, vastness. So one of my teachers, Ajahn Thanissaro, used to say, "Contemplate infinity every day. Contemplate the infinite everyday." The astronomers and cosmologists tell us the universe is 14 billion years old, 14 billion. Very long time. And will last at least as long, if not longer. Just vast unimaginable time and vast unimaginable distances. And our lives are 60, 80 if you're lucky, 100 if you're really lucky, years. Tiny, tiny fragments. And in a way our lives are in the context of that vastness.. vastness of space, vastnesses of time. And to actually begin to look at your experience with this backdrop of a sense of vastness. So right now here we are: there's the visual sense, there's the words, the sound: this moment [clicks fingers a few times]. This moment is in the context of vast time, it's also in the context of our death. So this isn't morbid, this is something to free us up. This moment.. we don't know what came before our life. We don't know.. no matter who says what, we don't know what comes afterwards. This right now, this sound, this sight, these body sensations, it's all in the context of a vast.. the vast unknown of death. So in a way can we contemplate the infinite every day, can we contemplate death every day. Not morbid. Maybe a little scary at first but actually moving towards equanimity, moving towards freedom.

So probably a less common way that's talked about, way that equanimity gets built, gets nourished, gets cultivated, is actually related to the whole quality of happiness. So if we reflect a little I think we can see that we are so wobbly with all these things, with all these conditions, often because

we don't yet have a reservoir of happiness inside that's not dependent on outer conditions. We don't really have a trustworthy source of happiness that's not dependent on outer conditions. When we have that, or as we develop that, let's put it that way, as we develop that, our equanimity becomes more unshakable, we become less wobbly. And this again is something the Buddha put huge emphasis on in his teaching, huge emphasis.

And so the question again, Well where are we going to.. how are we going to cultivate that kind of thing? Is that possible? And the Buddha of course addresses this. Developing this quality of metta that we'll talk about and we'll introduce as a meditation tomorrow, developing kindness, loving-kindness, metta, as a quality of the heart, really putting a lot of time, energy, effort into cultivating a heart of loving-kindness. Then that's there in the heart, it's a quality that's a frequent guest in the heart. That makes a huge difference, because kindness is a quality that brings happiness, it brings happiness. A heart of metta is a happy heart.

And that quality, our inner kindness, is not something that the world can take away. No one can say anything or do anything that will take it away from us. We take that quality with us to our deathbed. And if you believe in future lives and all that, we take it beyond. It's there, it's a jewel in the heart for us, and our own true possession. To borrow a phrase from Jesus, "A pearl of great price."

So kindness, compassion, service, this movement outwards.. for some people this can be quite significant in the cultivation of equanimity, for some people. Sometimes we're so caught up in *my* problems, understandably. My problems, my situation, my difficulties. And then we engage in some service, some movement of compassion, and sometimes for some people the sense of my problems just decreases. And even the sense of isolation in my problems decreases, can happen. And a person sometimes says, "Where did they go?" Can be very healing these qualities – loving-kindness, compassion – extremely healing to have that in the heart. So we heal ourselves as much by giving attention to ourselves and what's difficult in ourselves, as much as by developing what is lovely, as much as putting the attention outwards in a beautiful way and caring for others.

So I have a friend, a good friend, since high school we've known each other, and he doesn't meditate at all. And he was.. he lives in London and he was on the Tube going to work and in a little bit of a hurry and there were some tourists there visiting London, and they had a map as he got out of his station.. at his station.. and was hurrying to work. And they had a map and they were obviously confused about where to go. So he just took two minutes or whatever it was and just stood with them with the map and just explained, "it's here," you know, smallest gesture. And then he went on his way to work and he said, "but then the oddest thing happened, I noticed this happiness well up, just a little bit of happiness." And to me it was clearly related to that moment of kindness, that moment of the heart

moving outward just in the smallest gesture. It's something that I hope that if we're meditating, and if we're interested in these questions, that we're really.. that that shouldn't be a surprise to us, it shouldn't be a surprise.

And I also remember for myself many.. many years ago.. it was in the beginning period, beginning years, of intensive psychotherapeutic process that I was in.. going through.. and was really labouring under an illusion at that point without actually realizing it. I was feeling very unhappy and very stuck; very stuck in what seemed to be such solid personality structures, such difficult personality structures that were there either from my family or who knows. And they were just there and stuck and I believed that I needed to dissolve them, get rid of them, explode them, change them, whatever, in order to be happy, in order to grow and move on. I wasn't even completely conscious that I was making that connection between 'I need to get rid of this, in order to be happy', but it was there very strongly under the surface: I cannot be happy until I've got rid of this, until I've dissolved this personality structure.. *structures* actually. And I was really, really at times with this, extremely unhappy and a real sense of pain and stuckness with it, very painful.

And one day when the pain was particularly strong I got up in the morning and I had a day off and I decided "I'm just going to do metta all day, I'm just going to do this practice of loving-kindness." And so I sat and I meditated and I did loving-kindness and I had errands to run and things to.. people to see and things to buy.. and I went through my day and.. just doing metta.. went into the store to buy my groceries or whatever.. metta to the shopkeeper.. just metta.. to myself, to everyone I could think of, everyone I came across. Throughout the day I clung tenaciously, like a drowning man to a piece of wood in a stormy sea, I clung to the practice of metta, over and over with the phrases. And went and sat in the park and just did metta.

After about three or four hours of this something shifted; and slowly, gradually came a happiness, really quite a strong happiness, I mean I really had to you know to cling to it, but slowly came this happiness. And then a really, really, really strong and profound happiness. And it made such a strong impression on me, to this day I won't forget it. It was so clear: happiness is dependent on what qualities are in the mind and heart at the time. If there are lovely, beautiful qualities, that's where the happiness is. If they're not there, no happiness. Nothing had changed in terms of getting rid of these personality structures or so-called, whatever, solidity of that. All that had changed was a cultivation, a state of mind had changed and then the happiness was there. And it was so black and white that that made the insight so clear; because the suffering was so strong and the happiness was so strong. And to this day, that remains unshakably clear to me. That understanding: where does the happiness come from. Where do we get this source of happiness inside that's not so dependent on who's saying what or

what's happening to us from outside.

So this, this aspect, wisdom about what it is that leads to happiness, that's a huge aspect of wisdom. And what doesn't necessarily have to lead to suffering: someone praises or blames.. someone blames us, there's a failure, a loss, pain even – does not have to lead to suffering. So these qualities that build this happiness that's less – slowly, gradually, again, not linearly, over time but very gradually, over the *years* really I'm talking about, over the years – that build this happiness inside, that develop a reservoir of happiness inside, not so dependent on the outer conditions.

Loving-kindness, compassion, service. Another quality: mudita. Mudita, another Pali word, m-u-d-i-t-a, mudita. I'm going to translate it as spiritual joy, spiritual joy. Which means, a joy in life that's not so dependent, again, on what the self is getting, who's saying what about me or what I'm getting. A *spiritual* joy, doesn't have so much to do with the self. So one aspect of spiritual joy, we could say, is wonder, wonder. That quality of just a human being wondering, marveling.. a human being in awe at life, at existence, at the universe.

And Krishnamurti, some of you will know him, very well-known Indian teacher, I think he died 10 or 15 years ago, he said something very powerful.. I find it very powerful.. sometimes he had a way of putting things that were quite harsh, but he had a saying and it said, “We come to the infinite well of life with a thimble and so we go away thirsty.” We come to the infinite well of life with a thimble, and so we go away thirsty. And so, it's quite a question to ask ourselves, how do we feed wonder? How do we allow a sense of wonder in life? It's a huge question. It's also a huge question to follow Krishnamurti's point: why *is it* that we come with a thimble? Why *is it* that in a way we don't ask so much for ourselves from life? To me that's actually a very deep question, because it's so common: we very much limit what we ask from life.

How does wonder get fed? How does it get squashed? One way that it gets squashed is too much concern with the self, too much concern with building up the self, self-inflating, self-importance, self-aggrandizement or self-obsession, and even in the best possible motivations: so my process, my spiritual process, my therapeutic process. Can – *can*, I'm not saying it always does, but sometimes does – become just another manifestation of self-obsession. When there's too much self-concern, too much self-obsession, the receptivity of the being gets shrunk, gets shrunk. Me and my concerns and my process and my status and all of that: too much of that and our receptivity, our very awareness, gets shrunk and the wonder goes with it.

What's the place of our relationship with nature in practice, in cultivating wonder? Or art? Music? You know, certainly there's a lot of art and music or whatever that's just actually about distraction and entertainment, whatever. But there's a lot of.. a lot of things that touch the being very

profoundly, make something come alive in the being that opens this sense of receptivity, of wonder. And to me that's a huge part of practice, feeding that wonder.

So last night in the opening talk just talked briefly about, Where does our intentionality go? Why is it that we come with a thimble? And these are difficult questions and sometimes just hearing these questions doesn't.. you know it can be uncomfortable or even a bit sad if we truly reflect on this. Oftentimes our intentionality has just gone to being a bit more comfortable, things just being a bit more convenient, a bit more sense pleasure, a bit more secure. Very normal, very human. The more we do that, the less the wonder. And it's so, almost insidious the way it happens. If there is this sense of mudita, of spiritual joy, of wonder, then the ups and downs, this praise and blame and all that, they're kind of small change in life, small fry, the vicissitudes, the coming and going of all that – in relation to a sense of vastness, of mystery, it doesn't matter that much. Can be, *can* be, that the sense of wonder goes so deep that even death is kind of okay because we have a sense that we've really drunk deeply from life, really lived, and not gone through this life and not lived.

(eight worldly winds)

So, just the basic practice of showing up on the cushion, for the walking meditation, the calmness, the collectedness, itself that brings a steadiness; the contemplation of impermanence; the building of the happiness inside, the metta, compassion, mudita, spiritual joy, building this happiness – all this feeds equanimity. What about wisdom, what about wisdom? So these eight worldly conditions, can we look into them and ask: What am I making to matter? What am I making to seem so important? Are they really as real even as they seem to be?

Sometimes things seem very important to us and a little time goes by and they don't seem important at all. But to really notice that. And it may be a matter of days or months or years even. So if I think back on my life, how important it was to me when I was much younger playing football. I played football all the time and I was in teams and this and that and my happiness was so dependent on how well I played, or not, you know, if I didn't play well or scored a goal or whatever it was. It seems, you know.. where's it gone? A little while later, you know, I was going to one of these very academic institutions.. and sort of grinding people through and all the emphasis there was on how well one did academically. And then the sense of happiness gets attached to that kind of performance and then that goes.. you know, a few years later that didn't matter at all. If it *really* mattered it would matter, full stop.

So to track this coming and going of what's so important – or what's so exciting, or fearful. Something's coming up and it's going to be fantastic, just notice, okay, I'm feeling that excitement.

Track it through: do I remain, does it remain, as fantastic as it was going to be? Dalai Lama says, “Don’t get excited about anything.” Don’t get excited. Or with fear, something’s going to be terrible, “Oh my God, this thing coming up”, you know. Just see, okay this is the fear, how is it? Was it really as bad? Usually things are not as bad as we think they’re going to be and also not as good as we think they’re going to be.

How much – another question – how much are we prey to, victims of, influences from society with all of this? You know, what our status is, what our role is, what car we drive, all of that. *Even if* we’re very involved in these kind of scenes, Dharma scene, etc. Enormous pull, we’re subject to so much advertising and this and that.

I was teaching a retreat somewhere else a little while ago and was in a group interview and a woman had been devoting I think two years of her life to Dharma stuff. She’d been to India a lot and was traveling, basically going from one retreat to another, spending a lot of time managing retreats and meditating. And the first thing she talked about was.. she wanted to talk about right speech and honesty and we engaged in a dialogue about her thoughts about right speech and how she was practising with that and her absolute commitment to honesty and kindness in her speech. And really so much integrity of application there and presence. It was beautiful. And then she said, “and there’s another thing, I’m feeling kind of bad about myself, I’m feeling a bit worthless” and she said, “you know I’ve been basically just doing Dharma stuff for two years, I’m not, I don’t, you know, I don’t have a job, I’m not making any money and I just think, you know, I’m not really doing anything valuable.” And I just had to remind her, “look what you’ve just said. How rare that level of commitment to beautiful speech; and how *that* compared with having some status of some job or making money.” How we value.. just based on societal influences. Don’t underestimate the power of this, the power of what we’re subject to in this culture – and it’s actually a worldwide thing now.

I don’t know if just sitting on the cushion alone is enough to cut it. I think we need each other, we need sangha, we need like-minded people to really.. you know when we’re struggling under the weight of something that seems so important, to ask someone we trust, a friend, a good friend, a teacher, someone, whoever: What am I not seeing here? Show me what I’m not seeing. Like this woman, she was just.. wasn’t seeing how she had just completely devalued something and valued something else.

So these worldly conditions are empty, empty, empty when we look at them. They are also, if we look, very dependent.. how we feel about them, how much they register.. is very dependent on our mindstate at the time, our mood at the time, our personal circumstances. So really stupid example but.. you have just bought a new... what’s a good car? Jaguar, Ferrari, whatever it is.. and you’re driving it

home and you get in a car crash and you're really annoyed. What happens if that same day you'd also.. it's a stupid example I know but just.. you'd also just proposed or been proposed to by the man/woman of your dreams and they'd said yes and you're just.. this fantastic thing has just happened and here you are driving your new car and then you have a crash. Different impact. Stupid example, I know, but. What happens if you hadn't been engaged that day but you had been fired from your job unexpectedly and *then* you're driving. Double the impact. What happens if the person most precious in the world to you – your child, your spouse, whoever it is, your partner, your best friend – had just.. you'd just learnt that they had a terminal illness, a diagnosis of terminal cancer or something, and then you crash your car. Who cares, who cares. These things are completely dependent, completely relative on.. to our state of mind. In themselves they don't have any power, they don't have any inherent power: praise-blame, success-failure, gain-loss, all the rest of it; don't have any power inherently to effect us even.

So could say, it's empty.. okay.. but what about pain and pleasure, what about pain and pleasure? I mean pain is just pain and pleasure is just pleasure. But meditatively speaking, if we look into this a bit more carefully, a bit more investigatively, what we notice is that – say there's pain in the body, you're sitting, there's a pain in the knee, a pain in the back – the degree of the pain is dependent on my reaction to it. The degree of the pain is dependent on my reaction to it. If I am aversive to that pain, and push it away, and want to get rid of it, want it to go away, it has the tendency to actually build the intensity of the pain. Pain and pleasure are [part of recording missing, probably says something like “dependent on my reaction to them. Very counter-intuitive.”] It's quite remarkable. So again, if you've been practising for a while and you're quite comfortable with mindfulness and all that, just to begin to actually explore this. How is pain and pleasure dependent on the reaction? Dependent on the response to it? Very counter-intuitive. It's very profound wisdom to be discovered there. Am I making things.. am I making things with my reaction, am I making things?

(being equally near all things)

So there's a Tibetan teacher and someone asked him, “What's equanimity?” and he said, “Equanimity is being equally near all things.” Which is a very beautiful way of putting it, ‘being equally near all things’. And again we might take that and we might practise with that. What would that mean? What would it mean, or to sit in practice, what would it mean to not put any pressure on the self? Not put any pressure on things to be different, to be more, to be less. Not even worrying about how mindful we are, there's just some presence there and the agenda is *no pressure*. No pressure on self to be more, better, different, less. No pressure on the world, no pressure on things - inner, outer. No pressure. What happens? So ‘equally near all things’, very beautiful this definition. At one level very

beautiful. *But*, to be equally near all things means that I'm not pushing away what I don't like – what's difficult and unpleasant – and I'm not pulling towards me what's pleasant. The push and the pull have died down, have died down through mindfulness or deliberately letting them die down.

Something very remarkable can be seen here. As the push and the pull, as the reactivity to experience, dies down, our perceptions actually begin to change, our perceptions of what is happening begin to change. The push and the pull.. our push and pull to experience influences perception. Sometimes, what can happen, is when the push and pull dies down, experience itself begins to fade: pain, pleasure, it all begins to fade and just kind of become.. either fade completely or just become very.. very sparse, there's almost nothing happening, just a little flickering of experience in a space of awareness.. can do, can do.

And there's not.. there's really nothing happening, there are no objects even, per se. When there's no push-pull, when the push-pull has become very quiet. No objects, no problem. No objects, no problem. In a way that's a whole other perhaps level of meaning because we usually take equanimity to mean when something difficult or fantastic is going on then we're steady with it. But as it goes really into the depth, it's almost.. it takes on a whole different meaning, there's *nothing happening*, there's nothing really to be equanimous *about*.. in relation *to*. Deep equanimity has a real beauty in it, has a real beauty in it. Even.. even relatively superficial equanimity has some beauty in it. This level of equanimity really has a profound beauty in it. Something that really touches the being very deeply. It's also deeply nourishing, deeply nourishing.

So, I think long-term to kind of be with our experience and just relax the reactivity and then be in that space where we're not so much struggling with what's going on, where we're not trying to fix everything or make everything different, and there's just this dying down of the push and the pull: long-term nourishment for the being. And it has love in it, that dying down of the push and pull is automatically, naturally, organically imbued with a sense of love, of non-separation.

So not at all – especially on the first night of a retreat when you hear something like that – not at all to set up experience, “I want that, I'll grab that, nothing else matters.. where am I now, I'm, you know.. I'm nowhere near that.” You know, not to set that up. The experience actually is not the important thing. What's important through this is the understanding. Always, always, understanding more important than the experience. Experience very lovely, understanding much more important, much more transformative. And what's the understanding from this when we move into a less reactive mode, less push and pull? What's the understanding?

We begin to understand, what we could say, the *immeasurability* of all things; the immeasurability of all things. How a thing is, how strong it is, how intense it is, how much of a big deal

it is, how it is, depends on the push and the pull, how much of a push and a pull there is. In itself it's nothing, it's not any way. So the only way a thing really is is immeasurable. All things, so-called 'inner', so-called 'outer'. We begin to know this. And the knowing moves from a sort of intellectual level down into the heart, into the body, into the cells. And, in a way, that's the most, the deepest kind of nourishment of equanimity. Because then things, that we usually.. we don't believe so much in the inherent power of things or the inherent 'way things are'. We don't believe so much in the necessity of them making us wobble, making us keel over. We taste something about the immeasurability of things and there's a real freedom in that.

So not to make too much out of any experiences but just that understanding and moving towards that understanding.. it's very accessible for us, very accessible, very possible for all of us. So all these different.. we've just mentioned *some* of the ways tonight.. that equanimity gets nourished, gets nurtured in the being.

Shall we have a couple of quiet minutes together?