

Upekkhā

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Upekkhā (equanimity) is the fourth sublime virtue, which makes one remain undisturbed, unshaken.

Upekkhā means ‘discerning rightly’ and ‘viewing justly’. If one sees rightly, one will not be attached. Right seeing will also lead a person to avoid *rāga* (attachment, clinging) and *dosa* (aversion). There are eight *loka dhammas* (worldly conditions) that affect all humanity. They are loss (*hāni*), gain (*lābha*); fame (*yasa*), infamy (*apayasa*); blame (*nindā*), praise (*pasamsā*); pain (*dukkha*) and happiness (*sukha*). They are such *dhammas*, which affect all humanity. People become happy and feel elated when they gain, when they earn name and fame, when they are praised and when they feel happy. But they are depressed and sad when their opposites happen to them. If a person can remain undisturbed, unperturbed, unmoved and stable in such conditions of life, that person will really be practicing equanimity (*upekkhā*).

Equanimity is a great virtue, which makes a man *sthitaprajña* (established in wisdom). If in any circumstance, a man does not lose his mental balance, does not lose his cool and equipoise then he is practicing *upekkhā*. Because one has developed wisdom and known that nothing is permanent, so whatever situations arise in life, one is neither elated nor depressed. One does not allow elation and depression to overpower one but overpowers them instead. If one is elated to hear praise, one is bound to be depressed to hear blame. If one feels happy gaining something, one is bound to feel unhappy when suffering loss. Therefore, the Buddha has exhorted people to remain calm and equanimous particularly in that circumstance of life when one feels like retaliating. In the Dhammapada he says:

*‘Sace neresi attānaṃ, kaṃso upahato yathā/
Esa pattosi nibbānaṃ, sārambho tena vijjati/’*

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*.

The Buddha regards *upekkhā* as the greatest good, as the highest welfare.

*‘Phuṭṭhassa lokadhammehi, cittaṃ yassa na kampati/
Asokaṃ virajaṃ khemaṃ, etaṃ maṅgalamuttamaṃ//’*

When faced with the vicissitudes of life, one’s mind is unshaken.
Sorrowless, stainless, secure — this is the highest welfare.

We find several occasions when the Buddha practiced equanimity and defeated his foes and revilers. When Akkosaka Bhāradvāja came to him and began to insult him saying, ‘You are a swine, a brute, an ox...’ and so on, he did not feel offended at all. Instead, the Buddha asked him what he does when he gives a present to somebody who does not accept it. Upon getting the reply that he keeps it with himself, the Buddha said to Bhāradvāja very calmly that he does not accept his abuses either and so the abuses remain with him. This remark of the Buddha brought about a complete transformation in the character of Akkosaka Bhāradvāja.

In all adverse circumstances, a wise man should remain unshaken, undisturbed steadfast like a solid rock which is not shaken by fierce winds.

*‘Selo yathā ekaghano, vātena na samīrati/
Evaṃ nindāpasamsāsu, na samiñjanti paṇḍitā//’*

Upekkhā is a great quality, which abandons *rāga* (craving) and *dosa* (aversion). The chief characteristic of *upekkhā* is an impartial attitude. One who practices *upekkhā* makes no distinction between the good and the bad, between the saint and the sinner. If this sublime and ennobling virtue is practiced, a person will really become great and noble.

Thus, the four *Brahmavihāras* are qualities of mind which make humans noble, kind, sympathetic and equanimous. In the words of Narada Thera: “*Mettā* embraces all beings, *karuṇā* embraces sufferers, *muditā* embraces the prosperous, and *upekkhā* embraces the good and the bad, the loved and the unloved, the pleasant and the unpleasant.” (Ibid.p.640)

Upekkhā (equanimity) is like the quality of the earth, which remains indifferent in all circumstances. Whatever sweet or foul is thrown on it, it does not react. It remains undisturbed, indifferent and equanimous. Humans practicing *upekkhā* become like the earth.

“Just as the earth, whatever is thrown
Upon her, whether sweet or foul;
Indifferent is to all alike,
No hatred shows, nor amity.
So, likewise, he in good or ill,
Must even—balanced ever be.”

Questions:

1. Define *upekkhā*.
2. *Upekkhā* means ‘discerning rightly’ and ‘viewing justly’. Elaborate.
3. What are the eight *lokadhammas*? Explain.
4. The practice of *upekkhā* enables one to be a *sthitaprajña* (established in wisdom). Explain.
5. The Buddha taught not to retaliate. Explain why he said so?
6. How was the transformation of character in Akkosaka Bhāradvāja brought about by the Buddha?
7. ‘*Selo yathā ekaghano, vātena na samīrati/
Evaṃ nindāpasamsāsu, na samiñjanti paṇḍitā//.*’
Bring out the meaning of this *gāthā*.
8. ‘*Upekkhā* embraces the good and the bad’. Elaborate.
9. What is the quality of the earth? Why has *upekkhā* been compared with the earth?
10. Why is *upekkhā* called *Brahmavihāra*? Write in detail.