



50 - Balancing Equanimity as a Support

The heavy keel and the even-looking eye

“Just as a solid rock is not shaken by the storm, even so the wise are not affected by praise or blame.” ~ Gotama (The Buddha)

“If you let go a little, you will have a little peace. If you let go a lot, you will have a lot of peace. If you let go completely, you will have complete peace.” ~ Ajahn Chah

The trim of the vessel

In this Freedom stage of our journey, we arrive at the seventh and final Support: ‘Balancing Equanimity’. This is the quality that keeps everything else working together. ‘Liberating Mindfulness’ can be steady, ‘Penetrating Inquiry’ can be bright, ‘Enthusiasm’ can be available, ‘Energetic Joy’ can uplift, ‘Deep Calm’ can cool, and a ‘Unified Mind’ can stabilise – but without ‘Balanced Equanimity’, we still get tipped by what we like and what we don’t like.

Equanimity here doesn’t mean going blank or not caring. It means we stay present without being yanked around. Pleasant sensations can be felt without grabbing; unpleasant sensations can be felt without pushing away. It’s a kind of inner balance that makes experience workable – not by removing weather, but by giving us a steadier centre inside it.

It is helpful to distinguish this ‘Balancing Equanimity’ as one of the Seven Supports from the ‘Resilient Equanimity’ which we will explore in the Training stage of our journey (Chapter 52).

- ★ **Balancing Equanimity** (Freedom): This is an *internal* balance regarding phenomena (sensations, thoughts, moods). It is the antidote to reactivity. It is the ability to observe pleasure without grasping and pain without pushing away.
- ★ **Resilient Equanimity** (Training): This is the ‘Appropriate Response’ of even-hearted care – a steady, impartial warmth toward living beings.

It can hold others' suffering and happiness without collapsing into overwhelm, rushing to control, or hardening into indifference. It cares deeply while respecting that outcomes aren't ours to command: we stay present, kind, and balanced.

The heavy keel

If 'Liberating Mindfulness' is the anchor that holds us steady, and 'Enthusiasm' is the wind in the sails, then 'Balancing Equanimity' is the keel. The keel is the heavy, weighted structure at the very bottom of the hull. It provides the ballast that keeps our raft upright, even when the wind is strong and the waves are high.

Without a keel, a raft with sails is dangerous – the first strong wind (of joy or sorrow) would capsize it. With a keel, the raft may heel over, but it always rights itself. It utilises the energy of the wind without being overwhelmed by it.

Navigating the 'Eight Worldly Winds'

Gotama described the *ocean* of human life as being battered by eight conditions, known as the *Eight Worldly Winds*:

1. Winning and losing (gain and loss)
2. Approval and rejection (fame and disrepute)
3. Complements and criticism (praise and blame)
4. Comfort and discomfort (pleasure and pain)

For a vessel without a keel, these winds are dangerous. We chase the winds of winning, approval, compliments and comfort and we fearfully capsize when hit by losing, rejection, criticism and discomfort. 'Balancing Equanimity' is the capacity to sail through all eight winds without capsizing. We feel the comfort, but we don't chase it. We feel the discomfort, but we don't drown in it. We remain *even-keeled*.

The pivot of Freedom: from *push and pull* to *poise*

The pivot that opens the door to Freedom in this chapter is the shift from reaction (push/pull) to poise. In the cycle of cravings, compulsion and aversion, we are slaves to the *hedonic imperative*: we automatically *pull* toward anything pleasant (craving) and *push* away anything unpleasant

(aversion). This constant motion keeps the mind agitated and the raft unstable.

The pivot turns when we realise that *sensations do not require a response*.

- ★ Reaction: "This hurts, I must stop it." / "This feels good, I must keep it."
- ★ Poise: "This hurts, and I can witness it." / "This feels good, and I can let it pass."

This is the state of 'standing in the middle of it all'. We stop trying to control the waves and focus instead on the trim of the boat.

How to practise: inspecting the keel

We cultivate Balancing Equanimity less by *trying to feel neutral* and more by *relating differently* to whatever is here – so experience can move through without capsizing us.

1. **Start with a balance check (right medicine, right moment):** Before we reach for equanimity, we quickly sense the *state* we're in: are we sluggish/heavy, or restless/hot? Early teachings are very practical here: when the mind is already dull, leaning into calm-and-equanimity tends to sink it further; when the mind is restless, leaning into energising factors tends to inflame it. Equanimity does its best work when it's cooling and steadying what's already stirred up.
2. **Even-hovering attention (neither leaning in nor leaning away):** When we're with a sensation – craving, pain, anxiety – there's often a hidden *tilt*: either "I need to fix this/get closer" or "I need to get away." We try something simpler: let attention *hover* right in the middle. Not blank. Not braced. Just steady contact. Often that middle stance is enough for the charge to bleed off without a fight.
3. **Name the tilt, not the story (two words is plenty):** If we notice we're sliding into drama or problem-solving, we can use a very light label: pulling, pushing, gripping, resisting, chasing. This isn't about analysing – just catching the *stance* that destabilises us. Once we see the tilt, it's easier to soften it.
4. **"Is this mine?" (weather, not identity):** When a strong mood arrives – fear, elation, irritation – we can ask: Did I choose this? Usually, no. It

arrived. That doesn't make it irrelevant; it just means we don't have to treat it as *who we are* or as a verdict on our progress. The moment it becomes *weather*, it becomes workable.

5. **Widen the container (make the mind a bigger place):** If attention is glued to one painful point, we gently widen: sounds, light, posture, contact with the floor, the space around the body. The classic image is *salt in water*: a spoonful of salt in a small cup overwhelms it, but in a large body of water it doesn't dominate the whole taste. Equanimity often arrives through this widening – nothing is denied, but nothing gets to be *everything*.
6. **Let sensation be one event among many (de-centre it):** We don't need to stare the problem down. We can hold it in a wider field: *yes, this tightness is here – alongside breathing, hearing, sitting, seeing*. This de-centres the urge/pain without suppressing it, and it keeps us from fusing with it.
7. **Use a tiny physical cue to level the keel:** Equanimity is often helped by a *micro-release*: soften the eyes, unclench the jaw, drop the shoulders, lengthen one exhale. Nothing dramatic – just enough to stop the body from voting *panic!* When the body stops leaning, the mind often follows.
8. **Balance doesn't mean passive (it means clear):** Equanimity isn't "I don't care." It's "I can see." From that steadiness, we may still act – set a boundary, make a decision, take a next step – but we're less likely to act from surge and swing. And when the mind is clearly restless, we remember the early guidance: this is when calming factors – including equanimity – are the *right* tools.

Self-reflections

1. Do I mistake indifference (not caring) for equanimity (balanced caring)? Can I realise that true equanimity is vibrant and awake?
2. Which of the Eight Worldly Winds knocks me off balance most easily? Is it criticism? Is it the loss of comfort?
3. Can I feel the difference between *suppressing* sensations and simply *not reacting* to them?
4. When a storm hits (an unexpected difficulty), is my first instinct to fix it immediately, or can I pause and let the keel stabilise the raft first?
5. Do I believe that freedom means only having pleasant experiences? How does that belief make me vulnerable to the wind of discomfort?

6. How does 'A Unified Mind' (Chapter 49) naturally lead to this sense of balance?
7. Am I waiting for the storm to stop before I find peace, or can I find peace in the eye of *the storm* right now?

Journaling prompts

1. **The keel inspection:** Visualise your raft. How deep is your keel? Write about what gives you weight and stability in life (for example, your values, your practice, your understanding of impermanence).
2. **The *Eight Winds* log:** Review your day. Identify one instance where the wind of 'complements/criticism' or 'comfort/discomfort' blew. Did you lean into it or away from it? What would staying upright have looked like?
3. **The 'meh' versus 'peace' test:** Indifference feels cold, numb, and disconnected (meh). Balancing Equanimity feels warm, spacious, and present (peace). Write about a recent situation and identify which state you were actually in.
4. **The balance of feeling:** Describe a recent strong desire. Write a script for how to *witness* it without *feeding* it (acting on it) or *fighting* it (hating it).
5. **The anchor and the keel:** Reflect on the difference between stopping (anchor of mindfulness) and sailing (keel of equanimity). In which areas of your life do you need to stop, and in which do you need to move forward with balance?
6. **Witnessing the fade:** Choose a minor discomfort (an itch, a noise, a worry). Sit with it for five minutes and write down exactly how it changes and fades on its own, without your interference.
7. **Letter from the keel:** Write a letter from your *inner wisdom* to your *reactive mind*. Remind the mind that it doesn't need to fear the weather.

Supporting material: scientific and philosophical perspectives

For those interested in the scientific and philosophical underpinnings of Balancing Equanimity as a Support, the following overview highlights some key connections.

★ **Neuroscience:** The brain is always trying to keep us within a workable range: not too stressed, not too flat, not too driven. In compulsive cycles that range gets distorted. Big dopamine spikes (chasing a hit, a win, reassurance) and big stress spikes (panic, shame, threat-scanning) shift the *baseline* so ordinary life feels muted or intolerable. Over time, the system can become more sensitive to cues and more reactive to discomfort, which makes the next urge feel urgent and the next low feel unbearable.

Balancing Equanimity is a kind of nervous-system retraining. Each time we *don't* amplify the wave – by indulging it on the high side or panicking on the low side – we teach the brain that the body can ride activation and come back down safely. That “*I can stay here*” message reduces the need for emergency regulation and supports a steadier set-point. It's not about suppressing emotion; it's about reducing the *secondary* surge that comes from alarm, urgency, and reactivity.

★ **Psychology:** Psychologically, Balancing Equanimity is the capacity to experience thoughts, feelings, and urges without immediately obeying them, fixing them, or explaining them. It's close to what many therapies call *decentering* (seeing mental events as events) and *distress tolerance* (staying present when it's uncomfortable). Instead of “*this feeling means I must act,*” equanimity holds a different stance: “*this is what's here; I can make room for it; it will change.*”

With repetition, that stance widens the *window of tolerance*: more intensity becomes bearable, and fewer states trigger reactive behaviour. Cravings still arise, moods still swing, but they stop running the whole show. Equanimity also strengthens flexibility: we can choose the next wise step (pause, speak carefully, leave the room, reach out) rather than the most automatic one. In practice it often feels like the difference between being inside the storm and watching the storm move through.

★ **Philosophy:** In philosophy, the Stoics describe an “inner citadel”: a part of us that can remain steady even when circumstances are unstable. This isn't denial or passivity; it's clarity about what *is* and *isn't* under our control. Equanimity echoes that: we don't pretend life is pleasant, but we stop adding an extra fight with reality – “*this shouldn't be happening, I can't bear this, I must get rid of this now*” – which is often where suffering multiplies.

Buddhist thought makes a similar point in a different idiom: conditions arise, pass, and change, and wisdom is learning to meet them without grasping or aversion. Equanimity is the lived expression of that insight. It's not indifference; it's intimacy without clinging. A mind like this can care deeply and act decisively, while remaining less shaken by compliments and criticism, wins and losses, comfort and discomfort – because it's not trying to build a stable self out of unstable conditions.

Remember to remember

We've now reached the end of the 'Freedom' stage of our journey. Along the way we've learned how to recognise what's happening without flinching, how to set down some of the weight we've been dragging, and how to rely on the 'Seven Supports' as a tool-kit of inner resources. Taken together, they change the feel of practice. The mind becomes less dependent on crises to wake up, less dependent on stimulation to feel alive, and less dependent on control to feel safe. There is more brightness without buzz, more calm without shutdown, and more steadiness without rigidity. Freedom here doesn't mean life has stopped being life; it means we're less compelled, less yanked around, and more able to stay present as conditions shift.

Balancing Equanimity is the clearest sign of this change. When equanimity is available, we're not constantly tilting toward *more* or *away*, and we don't have to make every mood into a verdict about ourselves. The raft feels seaworthy: not perfect, but stable enough to hold course in real weather. That's why it's the hand-off into the fourth Training stage of our journey. In this next stage, we take this steadier vessel and learn to navigate by 'Gotama's Middle Way programme' (The Eightfold Path) – not as a theory, but as a lived route through perspective, intention, speech, action, livelihood, application, mindfulness, and collectedness. We're no longer practising mainly to heal; we're practising to live and to flourish and to support others to do the same.

"Equanimity is not indifference... it is a spacious mind." ~ Analayo

"Equanimity... is a mind at ease with itself." ~ Martine Batchelor

Sutta references

★ **Mahā-Rāhulovāda Sutta (MN 62) – The Greater Advice to Rāhula**

- *Summary:* The Buddha advises his son Rāhula to develop a mind like the earth, water, fire, and air – elements that receive both pleasant and unpleasant things without reaction. This is a primary teaching on cultivating Equanimity toward sensory experience.

★ **Lokavipatti Sutta (AN 8.6): The Failures of the World**

- *Summary:* This discourse explains the eight worldly conditions (the Eight Worldly Winds) that obsess the world: gain and loss, fame and disrepute, praise and blame, pleasure and pain. It describes how the "well-instructed noble disciple" reflects on the impermanence of these states and remains balanced.

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