



## 52 – An Appropriate Response: Resilient Equanimity

### The Captain's view and the wisdom of acceptance

*“Resilient patience is the highest ascetic practice.” ~ paraphrased Gotama (The Buddha)*

*“Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.” ~ Reinhold Niebuhr (The Serenity Prayer)*

### The view from the bridge

In this Training stage of our journey, we are learning to navigate the open ocean of life using ‘Gotama’s Middle Way Programme’ – our Operating Manual. But the ocean is vast, and the weather is unpredictable. To travel well, we need a particular inner capacity: something that steadies us in a storm and keeps us awake in calm seas. This is ‘Resilient Equanimity’ – the fourth and final Appropriate Response (Heart Practice). Just as we cultivated ‘Compassion’ (Chapter 06) to recognise what it is to be human, ‘Befriending’ (Chapter 26) to meet powerful urges, ingrained patterns, and the discomfort of letting go, and ‘Appreciative Joy’ (Chapter 35) to respond with gladness to wellbeing, successes, and small moments of goodness in ourselves and others, we now cultivate ‘Resilient Equanimity’ as part of our training on the path – Gotama’s fourth realisation that freedom can be cultivated – so we can meet things as they are, without panic, clinging, or collapse.

Because it is the final of the four Appropriate Responses, it also completes the set. ‘Resilient Equanimity’ is what keeps the other three from sliding into their distorted versions: it stops befriending becoming attachment, compassion becoming overwhelm, and joy becoming agitation. It is the capacity for self-balance – to care fully, feel honestly, and still remain steady enough to choose well.

### Distinguishing the two equanimities

You may remember ‘Balancing Equanimity’ from Chapter 50, and it helps to

separate it from what we're cultivating here.

'Balancing Equanimity' is an inner steadiness we develop in meditation: the ability to stay stable when experiences feel pleasant or unpleasant, without being pulled into grasping or pushed into aversion. Balancing Equanimity functions like a keel, keeping the raft from tipping when experiencing pleasure or pain.

'Resilient Equanimity', which we cultivate in this Training stage of our journey, is more outward-facing. It is the capacity to stay calm, kind, and clear in the middle of real life – especially when things don't go our way. It means being able to care deeply without trying to control the outcome. Resilient Equanimity is the Captain's View: a relational attitude toward the whole ocean of existence that helps us meet conditions without being thrown off course. It says, with warmth and clarity, "*I care deeply – even if I cannot control the outcome.*"

### **The supple raft**

Resilient Equanimity provides the supple steadiness required to survive. A rigid raft breaks when a large wave hits, but a raft bound with the *rope* of equanimity flexes, absorbs the shock, and remains intact. It is the Appropriate Response to the unchangeable. When the winds of life blow – whether through loss, ageing, or the actions of others – we do not waste energy shouting at the wind. We adjust the sails.

### **Why cultivate 'Resilient Equanimity'**

Because life includes what we didn't order: change, loss, misunderstanding, delay, disappointment, and the consequences of other people's choices. Without Resilient Equanimity, we either tighten into control (and burn out), or shut down into numbness (and disconnect). With Resilient Equanimity, we keep our dignity: we can meet reality as it is, without surrendering our care.

### **The near and far enemies**

In Buddhist psychology, each wholesome quality can be *knocked off course* in two familiar ways: by a far enemy (its clear opposite) and a near enemy (a convincing look-alike that mimics the surface but misses the spirit). For equanimity, the far enemy is the anxiety driven need to control – the tight urge

to manage everything, fix everything, and eliminate uncertainty. This manifests as craving and aversion – the mind’s push-pull habit of grasping for what it wants and resisting what it fears. The near enemy is indifference – shutting down, going numb, or pretending you don’t care so you don’t have to feel. It’s a cool numbness that looks calm from a distance, but is really an unconscious indifference – a shutting down of care. “*If I can’t get what I want – then I just won’t care about it at all.*” True equanimity is neither anxious striving nor emotional frost. It is steady, balanced presence: you care, you stay connected, and you’re not yanked around by liking and disliking.

In RAFT terms, the far enemy is the Captain running around the deck screaming at the waves, trying to force the ocean to be flat. The near enemy is the Captain retreating below deck, locking themselves in the cabin, with arms folded, saying, “*Whatever! I don’t care if we sink.*” Indifference is cold and withdrawn. True equanimity stays on deck – warm, awake, and calm, meeting each change of weather without grabbing at it or pushing it away. ‘Resilient Equanimity’ is neither controlling nor cold. It is warm steadiness: you care, you stay present, and you don’t get hijacked.

### **How to practice: the wisdom of non-control**

We cultivate Resilient Equanimity by recognising the limits of our power and the vastness of the causal web.

- ★ **The serenity check:** When you feel tight, anxious, or controlling, ask yourself: Is this within my *circle of control*?
  - If the answer is Yes, use Courageous Energy (Right Effort) to act.
  - If the answer is No, use Resilient Equanimity to accept.

Resilient Equanimity is the “*wisdom to know the difference*”.

- ★ **A 20-second ‘Self-Balance’ protocol:** When you notice yourself tipping into control or collapse, try this:
  - Name the tilt: *tight/control* or *checked-out/withdrawn*.
  - One slow breath and soften one place (jaw, belly, hands).
  - Ask: “Act or accept?” (If controllable: act. If not: accept.)
  - Take one values-based step (a kind word, a boundary, a pause, a practical task, a request for support).
- ★ **Anchor in the middle ‘Feeling Tone’:** Practise resting attention on *neutral*

sensations in the body, such as the earlobes or the hands resting on the lap. These parts feel neither pleasant nor painful. Neutral tones are the practice ground for equanimity; they teach the heart to stay present without needing a *fix* or an escape.

- ★ **Observe the extremes:** Notice the *Hedonic Treadmill* – the automatic impulse to chase a high or flee a low. Respond by grounding in the body and acknowledging, “This too is part of the crossing.”
- ★ **Expansive gaze:** Reactivity narrows our vision into tunnel vision. Resilient Equanimity broadens it. When dealing with a difficult person, imagine zooming out to see the thousands of causes and conditions that made them this way. You stop seeing a ‘villain’ and start seeing a ‘process.’
- ★ **The phrase of ownership (with warmth):** In Buddhist training, we use the phrase: “*Beings are the owners of their karma, heirs to their karma.*” This means that their happiness and suffering depend on their actions, not on my wishes. This doesn’t stop us helping; it stops us carrying what isn’t ours. Use this phrase to release the burden of trying to control everyone’s life. It is not “*I wash my hands of you.*” It is: “*I can care, I can help, I can set boundaries – but I cannot live your life for you.*”
- ★ **A simple self-balance practice:** Use one phrase as an anchor for the heart, especially when you feel pulled into fixing or fighting:
  - May I remember and accept that thoughts, words, and actions have results.
  - May I know and accept things just as they are.
  - May I find stillness within change.
  - May I be at peace and balanced in mind.

*“Your happiness and suffering depend on your thoughts and actions and not my wishes for you.” ~ Jack Kornfield*

## **Self-reflections**

1. When I feel stressed, do I go into control mode – trying to manage everything – or can I focus on what I *can* influence and let the rest be?
2. In my body, what’s the difference between indifference (shutting down) and equanimity (staying present and steady)? Can I sense the difference between giving up and letting go?
3. What would patience look like in one current difficulty – not gritting my teeth, but staying steady without becoming harsh?

4. Do I sometimes use worry as a way of trying to stay safe – as if worrying hard enough will stop bad things happening? What does that cost me?
5. Can I let other people have their own learning curve – including the right to make mistakes – while still caring and setting wise boundaries?
6. When I don't get the outcome I want, can I notice what opens up if I release the struggle? What energy becomes available for the next helpful step?
7. Can I allow this moment to be imperfect – even emotionally messy – and still stay kind to myself? In other words: can I be okay with not being okay right now?

### Journaling prompts

1. **The circle of control (The serenity sort):** Draw a circle. Inside, write what you can control in a current stressor (your effort, your words, your boundaries, your next action). Outside, write what you can't (other people's choices, timing, outcomes, opinions). Then write a few lines on what it feels like – mentally and physically – to release the *outside* items, even for today.
2. **The not mine label:** List three burdens you're carrying. Next to each, write: "I care about this, but I do not control it." Then add one sentence: "The part that *is* mine is..." (for example: how I show up, what support I seek, what boundary I hold, what action I take).
3. **The indifference check:** Think of a recent moment you said, "I don't care." Was it genuine peace and perspective – or was it numbness, armour, or overwhelm in disguise? What would 'warm steadiness' have sounded like instead?
4. **The supple raft:** Describe a time you held rigid expectations and ended up breaking – emotionally, relationally, or practically. What was the rigid belief underneath ("it must go this way")? Now rewrite the moment with *supple steadiness*: what could you have accepted, what could you have adjusted, and what could you have done differently?
5. **Boundless balance (Equanimity phrases):** Write the phrase: 'May I meet life's changes with balance and peace.' Then try holding the intention for someone you struggle with. Notice what happens in the body (tightening, softening, resistance). Write honestly about what's possible right now – no forcing.

- 6. Worldly winds audit:** Which of the eight worldly winds (Chapter 50) is blowing hardest right now and taking you off course – winning or losing, approval or rejection, complements or criticism, comfort or discomfort. Write how it shows up in your thoughts, body, and behaviour. Then write how Resilient Equanimity could return you to the centre when that wind picks up.
- 7. The Serenity Prayer (in your own words):** Rewrite the Serenity Prayer in your own language, applied to one specific situation you're living with. Make it concrete: name what you are accepting, what you are changing, and how you'll tell the difference this week.

### **Supporting material: scientific and philosophical perspectives**

For those interested in the scientific and philosophical underpinnings of Resilient Equanimity, the following overview highlights some key connections.

- ★ **Neuroscience:** Resilient Equanimity involves *top-down regulation*. The Prefrontal Cortex (the rational, planning brain) and the Insula (interoception) interact to regulate the Amygdala (the fear/alarm centre). In states of anxiety, the Amygdala hijacks the system. Equanimity training strengthens the pathways that allow the *captain functions* to say, “I see the threat, and I can respond wisely.” This reduces prolonged stress activation and helps protect against burnout. (Note: many studies describe these changes as associations with consistent practice; individuals vary, and change is typically gradual.)
- ★ **Psychology:** In modern psychology, this aligns with *Distress Tolerance* skills (DBT), which help individuals endure painful emotions without making things worse, and *Acceptance* (ACT) – allowing one to act based on values rather than emotional reactions. This fosters *Psychological Flexibility*: the ability to adapt to the fluctuating demands of the journey while maintaining a steady direction.
- ★ **Philosophy:** The Stoic philosopher Epictetus taught the *Dichotomy of Control* – suffering arises from trying to control what is not up to us. Nietzsche expanded this to *Amor Fati* (Love of Fate). This is the ultimate expression of Equanimity: not just tolerating what happens, but embracing it as material for your unfolding journey. As Marcus Aurelius said, “*The impediment to action advances action. What stands in the way becomes the way.*”

## Remember to remember

Resilient Equanimity is the great stabiliser. It keeps our Befriending from turning sticky, our Compassion from tipping into overwhelm, and our Appreciative Joy from spilling into restless excitement. This is why it matters so much in this Training stage: it doesn't cancel the heart practices – it completes them. It is the fourth rope that binds the raft without making it rigid, giving the whole vessel a flexible strength. When life hits hard, Resilient Equanimity doesn't harden us; it helps us stay tender without being torn. It doesn't ask us to stop caring. It helps us care in a way that is sustainable.

Resilient Equanimity is not the absence of feeling; it is the presence of wisdom. It is the inner spaciousness that allows joy and sorrow, praise and blame, gain and loss to rise and fall without capsizing the mind. And it brings us back to a simple truth: we are the Captain of the raft, not the Captain of the Sea. We can set the sails, train the crew, and choose the next wise action – again and again. The waves, the wind, and the tides are not ours to command. So we practise meeting conditions as they are, releasing what we cannot control, and turning faithfully toward what we can: our effort, our intention, our words, our actions, and our capacity to begin again. Trust the training, hold the course, and let the ocean be the ocean.

*“Even a happy life cannot be without a measure of darkness, and the word 'happy' would lose its meaning if it were not balanced by sadness.” ~ Carl Jung*

*“This life is but a play of joy and sorrow  
may we remain undisturbed by life's rise and fall.  
I care deeply about you, but you are the owner of  
your actions and their fruit, and sadly I can not  
keep you from distress.”*

~ Srilankan monastic blessing translated by John

Peacock

## Sutta References

### ★ Kakacūpama Sutta (MN 21) – The Simile of the Saw

- *Summary:* The Buddha gives the ultimate instruction on Resilient Equanimity. He states that even if bandits were to sever one's limbs

with a saw, if one gave way to anger, one would not be following his teaching. He instructs the monks to pervade the world with a mind of friendliness, vast and immeasurable, free from hostility, even under the most extreme duress.

★ **Loka Sutta (AN 8.6) – The World**

- *Summary:* The Buddha describes the "Eight Worldly Winds" (Gain/Loss, Fame/Disrepute, Praise/Blame, Pleasure/Pain) that spin the world. He states that the wise person reflects on them as impermanent and remains unshaken.

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

- *Summary:* The Buddha instructs his son to develop a mind like the elements – earth, water, fire, and wind. Just as the earth is not offended when dirty things are thrown upon it, the mind should be developed to remain balanced and spacious.

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