

## *Endurance & Equanimity*

*July 13, 2021*

Endurance and equanimity are two virtues that are very similar but they're not quite the same. With equanimity, the mind is not affected by things it likes or doesn't like. It has an ability to stay on an even keel. With endurance, you're dealing with things you don't like. Whether the mind is on an even keel or not, you're able to hold yourself back and not react out of anger. It's very closely related to restraint. In fact, endurance is the ability to maintain restraint for long periods of time. Often you have to exercise endurance in the absence of equanimity, when you're strongly tempted to respond to things you don't like but you hold back—basically through right view. You realize that if you respond in kind to what the other person has said, that becomes your karma. It's as if they threw a hot burning coal at you and you bent down to pick it up to throw it back. Who gets burnt? You get burnt.

So endurance requires a lot of talking to yourself. You don't just squash your emotions or pretend they're not there. You have to admit that they're there but that it's not wise to act on them.

This is why it's good to reflect on karma. You notice that if you don't like someone, it's not the same as having ill will for that person. The antidote for ill will is goodwill. The antidote for anger is to remind yourself that if you acted on the anger, you would do something really stupid. You would please the other person and, at the same time, you would be burdening yourself with unskillful karma.

That first thought—you don't want to please the other person—is spiteful. Here you're using spite in order to overcome the anger. At the very least, you get some control over it. Psychology has given a bad name for people who control their emotions. They think that in every case when you control an emotion it goes underground and turns into a mental illness of one kind or another that can have a physical component as well. That's a sign that modern psychology doesn't understand restraint. If restraint is wise, it knows how to diffuse the energy.

This is one of the reasons why it's good to be able to work with the breath. If something negative comes up and you're sensitive to the breath energies in the body, you'll know where that negative energy gets lodged and you can breathe through it, empty it out, make sure that you don't carry it around.

I had a student in Singapore one time who complained about how every day when came home from work he had to meditate for a while. He felt like he was a

garbage can during the day. People were just throwing things into the garbage can, and he had to empty it out before he could have a decent evening. As I told him, you've got to cut a hole in the bottom of the garbage can so when things come in, they go out. You can see them coming and you know what they are: They're garbage. Why carry them around? What they say might be an affront to your sense of pride, to your sense of self, but you know what the Buddha has to say about a sense of self: All too often, it can be very unskillful. And if you're making yourself miserable for the sake of that sense of self, is it worth it? The sense of self that has to be treated nicely by everybody all the time: That's a two-year-old self. You want to be an adult.

Reflect on the fact that speech in the world is of many kinds. There's kind speech and unkind speech; true speech, false speech; speech worth listening to, speech not worth listening to. This is the way it is in the world. So when you find yourself being subjected to speech that's untrue or unkind or not really worth listening to, don't take it as a personal affront. It's simply a normal part of the human race. The fact that someone else has chosen to speak in those terms doesn't really reflect on you, not necessarily at least. You can look at the words, and if the criticism really is useful, then regardless of the intention of the person who gave it, if you find that, yes, they're pointing out something that is a fault in your case, then remember that the Buddha said to regard those who point out your faults as someone who's pointing out treasure. After all, if you're really a serious practitioner, you want to know, "Where are my faults? Where can I work to change my behavior?" If someone points out a genuine fault, regardless of whether they do it in an ill-meaning or well-meaning way, you've got your handle on your problem. You've got your point of focus.

So try to use some discernment in your restraint. Realize that you don't want your goodness to depend on the goodness of other people, because their goodness is an extremely undependable support. You want to depend on your determination. Remember we're here to develop the perfections, and the perfections have to be developed by determination. They don't come naturally. They come when you've seen the harm you can do to yourself and to others when you're unskillful, and you really don't want to cause that harm anymore. So you hold back. You restrain yourself.

You're going to learn a lot about the mind as you do, because all these different voices are going to come in saying, "Well, how about saying this?" or "How about saying that?" or "If I don't say anything at all, they're not going to respect me." Where are those voices coming from? The conceit that lies behind them: Is it wise conceit? The Buddha does recognize that there is such a thing, but all too often

our conceit has nothing to do with wisdom at all. It's just the simple desire to get back. That's certainly not a Dhamma desire.

So you develop restraint and then you learn how to maintain it. That's the patience, the endurance. No matter how outrageous the other person gets, you're not going to do or say anything unskillful. This doesn't mean you don't say anything at all. If you can think of something that can diffuse the situation, go ahead and say it. But just because someone else has drawn a battle line doesn't mean that you have to cross the line and take up the battle.

I was talking one time with a man who'd been a student of Ajaan Lee. He'd ordained at a time when Ajaan Fuang was in charge of the monastery in Chanthaburi. One of his duties was to act as Ajaan Fuang's attendant. There happened to be a young monk who Ajaan Fuang had dressed down one day in front of all the other monks. The monk who was the attendant overheard the monk who had been dressed down saying to a few other monks that he was going to go up and show Ajaan Fuang a thing or two.

So our monk stayed under the hut, just in case something happened. He saw the monk coming, going up the stairs and—unfortunately—he couldn't hear what was being said. The monk went up, bowed down—and when a monk bows down, it doesn't necessarily mean he's showing respect. Sometimes monks can bow down in preparation for who knows what. But he bowed down, and Ajaan Fuang said something, and the monk burst out and cried. I'd really like to know what Ajaan Fuang said, because the words that can diffuse a situation are like gold.

You can master those words only if you learn how to show restraint. Because it gives you the time to think about what would be an appropriate response. As you show restraint, you can also get to observe the other person, which you wouldn't if you were just thinking about what you would like to say out of your anger, out of your displeasure.

So always remember that the person who shows restraint has the upper hand. You're not showing yourself to the other person. If you can think of the word that will diffuse the situation, all well and good. If you can't, you stay quiet. At the very least, you haven't done anything unskillful. At the same time, you can start working on your equanimity.

This is one of those cases where outside behavior then can move into the mind. There are other cases where the movement goes in the other direction. But this is one where you learn restraint first, you learn endurance first, learn how to put up with things. Then you learn how to put up with things in the most efficient way, which is not letting your emotions run all over the place. You're here to develop the wisdom that sees how a lot of issues in the world are simply not worth picking

up, not getting worked up about. When you've seen that, you've mastered a really good skill. And you've developed a whole pile of perfections, because this requires discernment along with determination. You've also got the perfection of endurance and patience and the perfection of equanimity. That's four perfections right there. If you can manage that many in a single day, you're doing well.