**What is Equanimity? wikipedia**

Equanimity is a state of psychological stability and composure which is undisturbed by experience of or exposure to emotions, pain, or other phenomena that may cause others to lose the balance of their mind.

**Equanimity in Buddhism wikipedia**

In [Buddhism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buddhism), [equanimity](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Upekkha) ([Pali](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pali): [*upekkhā*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Upekkh%C4%81); [Sanskrit](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sanskrit): *upekṣā*) is one of the [four sublime attitudes](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brahmavihara) and is considered:

Neither a thought nor an emotion, it is rather the steady conscious realization of reality's transience. It is the ground for [wisdom](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wisdom) and [freedom](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Free_will) and the protector of [compassion](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Compassion) and [love](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Love). While some may think of equanimity as dry neutrality or cool aloofness, mature equanimity produces a radiance and warmth of being. The [Buddha](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buddha) described a mind filled with equanimity as "abundant, exalted, immeasurable, without hostility and without ill-will.

**How is Equanimity Established Through Buddhist Practice?**

Equanimity is gained through knowledge and **experience** of the “The Three Characteristics”: **Impermanence** (anicca), **Suffering** (dukkha), **No-self** (anatman). Once equanimity is established, wise, compassionate ethical action will result.

**What Equanimity Is Not**

It is often said about Asian religious writings, even today, that the world is an “Illusion”. That the “Self” is an illusion. It is said that to experience these illusions for what they are will leave you (or a non-you) in a state of peaceful equanimity no matter the circumstances of life. Which leads to the ages old question, If this is true how can anything really matter? Where is the motivation for ethical action?

**So where do the misunderstandings arise?**

Feelings do ***matter*** (are of consequence) because we are ***matter*** (Real cause and effect physical stuff). The world and the people in it are not “Illusions” However **our mind created representative story** of this real world ***is like an illusion***. This **misapprehension** of reality is indeed the root cause of most of the suffering and unskillful actions in the world.

**Misapprehension of Reality?**

What is the delusional state?

What is the awake state?

What are the actual experiential differences between the two states?

**What is life? A biological perspective**:

Inanimate (non-living) objects stop exchanging energy and matter with the environment and reach a state of equilibrium due to entropy.

Animate (live organisms) continue to exchange energy and material with the environment (metabolism). We will use the term ***“Homeostasis”*** as a catch all phrase for metabolism and other essential life processes.

“What is Life?” By Erwin Schrodinger:

“When a system that is ***not alive***, is isolated or placed in a uniform environment, all motion usually comes to a standstill very soon as a result of various kinds of friction. Differences of electric or chemical potential are equalized. Substances which tend to form a chemical compound do so, temperature becomes uniform by heat conduction. After that whole system fades away into a dead inert lump of matter a permanent state is reached in which no observable events occur. The physicist calls this the state of thermodynamic equilibrium or maximum entropy.

When matter is alive it goes on *doing something* exchanging material with its environment” (*anabolism & catabolism*).

The first rule of life is to continue being alive. The second rule is reproduction.

“The Strange order of things” Antonio Damasio:

“But there was more to the process of life than just an evenhanded maintenance of balance. From a number of possible steady states the cell, at the peak of it’s powers, naturally tended to the steady state most conducive to positive energy balances, a surplus with which life could be optimized and projected into the future….Flourishing signifies both a more efficient way of living and the possibility of reproduction.”

The earliest form of life, Bacteria, can chemically sense both their internal and external environmental states and react appropriately according to their life driven homeostatic mandates. The beginnings of morals and society!



Table created by Antonio Damasio

**The Nervous System, misapprehension and Not Self – (Anatman)**

**Nervous Systems** began to form about 500 million years ago. At base they evolved to allow an organism to ***sense*, through physical interaction** and later, additionally**, “Know”** of interactions through ***representation.*** Representationsof the state of the organism’s internal and external physical conditions. Physical interaction in sentient creatures result in the ***action*** of ***emotions***.

Emotions (according to Damasio’s schema) are physical changes in the organism signaled by nerve firing or chemical releases to the blood stream. “***Feelings”*** in this same schema are the **mind** **created representations** of these physical ***emotional*** body states. Emotions and feelings give **Salience** (homeostatically relevance, importance) to these interactions. More moral imperative!

Representation of the shifting states of both the internal and external environment in a complex nervous system like a brain allows the organism a more complex ability called a ***conscious* *narrative space*** (In Buddhism, Formations) in the mind. This dynamic ***transitory*** space allows organisms to take lessons learned from past interactions and use them to plan for **future** homeostatic actions within this narrative space. This narrative space shows up as a “***story***” of us in the world within our mind’s conscious eye.

Remember, this story is not just about a world, it is about a specific creatures world and it’s needed homeostatic interactions within it. As such ***a representation of the creature*** is also created **within the narrative story**.

A “**Self**” for whom the story is centered is also created as part of the story. This Self is always **felt** implicitly (interoception) and often expressed explicitly within the narrative story.

Being that this representative self is literally created in the present moment as part of a narrative story means that it is akin to an ***illusion***. It does not actually ***exist*** in the classical (Newtonian Physics) sense of the word. **It occurs to be sure!** Just as consciousness itself also occurs. But as of this time in history NO ONE knows what the heck the ***experience*** of consciousness (qualia or “the hard problem”) is physically made of, or if it physical at all! Or exactly how the mind takes sensory input from the body and external world and weaves into a single narrative space (“the binding problem”). Worse yet, consciousness is the primary tool we have for knowing anything at all about ourselves or the world!

To be sure, “reality” is out there and our bodies are physically here. Also, our conscious minds representations are *somewhat* constrained by the actual world (reality testing) so they are *like* illusions but not exactly illusions. Unlike dreaming or psychoses in which the representations are completely unconstrained and maladaptive to homeostatic imperatives.

***Misapprehension & Suffering – (Dukkha)***

Remembered homeostatic actions of the past show up in the narrative story as **Judgements** about the **self’s** **past** interactions with the world. Positive judgments show up as **transient** pleasant **feeling states**, negative judgements shows up as transient unpleasant feeling states. Negative judgements show up as feelings such as embarrassment, shame, guilt or depression and anxiety about the future and low energy states. Positive feeling states about the past show up as pride, self esteem and higher energy states. All *these particular* feeling states have the ***integrity of the self-image as their primary concern (Ego)***! Primary because it is the only *measure* of how the organism was doing in the past and how the organism will probably do in the future.

The **motivational pressure** behind **future** oriented action is also feeling! Not thought! Thought (the ***story***) is a secondary tool used to do the bidding of feelings. This motivational pressure for a positive future state shows up in the narrative space as feelings of **desire for the self to achieve a goal**. Desire’s positive valence shows up when the emotional pressure (suffering) is relieved upon acquisition of the imagined desirable outcome. This release of pressure can also be combined with the **inflated sense of pride and illusions of the self’s control** in given situations.

***Misapprehension & Impermanence – (anicca)***

As stated through out the presentation thus far we have hinted that ALL of these feelings and secondary narrative states are **transitory** or **impermanent.** The posited self within the story ***constantly******desires new*** homeostatic successes. Homeostatic drive never allows any positive state to be permanent so that the organism will constantly seek to exploit it’s environmental resources (*bad news for the actual environment*). When that success has been thwarted in the past **suffering is experienced in the present**. When a desired future is not yet in hand the pressure toward acquiring that future shows up as **suffering in the present**. Over time we learn that *indeed the feeling all successes are temporary* even though the self would like them to be a permanent feature of itself. This realization and the memory of past difficulties can last beyond their occurrence in order to be stored in memory for self-learning. The self can never resolve the past entirely and permanently. **For the self**, past, present and future, thoughts and feelings, *all* involve a “***wish for reality to be other than it actually was, is or will be***”.

These are the root of suffering! Our ***experience*** of life ***as a self*** is suffering by homeostatic design. But wait, that is only the first noble truth!

**The Birth of Equanimity**

Once the *self-construct* is seen through ***experientially,*** once you have **woken up** from the dream, there establishes a **spacious** *peaceful* **awareness**. Within this space all sadness and joys *are allowed to manifest* **as they are**, when they are *and when they are not (****emptiness****)*. When there are no phenomenon in this space, a peaceful open awareness remains. A peace not dependent on causes and conditions that arise within this space. This is true equanimity. Equanimity and joy of simply “*Being*” in itself.

**Equanimity, how to get there!**

Simply being *told* this information does not cause us to “**wake up**” from this narrative dream of a self in a mind created representational world. You must first learn of, then practice **seeing** the three characteristics of Impermanence, Suffering and Not Self in our everyday waking experience of mind, *constantly*! This is insight meditation (vipassana).

We must also practice concentration meditation (samatha) to enable the mind to stay centered in awareness in the present moment and not be pulled into the stories (formations) of the mind which are always out of sync with present time and experience.

Even the first (or the thousandth) time we sit in samatha and are unsuccessful at stopping formations the **self** declares “I (self) suck at this!” “I cannot keep my mind from wandering getting lost in formations”. But do not listen to *that* **self**-complaint. Instead notice that there was a ***presence*** **in the moment of intention** (directed awareness) by some part of the mind to not be swept away, and yet another part of the mind created attractive formations to spring forth and grab away this awareness. Which activity of mind are “you” really? Awareness or content?

Notice that the story is always seen by an **awareness** that is not itself ***seen***! Awareness is a spacious energy that is ***contentless,*** so is not visible like contents of a story. **Awareness is a felt dynamic energy which seems larger than the story itself.** **Awareness has a spacious quality that seems to be unperturbed by phenomenon occurring or the stories about them,** *where as the self in the story is always experiencing some positive or negative valence* ***towards******feeling states*** *themselves, Awareness simply acknowledges feelings as they are.*

Self is always a judging self. **Self always** ***contracts*** **the breadth of experience** into like or dislike, advantageous to the estimation self or not. Self always accepts pleasant feelings and tries to make that which is inherently not permanent, permanent. Or rejects what is clearly occurring thereby creating more dukkha beyond the negative feeling state in itself.

Awareness does not have this preferential filtering and *doomed wish for control* and as such no pressure for phenomenon (experiences of the world and related feeling there-of) to be other than what they actually are.

***Equanimity is a side effect*** of not seeing phenomenon through the filter of a desiring self that wishes phenomenon to be other than what it is***. Equanimity is the felt character of that spacious aware state allowing things to be what they are.***

**Equanimity is** **NOT** an ***unfeeling state***, it is a state of accepting that some external and or internal state has arisen, **as it is**. The fact that external or internal events happen to arise are accepted, as they are, **in a “self*less”* space**.

When not seen from a position of Self the energy of denying or controlling experience (suffering) is absent. **This does NOT mean that that what has arisen is not dealt with according to its homeostatic derived emotional valance**. Without a self-construct the issue is **seen and experienced in a more complete and realistic way**, with no denials and no secondary self-construct to protect and fain competence and control.

*When phenomenon are seen just as they are the information about them is clearer. The experience of them is more vivid. The lessons learned from them are more valid and effectual*. Awareness is not cluttered and constrained with additional unskillful formations of the self’s desires.

When phenomenon are seen without a self there is **no emotional mandate that action taken will result in the desired outcome** as there is no self to maintain the illusion of control, approval or disapproval.

If some situation does not work out **sadness *is* felt *at that time***. This sadness may be further motivation to take more action if possible or be **an opportunity to become *wise* about the world as it is**, **as your heart is, and as *all* hearts are**.

This ***wisdom*** is the birth of real ***compassion***. You will find that when sadness arises, as it well should in some circumstances, and is allowed to express its energy on its own terms that, just as it arose it will subside on its own. While it is there, accept it, learn from its lessons ***experientially,*** emotionally and not simply intellectually. Sit with this sadness with no expectation of when it will go. Sit and listen only.

Over time you will learn confidence in your ability to accept and manage *whatever* arises, whenever it arises, with all possible wisdom, compassion and skillfulness, with no expectation of outcome. Then ***all experience is always welcome***.

“*Let come what comes, let go what goes. See what remains*”. Ramana Maharshi.

This is a life ***actually lived***. A full life, a richly textured life. And when it is time to let go of even that, peace.