

Equanimity: Letting Go - of Resistance

Peace be with you.

While often attributed to modern psychology (Carl Jung), the concept that "what we resist persists" aligns with the spiritual principles in the *Rule of St. Benedict*. Benedictine spirituality suggests that directly fighting faults or desires through harsh resistance often strengthens them; instead, overcoming vices requires turning toward God, cultivating positive habits, and accepting difficult situations through patience and humility.

- **Actionable Acceptance:** Benedict advises that when facing difficult, "somewhat severe" aspects of monastic life, one should not immediately flee out of fear but instead, with patience, allow the difficulty to become a "way of light" rather than a battle.
- **Focus on the Positive:** Rather than just fighting against bad habits, Benedict encourages "good zeal" that leads to God, emphasizing replacing vices with virtues through habitual, loving service rather than focusing on the fear of punishment.
- **The Problem of Suppressing Thought:** The Rule emphasizes that trying to forcefully repress thoughts, rather than accepting they exist and turning to better action, often keeps the temptation at the forefront of the mind.
- **Turning Resistance into Patience:** By practicing patience in the face of conflict, one moves away from "evil zeal of bitterness" (which persists when fought with more bitterness) toward a "good zeal" of love.

Ultimately, the Benedictine approach is that transformation occurs by fostering patience and changing behavior over time rather than attempting to violently banish unwanted aspects of oneself.

Equanimity is not something one adds to oneself. It's what remains when the systems that distort perception calm down.

01. Cosmological framing: you are not at the center

From a cosmological standpoint, the nervous system evolved to survive on a small patch of Earth - *not to perceive reality as it is*. The brain constructs a useful world, not a true one.

When one looks at the universe through the lens of modern cosmology-billions of galaxies, deep time, entropy – one begins to realize that:

- a. Personal concerns are locally meaningful but not absolute.
- b. Change is the fundamental rule (stars, bodies, thoughts all arise and pass).
- c. Stability is an appearance, not a guarantee.

This recognition doesn't produce nihilism when properly integrated-*it produces proportion*.

Equanimity begins as proportionality:

One experiences events at their actual scale and not inflated by self-referential processing:
(*i.e.* one does not take life (thoughts, feelings, emotions, people, places, things, events) personally).

02. Neuroscience: equanimity is regulation + integration

At the neural level, equanimity correlates with a few key dynamics:

- a. Reduced limbic hijacking:
The amygdale* rapidly tags stimuli as threat or reward. In reactive minds, it dominates.
- b. Equanimity involves:
 - (1) lower baseline reactivity,

(2) faster recovery after activation.

c. Strengthened top-down modulation:

- (1) The prefrontal cortex regulates impulses, reframes experience, and inhibits overreaction,.
- (2) But equanimity is not suppression-it's coordination.

d. Quieting of self-referential loops

- (1) The Default Mode Network generates the narrative "me"-rumination, projection, comparison.
- (2) When this network softens:
 - (a) experience becomes less "about me".
 - (b) perception becomes more direct.

e. Interoceptive* clarity::

- (1) The insula tracks internal bodily states.
- (2) Equanimity includes:
 - (a) feeling sensations fully,
 - (b) without compulsive reaction.

Summary (neuroscience):

Equanimity = high integration + low reactivity + reduced self-referential distortion

03. Psychology: decoupling stimulus from identity

a. Psychologically, suffering is amplified by identification (*taking "it" personally*).

b. Not pain itself-but the reactive thought:

- (1) "this shouldn't be happening",
- (2) "this defines me",
- (3) "this will last forever".

c. Equanimity emerges when three distortions weaken:

- (1) Permanence illusion:
All experience feels like it will continue. It won't.
- (2) Personalization:
Events are interpreted as about the self. Often, they aren't.
- (3) Control fixation:
The mind overestimates its ability to control outcomes.

d. As these loosen, a gap appears:

- (1) sensation still arises,
- (2) but the compulsion to react collapses.

N.B. Pain actually does not exist as it is like beauty: *in the eye ("mind" of the beholder*. The art form exists (sensation), whereas the art form's "beauty" is a totally subjective opinion, a fantasy in the head and, hence, made-up or constructed.

04. Phenomenology:* what equanimity actually feels like

a. From direct experience (not theory), equanimity is:

- (1) sensations arising without resistance,
- (2) thoughts appearing without being believed automatically,
- (3) emotions moving without becoming identity.

b. It is not numbness.

c. It is full contact without contraction.

d. A useful pointer from Edmund Husserl's tradition:

Bracket interpretation, and return to raw experience.

- (1) When bracketing takes place
- (2) pain is just sensation,
- (3) fear is just energy,
- (4) thought is just appearance,

The secondary suffering drops away.

05. Contemplative insight: non-clinging

- a. In traditions like those associated with Gautama Buddha, equanimity (*upekkhā*) is not Indifference but non-clinging.
 - (1) *Clinging* = wanting experience to be different than it is.
 - (2) *Equanimity* = allowing experience to unfold without grasping or resisting.
- b. This includes:
 - (1) pleasure (not grasping),
 - (2) pain (not resisting),
 - (3) neutrality (not ignoring).

06. The mechanism of awakening equanimity

Across disciplines, the same mechanism appears:

Step 1: Stabilize attention

Practices like Zazen or breath awareness:

- (a) to train the brain -
- (b) to notice without immediately reacting (*c.f.* impulse control).

Step 2: Observe reactivity in real time:

- (a) One begins to sense:
 - <1> the surge of irritation,
 - <2> the tightening in the chest,
 - <3> the narrative forming.
- (b) *This interrupts automaticity.*

Step 3: Deconstruct the experience:

- (a) One notices components:
 - <1> sensation,
 - <2> thought,
 - <3> emotional tone.
- (b) Instead of one solid “problem,” *it becomes a process.*

Step 4: Non-interference:

- (a) Here is the pivot:
- (b) One stops trying to fix, suppress, or amplify.
- (c) One *lets it be*.
- (d) This is where equanimity actually emerges-
 - <1> not as effort,
 - <2> but as the absence of interference.

7. A practical phenomenological exercise

- a. Try this in real time:
 - (1) Sit quietly,
 - (2) Notice the breath,
 - (3) When a sensation or thought arises:
Label it lightly (“thinking,” “tightness,” “heat”),
 - (4) Do nothing to change it,
Does it stay the same?
Does it intensify?
Does it dissolve?
- b. You will discover something precise:

All experiences self-liberate if not reinforced.

This insight is the **root of equanimity.**

08. A subtle but critical warning

- a. Equanimity is often misunderstood as:
 - (1) emotional suppression,
 - (2) disengagement,
 - (3) passivity.
- b. That's not equanimity-that's dissociation.
- c. True equanimity:
 - (1) feels everything,
 - (2) resists nothing,
 - (3) is fully responsive when action is needed,
 - (4) It increases clarity and ethical sensitivity, not decreases it.

09. The deeper convergence (science + nonduality)

- a. Modern neuroscience (predictive processing) suggests:
 - (1) the brain is constantly predicting reality,
 - (2) perception is a controlled hallucination constrained by input.
- b. Equanimity arises when:
 - (1) predictions loosen,
 - (2) raw sensory data is allowed more weight,
 - (3) the "self-model" becomes less rigid.
- c. This begins to converge with **nondual insight**:
The boundary between "self" and "experience" softens.
Not as a belief-but as a perceptual shift.

10. Final synthesis:

- a. Equanimity is not a moral achievement or personality trait.
- b. It is what appears when:
 - (1) perception is less distorted,
 - (2) reactivity is regulated,
 - (3) identification is weakened.
- c. In simplest terms:

Equanimity = experience without unnecessary resistance.

Blessings and Peace and Joy!

White Robed Monks of St. Benedict

(Editorial Note: *The foregoing text in its original form was generated by an AI processor. The Monks created the prompt, edited, clarified, and formatted the text as it appears above.*)

May all beings be happy and at their ease.
(Metta Sutra)

The **amygdala*** is a small, almond-shaped structure in the brain that plays a crucial role in processing emotions, particularly fear and aggression. It is part of the limbic system and is involved in emotional regulation, memory consolidation, and the body's response to threats (Cleveland Clinic)

***Interoception** is the awareness of your body's internal senses or signals, such as hunger, pain or heartbeat. (WebMD)

***Phenomenology** is a philosophical study of subjective, conscious experience that aims to describe phenomena as they appear. (WIKI)