

Anushka Fernandopulle 01-27-2010



Anushka is a lifelong spiritual practitioner who has done meditation in the Theravada tradition for 20 years in monasteries and meditation centers in the United States, India, and Sri Lanka. Other influences have been mystics of Christian, Hindu, Sufi and other traditions; creative arts; nature; service work; progressive social change movements. She teaches dharma in the San Francisco Bay Area and beyond, and has been part of a dharma teacher training at Spirit Rock Meditation Center and Insight Meditation Society over the past 3 years.

The Eight Worldly Dharmas (concerns)

There are eight worldly concerns that blow us about like winds. They are grouped into four pairs, and are sometimes known as the eight winds.

The first pair is pleasure-pain. We enjoy pleasure and try to prolong it. We try to look pleasant, and seek botox injections, cosmetic surgery, and hair transplants to maintain a youthful and pleasant appearance. But the pleasant is temporary. No matter how we try to grasp it, it eventually eludes us. Eventually the pleasant is replaced with the unpleasant or with pain. When we are in pain, we try to avoid it and run away from it, and get back to the pleasant.

Another pair is gain-loss. We gain friends, loved ones, material goods, skills, employment. But no matter how hard we try to hold on to our gains, we eventually lose all. We lose friends, loved ones and family die, we become unemployed, skills fade, material items break. We delight in the things we have gained, and become depressed when we lose them.

Praise and Blame concern us. We like praise, we enjoy it, and we try to get more. But no matter what our actions, there will always be blame. His Holiness the Dalai Lama treats his enemies with compassion, and they in turn blame him for stirring up rebellion and creating turmoil. We tend to shrink from blame, or get angry, resentful, or guilty about it. We bask in praise.

Fame-disrepute are another pair of concerns that drive us. Some of us chase after fame, and hide from disrepute. Fame is "good" and disrepute is "bad."

We are driven back and forth by these worldly concerns. We cry over spilt milk or get drunk on success. We react to these worldly concerns, and they tend to control us and drive our behavior.

What can we do to prevent being blown about by the eight winds?

The antidote is equanimity . Equanimity is one of the divine abodes or shelters (Brahmavihara's). Along with compassion, loving-kindness, and sympathetic joy, equanimity gives us balance, and provide ballast against the eight winds of worldly concerns.

How can we cultivate equanimity? -- By cultivating calm, and by cultivating mindfulness. We practice being present with everything the way it is. Although we can be tossed about by circumstances or by our own mind and reactions, if we pay attention to our conduct, if we behave well, we will feel more equanimous. Pay attention, too, to the people in your life. Good companionship can help keep us on a steady keel – the sangha, the spiritual community, is a shelter from the winds.

Things are the way they are.

For everything that arises, there are options. If we take the actions based on good intentions, we sow the seeds for equanimity. If we take actions based on reaction, anger, fear, or aversion, we sow the seeds for unpleasantness. All beings are heir to their own karma. What do you have a choice in now?

Rage is the far enemy of equanimity. It is obvious that rage and anger sow the seeds for unpleasantness. But more subtle is the near enemy. The near enemy of equanimity is indifference or apathy. Indifference can look like equanimity, but it is the enemy. One of the ways to tell the difference, is to look at connection. With equanimity, there is a connection. With indifference, the connection is missing.

In the Lokavipatti Sutta: The Failings of the World, the Buddha said:

"Monks, these eight worldly conditions spin after the world, and the world spins after these eight worldly conditions. Which eight? Gain, loss, status, disgrace, censure, praise, pleasure, & pain. These are the eight worldly conditions that spin after the world, and the world spins after these eight worldly conditions....

Gain/loss, status/disgrace, censure/praise, pleasure/pain: these conditions among human beings are inconstant, impermanent, subject to change. Knowing this, the wise person, mindful, ponders these changing conditions. Desirable things don't charm the mind, undesirable ones bring no resistance."

<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/an/an08/an08.006.than.html>

Remember that when experiencing any of the eight worldly concerns, "this too shall pass". As the Buddha said in the Diamond Sutra,

Thus shall you think of this fleeting world:
A star at dawn, a bubble in a stream,
A flash of lightning in a summer cloud,
A flickering lamp, a phantom, and a dream.