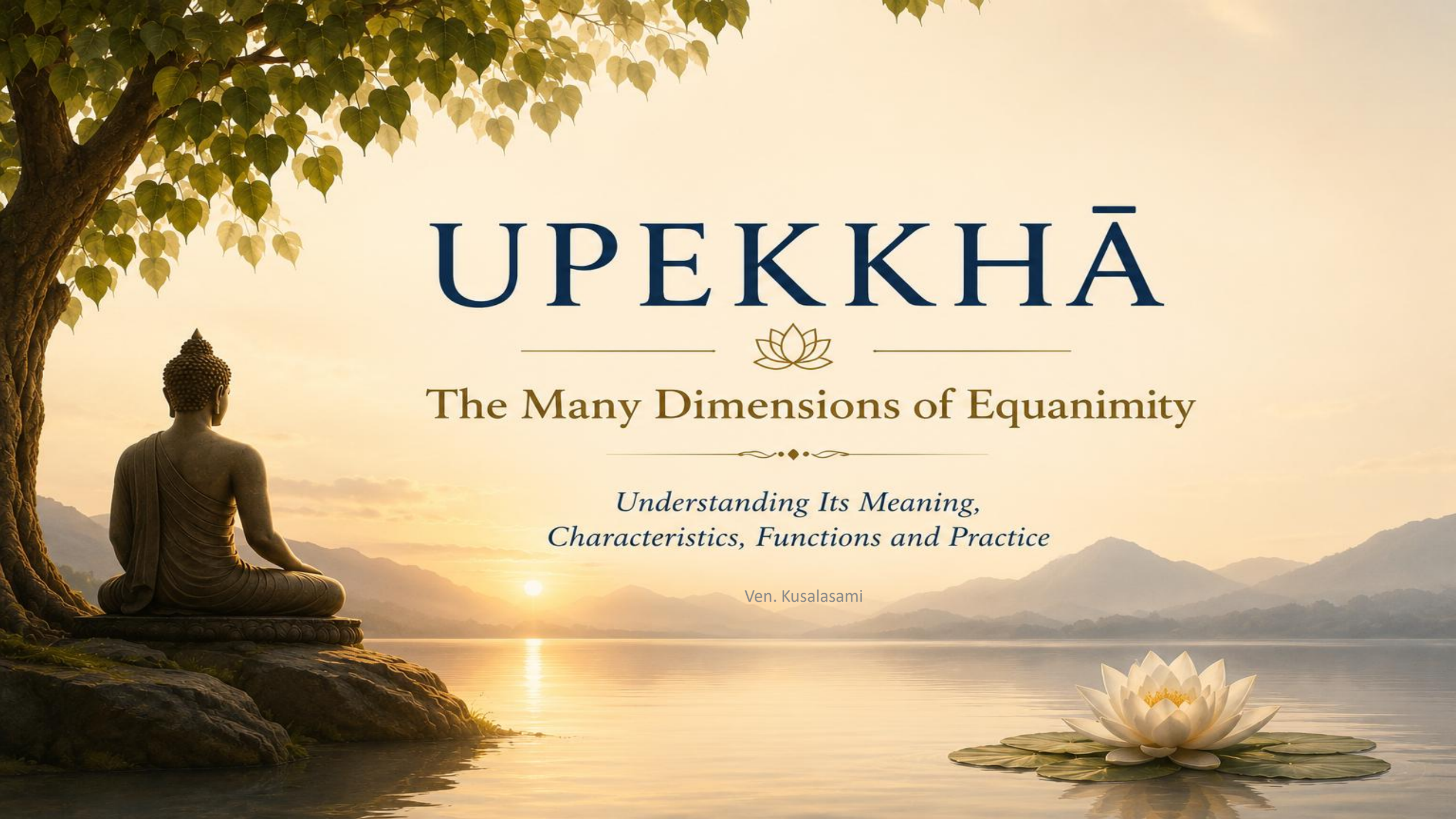


A serene landscape featuring a Buddha statue in a meditative pose on a rock in the foreground. A large tree with heart-shaped leaves is on the left. In the background, a calm lake reflects the sunset, with misty mountains visible on the horizon. A white lotus flower floats on the water in the bottom right corner.

UPEKKHĀ



The Many Dimensions of Equanimity

*Understanding Its Meaning,
Characteristics, Functions and Practice*

Ven. Kusalasami

Understanding Upekkhā

What is Upekkhā? It is equanimous observation, impartial observation, and neutrality of mind. This is called Upekkhā. (Tattha katamā upekkhā? Yā upekkhā, upekkhanā, ajjhupekkhanā, majjhattatā cittassa — ayaṃ vuccati upekkhā.)

upa + √ikkh

upa — toward / upon / closely

√ikkh (īkṣ) — to see, observe, look upon

“to look upon with impartiality”

“to observe without attachment or aversion”

Etymological / commentarial explanation:

upa + √ikkh — “to look upon / observe”

In the commentarial interpretation, this develops into the sense of **looking upon things impartially and maintaining mental balance**.

Equanimity should be understood as looking upon things that should be regarded evenly, without urging or interfering.

Understanding Upekkhā

What Upekkhā is?

UPEKKHĀ — EQUANIMITY

Upekkhā is a state of **mental balance, impartiality, and inner composure.**

It is not indifference, coldness, or lack of compassion. Rather, it is the ability to remain **calm, balanced, and non-attached**, while seeing things according to reality.

Outlines >

- ❖ **Mental balance** — The mind remains steady amid changing circumstances.
- ❖ **Impartiality** — One does not favor or reject beings based on personal attachment or aversion.
- ❖ **Non-attachment** — The mind does not cling to pleasant experiences or resist unpleasant ones.
- ❖ **Freedom from partiality** — One does not become biased by liking, disliking, attraction, or aversion.
- ❖ **Clarity of mind** — One sees things without being overwhelmed by emotional reactions.
- ❖ **Compassion with wisdom** — Upekkhā does not eliminate compassion; it allows compassion to remain free from attachment and distress.

Understanding Upekkhā

- In the commentarial explanation, Upekkhā carries the sense of **remaining in the middle, without being pulled toward either extreme.**

It is therefore a mind that does not become dominated by:

Attraction ↔ Aversion

Pleasure ↔ Pain

Praise ↔ Blame

Gain ↔ Loss

- Upekkhā does not stand in the middle because it has no feeling.

It stands in the middle because **it is not controlled by attraction or aversion.**

- **What Upekkhā is NOT? –**

Upekkhā > Indifference > Emotional numbness > Lack of compassion > Ignoring suffering

In essence

Upekkhā is the balanced mind that remains neither attached nor averse, seeing things with clarity and wisdom.

Understanding Upekkhā through the Fourfold Analysis

- The Visuddhimagga frequently explains mental qualities through these four perspectives.
- This method helps us understand not only what Upekkhā is, but how it functions in practice.

Lakkhaṇa (Characteristic)

Upekkhā has the characteristic of occurring as impartiality toward beings. (Sattesu majjhataṅkārap pavatti-lakkhaṇā upekkhā.)

The mind no longer divides people into ‘my people’ and ‘my enemies’ or the objects I like and the ones I hate.

The mind regards beings or objects without making distinctions based on personal affection or hostility.

It does not say:

“This person is mine.”

or

“This person is my enemy.”

Instead, it sees beings with an impartial mind.

Understanding Upekkhā through the Visuddhimagga

The Fourfold Analysis of a Dhamma

Rasa (Function)

Its function is seeing beings with an equal regard. (Sattesu samabhāva-dassana-rasā.)

It calms resentment, hostility, favoritism, and emotional attachment.

The mind is no longer pulled toward liking or disliking.

Upekkhā prevents the mind from being pulled by two opposing reactions:

Resentment / Aversion

and

Approval / Attachment

Thus, the mind becomes balanced.

Understanding Upekkhā through the Visuddhimagga

The Fourfold Analysis of a Dhamma

Paccupaṭṭhāna (Manifestation)

How does this dhamma appear when it is present?

It manifests as the subsiding of aversion and attachment. (Paṭighānunaya-vūpasama-paccupaṭṭhānā.)

The calming of resentment and approval.

When genuine Upekkhā is present, the mind becomes neither emotionally carried away by attachment nor disturbed by aversion.

Understanding Upekkhā through the Visuddhimagga

The Fourfold Analysis of a Dhamma

Padaṭṭhāna (Proximate Cause)

What is the nearest condition supporting its arising?

Its proximate cause is the seeing of beings as owners of their kamma, arising in this way: ‘Beings are owners of their kamma. By whose will could they become happy, be freed from suffering, or not fall away from the prosperity they have attained? (Kammassakā sattā, te kassa ruciyā sukhitā vā bhavissanti, dukkhato vā muccissanti, patta-sampattito vā na parihāyissantī”ti evaṃ pavatta-kammassakatā-dassana-padaṭṭhānā.)

This is one of the most important points in the *Visuddhimagga*.

The practitioner reflects:

“Beings are the owners of their deeds and the heirs of their deeds.”

Therefore, one understands that beings experience the results of their actions according to their own kamma.

This understanding supports impartiality.

Brahmavihāra Upekkhā

The Fourth Divine Abiding in the Visuddhimagga

One may have:

1. loving-kindness (Metta),
2. compassion (Karūṇā),
3. sympathetic joy (Muditā),
4. yet remain free from excessive attachment and emotional partiality.

That is why Upekkhā comes as the **fourth Brahmavihāra**.

The *Visuddhimagga* describes the cultivation of Upekkhā by progressively breaking down the barriers between a neutral person, a dear person, a close companion, a hostile person, and oneself.

Brahmavihāra Upekkhā

Upekkhā in Relation to Mettā, Karuṇā, and Muditā

This is a beautiful way to show the relationship among the **Four Brahmavihāras**.

Mettā — Loving-kindness - “May all beings be happy.”

Karuṇā — Compassion - “May all beings be free from suffering.”

Muditā — Sympathetic Joy - “May all beings rejoice in the happiness and success of others.”

Upekkhā — Equanimity - “Beings are owners and heirs of their kamma.” (*Kammassakā, kammadāyādā.*)

This does **not** mean that Upekkhā opposes Mettā, Karuṇā, or Muditā. Rather, **Upekkhā brings balance to the other three Brahmavihāras.**

Mettā opens the heart with goodwill.

Karuṇā responds to suffering.

Muditā rejoices in others' well-being.

Upekkhā keeps the mind balanced and free from attachment and partiality.

Upekkhā is not the opposite of Mettā, etc.. It is the impartial balance that completes the Four Brahmavihāras.

The Ten Upekkhās

Summary with doctrinal grouping

1. Chaḷaṅgupekkhā — Six sense-door equanimity (Arahant's impartiality).
2. Brahmavihārupekkhā — Impartiality toward beings.
3. Bojjhaṅgupekkhā — Enlightenment-factor equanimity.
4. Vīriyupekkhā — **Balanced energy.**
5. Saṅkhārupekkhā — **Equanimity regarding conditioned formations.**
6. Vedanupekkhā — **Neutral feeling.**
7. Vipassanupekkhā — **Insight-based equanimity.**
8. Tatramajjhātupekkhā — Balanced neutrality among mental factors.
9. Jhānupekkhā — Equanimity in jhāna.
10. Pārisuddhupekkhā — Purified equanimity of the Fourth Jhāna.

Important Note

The Visuddhimagga explains that several of these names refer to the same underlying quality of balanced neutrality (tatramajjhattatā), while others refer to **feeling**, **energy**, or **insight** according to context.

The Ten Upekkhās

Summary with doctrinal grouping

1. Chaḷaṅgupekkhā (Six-factored Equanimity)

Equanimity when desirable or undesirable objects appear through the **six sense doors**. He is neither pleased nor displeased, but remains mindful and clearly comprehending.

Chaḷaṅgupekkhā refers to the equanimity of an **arahant at the six sense doors**. When an arahant encounters desirable or undesirable objects through: the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind, there is neither delight nor displeasure. The mind remains **mindful, clearly comprehending, and equanimous**. Thus, Chaḷaṅgupekkhā represents an extremely mature form of freedom from **attachment and aversion** in relation to sense objects.

Practical significance

For ordinary practitioners, it is better to regard this as a **model of the arahant's perfected equanimity**, rather than claiming that an ordinary person has already attained Chaḷaṅgupekkhā in its strict Visuddhimagga sense.

The Ten Upekkhās

Summary with doctrinal grouping

2. Brahmavihārupekkhā (Equanimity as a Divine Abiding)

Impartiality toward beings, free from personal attachment and aversion.

This is particularly useful in relationships with other people.

It helps us remain: impartial; free from excessive attachment; free from hatred; compassionate without becoming emotionally overwhelmed.

Its basic perspective is: **Beings are owners of their kamma.**

Therefore, one does not become excessively attached even to those one loves, nor does one develop hatred toward those one dislikes.

The Visuddhimagga explains this in terms of its characteristic, etc.

This is particularly important for **interpersonal relationships and emotional balance.**

The Ten Upekkhās

Summary with doctrinal grouping

3. Bojjhaṅgupekkhā (Equanimity as an Enlightenment Factor)

The equanimity that maintains a balanced state among the associated mental factors while developing the path to awakening.

It is one of the **Seven Factors of Enlightenment**: Sati, Dhamma-vicaya, Viriya, Pīti, Passaddhi, Samādhi, **Upekkhā**.

It can function within the development of both: **Samatha-related mental balance and Vipassanā-related insight**. Its defining context is its role as an **Enlightenment Factor**.

One develops the equanimity enlightenment factor, dependent upon seclusion. (**Upekkhā-sambojjhaṅgaṃ bhāveti vivekanissitaṃ.**)

Therefore, this Upekkhā is directly connected with the **Noble Path and the development of awakening**. It is not merely emotional calm. It is an equanimity functioning as part of the **awakening process**.

The Ten Upekkhās

Summary with doctrinal grouping

4. Vīriyupekkhā (Equanimity Energy or Balanced Effort)

Energy that is neither excessive nor deficient—avoiding both **over-striving and laxity**.

Vīriyupekkhā means **balanced effort**. It prevents two extremes: excessive effort → tension, restlessness, burnout and insufficient effort → laziness, negligence.

Therefore, it is useful in: work, study, meditation, spiritual practice, dealing with difficult responsibilities.

The principle is: **Neither too forceful nor too lax — effort should be balanced.**

The Ten Upekkhās

Summary with doctrinal grouping

5. Saṅkhārupekkhā (Equanimity Regarding Formations)

A mature insight-based neutrality toward conditioned phenomena, without compulsively grasping, resisting, or attempting to manipulate them.

Saṅkhārupekkhā is **equanimity toward conditioned formations**. It is particularly important at the mature stages of Vipassanā.

The meditator sees formations arising and passing away and no longer reacts with strong attachment or aversion.

Vipassanupekkhā and Saṅkhārupekkhā are closely connected with mature insight practice.

The Visuddhimagga explains that they are essentially one in meaning as **paññā**, but are distinguished according to their different functions.

It therefore has a broader meaning than simply “being emotionally calm.”

The essential feature is **wisdom-based neutrality toward conditioned phenomena**.

The Ten Upekkhās

Summary with doctrinal grouping

6. Vedanupekkhā (Equanimous / Neutral Feeling)

Feeling that is neither pleasant nor painful: **neither pleasure nor displeasure.**

Vedanupekkhā is the simplest to distinguish conceptually.

It means **neither pleasant nor painful feeling.** Thus, Sukha → pleasant feeling; Dukkha → painful feeling;
Upekkhā → neutral feeling

This Upekkhā is therefore just **vedanā**, rather than the same mental phenomenon as the equanimity of insight or Brahmavihāra. This distinction is very important.

Therefore, Upekkhā does not always mean “neutral feeling.” Only in the context of **Vedanupekkhā** does it specifically mean neutral feeling.

The Ten Upekkhās

Summary with doctrinal grouping

7. Vipassanupekkhā (Equanimity of Insight)

The balanced state of mind that arises when insight clearly sees the characteristics of conditioned phenomena.

Vipassanupekkhā arises in the process of **investigating formations through insight**. When the meditator sees the three characteristics: **Anicca, Dukkha, Anatta** clearly through Vipassanā knowledge, the mind gradually becomes balanced toward formations.

It no longer needs to keep asking:
“Is this permanent or impermanent?”
“Should I hold on to this?” or “Should I reject this?”
The mind becomes even and detached.
This is called **Vipassanupekkhā**.

The Ten Upekkhās

Summary with doctrinal grouping

8. Tatramajjhattupekkhā (Equanimous as Specific Neutrality)

The mental factor that keeps associated states **evenly balanced and equally effective**.

It is an important point in understanding the ten Upekkhās because several of the ten are, in terms of their underlying dhamma, ultimately related to this same **tatramajjhattatā**.

It is therefore useful to think of it as:

the mental capacity to maintain balanced equipoise among associated dhammas.

It does not necessarily mean that Tatramajjhattupekkhā is itself a separate meditation object.

The Ten Upekkhās

Summary with doctrinal grouping

9. Jhānupekkhā (Equanimity of Jhāna)

Equanimity that remains impartial even toward the **sublime happiness of the third**.

This is a subtle point.

The third Jhāna contains extremely refined happiness, but the meditator does not become attached even to that sublime happiness.

The Visuddhimagga gives its analysis as:

Majjhata-lakkhaṇā — having the characteristic of neutrality/evenness

Anābhoga-rasā — having the function of non-attention/non-involvement

Abyāpāra-paccupaṭṭhānā — manifesting as non-interference

Pīti-virāga-padaṭṭhānā — having fading of rapture as its proximate cause

The Ten Upekkhās

Summary with doctrinal grouping

10. Pārisuddhupekkhā (Purifying Equanimity)

Equanimity purified from opposing factors, associated with the **fourth jhāna** and the purity of mindfulness.

Upekkhā-sati-pārisuddhiṃ catuttham jhānam

“The fourth Jhāna, which has purity of mindfulness due to equanimity.”

Here the mind is purified from the opposing factors that disturbed the earlier stages.

Thus Pārisuddhupekkhā is associated with profound mental purity, equanimity, purified mindfulness, and fourth-Jhāna attainment.

True Upekkhā and False Upekkhā

A crucial distinction for practice

False Upekkhā

- Indifference
- Emotional avoidance
- Coldness
- 'I don't care.'

True Upekkhā

- Wisdom
- Compassion without attachment
- Impartiality
- Calm, balanced response
- 'I care, but I do not cling.'

Key Point

Upekkhā does not remove compassion. It protects compassion from becoming possessive, biased, or emotionally overwhelmed. One does not abandon loving-kindness or compassion. Instead, one develops a mind that is free from **favoritism, attachment, and aversion**.

False Upekkhā	True Upekkhā
Emotional withdrawal	Inner balance
Avoidance	Wise engagement
It is not my problem.	I care, but I do not cling.
I don't care what happens.	I understand what is happening.
Lack of concern	Compassion without attachment
Whatever happens, happens.	I will respond wisely.
A cold heart	A balance heart guided by wisdom.

True Upekkhā and Wisdom

A particularly important point is that **true Upekkhā is closely connected with wisdom.** Without wisdom, “equanimity” can easily become: indifference, passivity, emotional suppression, or simply not caring.

With wisdom, however, the mind understands:
“Things arise and pass according to conditions.”

Therefore, the mind does not cling excessively to what is pleasant or become overwhelmed by what is unpleasant.

Upekkhā = Balance + Non-attachment + Clear Seeing

True Upekkhā and Indifference

Upekkhā — Equanimity

Wisdom is present — *paññā*; **Mindfulness is present** — *sati*; **Compassion is present** — *karuṇā*; **There is no partiality** — the mind remains impartial. **There is no clinging** — the mind is free from attachment.

Indifference

I do not care. I am not interested. I do not want to take responsibility. Emotional withdrawal or avoidance.

Upekkhā and Indifference

Upekkhā is a mind that **cares without clinging, responds without hatred, and sees without partiality.**

Indifference, on the other hand, is a lack of concern or willingness to engage.

UPEKKHĀ > Wisdom + Mindfulness + Compassion + Impartiality + Non-attachment

INDIFFERENCE > “I don’t care.” + “It doesn’t concern me.” + “I don’t want to get involved.”

Upekkhā and the Eight Worldly Conditions

Remaining balanced amid change

The Eight Worldly Conditions

- ✓ Gain (Lābho) ↔ Loss (Alābho);
- ✓ Fame (Yaso) ↔ Disrepute (Ayaso);
- ✓ Praise (Pasaṃsam) ↔ Blame (Ninnaṃ);
- ✓ Pleasure (Sukhaṃ) ↔ Pain (Dukkhaṃ)

Reflection

The world continues changing between these eight conditions.

The practice of Upekkhā

Upekkhā does not try to stop change; it stops the mind from being enslaved by change and **remain steady when the world changes.**

This does not mean that we become emotionless. Rather:

We experience what happens, understand it clearly, and respond wisely without allowing the mind to be dominated by it.

Conclusion

The Essence of Upekkhā

Balance

The mind remains steady.

Impartiality

The mind is free from favoritism.

Non-attachment

The mind does not cling or resist.

Wisdom

The mind sees according to reality.

Final Definition

Upekkhā is a balanced, impartial, and compassionate mind rooted in wisdom. It cares deeply, yet remains free from attachment and aversion.

The Prayer of Equanimity

- ❖ May we cultivate Upekkhā,
remaining balanced amidst gain and loss,
honour and dishonour,
praise and blame,
pleasure and pain.
 - ❖ May attachment and aversion gradually fade,
may wisdom become our guide,
and may we learn to care without clinging,
to respond without hatred,
and to remain peaceful without indifference.
 - ❖ May this equanimity lead us
from mental balance to insight,
from insight to non-clinging,
and from non-clinging to liberation.
- May all beings be free from suffering
and abide in wisdom, peace, and true equanimity.