



SUMMER RETREAT WITH STEVE ARMSTRONG & KAMALA MASTERS JUNE 13—JUNE 21, 2003



GRACE IS AVAILABLE.

By Steve Armstrong

God has done his/ her part. Now you do yours. Make yourself available to the grace. Do the work of purifying your own heart, your speech, behavior, and understanding. This cleansing makes a space for grace to appear and be seen.

The way to do that is revealed in the Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path, which is really three trainings: the training in *Sila*, which purifies our speech and behavior; the training in *Samadhi*, which purifies our mind of the hindrances; and the training in *Panna*, which purifies our understanding.

Sila, or living in harmony, tames what are called the transgressive *kilesas*: the acting out of strong torments in the mind. If you practice *Sila*, then you won't act them out unskillfully, because they transgress against others. *Sila* controls the worst expression of our tormented mind.

However, even if we are not acting them out, we can still be quite tortured within our own mind. We may want to act them out, by being angry, proud, jealous, envious, etc. So, we need another practice. We need another way of training that level of torment, which is called obsessive *kilesas*. They obsess our mind. We need the development of *Samadhi*, or

Samatha: putting aside the hindrances through development of the five *Jhanic* Factors: connecting, sustaining, joy, *sukkha*, and one-pointedness.

So, when we can live in harmony and get a cap on our transgressive *kilesas*, and practice *Samadhi* to get a stilling of our obsessive *kilesas*, that's great! However, when conditions change and our *Samadhi* isn't quite up to the requirement for calming the obsessive *kilesas*, we get these latent *kilesas* erupting in our mind. So we need a stronger, a more subtle practice or training to uproot what are called the latent *kilesas*. So, even if we're living in harmony, really chilled out through a lot of tranquility, the potential is always there when "Oop! — Conditions changed!" — up arises a latent *kilesa*.

So, *Sila* purifies our speech and behavior, giving us the happiness of living in harmony. *Samadhi* purifies our mind of the hindrances, giving us a taste of the happiness of tranquility. *Panna*, or the development of insight knowledge or wisdom, actually uproots misunderstanding from the mind. It purifies our understanding. Our mind is already purified, but *vipassana* or insight purifies our understanding. It is in the purification of understanding where we uproot the misunderstanding that things are permanent, things are really satisfying, and things have an inherent essence.

When we uproot these misunderstandings from the mind, then we've purified our understanding and we get a glimpse, we get a taste, we get the capacity, the ability, the opportunity to experience the happiness of peace. So, once the misunderstanding of permanence, ultimately satisfying conditions, and inherent essence are uprooted from the mind, "Hey! It doesn't really matter what conditions arise." Why? Because we are not going to be deceived into thinking that it's going to offer some stable, secure, pleasant happiness to your essential self! You will know that is not possible.

When you have uprooted those misbeliefs from your mind, then it really doesn't matter what conditions unfold, either externally or internally, because you won't fall into any wrong understanding. Your mind is at peace with all conditions, all the time.

So, now the question really is, can we get to that wisdom without looking at all of the habits of mind that we have cultivated over (possibly) hundreds of thousands of lifetimes? Can we uproot wrong understanding without looking at everything we've done wrong? That's the question.

We can! That's what the power of insight is. You don't have to see every time you got angry or irritated or frustrated or disappointed or whatever. You don't have to see every time,

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(EQUANIMITY, *continued from previous page*)

final weeks of retreat, I began to experience quite a deep and quiet sense of balance, an evenness of heart/mind. A day or two before the end, the thought came up: "There's equanimity here—seems to be fairly deep abiding equanimity." The next thought was: "I wonder if there's an equanimity test? If this was a Zen practice session, any good Zen teacher would do something creatively startling to check my equanimity... But this is a Vipassana retreat, and Vipassana teachers don't do things like that."

Later that day I WAS startled by a true equanimity test, Vipassana style—I got a note! The note was signed by one of my teachers, Sharon Salzberg, though it was actually from all of the 3 month teachers at IMS, where I was practicing at the time. It said, "We would like you to give the dana talk to the yogis tomorrow." For a moment, all equanimity flew out the window. My heart felt like it stopped. "I can't. I can't do this now," said my old habit. "I've been silent for six weeks and deeply into practice. I can't get up in front of all my fellow yogis and talk... impossible." And then the thought came in, "Ahh, this is my equanimity test, of course, and I can do it. I want to do it."

I began to feel tremendous gratitude for the teachers, who had been so helpful and generous over the six weeks, and for all the IMS staff. Suddenly equanimity was back. What I was being asked to do felt like the most natural thing in the world.

There is a prayer that I like a lot that says, "Please grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."

As we practice, we directly prompt the quality of equanimity, reminding ourselves over and over again that things are as they are, that each one of us are the heirs of our own Karma and that our happiness or suffering depends upon our actions, not upon our wishes. We remind ourselves to accept things as they are and to be undisturbed by the changes—the comings and goings of experience, beginnings and endings of events, the arising and passing of life itself.

As we practice Vipassana, again and again and again we see how *it is*, rather than how we would like it to be, and slowly this "Heart of Greatness" grows and develops and matures. The wisdom of equanimity begins to live through us more and more often, unbidden.



LIFE ON THE EMPTY PHENOMENAL PRAIRIE: A RADIO PLAY

by Steve Burt

*Western music, sound of hoofbeats arriving, neighs of horses.
Head Cowpoke Matt and the Kid, phenomenal cowpokes on the
endless Ranch Circle Sara, pull up their horses.*

- KID: Whoah there! Holy Bhavanga, Head Cowpoke Matt, those phenomena are really raising the dust today!
- MATT: Right ya are, Kid. I noticed that meeself. So thick you couldn't hardly tell sense-consciousness from sense object, clustered around the sense organs the way they were.
- KID: And those lightning flashes! Give ya the lay of the land, and that's it. Worse n' no light at all.
- MATT: What grabs me is the moodiness... high, low and in the middle, every one. Get a mixed-up corral of them, you got a mess on your hands!
- KID: And then on top of that you got your mentals. Sneaky critters, and it only takes a few to spook the whole herd.
- MATT: Yeah, they say perceptions were a mental too, 'till they got too big for their britches. Now you see their hoofprints on everything. (*Half to himself*) How did I get in this line of work anyway? Sometimes I feel like a character out of a movie I saw in a past lifetime. Say Kid, did I tell you about Tarzan, in *Tarzan and the Apes*, where he shows courageous commitment in rescuing Jane?
- KID: Yeah, ya did.
- MATT: Did I tell you about King Kong when he's swatting the planes, showing persistence?
- KID: Yes, last night.
- MATT: Did I tell you about Lassie in *Lassie Come Home* where he's investigatin' phenomena?
- KID: (*impatiently*) Yes! Yes!
Silence falls. Head Cowpoke Matt is trying to think of which stories are left to tell the Kid. The Kid is wondering if he's riding for the right outfit. Low thunder in the distance; a huge dust cloud appears on the horizon.
- KID: Heaving heavenly abodes! What's that?
- MATT: Uh-oh. That's a herd of 10,000 sense desires, and they're stampeding right at us!
- KID: I thought we had those penned up!
- MATT: We did, but you-know-who didn't watch the gate again.
- KID: You mean...
- MATT: Yeah, Mr. Big, Mr. Big M Mental Factor. I admit he's our best hand, if we could only get him to work full time. Anyway Kid, right now our only hope is to keep moving. Don't stop anywhere! Remember, you can't turn them easily once they're runnin'. Ya gotta put the fear of death in 'em.
- KID: Oh, right.
The pair rides off into the gathering storm.
- MATT: (*under his breath*) Kids, you tell 'em once, you tell 'em a thousand times.