THE PERFECTION OF EQUANIMITY
Quotes from the Theravada Tradition

Equanimity purifies loving kindness. … The function of equanimity is to see things impartially; its manifestation is the subsiding of attraction and repulsion. Its proximate cause is reflection on the fact that beings inherit the results of their own karma. … The perfection of equanimity should be considered thus: “When there is no equanimity, the offensive actions performed by beings cause oscillation in the mind. And when the mind oscillates, it is impossible to practice the requisites of awakening.” And: “Even though mind has been softened with the moisture of loving kindness, without equanimity one cannot purify the requisites of enlightenment and cannot dedicate one’s requisites of merit along with the results to furthering the welfare of beings.” …

Without equanimity the bodhisattva cannot offer up something without making false discriminations over gifts and recipients. Without equanimity one cannot purify one’s virtue without thinking about the obstacles to one’s life and one’s vital needs.

Equanimity perfects the power of renunciation, for by its means one overcomes discontent and delight. … When energy is aroused to excess because it has not been examined with equanimity, it cannot perform its proper function of endeavoring. … And because one is unconcerned over the wrongs done by others, one perfects the abiding in loving kindness. …

Equanimity is accompanied by compassion and compassion by equanimity. (Someone may ask:) “How can the bodhisattvas, the great compassionate ones, look upon living beings with equanimity? Some teachers say: “Sometimes they show equanimity towards living beings when it is necessary to do so.” But others say: “They do not show equanimity towards living beings (as such), but toward the offensive actions performed by beings.” A Treatise on the Paramis translated by B. Bodhi

Pali words for equanimity:

Upekkha = originally meant “to look at” and “to perceive (patiently).”
Tatra-majhhattata = “standing in the middle of all this” or “there in the middleness”

As a solid mass of rock
    Is not stirred by the wind,
So a sage is not moved
    By praise and blame.
As a deep lake
    Is clear and undisturbed,
So a sage become clear
    Upon hearing the Dharma.
Virtuous people always let go.
    They don’t prattle about pleasures and desires.
Touched by happiness and then by suffering,
    The sage shows no sign of being elated or depressed. Dhammapada 81-83
Such a person
Who, like the earth, is untroubled,
Who is well-practiced
Who is like a pillar of Indra,
Who is like a lake without mud,
Continues wandering no more.  Dhammapada 95

They find fault in one sitting silently,
They find fault in one speaking much,
They find fault in one speaking in moderately.
No one in this world is not found at fault.
There has been, there is,
And there will be no person
Who is only criticized,
Or only praised.  Dhammapada 227-228

Peaceful in body, peaceful in speech,
The bhikkhu who is peaceful and well-concentrated
And who has rejected the world’s bait
Is called “one at peace.”  Dhammapada 378

Whoever is unopposing among those who oppose,
Peaceful among the armed,
Not clinging among those who cling,
I call an brahmin.  Dhammapada 406

The Various forms of Equanimity and their context:


The Brahma Viharas or Immeasurable: Loving Kindness, Compassion, Sympathetic Joy, Equanimity (= balance in regard to beings).

The Seven Factors of Awakening:
Mindfulness, Investigation, Effort, Joy, Tranquility, Concentration, Equanimity (= balance in regard to things and in regard to the other six factors)

Main characteristics of the 2nd to 4th jhana:
(2nd): joy;  (3rd): Happiness  (4th): Purity of mindfulness by means of Equanimity (= impartiality to the happiness of the 3rd jhana; it is also a form of upekkha vedana or a feeling tone that is neither painful or pleasant).

Final stage of Vipassana prior to Awakening:
Knowledge of Equanimity towards all Formations.
Descriptions of the various forms of Equanimity:

Commentarial description of the Equanimity Factor of Awakening.

[Equanimity is like] someone who oversees by overseeing the co-nascent (factors of awakening). The awakening factor of equipoise is the property of balance termed the not-drawing-back-and-not-over-running of the [other] six awakening-factors. For it is like the case of horses that are running evenly; then there is neither any urging on on the charioteer’s part, thinking, ‘this one is lagging behind’, nor any restraining, thinking, ‘this one is running ahead’, there is just the property of stability of one who sees thus. Just so the property of balance termed not-drawing-back-and-not-over-running of the six awakening-factors is called the awakening-factor of equipoise. Ps IV 143 (Gethin 160)

One develops the Equanimity factor of Awakening depending on letting go.”
Visuddhimagga IV, 157

Equanimity Brahma Vihara:

Here, a monk abides pervading one quarter with a mind imbued with equanimity, likewise the second, the third and the fourth; so above, below, around, and everywhere, and to all as to himself, he abides pervading the all-encompassing world with a mind imbued with equanimity, abundant, exalted, immeasurable, without hostility and without ill will.
MN 55.10 (Bhikkhu Bodhi, 475)

Equanimity is characterized as promoting neutrality toward all beings. Its function is to see equality in beings. It is manifested as the quieting of resentment and approval. Its proximate cause is seeing ownership of deeds (karma) thus: “Beings are owners of their deeds. Whose (if not thiers) is the choice by which they will become happy, or will get free from suffering, or will not fall away from the success they have reached?” It succeeds when it makes resentment and approval subside, and it fails when it produces the equanimity of unknowing. Visuddhimagga IX, 96

Knowledge of Equanimity toward Formations (the penultimate stage of vipassana practice)

When a practitioner has discerned formations by attributing the three characteristics to them and seeing them as empty in this way, he abandons both terror and delight, and becomes indifferent to them and neutral. The practitioner neither takes them as ‘I’ nor as ‘mine’ and is like a person who has divorced a spouse (and in so doing become unaffected by the doings of the ex-spouse). Vissudhimagga XXI, 61
**Sutta passages on equanimity:**

Rahula, develop meditation that is like the earth, for then agreeable and disagreeable sensory impressions will not take charge of your mind. Just as when people throw what is clean and unclean on the earth – feces, urine, saliva, pus, or blood – the earth is not horrified, humiliated or disgusted by it; in the same way, agreeable and disagreeable sensory impressions will not take charge of you mind when you develop meditation like the earth. Develop meditation like water, fire, wind and space, for then…

MN 62

[On attaining the fourth jhana] there remains only equanimity: pure and bright, pliant, malleable and luminous. Just as if a skilled goldsmith were to prepare a furnace, heat up a crucible, and, taking gold with a pair of tongs, place it in the crucible. He would blow on it, sprinkle water on it, examine it, so that the gold would become refined, well-refined, thoroughly refined, flawless, free from dross, pliant, malleable, and luminous. Then whatever sort of ornament he had in mind it would serve his purpose. In the same way, there remains only equanimity: pure and bright, pliant, malleable, and luminous.

[after developing and bringing about the formless jhana, the meditator] neither brings about or wills the becoming or the non-becoming of anything. This being the case, one is not cling to anything in the world. Not clinging, one is not agitated. Unagitated, one is totally unbound right within.

MN 140

**Common phrases for the practice of Equanimity Brahma vihara:**

You are the owner/heir to your own karma

Your outcome depends on your actions and not my wishes

No matter how I might wish things to be otherwise, things are as they are.

Although I wish only the best for you, I also know that your happiness and unhappiness depends upon your actions, not my wishes for you.

Whether I understand it or not, things are unfolding according to a lawful nature.