

Resolve Week 1: What is Resolve? What is the spirit of 'Vow'?

This week, some thoughts on approaching this parami.

From David:

"Bhikkhus, whatever a bhikkhu frequently thinks and ponders upon, that will become the inclination of mind." The Buddha

"Until one is committed, there is hesitancy, the chance to draw back, always ineffectiveness. Concerning all acts of initiative and creation, there is one elementary truth the ignorance of which kills countless ideas and splendid plans: that the moment one definitely commits oneself, then providence moves too. All sorts of things occur to help one that would never otherwise have occurred. A whole stream of events issues from the decision, raising in one's favor all manner of unforeseen incidents, meetings and material assistance which no man could have dreamed would have come his way. Whatever you can do or dream you can, begin it. Boldness has genius, power and magic in it. Begin it now." Goethe

"The Journey" Mary Oliver

http://www.phys.unm.edu/~tw/fas/yits/archive/oliver_thejourney.html

Suzuki Roshi taught that the most important quality of practice is Vow, more important even than meditation. When I was practicing at the Zen Center, every day I would consider my vow, my intention, and allow my thinking to gravitate to this volition in all aspects of my life. Vow can be the most beneficial and centralizing frame of reference that can reward you and others with its resonances as you go through your day. Your vow can give you unshakeable confidence, strength and stability.

For this month, give some thought to your aspiration, and notice how this affects the quality of your life. Vow is activated by faith---what do you have faith in? What is my deepest desire for myself for this life, for this day, for this moment? Allow your wisdom to guide you. Your aspiration may be different tomorrow, but whatever it is now, it will be helpful in shedding suffering. *You may try making a Vow every day*, when you get up in the morning, or with your morning meditation if that is when you meditate. Turn on the light that will help you see your path that is right in front of you, gently guiding you. When the Dalai Lama wakes up, he

immediately vows not to harm anyone today, and this vow evolves into warmth and kindness for all those around him all day long.

In coming weeks we will discuss the Four Great Resolves from the suttas, as well as the Four Bodhisattva Vows. Your own vow, or any of these, can be used as an occasional mantra, to return you to their frame of reference and well being.

Don't get attached to your vow, so that it just adds on another self, so that you feel enhanced by it if successful, or beat yourself up if you do not live up to your expectations. This is not for personal enhancement, this is not a success or failure thing. Just, without rushing, we reaffirm from time to time our desired direction, and open to the path. Navigate without attachment and **appreciate** the process, without **acquiring** or losing. With faith and confidence this is a joyful journey, not a grim one. If something is not working, try something else---like practicing the eightfold path, practicing a parami, patiently mindful of your aspiration for a free heart.

I have heard that 97% of the time space shuttle is off course on the way to a space station, but keeps correcting mid course and eventually arrives. Practice is like this. Set the resolve and let dharma do the work, and set the resolve again. Many obstacles arise over the course of the day, brutal self judgements, resistance, doubt, restlessness, anxiety, impatience, distraction, aimlessness, sleepiness, self pity. We want to give it all up, collapse our resolve in the face the depth of dukkha in our hearts. Infinite patience is needed. Keep going. Try something else, take a break, but come back. Something within us knows this is worthy of doing.

Challenges can also be opportunities for growth---with renewed commitment "all sorts of things occur to help one that would never otherwise have occurred." Allow the paramis, equanimity, compassion, wisdom, any step in the eightfold path, to come in to help you. With faith, we are willing to face our demons with gentle persevering resolve. Let yourself be inspired.

Just as space is always here but we don't see it, peace and deep well being is always here, no matter what is going on. We often forget about what we aspire too, but acknowledging and connecting with resolve, even better--- **devotion** to our highest aspiration, will bring us back to sensing our own

goodness. Happiness is not caused by sensual gratification, not by becoming, but is in having a sense of well being. We can land where we feel good about ourselves, not where we feel bad about ourselves. We don't necessarily know it, but we have this all the time, this inviolable sense of well being, even if someone is shouting at us. Our drops of agitation are no comparison to the vast ocean of peace that is here.

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Chris offers a few selections from Ajahn Sucitto's chapter on Resolve (the whole chapter is of course recommended):

The eighth of the ten *pāramī* is resolve — *adhitthāna*. The prefix '*adhi-*' means further, higher or fuller, and '*-thāna*' is a foundation, a standing place. Thus the origin of the word suggests the most complete establishment, and it has come to mean resolve or determination. When it's conjoined with other perfections, *adhitthāna* serves to underline and strengthen them. So one determines to be generous; to refrain from doing harm; to let go of what needs to be relinquished; to discern and investigate; and to bring energy, patience and truthfulness to one's practice.

Resolve isn't a small matter: if you're looking for the best results or the deepest changes, you have to do that with the understanding that this will most likely mean working at it and overcoming some resistance. And it will require the faith that you can at least try. Otherwise you aren't going to grow.

Naturally, you can develop stronger degrees and a further extent of resolve in accordance with a wise assessment of what is needed or useful for you. For example, when you begin to meditate, you might start with ten minutes and check out how that was. If you get interested you go on to fifteen minutes, or half an hour or more. When you read a book, you don't start off thinking that you will read all day and all night, but rather you pick up a book and then look into it for ten minutes; then if it's worthwhile, you continue. So wise resolve supports strengthening according to feedback, interest and capacity. It's not blind doggedness.

It does, however, mean that you put aside the alternatives and stay with your central aim. The end result is a stronger and more skillful mind, but it means getting over the first hurdle: the idea that lasting personal development can occur quickly with little effort. Frequently

we find ourselves presented with many options, so it's more likely that we'll get exactly what we want. It sounds good, but the multi-option scenario can lead to option paralysis: you don't give due time and effort to change in yourself, and you get the ongoing sneaky feeling that if you'd only done that, or bought *that* one, it would have been better. So resolve comes late on the list of perfections, because to make a wise resolution requires a mind that has sampled, practiced and received the benefits of generosity, virtue and the rest. Then you know what a useful commitment, and its results, feel like.

Without this ongoing reflection you may find yourself with commitments that you never clearly looked into and resolved upon.

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Reflection:

For this week, perhaps just examine the feeling of resolve within your mind/heart/body. Think of something that is a cornerstone commitment in your life, doing your best to raise a child, or not killing other humans for example. How does that feel different than, say, often made and often abandoned self-improvement schemes? What are some vows or resolves you are already living by?