

## Resolve Week 4: Resolving

From Chris

What is the felt sense of resolve? How is it different, for example, from idealistic wishful thinking or egoic striving? For many people, the ability to resolve with some success may be a fruit of maturing Dharma practice, like a foundation that is discovered and strengthened as we learn to see through and release habits of craving, distraction and self-doubt. It takes enough wisdom to see clearly that something is truly good for us and others, enough investigation into our habits of mind, heart and body to know what the challenges are, enough confidence that we can sincerely engage in learning to meet those challenges, enough mindfulness and patience to keep working with it, finding our way through and around all the temptations to do otherwise, and enough equanimity and self-compassion to simply begin again and again as often as needed. With practice, making a resolution results in learning and growth in confidence rather than frustration and loss of confidence.

It can be interesting and useful to consider what in you is ready to be the subject of true resolve. And if something you would like to cultivate or abandon doesn't quite seem to rise to this bar, then it's extremely useful to sense and feel into why not. What conditions would need to be cultivated to be able to feel confident in this resolve? You could be ready to resolve to work with those conditions first. It could be very helpful, for example, to resolve to simply notice each time the situation comes up, without at first trying to change your response. If you can sincerely intend this, appreciate when you do notice, forgive and begin again when you don't, then mindfulness will grow, and more insight into what's going on may arise. For urgent situations where your health is at risk, such as addictions, expert support in learning specific ways to work with your issue may be needed. Practice needs to address our real circumstances; we need to begin where we actually are. Then sustainable progress is possible.

There are all kinds of resolves. It could be something very concrete, like to sit every day, or to be truthful in a specific difficult context. Or it could be something very general, an inspiration to orient your heart by every day, as we have discussed in the last two mailings. I've appended another list of those to the end of this mailing. This list comes from MN8, a sutta where the Buddha is directing a monk away from speculating about some kind of 'not-self' attainment that he is not currently ready for. Instead, the Buddha advises him that now is the time to ground his practice in being resolved on wise, ethical, wholesome, un-self-centered actions of body, speech and mind. The phrasing of this list contrasts these to what "others" do. This points to the need to become independent of the unwise influence of social conformity. Resolve needs to be firmly rooted in one's own experiential wisdom. Yet the "we here" wording also invokes the support of a like-minded sangha in keeping these resolves.

You might read over this list and ask: Do I feel clear in mind about the benefits of this? Do I feel a sense of devotion to it in my heart? Do I sense an energetic strengthening when I consider making an explicit resolve or vow on this topic to guide my life? Or perhaps there is doubt, energetic wobbling, private reserve of the heart that maybe this isn't quite 'ripe' yet? Maybe

more inner inquiry is needed. You can resolve to practice in order to close the gap between your aspiration and your ability to sincerely resolve.

Here is a selection on this theme of how to resolve from Ajahn Sucitto's chapter:

The issue of personal strength is very much to the fore when we consider resolve. However, it's also a practice of wise discernment — what resolutions are pertinent and useful to you? And of course that brings in our empathic sense. Any resolve needs to be referred to the effect it has on our minds, and the intention and motivation that brings it forth. Wise resolve isn't aimed at proving oneself to oneself or others, or at becoming the best. It is a skill that can make wise reflection effective by putting it into action and sustaining it. In this respect, it is a servant of all the *pāramī*.

### Reflection

To link wise reflection to resolve we might enquire: 'With a mind that seeks my welfare, how do I shape and sustain a direction in life? How do I let myself down; where are my weak spots? On the other hand, what is a good quality or skill to develop? Which of these obstacles or skills would I point out to someone I wish well who has a similar disposition, or is in a similar situation?'

Bringing together your recommendations to yourself and to your friend may give you a balanced view of some central topics for resolve.

Are there any of these that your circumstances, your job, your commitments or your age will make it difficult to keep? Which of these, on the other hand, will you find support for in your lifestyle or situation?

The results of these questions will give you the optimal themes around which resolve is most likely to stick and bear fruit.

### Action

How to make a resolution:

Think it over slowly and carefully, noticing the feelings and the mental reactions. Every time the mind responds half-heartedly with thoughts such as, 'Well, I'll give it a try ...' or quails with doubt: pause, and bring back the thought of the resolution again, slowly and deliberately passing it through the mind. Do this until the mind's response is quiet and has a strengthened feel to it.

You might like to complete the resolution by a physical movement, such as folding your arms or standing up, with a few moments of silence again. Finally, mentioning your resolution to a trusted friend may add some strength.

How to keep a resolution:

Repeat the last process. If at any time your resolve slips, note that and reflect on how that feels without going into a self-analysis. You might feel confused, humbled or angry, but feel

those feelings and let them pass. Then consider the points on selecting a suitable resolution, and see what would plug up the hole in the resolve.

As this parami matures, perhaps it gets simpler. After describing his many efforts in training himself as a monk using this parami, such as sitting all night, restricting his food consumption, etc., Ajahn Sucitto concludes:

Over time, my resolve energy has simplified and calmed to one of sustaining the attitude, 'May this action or thought be for my welfare, the welfare of others and lead to peace.' Compared with the more extreme practices, such a resolve doesn't make the headlines. But it acts as a life commitment and a basis for external action, enquiry and insight. This resolve doesn't make a self out of intention or results; it just holds experience carefully and lets it pass through and dissolve. This is beautiful, and selfless: the self doesn't do it, *pāramī* does.

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Appendix: from MN8 (partial list):

'Others will be cruel, but here we will not be cruel.'

'Others will kill living creatures, but here we will not kill living creatures.'

'Others will steal, but here we will not steal.'

'Others will be unchaste, but here we will not be unchaste.'

'Others will lie, but here we will not lie.'

'Others will speak divisively, but here we will not speak divisively.'

'Others will speak harshly, but here we will not speak harshly.'

'Others will talk nonsense, but here we will not talk nonsense.'

'Others will be covetous, but here we will not be covetous.'

'Others will have ill will, but here we will not have ill will.'

'Others will have wrong livelihood, but here we will have right livelihood.'

'Others will have wrong effort, but here we will have right effort.'

'Others will have wrong mindfulness, but here we will have right mindfulness.'

'Others will be overcome with dullness and drowsiness, but here we will be rid of dullness and drowsiness.'

‘Others will be restless, but here we will not be restless.’

‘Others will be irritable, but here we will be without anger.’

‘Others will be hostile, but here we will be without hostility.’

‘Others will be offensive, but here we will be inoffensive.’

‘Others will be contemptuous, but here we will be without contempt.’

‘Others will be jealous, but here we will be without jealousy.’

‘Others will be stingy, but here we will be without stinginess.’

‘Others will be devious, but here we will not be devious.’

‘Others will be deceitful, but here we will not be deceitful.’

‘Others will be stubborn, but here we will not be stubborn.’

‘Others will be arrogant, but here we will not be arrogant.’

‘Others will be hard to admonish, but here we will not be hard to admonish.’

‘Others will be negligent, but here we will be diligent.’

‘Others will be faithless, but here we will have faith.’

‘Others will be conscienceless, but here we will have a sense of conscience.’

‘Others will be imprudent, but here we will be prudent.’

‘Others will be uneducated, but here we will be well educated.’

‘Others will be lazy, but here we will be energetic.’

‘Others will be unmindful, but here we will be mindful.’

‘Others will be witless, but here we will be accomplished in wisdom.’

‘Others will be attached to their own views, holding them tight, and refusing to let go, but here we will not be attached to our own views, not holding them tight, but will let them go easily.’