Faith (Saddhā) and Determination: Allies of Mindfulness

Carol Wilson · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Carol Wilson · 1:03:28

So just as I was walking in here tonight, it's such a beautiful night with Venus, and it's so still and lovely. And then I walked in here, and it's really hard to imagine how wild it could be inside your little heads, what's going on. Sometimes it can seem so dissonant—one, the other, and all of it is samsara.

My sense at this point in the retreat... long retreats kind of go in a wave. Not everybody's in the same place, but there's a kind of a flow that we can sometimes feel. And so my personal sense, my limited sense from just some of the people I've been meeting with, is that you guys are cooking. It really may not be the recipe you thought you were ordering. It certainly may not be the one you want. But I just want to say that this is what the practice is.

It's easy to think, when we talk about the instructions and talk about the steadiness of awareness and all the subtleties of what we see, that it should be a certain way. And then you just get hit upside the head with really strong patterns of thought, memory, the emotions that go along with it, and in really intense waves. Has anybody experienced such a thing? And often that may come after you've started to feel a little calmer, started to feel there's a little more steadiness. "Okay, I got it licked." And then suddenly—whop.

As Pema Chödrön says, it can be helpful to think not so much that we're being with the unpleasant as with the unwanted. Because that helps us see what's really the suffering in the mind. I don't want this stuff. I want to look at intention. But instead, there's a wave of memories that we may have had conscious access to, but all of a sudden everything we ever did that we feel remorse for comes up. Or something triggers unworthiness and self-hatred and it just comes in like a cloud and starts distorting every thought that arises. Or rage. Or guilt. Or grief.

All of it's valid. And often it's not new information, but the thoughts will come, and then this flood of memories will come, together with the strong emotion that was generated at the time it happened. And it goes in waves, of course. And you can feel like... most people do feel like... A yogi years ago used to come in and say to me, "It's all gone to hell in a handbasket." And I'd think, what does that mean? I mean, you get a drift of what it means. What's a handbasket? I'd get sidetracked in that. But the sense is: this isn't what's supposed to be happening, and I'm certainly not growing in awareness and wisdom through this.

There's no question it's difficult. We can feel like we get filled with doubt, filled with self-recrimination. We get sidetracked into the story and the memories. We think "overwhelm"—like someone said today, about to be overwhelmed. It can even be a little bit overwhelmed.

But what we don't realize often—most of the time, everyone I've talked to—is that you think it's just overwhelmed and you're just lost. It gets so strong and you're feeling the grief or the anger or the rage or the remorse or whatever it is, to the point that you need to go and just sob for a couple of hours. And our tendency is to think, well, this has blown it, and maybe somehow I can patch my practice back together.

But this is what's happening at this moment. It's these cycles of... Someone reminded me of a way of speaking. There are cycles of purification of heart and mind, and then purity. The two go back and forth. The purification in a way is when all this stuff is coming up. You feel you're being overwhelmed, but there's really mindfulness still running through it. We often don't recognize it because the emotions and the thoughts are a lot stronger than the mindfulness, but we're still meeting it. With awareness there's a shift in how we're being with it from our regular daily life. And in fact it's coming up so strong, deeper into retreat, as a result of mindfulness and concentration. As the mind gets purer, the conscious or unconscious habits of kind of keeping stuff down aren't being fed, and boom, boom.

I remember one retreat I was sitting with Sayadaw U Pandita, who was a very tough taskmaster. You come in, you report—note, note, note—how it's supposed to be. And I had utmost confidence in him, and I really felt his deep compassion. So I wasn't really afraid of him somehow. In the interview—every other time, yeah, but not in the interview.

I was having one of these times that went on, off and on, nothing steady state for days, where a memory would come up, and a kind of grief and loss, and I would just be sobbing, sobbing. And I would be noting "sobbing." I'd go in and just describe what happened. I wouldn't give the story, I'd just describe what happened.

And he was so happy. Because he said, "This is dukkha. This is understanding dukkha."

Just what Bonnie talked about last night. We would like it if we got these little messages—*oh, dukkha, dukkha, now I get it, it's like that, la la la, that's a little bit of dukkha, I see, it's suffering*. It doesn't work like that. We don't really see what's feeding it until we're spinning in it. And then we pop out. The mind calms down, something else goes on, you're just eating lunch and tasting that little burst of flavor or whatever.

Then there can be a period that's more calm where you're just feeling the breath or watching the walking steps. And that's kind of like the purity of mind in that time—where the mind isn't distorted by the fear, by the kilesas, by the self-judgment. And they support one another.

So I just want to say this is happening for many people, and it's a very important part of the practice. Just seeing how changeable it is. From the purification to the purity, from contraction to expansion, from wild west to *oh yeah, la la la*, just feeling the lifting and feeling the pressure. It's like nature, right? Just changeable—how could it be otherwise?

What I want to speak about tonight is two qualities of mind that can help support us. Two wholesome qualities—there are many wholesome qualities that come along with mindfulness—but I want to call our

attention to these two in particular. Because there are times when it's going wild like this, or you're bored out of your mind, that could be it too. There's mindfulness, there's awareness, we're pulling it along, but it could use some support. It's getting some support, but I want us to recognize these two qualities tonight.

Because the way this works is huge, like firestorms, and then it passes, it's calmer, then the firestorm may come up again. Have you noticed? It's the same stuff, but maybe it's a little bit less intense. These patterns—don't expect them to completely go away. Please. Or if you do expect that, notice it, and don't give it a lot of energy.

But what does go away is the stickiness. It's like the Velcro. The *me, me, me*. You know how Velcro starts to get worn out and then it doesn't really stick and then the thing comes and it just doesn't stick at all? It's like that.

So I can feel a wave of self-hatred coming in. That's one of my favorite friends. If I don't recognize it, it's distorting everything, every thought I have. I can kind of now feel it coming in like a wave. I can see what triggered it, and without having to analyze my whole history—I know it, it's enough already—I can just feel it coming in. Sometimes the immediate cause is just that my mind is tired. I don't have to go looking for a big thing. You feel it come like a wave and go, *okay, self-hatred's here now, feels like this*. Don't trust anything your mind tells you as long as it's got the blinders on. That's how it is. Nothing personal. Passes out.

So, the two mental factors, qualities of mind I want to point us to tonight are *saddhā*, usually translated as faith, and *adhiṭṭhāna*, which Bhante spoke about, usually translated as resolution or determination. I'm going to speak about them tonight quite specifically in terms of recognizing them in our heart and mind, how they can support our practice here. Because they're both really huge topics and there's so much to say about each one, so I'm being quite specific in the way I want to speak about them tonight.

They're allies—allies of mindfulness. Not only in the difficult times, the unwanted times, but in those unwanted times when we can't quite find the strength of mindfulness, we can sometimes find these. Other times too.

So, mental factors—what do I mean, how does that work? First, I just want to mention: we keep talking about the mind. The mind does this, the mind sees that. And in listening, I hear—maybe you don't hear it this way—but I hear how it could easily sound as though the mind is some steady thing that's doing stuff and recognizing, some kind of blob, usually up here, but wherever it is, as if it's a thing. But to point out: the mind, what we're calling the mind, is actually a dynamic process that in itself is cognizing the flow of events. It's not a steady state thing, kind of cognizing the mind itself.

This is Silananda, who was a Burmese Sayadaw and scholar. He spent quite some time in California and has since passed on. He's describing the two component aspects of what we call mind in this form.

First, consciousness—remember, this is a test. Guy spoke about consciousness, one of the five aggregates,

viññāna. You remember that? It's just that natural knowing faculty, very simple. Consciousness is arising in every moment of contact, and consciousness is that which is aware of an object—the basic awareness of an object.

The other component part of the mind are all the mental factors arising in that moment, in that consciousness. Silananda explains that mental factors are what influence a moment of consciousness. They arise together with the consciousness and modify it.

So really, what we're calling mind is this moment-to-moment arising of viññāna, consciousness, and various mental factors—whole bunches of them coming together. What we're calling an unwholesome mind state is when the mental factors are kind of led by greed or aversion or hatred or fear, confusion, not knowing what's going on. A wholesome mind state is when those are absent—it could be led by compassion, it could be led by mindfulness, it could be led by concentration. But they come with several of them together, not all by themselves.

I just want to clarify that in the way I'm talking, faith, saddhā, and adhiṭṭhāna—resolution, determination—are mental factors. They're qualities of mind that arise together with mindfulness and other wholesome states. They're not by themselves, but sometimes they're the stronger one, and we can recognize them.

For instance, one moment of citta—citta is a word that includes consciousness and the mental factors together—one moment of citta with sati, with mindfulness and wholesome qualities, makes it more likely that it will influence the next moment. Hence, continuity is really helpful. It starts to build up the momentum. Same way when the Buddha says what we habitually ponder and think about, that becomes the inclination of the mind. It's like the laws of physics, like inertia. A body in motion tends to stay in motion. We kick the wheel of mindfulness, it's easier to go. We jump on the wheel of aversion, it's easier to roll. It's nothing personal. That's what's so interesting to watch.

So that's the way I want to talk about these factors—in terms of recognizing the quality, what their effect is in our own mind, in our practice.

Faith, saddhā. The first thing I want to say is that many people in English have various relationships and reactions to that word. Some very positive, some not so comfortable. Faith, saddhā, as a mental factor, as we experience it in our mind, is not about believing something. Often we hear it talked about—if you're reading the suttas, saddhā is faith in Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha. And it can easily come to seem like, "I have to believe these things—right view, the whole list of things, and what the Buddha and the Dhamma and the philosophy say—to become a card-carrying Buddhist, and that's what faith means." People can have different reactions to this.

On one retreat a couple of years ago, one of the teachers mentioned faith. It wasn't in terms of "you've got to believe this," just mentioned faith as a wholesome, supportive factor. And in the questions and answers

the next day, a man said, "So you mentioned the F word"—which for you non-English speakers, I can't really elaborate, but it's not a good thing. It's a word you don't really want to say, not a nice word. That illustrated his relationship to the concept of faith from his past history.

That's not what we mean in terms of a mental factor. It's a practical, experiential factor that uplifts and brightens the heart and mind. It brings this quality of brightness, expansiveness, energy.

And it's essential in the way that the Buddha described the path. When he talks about the five spiritual faculties—five qualities of mind that, when there's momentum of mindfulness, when we talk about intelligent awareness, all those five faculties are there together to some degree, not always balanced. The first one is saddhā, faith, which leads to viriya, effort and energy, to sati, mindfulness, to samādhi, balance and collectedness of mind, to paññā, wisdom. And they cycle around and support one another. So it's not like faith is just a nice thing—it serves a very essential function in our onward leading on the path, in our practice.

The Abhidhamma can be interesting in this regard. There are descriptions of each of the mental factors—what they feel like, how they are in our experience. I'll just read a little about saddhā: "It has the characteristic of trusting. Its function is to clarify, as when a muddy lake becomes clear." So you can see the difference between doubt and faith. Doubt asks, "What's going on? What should I do?" In faith, there's "Oh, it's like this." There's a brightness, a clarity. "Or to set forth, as one might set forth to cross a flood." Sayadaw U Pandita would describe this quality, this aspect of saddhā, as a willingness to do. That's how he would describe its effect—it gives a willingness to do in the mind. To do what? To show up for the next moment. It's that brightness, that energy. "And it manifests as non-fogginess, as confidence, or as resolution." So you can see these are really supportive qualities: confidence, resolution, willingness to do—which is how it leads into viriya, into energy, into the willingness to just keep showing up.

This uplift, this brightening of the heart and mind, is actually what enables one to even begin—it purifies in that moment, just for a moment, the heart and mind so that we can actually hear the Dhamma, so we can hear how things are. When we're distorted and clouded with confusion, with longing or aversion, we can hear the Dhamma, but it doesn't really quite get in. Has it ever happened that you've heard something you've heard a million times before, Dhamma-wise I mean, and you suddenly think, "Oh, that's what that means"? And it can keep happening on deeper and deeper levels as the mind is brighter, clearer. So this is a key aspect of our own practice, our own path.

There are many suttas where the Buddha, when he begins to give instructions to someone, looks through an assembly—you know, that amazing mind he has—thinking, "Okay, who here is ready to hear the Dhamma? Who here is ready to hear how it is? Whose mind is ready?" He'll look and see. There's one sutta where a poor beggar afflicted with leprosy comes to the edge of the sangha thinking, "Oh good, here's a big group of people. Maybe somebody's giving out food." He sits down and sees it's the Buddha. He thinks, "Oh, nobody's giving out food, but I might as well just sit and listen." And the Buddha looks out and

recognizes that this man—Suppabuddha was his name—is ready to hear the Dhamma. So the Buddha looks, and it's not about anybody's state in life, or how rich or poor, or their background, or their gender, or anything. He just looks and knows: this person is ready to hear.

But then he doesn't start by blasting them with anattā. He always starts with gradual teachings to bring the mind along. He talks about generosity. He talks about sīla. He talks about different aspects of conditions and karma and renunciation in order to brighten the mind. The mind becomes bright, purified, pliable, free from hindrances—and then it's able to hear the Dhamma in that moment. So, in a little bit of a way like that, saddhā has that function in our mind in moments.

In terms of faith, it's said the immediate cause is something that inspires, that arouses that faith—something to place faith in. Classically in the suttas, it's the three refuges: Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha, which Bonnie talked about so beautifully the other night. But it doesn't have to be that. That's where we get sucked into the object again and think, "I have to have faith in that." Instead, it's about looking within. I want to drop this in for you: as you go through the day, tune into what it is that inspires you, that re-inspires, that deepens—what you can access as your own faith. Faith in terms of what brightens your mind in the difficult times. What helps you remember or strengthens a sense of trust and confidence? Depending on how your mind works, it may be confidence in the teachings, confidence in the Buddha, confidence in your own verified experience—which is called verified faith—or confidence in someone who has really inspired you, where thinking about them brings it up again. That's called bright faith. Look and see.

There isn't a right thing, but knowing what it is for you matters deeply.

This practice of awakening is not like, you know, being into Formula One and thinking about a certain kind of car brightens your mind. We're not talking about that. I just want to be sure that's all clear. But to look for yourself—this is really important.

Another aspect of faith that's true for some people, though it doesn't have to be, is that sometimes *saddha* is thought of as synonymous with devotion. You've probably noticed here in this particular place that the way we're teaching, devotion isn't a huge aspect of how we're presenting things—which is more reflective of us than anything else. But faith is often inspired and strengthened by this quality of devotion, which can be this real sense of placing one's heart upon, being inspired by a teacher, by the sangha, or by thinking about the Dhamma. But it doesn't have to be that, because we're all different personality types.

A while ago, some of us were having a group discussion with Ajahn Sucitto, who is an Englishman, a monk in the Amaravati tradition from the followers of Ajahn Chah. He's one of the followers of Ajahn Sumedho—a really lovely and, I found, quite inspiring and deep person. He's been a monk for thirty-five years, I think. We were just having a discussion, a bunch of Western Vipassana teachers and him. We'd been sitting a retreat with him, and in those monastic-style retreats, there's just a more natural emphasis on devotion, which manifests through chanting—chanting a lot of the homage to the Buddha, the qualities

of the Buddha, chanting the qualities of the Dhamma, the qualities of the Sangha. Bringing that to heart, to mind, over and over. And people at those retreats love it.

He was saying to us, "Well, what do you all do to inspire faith? Because here these people love it so much, and you don't do it." And the people that come here love what we do. We said, "Yeah, they're the ones who come here." And in some of the retreats we do, there are people who really miss that devotional element, for sure. And there are other people like that man who talked about faith as an F-word. There isn't a right or a wrong.

So I'm just encouraging you to look and see for yourselves what lights you up. Devotion—it may be the qualities of the Buddha or the Dhamma or Sangha teachers. But I want to encourage you to tune into what's been meaningful for you. If you are devotional, what lights it up for you? Who have been your own teachers, your own inspirations? It doesn't have to be a Buddhist person. Whatever it is that really lights you up and brings that energy, that cohesive energy, that brightness in mind that kind of purifies the heart and keeps you on the path for the next moment. Sometimes it's surprising where it can come from.

I don't particularly think of myself as a devotional type, although I have to say it tends to come in more and more over the years. So now I find in my little house I have photos of some teachers who've just really been meaningful and inspired me. Ramana Maharshi, who you may know as an Indian saint in southern India who died in 1950—before I was even born—but lots of photos of him around the house. And when my mind's all caught up and the velcro is really working well, I just kind of look at a photo. It's hard to stay all worked up when I look at a photo of Ramana. He's just *right*.

But even more surprising to me—and I'm just giving this as an example—several times I've gone to Tiruvannamalai, his ashram in Tamil Nadu in southern India. He went there after his awakening, when he was sixteen or nineteen years old, because he was drawn to the mountain, Arunachala, as a holy mountain, an inspirational mountain to him. As you come up to it, it's just flat, flat, flat. And then there's just this big hill rising up in the middle of the flatness. He spent the whole rest of his life there, built his ashram around it, and really felt that it was all about Arunachala, all about the mountain.

So, okay, fine. I went to the ashram, which is a lovely ashram, really well organized, and I really like being there. And over time, it's like the mountain just starts coming in, coming in. You just look at the mountain. And there's a saying Ramana always used: "Arunachala, thou dost root out the ego of those who hold thee in their heart." Something like that. And I'd think, *yeah, right*. Because I'm from New York. I'm a cynic. The mountain's rooting out ego in my heart? Give me a break.

Mountain's just sitting there.

Well, I have a long photo of Arunachala on my altar, which I look at every day, and I cannot explain it. But luckily with saddha, you don't have to explain it. You just look at what's the effect. It brightens. I'm getting chills talking about it. I have no clue why. But when I tune in, it's the effect of saddha. It brightens my

mind and heart in that moment. There's an energy, an uplift, an openness, a willingness to just look at what's going on. It's really quite amazing. So look and see what's true for you in that way.

The Buddha talked about various kinds of followers in different suttas. I'm just going to briefly mention a part of one sutta. In terms of what I'm speaking of here, he comes down to two types of followers who are not yet completely enlightened.

He says, what is an individual who is a Dhamma follower? This is the case where someone, not yet awakened, but with a certain degree of reflection through wisdom, has come to an understanding, an agreement with the teachings proclaimed by the Tathagata. In other words, you've really looked at it, thought about it, and it makes sense. You've kind of taken the teachings into your own mind and heart. I would call it a wisdom follower in our investigation language.

And this person has these qualities—see if you recognize them: the faculty of conviction, or saddha; the faculty of persistence, or virya, energy; the faculty of mindfulness; of concentration; and of wisdom. So the five spiritual faculties beginning with conviction. But this is a wisdom follower.

And then he says there's another type of individual who is a faith follower, a saddha follower. This particular individual, not yet awakened, but having seen with discernment, has a measure of conviction, of faith in and love for the Buddha. And I would add the Dhamma, the Sangha, whatever your particular faith in and love for is. And this person also has these five qualities, the five spiritual faculties.

I just appreciated that—the Buddha noticing there are these different ways. Both of them arouse faith, saddha, this conviction which is onward leading to the other five spiritual faculties. So just seeing what our personality type is, what works for us.

In the Dhamma follower, which I always thought I was more of—but maybe not, and we all can have both—it tends to be that what really can bring that brightness, that lighting up in the mind, is just starting to see how things work, getting a sense of insight, just noticing.

And this is true for everybody: what we call verified faith. When you have an experience that confirms some of what we've been understanding and it just happens by itself, and then—oh, wow, that's really true. So many people have said that.

An example that quite a few people have told me about: some really familiar, unwholesome train of thought starts. You've been watching it, fighting with it, whatever. It starts up, awareness comes and notices it, and all of a sudden the mind, the wisdom says, no, let's not do that now. And it just vanishes. And you didn't do it. Wow. Notice that. That really can lead to verified faith. Oh yes, this Dhamma makes sense. I can see it's actually occurring the way that I've read about it. So it moves from just intellectual agreement—yeah, it makes sense—to actually noticing.

The Buddha talks about the importance of why it's really beneficial to know, to let others know and to

know for yourself, that real awakening is possible. That it's not just some kind of cockamamie idea to keep us being mindful. That it really is, as he so often said, if it were not possible, I would not ask you to do so.

And so a moment when your heart-mind is pure, freed from the defilements, the kleshas—that's just like a little mini doorway in.

But to really know that this is possible is, as the Buddha says, really important. You don't talk about it or describe people who've awakened just for flattery or for any self-serving reason, but because there are faithful people who are inspired and gladdened by what is possible. If we never hear about it, we can never know.

There's a lovely book by Ajahns Pasanno and Amaro called *The Island*, which is a compilation of many suttas and other teachings about all aspects of the quality of sotāpanna, the first level of awakening in the Theravāda schema. It's really well organized, with lots of sutta references and their own commentary. But what I'm going to quote is the very last quotation in the book, from Yogi Berra. Do any of you remember who Yogi Berra was? You non-Americans will have no clue. He was a baseball player and manager of the Yankees, and he's kind of well-known for all these statements he would make that don't quite make sense—but if you think about them, they do. So this is their last quotation, from Yogi Berra: "If you don't know where you're going, you will wind up somewhere else."

So, the wisdom follower has a sense of the Dhamma. And the faith follower—again, seeing what we can actively bring in when we notice we're caught, when difficult situations are just too strong and we're caught in negativity and fear—what can we use to brighten the mind? If it's reflections on the qualities of the Buddha, the qualities of the Dhamma, the qualities of the Sangha, if that brightens you, bring it in.

There are suttas where the Buddha talks about directed and undirected meditation. He describes when you're meditating: "A monk is abiding, contemplating body as body, ardent, fully aware, mindful"—you've heard that before, right? And bodily distress arises, or mental sluggishness that scatters the mind. See, he knew this stuff happened. So when you're really lost—not just momentary sluggishness—this is skillful means, not running away. Then one should direct the mind to some inspiring object: the three refuges, but also your own generosity, your own sīla, your own non-harming conduct. These are important aspects of contemplation that bring up faith and brighten the mind.

And he says: when the mind is directed to some inspiring quality, happiness is born. From this happiness comes joy. With a joyful mind, the body relaxes. With a relaxed body one feels content, and the mind of one who is content becomes collected. Then one recollects, "The purpose for which I directed my mind has been accomplished. The mind has been brightened, purified." So one withdraws attention from that particular inspiring object and returns to undirected, choiceless awareness.

You see, this is actually a skillful use of thought, of contemplation. And what it's doing is inspiring faith. This inspiration of faith is onward-leading, supporting this willingness to do, this quality of vīriya, of

effort.

And that leads to the next mental factor I want to talk about: determination, adhiṭṭhāna. It's not the same as vīriya, effort, but you can see how they come together. Resolution, variously described—Thanissaro Bhikkhu describes it as resolution in the mind that gives focus, motivation, and direction to the practice. But I want to say that even in a moment, we can recognize it. Ajahn Amaro describes it as being unwavering in the face of disappointment and discouragement.

This is one of the ten pāramīs, one of the ten perfections: resolution, determination. And it can be a very strong force to support vīriya and support our practice. Personally, I didn't really hear it talked about much in terms of moment-to-moment awareness—how it could support practice in that immediate way—until the last few years, when I've been exploring it more in my own experience.

It's often talked about in the big picture of vast lifetimes. The legend goes that in a previous era, the previous Buddha—the Dīpaṅkara Buddha, so long ago, in another world cycle, another lifetime—there was an ascetic called Sumedha who was so inspired by that Buddha that he made the resolution, the adhiṭṭhāna, that however long it would take, he too would become a Buddha. He would go through all the necessary wisdom practice, all the purification of heart and mind, so that he too could be of such immense benefit to beings. So this is the vast picture.

And then, if you read the whole collection of the Tipitaka, the Buddhist texts, there's a whole series called the Jataka Tales, which are supposedly all these stories of the different lifetimes of the historical Buddha we know—Gautama Buddha—and all the different lifetimes and the ways he was working to purify his heart and mind. That's the long view.

Tonight I'm talking about the moment-to-moment view, just to give you a sense. I'm just taking a little slice. But the point is to really start to recognize the wholesome, because when we recognize the wholesome, the mind can more easily incline towards it.

When we talk about the qualities of courage, of perseverance, the willingness and ability to be with the difficult—but not with striving, right? To really keep being there, but then we say, "but not striving, not expecting, not pushing." Or when we talk about choosing not to feed the unwholesome but inclining the mind towards the wholesome, where some series of difficult thoughts come up and we've been fighting them, but then we go, "No, not now." This quality of strength that isn't coming from either aversion or clinging or me-ing—what is that? How do we access that? That can be a tricky place, no?

This is one of the places where we can start to feel this mental factor, this energy of resolution. It's really what we can call on for skillful means. The best I can describe it in myself is that I feel it in a moment as a kind of collectedness and alignment of energy around a particular motivation.

I'll take a really simple example: waking up and being in bed in the morning and having to get up. Well, that happens every day. But there's this state where, whether you're on retreat or not—let's say you're on

retreat—you wake up, it's not the alarm, you're kind of lying there, "should I, shouldn't I," aversion, you're kind of fluffing around. That's what I call it—fluffing around. It's so cozy in the bed, I'm all snuggled in, should I get up, shouldn't I get up? Wanting and aversion, all of this.

And then, for me, the resolution is when the thought, the intention comes: "Just get up." Not "Just get up, you stupid, lazy person." Just: "Get up." And the resolution is that in that moment, the energy all aligns—just get up—and you just do it. You just do it.

Sayadaw Tejaniya often says that: "Just do it." In fact, sometimes he'll just hold up a big sheet of paper with a Nike swoosh. He'll just hold it up—just do it. Rather than this dithering.

It's different from forcing, it's different from doing it from aversion, but it really counteracts what I call flabbiness of mind. I know none of you would make this mistake, but there's this sense of feeling like we're just being with whatever is. So I'm lying in bed: "Okay, there's aversion, yeah, there's tiredness, yeah, it's snuggly, it's nice, okay, snuggly, nice, feels like this, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah." Just do it. Get up.

You can feel the difference. And the first thing you might think is, "Oh, that's just being choicelessly aware." Yes, but there's a certain place for inclining to the wholesome. I'm picking a simple thing, but this is really where we can explore this quality.

Adhitana, resolution—as you can see, it's a factor that could be called ethically neutral, meaning that quality of collecting around a motivation, just doing it, doesn't have to be around a wholesome thing. I don't have to elaborate on that. That's how many things get done. But in terms of Dhamma practice, of course, it is wholesome because it comes together with mindfulness, it comes together with wholesome faculties.

I want to describe resolution as a parami. Don't get all crazy trying to remember, but just notice the four wholesome qualities that come together with resolution, with adhitana. I'll give a simple example of how we can see them supporting one another, and the difference from just a kind of forcing. Because it can be tricky. We can think it's simple resolution, but it's got that forcing quality. We all know how subtle that is.

The four qualities that come together with adhitana are wisdom—paññā, wise discernment—honesty, relinquishment or non-clinging, and calm or peace.

Let me give a simple example of how they go together. In terms of wisdom, wise discernment, even just beginning as a resolution comes up in the mind—is it even reasonable? I always thought it was very interesting, the story of the Buddha. He made this great determination to sit under the Bodhi tree: "I'm not getting up until I'm awakened." But he'd been doing intensive practice for six years before he did that. He didn't do that on day one. So there was some sense of clear, wise discernment.

So for us, we won't always know. But for example, say you decide, "I'm going to sit for seventeen hours straight without moving." Now for some people, at some times, that is quite possible and supportive. For a

lot of us, a lot of the time, not so much. Knowing that, just knowing what's reasonable.

Take another example. We often recommend to people, just as a way of settling and strengthening the continuity, to take a period—if you're not already doing this, maybe you're all already doing this—take a period like the morning from the 8:15 sit until lunch, or from after lunch until tea, and just stay really steady. Sit, walk, sit, walk, don't do anything else. That's all. Just do that. Now one could make a resolution: "I'm just going to sit, walk, sit, walk." I would say generally, with discernment, does that seem reasonable? Does it seem useful? You don't have to write a thesis about it, just checking in and seeing. So that's the discernment part.

And the truthfulness, the honesty, is just being honest with seeing what we're really doing. So if we make that resolution, just very gently, and we're doing it, but then, "Okay, well I'm just going to go and have this little cup of tea and come back," and we somehow pretend we're not doing that—you know what I mean? We just kind of decide that didn't count. It's not quite the clear seeing, the honesty piece, that's all. Honesty is just part of mindfulness anyway: what's really happening.

The relinquishment is kind of obvious because when there's a resolution to do one thing, we're relinquishing other possibilities. Getting up in the morning is relinquishing more snuggling in bed. Sit, walk, sit, walk for four hours is relinquishing whatever else. Just very basic.

And the fourth, which is interesting, is calm. This I find one of the useful ways to check if what I'm doing is truly a resolution or kind of forcing or aversion.

For example, sitting and there's a difficult experience—let's just take pain in the body. And the idea comes in: "I'm just going to stay with it, see what happens." Well, you know all the different energies that could be feeding that motivation, right? And so if it's just the clear seeing, if it's the adhiṭṭhāna, there would be the discernment: "Okay, it's not that I have a bad knee and I'm going to hurt the knee." That's clear seeing, you know? And I know people that have hurt their knee from not using that discernment. That's different from fear and discernment. And the honesty: "Okay, just be with it and see what happens." And relinquishing moving.

But the calm is this: when it's from this resolution, all the energy just collects, it's just steady, just do it. There's not all this wavering, aversion, forcing—"Should I? Shouldn't I? I'm doing so great. I'm doing so bad. By God, I'm not going to move"—all that extra stuff that leads to agitation of mind, agitation of body. When it's a sense of resolution, it's like all the extra energy that's just floating all over the place just comes together in that resolution. "Oh yeah, just do it." Just for that moment. It's quite calm. And so that's something you could just kind of tune into: wisdom, truth, relinquishment, and calm.

I really want to encourage learning to and getting interested in exploring this in little ways in our practice, because the more we recognize these wholesome states, the more easily the next moment of citta, of mind, inclines toward it. And you know how we can remember a wholesome state and kind of call it up. We can

use it. And the faith, our confidence, the willingness to do, gives us the trust also that the resolution is possible, that we can do this.

Let me give a couple of examples, kind of a close, personal one. It's just to show that this isn't only about being on retreat. This was an experience where I was really consciously working with this quality, and I learned so much about adhiṭṭhāna from it. This was about two or three years ago. I had a summer where I took some months off of teaching, and I arranged to study German for three to four weeks in Munich. I'd been wanting to do this for a long time. My German friends may wonder, talking about resolution after twenty years—resolution of learning German was noticeably lacking. But anyway, I decided I really wanted to do this. So I set it all up. I was in this class.

I came in a few days late. They didn't put me in the beginning class—they placed me in the next level up based on some little test I took. But the knowledge I had of German was very spotty, just from hanging out. No clear grammar or anything.

Anyway, I was in this class, coming in a few days late. I was all happy. I was staying with a friend in Munich, I loved being there, and everything was great. And I come in, and from the first moment, I hadn't a clue what was going on. The class was not big, maybe eighteen kids. That's the operative word—*kids*. Aged sixteen to twenty-three. And me.

It was a really interesting group from all over. A couple of young men from Turkey, from Spain, from Mexico, from Portugal, from Denmark, from Mozambique. All there really wanting to learn German, to come and study mostly, to enhance their careers. So it was a really interesting group of kids. Kids.

Right away, I felt... *really?* I looked around. And then we had to do a lot of work in pairs. Of course, the instructor was speaking in German, and for the first day, I went into total panic. I had no clue what he was saying. We were supposed to do these exercises, and I'm like, what are we supposed to do? So much got triggered in me—really just like what's going on for you here. All kinds of inadequacy and feeling old. I don't usually feel old. I felt old, I tell you. Being absolutely the worst in the class. I was back in school and I was like, what is this? I was just doing this for fun. And I was really, really in a panic.

Just as an aside, I find how valuable it is to put oneself in situations like that, outside of our comfort zone, because we really learn. First, I got so much more respect—in a way, for all these people, immigrants, people coming from other countries, immigrating for refuge or for economic reasons or whatever, and they can't speak the language, and the general population isn't that helpful, and just what it is to go through that. Growing up a white American in suburbia, everybody around me spoke English. I never had to give it a thought. And I spend a lot of time in Europe and I feel humiliated about two-thirds of the time when I'm hanging out with my Swiss friends. It's like, okay, what language do we want to speak? French, German, English? Schweizerdeutsch? Or maybe I could go into Italian? And I say, well, here I am. It's going to be English. Pretty clear, it's going to be English.

So this sense of real appreciation for people who have to navigate that—that was one thing.

And the other was what it's like not to be able to learn so easily, or to know what's going on, or to read so easily. That hadn't been my particular problem in school. It was here. So just appreciating that, getting outside of the comfort zone.

Anyway, it was amazing to me, the emotional stuff that was getting brought up. We'd be paired up, and I knew no one wanted to work with Granny because—I mean, they were respectful, but I didn't know what the heck I was doing, basically.

That's why they didn't want to work with me. Half the time I wouldn't even understand the exercise. Still, I'd learn things, and then I would spend all afternoon doing my homework. That's what I was there for, and that was all fine.

And then after the second day or so, I woke up and thought, "Why am I doing this? Nobody else cares. I'm doing this for me. And this is horrendous. I could just cut and run. I'm not going to learn enough German that my German friends will even know the difference if I did it or not."

But then I thought, "No, this is really for resolution." I'm just going to do it. And it became my practice. I said, "I'm going to do it. Everything that comes up around it is the practice."

So every morning I'd get up early and sit. Every day was different. Some days I was fine—I just went down and it was kind of interesting. Some days I woke up in a panic. Some days I woke up feeling like the stupidest person on earth. Some days, whatever. But I just made the commitment: I'm going to do it. I'm going to be with whatever comes up. I'm not going late. I'm not leaving early. I'm not missing a day. That's just it.

And I learned so much about the power of resolution. It brings us into the ability to be with all the other stuff that's going on. You really see the emptiness of all of it—all of it. You can do what's important to do while the mind's doing all its stuff, and you're embarrassed. Okay, embarrassment's like this—that's okay. You can make a choice for the greater good.

So that was really a huge learning for me about this quality of determination.

I'll close with one other story of determination, on a bit broader scale, from the biography of a teacher who really inspired me and many of my friends. He died just a few years ago—a Chinese Chan master, Master Sheng Yen. A really very profound teacher, but also in who he was: so kind, so relational. I just had the good fortune to sit maybe two retreats with him, one in Switzerland and one in upstate New York at his center.

He was so kind. The second time I went, even with so many students, he recognized me and called me by name right away. Then you find out that in Taiwan he has a huge monastery with tens of thousands of students and nuns and monks. He's like the Thich Nhat Hanh of Taiwan—a huge teacher. But so kind, with

such deep teachings.

He wrote an autobiography. I'm really condensing it here. He grew up in mainland China, in the 1920s or so—a very hard life, a lot of suffering, not enough food, very harsh.

And as a young man, he became a monk in the Chan monasteries. It was tough, really tough—not even having enough food, working extremely hard. I won't go into the whole story, but he became a very devoted monk, deeply committed to his practice and to the monastic life.

In 1949, there was civil war in China, which made conditions even worse. When Mao Zedong and the communists won the civil war, he was living in a monastery in Shanghai. He realized his only chance to remain a monk was to get out of mainland China to Taiwan. He had no money, nothing. The only way he could escape to Taiwan was to join Chiang Kai-shek's army, who would bring him over. So that's what he did—a monk joining the army to get to Taiwan.

He had to disrobe. But he says, "In my mind, in my heart, I was always a monk." It wasn't as though he could simply arrive in Taiwan and say, "Thanks a lot, I'm leaving the army now." That was not an option at all. He said it was extremely difficult to get out of the military. For ten years he was in the army, yet in his heart, always being a monk.

One of his rules of training was to be vegetarian, but the army food wasn't vegetarian. As much as he could, he would eat around the meat, taking only the vegetables, until sometimes he was truly starving, really unhealthy. Only at that point would he eat a little meat. But then he would feel that was an unwholesome act. The way he worked with his unwholesome karma was through prostrations—he would do many prostrations, not from a sense of "I'm bad, I have to do this," but as a way of devotion, of bringing in wholesome energy in his mind.

He had no teacher. He had no support. After some years, he began to find teachers. And finally—without going into the whole story—somebody helped him find a way to get out of the army after ten years. It was really unusual; he said it was extremely rare that anyone managed to leave that branch of the military. But he got out, and immediately went on a six-year retreat.

A quotation from him: "Looking back, I realize that if I did not have a very strong determination to return to monastic life, I probably would not have succeeded. Getting out of that particular branch of the military was nearly impossible."

Determination—but just moment to moment. The determination to be a monk in his heart.

We never know where it's going to go. Maybe what seems impossible can become possible with a combination of faith, determination, and of course our mindfulness practice.

Thank you. Let's sit quietly for a moment.

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