Aspiration and Resolution

Carol Wilson · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Carol Wilson · 54:56

I just thought I'd offer a few reflections inspired by a list I read from Dilgo Khyentse called "An Explanation of the Practice as a Way of Life." It's called The Five Strengths—five qualities that really support practice, waking up in our life. The five strengths are the power of resolution, the power of familiarization, the power of wholesome seeds, the power of disenchantment (nibbida), and the power of aspiration. I took the list, but what I'm talking about has nothing to do with anything he said. I just like the list, and then my own thoughts emerged from it. Mostly I'm going to put together resolution and aspiration and focus on that.

My idea is this: since the conditions we're in will be changing more radically than they usually do day to day in a couple of days, we're all faced with continuing to cultivate and trust and develop our moment-to-moment awareness as the conditions get more demanding or louder—more things coming. As the demands come, how can we continue to support ourselves? Really, our resolution and aspiration is the main thing. There are ten million different ways to help us remember, but what's really at the core is the commitment, the resolution, and our aspiration to awaken.

There's a line from Thich Nhat Hanh I read way back in the beginning of my practice, but I often think of it in terms of continuing to commit myself to a life of Dharma, of awakening. He said: "Do not let yourself be colonized by society." I think of that so much. Not to be negative—it's just so easy for us to fall into the habits and patterns that we grew up with, that we're used to, and that are coming at us from every direction. Not to be fearful, but just to be realistic.

The more we continue to commit to the habit of awakening, to the path of awakening, the more we're really bringing it into our life, the more we're aware in our life. In my experience, the more wisdom, the more awareness there is, the more is called forth from us. In some ways, life is more harmonious, but in other ways, we're really opening much more deeply to the way things are—which is all beauty, but also our own suffering and confusion. We become more empathic, more connected. We can't just close off to the confusion of the world, but we meet it with a wisdom eye, not just overwhelmed—usually—but sometimes.

I've found that the more we practice, the more faith there is, the more aspiration, the more commitment. But that's because more is called for. I don't know anyone who's really practicing who says practice just gets easier. We trust it more. It becomes more who we are. It becomes more our way of being. In that way, it's absolutely easier. It's not like you go for a week and then think, "Oh yeah, right, awareness. Oh yeah, right, the Dharma. Oh, the precepts—I remember that." It just becomes part of our being. In that way, it's

easier. It doesn't even feel like practice. It's more who we are.

There's another line, I think from Dilgo Khyentse, that stays in my mind: mingling our mind, mingling our hearts with the Dharma so that we die without any thought of Dharma in our mind. What that means to me is we don't have to think about Dharma, because that's what we are.

So I've found that the more practice becomes part of who we are, the more we're motivated to keep finding ways to recommit, to call up our resolution, to call up our aspiration—rather than just thinking, "Oh no, now the retreat's faded, and I have to wait for the next retreat." In fact, it stops being about retreat or not retreat. It's about recognizing we don't have to do this alone, and we can't do it alone. Don't be afraid to find ways.

And that's what I want to talk about: ways to truly re-inspire ourselves, get in touch with our aspiration again, find that energy of resolution just to keep going. So that's where I want to begin—resolution, and then resolution in terms of aspiration, those two together. I'll say a few things about the other three if there's time at the end.

I could give a whole talk on resolution. It's a fascinating quality of mind, a translation of the Pali word *adh iṭṭhāna*. It's a mental quality—not like an idea, not your New Year's resolution where you make some concept: "I'm going to go to the gym every day." We know how that works. That's just an idea in the mind, a thing, a concept.

Resolution in this talk is one of the *pāramīs* when combined with wisdom. It's a quality of heart-mind. Just like greed, just like *samādhi*, just like *mettā*, we can recognize and become familiar with the presence or absence of this quality of resolution in the mind. I find it so interesting because it's not something I ever thought about or recognized in my regular life, or even in the first years of my practice. But actually tuning into it has been very helpful when I remember. It can be very helpful.

The way it's described is as a steadiness of purpose. It's a mind that is unwavering in the face of disappointment and discouragement—it just keeps going steady. They give the image of something steadfast, like an upright stone pillar. But I think that's not exactly the best image because it sounds inflexible, like "That's my New Year's resolution, I'm going to do it by gum no matter what." And that could be aversion. It could be a little disconnected. It might not have wisdom.

So it sounds inflexible, but it's not. It's a quality of mind that collects our dispersed energy, collects our scattered commitments and brings them together with a focus and a sense of just moving onward, doing what needs to be done.

We know how to do things. We know how to do things that are difficult, that require energy, that require commitment. But often, before we tune into resolution—just in our normal life, and we see this at the beginning of practice—the way we know how to do things is really by pushing or striving. Or there could be a little tinge of aversion. Maybe, I don't know, you've got to get up every day and make breakfast for the

kids. That could be different on different days. For one thing, you have to do it—pretty much you've got to get up and feed the kids. But that could be done with *mettā*, done just with love. It could be done with aversion. It could be done with lots of different things.

Or coming on retreat. Getting up every morning on retreat. As you know, you could have lots of different mental states. So what's the quality of mind that keeps one getting up, going through the routine, doing the sittings, doing the walkings? That could come from striving. It could come from trying to look good. It could come from a real commitment, but with this energy of aversion pushing behind it. You know what I mean, right?

But the sense that comes with resolution doesn't have that overtone of striving or being disconnected or aversion. It's actually very calm, collected. I call it, in my experience, the opposite of dithering. "Should I do this or should I do that? Should I get up?" You know how exhausting that is?

I've used this in other talks, but the example where I really saw it in my life these last few years: in the morning before breakfast, especially when I'm coming up to teach and I'm on a schedule, I do about fifteen minutes of qigong. I enjoy qigong—fifteen minutes just helps me connect. Here too, but sometimes at home when I don't have a schedule, it's actually even harder.

But I would just sit on the couch and think, should I have the tea first? Maybe I'll just have some tea. Should I do the qigong? Well, why not? I could do it later. After breakfast, I could do it. And it's just dithering. Should I or shouldn't I? But no, I'll just sit another few minutes.

And then when I recognize resolution, it's just kind of the energy—just do it. In fact, that's really what it feels like. Just do it. You just get up and do it. It's not forcing. It's really a relief. Because instead of the energy going back and forth—that's really exhausting, sitting on the couch and dithering. Should I have tea? Should I do this? Should I get up? Should I lie in bed five more minutes? I mean, that's horrible, isn't it? And on and on and on. And by the time you get up, you feel lousy.

So sometimes U Tejaniya used to just hold up the Nike swish. Just do it. He would just hold it up. Just do it—without any kind of aversion or judgment.

It collects the dispersed energy. It's really a very interesting quality. It's a relief, and we can feel it. You can actually feel it. Just do it. It collects it. You do it. The mind is calm. It's not going in all these directions. You're not thinking about should I or shouldn't I. Not anything. It's just the energy's there, and you do it.

This is a very accessible quality of heart and mind that we can consciously tune into. We all know it, but we can consciously tune into it. It's one of the ten pāramīs in the Theravada tradition when it's supported by wisdom.

On its own, resolution is like an ethically neutral quality of mind, meaning that in the moment of kāja, in the moment of citta, it could be paired with unwholesome states. Like you could really have a lot of

resolution to go and do something unwholesome—to do something really greedy, to rob a bank, to do whatever. You could have a lot of resolution. But that's not the pāramī.

When it's combined with wholesome aspiration, that's different. Or it can be neutral, like me doing qigong. It's not super wholesome. It's not unwholesome. It's just kind of neutral, calm. There's equanimity. So that would be wholesome. That would be a pāramī. It doesn't mean the resolution has to be to go save the world. It's just combined with a wholesome mental factor.

But in terms of our life of practice, in terms of working together as supported by paññā, wisdom—or if you translate wisdom as discernment, I find that really helpful. Because the discernment can go along with perhaps a wholesome intention of compassion or a wholesome intention of strengthening the body. But the discernment is also about seeing if the appropriate conditions are there for the resolve.

Like I'm sitting here—I could make a resolve to go into fourth jhāna right now. That would not happen because the conditions aren't here. And we often, without the discernment of wisdom—and in practice we can really do this—we collect the energy: "Yes, now I'm going to do this." But the conditions totally aren't there.

I like the example of jhāna as a specific state because, as Sayadaw Tejaniya says, there are very specific conditions we can see in the mind and body that support the arising of one-pointed concentration. Wanting it to happen is not one of them. If we could just remember that and really believe it, it would save so much suffering.

When I first started thinking about the wisdom and discernment that goes with resolution, I considered the story of the Buddha's life and the story of Buddhism—the big resolution he made when he sat down under the Bodhi tree and said, "I'm not getting up until I'm completely awakened," in whatever language he was using. And it happened that night. So somehow he had the discernment to know. He didn't do it six years prior. The first thing he did when he went out as a renunciate wasn't to sit under the Bodhi tree and declare, "I'm not getting up until I'm fully awakened." No, he went through six years of incredible practice and seeking—concentration practice, starving himself, really finding the way. And when he did have the discernment to sit under the tree, that was really coming from wisdom about the conditions, and from faith and trust in what he knew. I think that's always been really interesting for me to consider.

I'm thinking of this because of the last time I was in Bodh Gaya. We were visiting Dipa Ma—it was the year before she died. She was a very deeply practiced Bengali woman, about this tall, really tiny, a little grandmother. And she was so—not fierce, but just really committed. She said to Joseph, "Joseph, you should sit for a weekend." And he said, "Oh, yeah." She said, "No, sit for a weekend. Sit down for the weekend and don't get up." He just started laughing. She said, "Don't be lazy." She meant that from her ability, from her practice. For her, that was not a crazy thing to say. For him, maybe a different thing—I can't speak for him. I don't know if he did it or not.

So that's the sense of resolution—when it's supported by or when it's supporting our aspiration, not just in practice but in our life, the aspiration that we bring to our dharma life. When I say practice, I don't mean formal sitting and walking. And I don't really mean being on retreat. I really mean, at this point, the way we've been here and the way I'm talking now—I really mean our life of commitment to Dharma. And I want to say commitment to awakening, but that might not be your aspiration. I'm not here to tell you what your aspiration should be.

But I want to talk about how supportive it is to keep tuning into what one's aspiration is. Because it has been—you all know it—and it will again get hard or flat, become just a memory where you're not feeling connected to the wakeful energy. And instead of going, "Oh no, I can't do it," really taking the time to reflect, to tune in to what is truly, truly important to you in your life and in your life of Dharma—which hopefully stops being a separate life—and really allowing ourselves to feel it deeply.

Because aspiration is different from expectation. Aspiration is really this heart-mind sense of, as I said, what's truly important, what's possible, why we're practicing—whatever words you want to use. And when it's aspiration, the quality it brings to our heart and mind uplifts. It uplifts our energy.

It uplifts our heart. It brightens the heart and mind. It strengthens faith. And that faith strengthens our willingness to show up again.

We might think, "Okay, this might be a really hard thing that's going on in my mind, a really hard response to something in the world. Can I have another moment of confidence in awareness? Can I have confidence in cultivating the wholesome instead of just going down the old rabbit hole of habit?"

So aspiration, when we touch it, really brightens this for us. It helps us in whatever way is appropriate to how we practice. It's different from wanting or expectation. But I know it's easy, the way we think about things, to get confused.

Because aspiration could be, say for example, to completely awaken from suffering. That could be one's aspiration. And the way our minds work, we can think, "Well, that's a goal, right?" It is looking at a possibility. If there was no possibility—if it was like, "Just practice and nothing's ever going to change, your mind's going to stay the same as it is, we're just going to fluff around, it's hopeless, but keep on practicing"—we need a little sense of what's possible.

But that's like a sense of, "Oh yeah, that's possible." And the aspiration feeds the willingness to be here now, to completely surrender into this moment with awareness and wisdom.

But when that same aspiration—to fully awaken in this lifetime, whatever it is—when the quality of mind relating to it turns, as it will at times, into a subtle yearning or expecting or judging or measuring how far to go, anything like that... you get a sense that instead of completely surrendering into wakefulness here, it has started leaning forward. And that's the little movement that gets all of samsara going again.

But you can tell it's different from the quality of aspiration because it isn't uplifting. It's like, "Oh no, it's hopeless. Why am I doing this? This is useless." I don't have to go down that road. You can tell the difference. It really isn't that subtle when it gets going.

Because that can be a habit of our mind, don't use that habit as a reason not to really land in your aspiration. I think it's so important not to be afraid, to really open to—in your own heart and mind, you don't have to tell anybody else, you don't have to write it on the bulletin board—but in your own heart and mind, really touch into: What's most important to me?

We know the habits get triggered quickly. We know that we can lose the sense of faith. But truly tuning back into the aspiration can change that. Give yourself time to do that again and again, especially when we feel lost. That's what can get the faith going.

When we're in touch with our aspiration—say the aspiration is to awaken in this life—whatever way you are practicing, working with awareness or cultivating concentration, this aspiration is supported by the quality of resolution. Because it's not that you make an aspiration and that's it, right? It's every moment.

There's a saying I read years ago from some teacher, one Buddhist teacher, saying: in every moment the mind is committing to something. The question is, to what?

If we look at that with interest—and you have to look at it with interest, not with judgment—when we see "to what?" we'll find it's things like: I want to take a rest. I'm a little bit hungry. This is too much trouble. What's it connecting to? We look and see.

It's moment after moment after moment.

So the idea, the connection in your heart-mind with your aspiration—even if it's just a feeling, it might not even be words—but that can support the resolution to the little choices we make, the bigger choices. Not every single moment. Don't make yourself nuts. But just really seeing in the little choices, "Oh, what's my aspiration?" I mean, that already feels like too much.

But a lot of people here have described just an exploring in ways that were interesting. Seeing something in a little moment that wasn't important in life, but in that little moment seeing craving come up where they didn't expect it. "Oh, look at that. That's craving for that." The craving was seen with awareness and could just go. That kind of thing.

The resolution, the willingness to meet it with awareness, to be interested. Remembering that again and again and again. The resolution to when we have bigger problems, choices that we have to make. And we never know what's going to happen whichever choice we make. Quite a few people have brought up needing to make some kind of choice and just seeing all the stuff that goes on with that, all the thinking.

And somehow there can be this secret belief: if you make the right choice, everything works out. And if you make the wrong choice, it's just all dukkha. It's like we keep thinking that there's some fairyland

where everything is going to work out. Forget about it.

But when we're tuning into aspiration, what I find is that it helps us more easily align with checking what's the motivation as we make the choice, rather than looking for the result of what we want. Checking in with awareness, tuning into the present moment, letting the decision—even just a little one—come out of awareness and out of wholesomeness when we see it. So the resolution just gives us the strength of mind to do it. Or to get up and do the Qigong. Or in a day—I'm not saying you need to sit every day—but it's really helpful just to remember awareness.

I was talking about Thich Nhat Hanh one night, maybe it was the first night, where he was talking about just coming home to ourselves. And I found that just in daily life, if I just sit down—and that just happens to be the posture, sometimes I'll do walking—it could be for thirty seconds. But that commitment of taking the posture, in a way it's like taking the quality in the mind. It's really reminding my mind, "Oh yeah, awareness is the main thing here." It's more important than getting my toast right away. It's more important than whatever. It's not saying it, but just doing it. Just doing it. This is where the resolution really supports us. It's just simple. It makes it easier. But I'm saying it so we can call it up to our minds sometimes. We need to call it up to our minds, and we can do that.

So tuning in for yourself again and again. What's the aspiration? What lights up your heart and mind? What keeps you going? What's kept you going this month? What will keep us going on this path as we continue?

Ajahn Sucitto was saying once, he was going on about faith, and he said, "It's such a beautiful aspiration to transform one's consciousness." He said, "So few people in this world seem to have that aspiration." And it really takes faith—trust and confidence in the truth of the teachings, the truth of the path, or confidence in awareness, or however you want to say it. Confidence in your own commitment, in your own practice. It really takes connecting again with the aspiration and confidence because it's so easy to fall into skeptical doubt.

It's just the information that's coming in from so many other avenues. If we're just kind of—not that you have to be on your guard—but if we're just kind of really not quite aware, which often we're not, it gets in and starts feeding the old habits. And then you find yourself all caught up and go, "Wait a minute." Just—I say sit. It doesn't matter if you sit. It's just take a moment. What's happening now?

Right. Awareness. Being really present with things as they are—so much more helpful on the path than giving in to skeptical doubt. We might say, "Oh no, I'm lost again. It's all over." No. Recommit. Reconnect with the aspiration.

So what works for you to discover, to rediscover? It takes a lot of humility, right, and courage. You just keep beginning again, rediscovering. You say, "Okay, I got really lost in this reactivity for this day, for this week, for whatever it was." But now's now. Meeting this with humility, rediscovering—that's beautiful.

That's not a failure. Trusting that, seeing what helps.

In my life, in the last few years, I've been realizing how much support I get for reconnecting with aspiration and with the reality of the potential for awakening by consciously tuning in to other people, dead or alive, that are inspirational. Really, this sense that we don't have to do it alone. And in fact, it's too hard to do it alone. We always talk about sangha, living sangha, and of course that's wonderful when we have it. But even more than that, I've been consciously reminding myself—and I'll give some examples, because I like to talk about it for one thing, and I get to, but it's also really supportive.

One is just sometimes consciously reflecting on your particular lineage. As far back, all the beings who've been real teachers for you—it could be in this form, it could be in another form. Just right now, my old piano teacher when I was in elementary school popped into mind. She was a Christian Scientist. She was like a pseudo-grandmother. But there was a way that she really inspired me toward goodness and love. I hadn't thought about her in ages. That just arose now. But we all have lineages like that. And it can also be the lineage back to the Buddha, whatever it is. But consciously calling on it, instead of our kind of Western notion that we're independent, we do it all by ourselves—as if that's intelligent.

Really, thinking about whatever your particular lineage is, it can be devotional or not. I'm not a particularly devotional type, so I wasn't doing this for a long time. But when I think about different teachers of mine, especially when I'm on retreat and the mind is quieter and you can kind of feel them in your heart, I feel so much gratitude and appreciation. And then just using that gratitude as this wholesome energy to restrengthen, to recommit to our aspiration, to turn our energy back into cultivating what we value.

I've also thought often of different beings alive in my life on the path—people I share the path with or that I've met. And it's not that they have to be extraordinarily realized. When Menandria spoke about Ujjayanta the other night, that really hit me as very inspiring. It took me back to this place in Sagaing where I've been every year for twenty years. And it really touched me, but it also reminded me of other beings that truly inspire me.

I'll share a couple of stories to make a point: it doesn't have to be someone who seems incredibly enlightened. There are so many people one might come in touch with who have various aspects that are incredibly inspiring. And inspiring in the way that it touches that potential in our own heart and mind. It wakes that up. That's, I think, why it's inspiring.

So one of the nuns I know from Burma—a few of us would go every year and offer support. I visited her, so I happened to know her story. When she was about nineteen or twenty, she was really, really ill. Her family was a farming family in the country. She wanted to become a nun, but they wouldn't let her. Actually, a lot of the nuns had parents who didn't want them to go be nuns. Her parents wouldn't allow it. She became so ill she was almost dying. The parents were having to call doctors.

There are many stories of families that use all their money on medical care for one member of the family. This just happens all the time. So they were doing that, and then they were about to have to sell their house and their farm. She convinced them to let her go be a nun if her sister would come too. This was because her faith was so strong. She's someone who has really strong faith, and as I said, her practice is powerful – mostly at this time, Buddhānussati, which is really reflecting on the qualities of the Buddha. This would brighten her mind and heart and bring forth this faith, which would bring steadfast resolution. She was committed because she felt so much faith in wanting to be a nun that it would heal her.

So her sister and she both got ordained when they were about nineteen or twenty. She showed us in her little nunnery – at this point started with a small bamboo nunnery near Shwe Oo Min, near Yangon – they had a little Buddha rupa. There's always a Buddha rupa in any nunnery or monastery. And she said, "This is the first one we bought." She said, "When I cut my hair, which was really long and beautiful, I could sell it. And we used that to buy this Buddha rupa." They were so proud of it. It was just so touching.

She did get well. She amazingly did get well, because this happened maybe twenty years ago. Then she and her sister came to Yangon and went into a nunnery or a meditation center, usually run by monks, by a Sayadaw. They really wanted to meditate, to really reach Nibbana. So they were there meditating for some months.

And then from her home village down in the country, the head Sayadaw of the village – each village would have that Sayadaw, the monk teacher – said to her, "There are a bunch of poor young girls, either orphans or only have one parent, and their parents want them to get schooling but can't support them." This happens so much there with nuns. And he said, "I'm sending them up to you to take care of." They didn't ask for this. But this is just what happens.

So she made a complete 180-degree turn. She left the meditation place, went and got a tiny little piece of land, probably got the money from their parents. This was near Shwe Oo Min. They started by building a tiny little bamboo hut, and the young girls came – like ten of them, fifteen of them. And then the two sisters were completely devoting their lives to taking care of these girls. They become little nunlets, so cute, taking care of them and supporting them so they can go to school. All of the support is on dāna – the rice they receive and a little bit of money on dāna to take care of these girls.

This is not an unusual story. You can go to hundreds of places like this. But we happened to know Daw Tara and speak with her. The sense was that it was a real 180-degree turn. They wanted to meditate, but now this is the path. She was so committed to these girls. "We want to give them the chance to have a wholesome life. They don't have to stay nuns after they grow up, but we want to give them the chance" – basically, not to have to go on the street. She didn't talk like that, but essentially, not to starve completely.

You can see the affection. You can see the care. You can see the love. And it wasn't like, "We're doing this until they're gone and then we're out of here." Because it's never going to happen – they keep sending new

young ones.

But the tenderness, the generosity, and the absolute commitment to this path—to me this is really inspiring as an example of how your life is your path. It's all about awakening.

At the same time, Dodra, who is kind of the smarter one, is studying to be a Dhammacharya, which is the path available for the simple nuns—someone who doesn't have a lot of education and not a big place or a lot of support. It's a Pali Dhamma training that takes years and years of study for these nuns, kind of like five years of successive tests. I know many nuns who may be studying this for ten or fifteen years before they manage to pass it, but it's a huge big deal when they do. So she's been studying this, and she did finally pass it.

But this sense of just the complete giving over, out of generosity and love—but it's the Dharma practice. It's the awakening practice. It's not something else. So that was very inspiring to me.

Another friend, who I don't want to name, I've known for maybe thirty years—not a Burmese person—of practice and really committed to practice, and like a normal person, like all of us, with hard times, hard mind, hard life. This person ordained as a Burmese nun I think it must be seventeen or eighteen years ago now. I know her really well. We work together with a couple other friends, and we offer support to nuns in Burma. So she's spent a lot of time in Burma, but not all the time there.

Watching her really closely over these years of being a really committed nun—in the Burmese tradition, they don't get much support. She can't stay there all the time. She's a homeless nun. She has to leave, but now she can't even get back in. They wouldn't even give her a visa this year.

Watching her over these years, I can't even know how hard it's been, how demanding. And it's not that it was a natural fit with her personality. So there are a couple times when it's so hard, and I say, "Why are you still doing this?" She says, "Because I really want to purify my heart and mind. And this is how I'm seeing, this is how I'm doing it." And she is doing it. It's really so inspiring.

When I think about it—I'm just used to being around her and I don't always think about it—but when I think about what she's gone through in all these years, and it gets easier and it doesn't, the situations keep changing, it's really inspiring to see what someone can do. Talk about resolution. This woman has incredible resolution and incredible aspiration. And it's really been work. It's not like, "Oh yes, I'm just a nun and everything's fine." It's been work. Very, very inspiring to me.

So think, see who comes to your mind, who inspires you, who really can wake up this energy. It really touches me just to see these people. And then it wakes that up in us. And they're regular people. Don't make them into something like, "Oh, I could never do that." They're regular people. Everywhere you look.

One other nun—Dasumanachari. The first time I ever went to Shwayumen, I don't know, 2006 or something, there was another nun with a little nunnery right around the corner. There's a lot in that little

area. A poor nunnery. A little nunnery. A friend took me there first because the friend was offering money so that she could put electricity into her place at this time.

We knew her over the years. Fine, she's a little bit depressive, but there's a nunnery with about twenty nuns and just doing their thing. And then one year—I'm not sure how long ago, maybe ten or fifteen years—she came by when we were all there, usually there in the winter. Friends give us money and we're offering money to different nunneries.

She knew that, and we offered her money. She came to us before we left and said, "I really have this vision." She's speaking in Burmese, but one of our friends translates. "I really want to open a school for poor kids."

Some of the nuns do this because—and this was even before the civil war—a lot of poor kids couldn't afford to go to the government schools, even though they're supposedly free. So some nuns and some monks start Sangha schools that are free for the children. To have the school means that nunnery or monastery is running the whole operation on the dana that they're offered. They hire teachers at a regular rate. They have to have donations to build the building or the lean-to or whatever they need to keep it going. They raise money even for the uniforms for the kids—all on dana.

So she came and said she had this vision to start this school. Like I said, she's... you wouldn't have seen that as a possibility in her. And what we offered was not nearly enough to do it, but it was kind of a seed starter.

We came back the next year, and it's still running now. She came and she had done it. She'd started this school—I think at that time she had 150 little kids, up through what we'd say fourth or fifth grade, that would come every day. She was having to hire teachers. They don't get a huge amount of money, but she's hiring the teachers. She had given up most of the living space for the nuns. They'd moved into the one little building and built a big, open-air lean-to and gotten money for desks and gotten some support from organizations in Burma that offer assistance. Some big companies used to have a little wing that would be like a donation generosity wing, and they'd offer money to nuns and monks and schools and such.

So she came and she had this thing going, and it's gotten only much, much bigger. And she—this is the point—she was like transformed. She was just glowing. She had so much more work, so much more responsibility, because it's all on her. But she was filled with light.

What she said was, "It's so much responsibility. I have to raise all this money and the buildings. I'm exhausted." But she was radiant. She said, "Now my citta is calm. My mind is calm. My mind is peaceful." And it was really true. You could see it. And it wasn't a one-off thing. Every year it's bigger, and she has more going on, more teachers, more students. It's really amazing to see the aspiration married to the resolution, and really that coming from the faith, and the generosity coming from the faith. I think she's one who practices Buddhānussati, just looking at the qualities of the Buddha—that really brings up her

faith.

So just seeing what's possible. Really tuning in. That helps me. That helps me to reconnect with aspiration, to bring up this energy.

I know I have to mention the other three really quickly. But I just want to say other ways, some that we've mentioned. Like when I mentioned the Buddha saying to contemplate your sīla, to contemplate your acts of generosity—really take time and tune into that. Previous acts in your life of wholesomeness. Or even just tuning into, as some people have mentioned, thinking, "Where am I going with this practice?" And then reflect on the last ten years of your life, or how things were before you started practicing. Really let that come in so that our faith in the Dhamma, in the Buddha Dhamma, the faith in the truth of how things are, and that that transforms how we are with life and how we live—you can't overvalue that. I think it never hurts us to do it again and again and again. Whether it's reading, whether it's being in nature, whether it's listening to the ten million things available online or videos you can see—that can be inspiring.

I would say show some care when you're choosing what to engage with. Not just anything. There's a lot of garbage out there too. But really pay attention to what's inspiring for you. Notice what the effect is. If it's just making you feel envious or critical, that's not helpful. For now, put it down. See what's feeding the wholesome. That's really what matters. Strengthen that.

Find ways to give attention to your intention as you're doing things. Mingyur Rinpoche mentions this, but many teachers do. Just noticing, say, the intention of generosity. Contemplate that in your heart. Feel how lovely it feels, the intention of generosity. And then when you're doing little activities, you could consciously bring in the motivation of generosity. If you have a service job, consciously infuse it with that motivation. "I'm cleaning the floor. May all the yogis and the staff appreciate the clean floor."

My first three-month retreat I sat, my job for a month was cleaning the toilets. And I really got into it. It just made me happy to make clean toilets for everyone to use. That's not an ego thing. That's having wholesome motivation as we do things. It transforms activities.

The Buddha himself, when talking about generosity in different suttas—there's one where he says to the monks and nuns, when you rinse your bowl after eating and throw the dirty water into a little pond, even then you can think, "May whatever beings live in this pond be able to eat from the rinsings of this bowl." That's an act of generosity. How much does that take? Just remembering. I think of that teaching all the time.

Consider how different our life becomes. Instead of "Oh God, I have to clean the floor again," we think, "May beings really appreciate this floor." It's no more work. It's actually less work. And it's really feeding the wholesome. So that's just another idea I'm offering.

One last thing I want to say: please don't be shy or afraid to really connect with your aspiration. Let it be

what's true for you. Not "Oh, I couldn't have the aspiration to awaken. I'm just a little nobody." That's not serving you or anybody else. It's just an ego thing.

When you feel that sense of inspiration, dhamma inspiration, just let it come up. That's all you have to do. Just tune in. Don't be afraid. The Buddha said two things he never lost sight of: not to shrink back from the difficult, and not to rest contented merely with wholesome states of mind. I like that. It's not a "should," but it's recognizing when we hit that place of "okay, this is good enough" and come out of retreat thinking "this is good enough." That's the trouble though—how long does it stay good enough? Something always happens. Not to rest content with merely wholesome states of mind.

But as I think Andrea said the other day, he also said, "If it were not possible, I would not ask you to do so." So see what's true, but don't sell yourself short. Let the aspiration be as vast as the Dhamma is vast, because we are the Dhamma.

So I just mentioned the power of familiarization, which is basically being familiar with our practice—in this case, familiarity with awareness—so that we really have confidence in it, we recognize it.

We've been spending the month of your practice recognizing it. Familiarization with how the mind feels when it's lost in aversion and greed, how it feels when it's free from kilesa—those moments of coolness that Andrea mentioned, that Ajahn Buddhadasa speaks of, those moments when the heart-mind is free from kilesa. Familiarization with those moments. They happen a lot. They happen in life. We can recognize those. We can know we've experienced this, we know awareness is able to be with anything. We're familiar with that. We can call on that to remind us, to strengthen our faith, to keep us going.

Wholesome seeds—well, we've talked about that. Just cultivating the wholesome, cultivating sila, cultivating generosity, really strengthening those qualities in heart and mind, as I read the other night. Even that has the effect of really uprooting the asavas, the kilesas. It's not like we practice generosity so that we'll have a good rebirth or something. The moment of generosity is the moment of non-clinging—the moment of non-clinging to sense of self or things. Just tune in. In a moment of generosity, the heart is happy. It's open. There's a sense—not even connection, but self and other, that delineation is much more gone. Real generosity, you know. Whatever it is, even if it's just a smile. It's a powerful practice of freeing the heart and mind from greed. Sila, the same in its way. We've talked about that before, but not to think that's just an ancillary practice to get ready for the real thing. It is awakening practice.

And the fourth, nibbida, which is often translated as dispassion. Let's translate it that way—not translated as disgust, as it's sometimes rendered. All these negative translations, you know, from back in the 1900s or whenever it was.

I wrote a little piece about nibbida. Disenchantment is actually a very peaceful, a very calm and peaceful and spacious quality of heart-mind. It's described as losing one's taste for, or not delighting in the flavor—really losing one's taste for the fascination with all our experience and the fascination with sense

pleasures. We're often experiencing this: losing the fascination, losing our taste for the narrowness that comes with our self-centered perception and self-centered way of living. And after a while, it's not every moment, but there are moments where it's just, "Yeah, what about me?" It feels so unpleasant, so separating, and kind of the nibbida just puts it down. It's not disgust, but the mind just loses the taste for it. There's no nourishment there.

The example that's often given is of a dog that's really hungry, and it finds this bone that's been bleached in the sun for ten years. And it's gnawing on the bone, but there's absolutely no nourishment there—no marrow, no nothing. And so it just puts it down and goes away. That's nibbida. It's actually a cool, settled, and clear moment of heart and mind. It really comes from a lot of wisdom. And sometimes it arises just naturally from wisdom.

Contemplation and reflection, at times, can support it. Reflecting on—say, I'm getting all involved in something, and suddenly: this is all about clinging. It's all about me. Not a judgment, but just feeling that. The contemplation of the complications that come from following on this wanting, from this doing. It's just a reflection. And the mind goes, "I don't need to do that. The peace is so much more." The mind just inclines to peace. It's a lovely experience.

Or the other way that's mentioned is consciously inclining the mind towards the peace, the peace of Nibbana. There's this saying of the Buddha's that I like a lot. He says, "Here, Ananda, having gone to the forest, to the foot of a tree, or an empty hut, a practitioner reflects thus: This is peaceful. This is sublime."

That is the stilling of formations, the relinquishment of all acquisitions, the ending of craving, cessation, Nibbana.

Even momentary. Just incline the mind in a moment. What can I do now instead of that? Ah. This is peaceful. Just in this moment, the relinquishing of acquisitions. No formations arising. The ending of craving is peaceful.

That's something we can familiarize ourselves with—just noticing that more. It's not going to be fed too much in the regular daily culture. But this is what we can support in our lives.

So those are just some reflections, hopefully in some way helpful in your ongoing practice.

Thank you for your kind attention.

Let's share the blessings that we are so fortunate to receive with all beings.

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