08. Adhiṭṭhāna — Resolution

Bhante Bodhidhamma · DhammaBytes · 13:44

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Homage to the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

So we're on number eight now of our perfections, our *pāramī*, those that take us to the other shore. It's resolution, *adhiṭṭhāna* — A-D-H-I-T-T-H-A-N-A, just in case you want to know. *Ṭhāna* means position or place, your standing ground, and *adhi* just reinforces it — resolute resolution, enormous resolve.

This is mirrored in the Buddha's life just before he became fully liberated. You remember the story: he left home, finding the household life had become empty because of this problem of meaninglessness. It would have been expressed in those days as constant rebirth — constantly having to come back and do the same thing all over again. The same thing, slightly different story, but always being born, growing up, going old and dying, and that constant thing is reincarnation.

He then went out to try and find an answer to this end of suffering, as he would call it — something hard to bear, unsatisfactoriness, a fundamental unsatisfactoriness. And he tried all that business of developing absorption states, for they would disappear inside. And he tried self-mortification, and it just got very thin. And eventually he had that inspiration coming from childhood, the way that child gets wrapped into something and yet has that curiosity. So that was his inspiration, and he went to sit under this tree, what we now call the Bodhi tree, the fig tree, the religious fig tree. And he made a determination: either to crack this problem or to die.

That was the great determination, and it took him six hours. So it's mirrored in his life as that moment when he'd come to an end and he thought, well, either this is it or what's the point. He was going to sit there until he dropped dead.

This comes as one of the great virtues, and you have to make a distinction between an intention and the intentioned. The English word "intention" has this double meaning of meaning a wish — I have an intention to go — and I intended to do it, meaning that you actually made an act of will. That's why we always make a distinction between the desire that arises and the empowerment of that desire. These are two moments — two moments.

So even in simple things like a cup of tea, it comes up as a desire and nothing happens until you empower it. Normally speaking, it's habitual — we just go and do it. But what meditation, what our mindfulness should do, daily mindfulness, is to make us more and more aware of these little intentions that come. And

then there's this power that goes into an intention. That's your will. And it's the will that takes something out of potential into actual.

So long as it remains a desire in the mind, nothing's happened. But as soon as you empower it, something happens: either a train of thoughts or an action or speech. One of those things happens. And that's what we understand as a *kamma*. And the important thing is to know that this is how we condition ourselves, through these intentions.

Now, when an intention becomes, instead of habitual, something that you consciously make a decision about, then you have to be resolute about that. You have to really contemplate why you want to do something and then you do it. And of course there's always a little clause that stops you from going and taking it overboard, except in exceptional circumstance or emergency.

So you might determine to climb a mountain — see that corner there, where's the hill. And as you get up and up and up, you might find that you're getting colder and colder and colder, you haven't put the right clothes on. In which case you have to come down because there's good reason. But if you got up and up and you felt, well, I can't be bothered getting to the top, then that wouldn't be a wholesome reason.

And slowly but surely, by not completing your resolutions for good reasons, you undermine your resolve. You undermine your ability to commit yourself. You never finish anything — these people who say they can't finish anything. So you have to be quite clear when you make a resolution that's what you're going to do.

This comes about also when even inadvertently you say you're going to help somebody and then you decide you don't want to do it. So you're undermining constantly your commitment. In this case, you're undermining your goodwill. And the spiritual life — to do that in the spiritual life is really undermining, because if you say to yourself, "I'm going to sit here for six hours, I'm going to sit here until I become fully enlightened or I'll drop dead or I die," and you give up after half an hour, that's bad news, isn't it?

Having made a rational decision that you are going to sit here for 40 minutes, try to keep it. Even if you're shifting and moving and doing all sorts of silly things, you keep to that resolve. And then there's that lovely feeling of having completed your commitment.

I remember when I first started meditating in the Zen — we were facing the wall, sitting on a bench. I wasn't sitting cross-legged. So it must have been, it wasn't very long I'd started, but the pain was excruciating in the knees and whatnot, really quite painful. But I was determined not to move. I was absolutely, you know, Zen. You bang your head against the wall — that's what it's for. That's why you sit next to the wall.

But I couldn't take it. And just as I gave up, the bell went. Oh, I felt terrible. Oh, never again, I said. Never again will I give up on a resolve. So, be careful.

When you hear of people trying to overcome certain habits, certain addictions around smoking, eating, drinking and whatnot, it's very difficult. And the more you don't keep your resolve, the more you undermine your ability to keep resolve. So you have to really keep to your resolve.

Now, you won't keep to resolve if it's not a wise undertaking. And what we mean by that is that it's something that you actually feel you can do. There's no point in determining to climb Everest. I mean, you've not done any training for it. It's an absolute waste of time. You just keep — like it's a Walter Mitty, isn't it?

So it has to be something that is rational, something that you know you can do, even if it takes just that little bit more effort. But you keep the resolve. And that's, of course, the same with things that are wholesome, too.

After morning chanting here, before we make the final bows, I always ask people to make a resolution for the day. This is more like a general resolve just to live mindfully with a good heart, something very general.

Now the problem with these resolves, of course, we keep forgetting. So, as often as you can during the day, to keep reinforcing that resolve by just saying it, eventually becomes habitual.

When we take vows, such as marriage vows, I think people think that once you've had this big ceremony, you've made a vow, that's it, you don't have to worry about it anymore. But the vow only lasts as long as the ceremony. It might last a couple of days after that. Then you get fed up with each other. So it's a constant. That's why, when I've done these little things for people, I always say on your anniversary, don't just go out and get drunk or something. Actually use it to re-establish the vow. And in that way, you keep reinforcing your commitment to the relationship.

So it's the same with a job. Once you've undertaken a job, ordinary work — if you keep reinforcing your commitment to it, you won't give in to silly things like boredom. There'll be that constant empowering of your effort towards what you're doing.

I had somebody email me just recently, and they had found a way of being alive by doing something new. But having done something new for so long, it became habitual again and they went back into these old patterns of a lack of spontaneity in their lives. What I pointed out to them was that it's your intention and your constant empowering of your intention to be with what you're doing in a completely whole-minded, whole-hearted way that turns it into a spontaneous action again.

So then he wrote back and he said, when I'm playing with my children — and he's got young kids — and he's actually in that communication of being creative with them and all that, then these ideas of being habitual and lack of spontaneity disappear. He said, is that what you mean? I said, yes.

So this comes about by recognising what your intentions are, make sure they're wholesome, and then you

just do it. You put yourself into it. And that's one of this business of *adhiṭṭhāna*.

So this *adhiṭṭhāna*, Resolute Resolution, is a real virtue to develop. And it's a case of keeping to your resolve as best you can, making sure it's within your power — don't be ridiculous about results — and to make a determination to do it. Then you always say, save an extraordinary circumstance or emergency. Else you become foolhardy. You push yourself even when the whole situation is telling you that actually this resolve is not working. It's not working anymore. Stop it.

So I can only hope my words of being of some assistance and that by your resolute resolutions you will indeed come to the end of suffering sooner rather than later.

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