

New Year Resolution

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Tips of the Day · 3 min read

Resolution comes from the Latin which means literally to ‘solve again’. And that’s what the New Year offers us. An opportunity to reflect on the past year, indeed our lives and consider how we can do better. The key is in that reflection. One of the Buddha’s constant exhortations is to reflect wisely. There are many ways in which we can and indeed should reflect on our lives. The meaning of our work and our leisure time, our relationships and our community, city life and nature. How we spend our wealth and our time. Some of our reflections may be pragmatic, artistic, social and so on. Here we are concerned with the spiritual life. It is not that we can split off the spiritual life from any other part of our lives. It is more how to imbue everything we do with spiritual meaning. And by spiritual here, we mean in the main ethical, for it is in the motivation with which we behave that manifests our wisdom or lack of it. Our objective, of course, remains liberation from all mental distress and awakening into a different relationship with ourselves and the world, free of strife. What we do arises out of intentions and our intentions are present expressions of our attitudes. And our attitudes arise from our understanding. In reflection we can correct any misunderstanding that has arisen and in unsure cases a spiritual confidant can be very helpful. When we behave in an unskilful way that causes others to suffer, we also create suffering for ourselves. The guilt and shame we may feel manifests a measure of compassion. For if we did not love and care, we would not feel guilt or shame. So whenever these two mental states arise in our reflections, we know that we have acted unskilfully, but we also know that we have the compassion and love to do something about it. This is what leads to remorse. And remorse compels us to put right what we did wrong. Asking for forgiveness is a salve that facilitates reconciliation. And so does forgiving. It is in acknowledging the suffering of the one who has done us harm and the suffering we cause ourselves by holding on to our grudge that leads to the desire for reconciliation. No matter how painful that may be. And it is worth it. For such pain is the pain of healing. In the same way we need to develop that same attitude of forgiveness towards ourselves. What ease there is in a heart free of guilt and shame! What ease when free of grudge and revenge! What ease when free of self-hatred and self-recrimination! Seeing the suffering caused by unwholesome thoughts, words and deeds, how easy it is to resolve to guard our thoughts, speech and actions. But we must go further and that is to develop virtue. The Ten Perfections and the Four Illimitables offer us ways we can strengthen our characters and yet soften our hearts. And finally, to reflect on the absolute necessity of our practice. We have been initiated and empowered into a practice, vipassana, that leads to liberation. We access a level of consciousness that rises above the mundane and prevents us from entanglements and bewitchments. This in itself is a purification. Here is one of the Buddha’s best known aphorisms: Put an end to hurtful behaviour. Do what is good for ourselves and others. Purify the heart. This is the teachings of all the Buddhas. Dhammapada The success of a good resolution lies in humility. And humility is to see

ourselves as we really are. One resolution taken to heart and practised is better than a thousand we fail to accomplish. The path to hell is paved with good intentions. Therefore, we need to resolve what we know we can do. Start small. Do what we are sure is do-able. This leads to success and success breeds success. Surely in 2010, our resolutions will bear great fruit! You may find the following on the website of some use: On Reflection: <https://www.satipanya.org.uk/audioLinks/xmas07.htm> New Year Reflections If you want take the theme of forgiveness further, you may find Towards the End of Forgiveness helpful: www.satipanya.org.uk/essays/angulimala.htm For some ideas on Perfections and Illimitables: <https://www.satipanya.org.uk/audio.htm> and click on The Perfections Turned Inward and The Illimitables

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