

Paramis (8 of 10) Determination

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Today we are at the eighth *parami*, the eighth perfection, often translated into English as “resolve” or “determination.” This is a wonderful quality. It is a quality of strength. Tapping into our capacity for personal strength and living from that strength is one of the great blessings of life.

It is said some people are afraid of their own strength. Sometimes this is because they're afraid they're going to hurt people. Sometimes they're afraid they're going to be hurt if they live in a strong way. So the idea is to maybe live in the shadows, on the side or not so centrally so they are not so easily threatened by things.

But I believe that feeling that we can take our place and be here in a definitive way – feeling that we have a right to be here and we're allowed to stand tall and straight and be a valued and valuable person – is one of the things that can come slowly through meditation practice. Over time, as mindfulness gets more sensitive, we start to feel that anything short of that is a kind of suffering, a diminishment of ourselves, and a limitation. It can seem as if, why bother? Doing that is just unfortunate.

There is a growth of strength and power as the eighth *parami* builds on all the others. This expression of strength in terms of resolve and determination comes as something that has been building slowly over time through having practiced generosity and ethics, renunciation, wisdom, effort or engagement, patience, and truth.

As we connect to the truth more – to what's really true – that is a healthy basis for determination and being resolved. The Pali word for “resolve” or “determination” is “*adhiṭṭhāna*.” In this context “*adi*” means something like “higher” or “special.” “*Tthana*” means “to stand, to take a stand.” So it means a higher stand, taking a higher stand. I like this because it suggests there is a physical component of this, where we kind of take a stand – we stand on our two feet firmly and strongly, maybe uprightly. We're really rooted in the place we are. It suggests the strength of presence – of being here.

What are we resolved and determined about? I think over time, in the course of cultivating the *paramis* and mindfulness practice, what is worthwhile to be resolved on becomes clearer. Being resolved on buying the next latest technological device and spending a lot of time concerned about that is not a very valuable place to be rooted and grounded in and take a stand on. We learn through practice to take a stand on freedom and on non-clinging.

We take a stand in the practice itself – yes, being mindful is valuable. Some of us will feel the most valuable thing we can do with our lives is to really be here and present in a mindful, clear way. That's a valuable place to take a stand. It is much more important than many of the experiences that we're searching for in life, or acquisitions of material goods we might want, relationships, or jobs. There's something very significant about highly valuing being grounded in mindfulness.

The Buddha gave four different things that he emphasized that the wise person would be resolved on, or take a higher stand on. It's an interesting list: wisdom, truth, letting go, and peace.

The first is being resolved on being wise. I think it gets very interesting here because of the definition the Buddha gives for what it is to be a wise person. The Buddha said, “A wise person is someone who is concerned for the welfare of self, the welfare of others, the welfare of self and others, and the welfare of the whole world.”

So taking a stand on being wise is not reading a book and gaining some knowledge about Buddhism. Wisdom comes from a real experiential reference point of what is harm and what is welfare, what is suffering and what is happiness. These grow through practice. It is valuable to have a clear sense of and be inspired by the idea of not suffering and not harming oneself or others.

The opposite is to be concerned for the welfare of others and self. The idea of self and others is important – *all* are included. We gaze upon the world with care. This is all-inclusive – 360 degrees. It includes us. That's why it can grow into a strength – because we include ourselves and our own personal growth and freedom in the process.

So we take a stand on wisdom and we take a stand on truth. Truth has many meanings. Truth can mean just being truthful and honest. It can also be taking a stand on the truth of the Four Noble Truths. This is a very central Buddhist teaching that is not a propositional truth, but an experiential truth. It comes clearly out of our experiential contact with suffering and the release from it. Release is the possibility of not suffering, of letting go of whatever activities we're doing in the mind and the heart that are harmful to us.

The truth here is an orientation toward this very simple but profound, maybe difficult-to-acquire, deep understanding of the nature of how we suffer, how we contract, how we limit ourselves, and how we can release all that and be free to take a stand on those truths. This is the orientation. This is the perspective on life that is valuable.

The third aspect the Buddha listed is letting go. Interestingly, the word "*chaga*" that's often translated as "relinquishment" also has the meaning of giving or generosity. I love this connection because sometimes in English, the idea of letting go or relinquishment can seem like bad news, as if Buddhism is saying that here is one more thing I have to let go of, and I become less and less.

But actually, letting go of our attachments can be seen as an act of generosity. It is an act of generosity to let go, to give away – not to anyone but just to let it go – of the ways in which we limit ourselves and get caught in ideas and identities where we can feel the limitation and the suffering. We relinquish that and let it go. Taking a stand in freedom is to take a stand in relinquishment and letting go.

The final quality in the Buddha's list is taking a stand on peace. The Pali word *upasama* is often considered synonymous with awakening itself. One of the positive ways that Buddha talks about awakening is as a form of profound peace. Taking a stand on that peace – valuing it, loving it, being connected to it, and taking a stand on it in our mind – means that we don't sacrifice it for anything that diminishes us, belittles us, or causes us to lose that peace and therefore suffer. We have such a clear sense of peace that it is a reference point – *this* is helpful, *this* is valuable. Anything else is a loss.

Then we can learn from that peace to live a full life with that peace. We can be engaged in the world in a wonderful way without losing a sense of the reference point of that peace. That is easier said than done. All these things are easier said than done. All these four resolves are called "resolves" because they're not easy to do. But at some point in practice, we have a very clear sense that these are worthwhile qualities to be committed to, to be determined on, to love, and practice, and bring forth, and take a stand on. We stand with them so that they can grow further. We don't sacrifice them or give them up easily.

The value of determination is to help us stay close to something valuable that we have discovered for ourselves over the time that we've practiced. With that determination and taking a stand, those things can grow and develop further and further until the point that resolve and determination are not needed. Because the *paramis* have become who we are. We are peace. We are wisdom. We are truth. We are – I don't know if we are letting go, but we have let go.

Determination is one of the higher *paramis* that the practice comes to at some point. I hope that in the next 24 hours, you will consider the topic of determination, resolve, taking a stand, and commitment. Maybe you'll have a better word of your own than any of these words I've offered today. But does anything I said today resonate with you? What is it that you can be more committed to and dedicated to? What is it that you know is worthwhile taking a stand on, so that you don't easily lose it, and you can live that way in your life? Please reflect on this and discuss it and write about it and that'll be a preparation for tomorrow. Thank you.

