Taking a Stand

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So there is this teaching the Buddha gave on the four things to take a stand on, the four places to be grounded or established. And the word, literally, the etymology of the word *adhiṭṭhāna*, means kind of like a higher stand, higher ground, a higher base upon which to ground oneself. It is sometimes in English called resolve or determination. This is something to be determined on or be resolved on.

But resolve and determination, in my mind, give me a little bit of a feeling of being tense. It doesn't have to be, but that's kind of what I get. But this idea of taking a stand on something, I feel there is a kind of dignity in it, a kind of fullness in it, a kind of ability to stand tall on something that's important. And so the Buddha talked about four resolves—four things that we stay grounded on. That is worth pursuing, worth being close to, worth maybe trusting, worth being oriented around, guiding your life.

And these four things are wisdom, truth, I'll skip the third one, and peace. I skipped the third one because the word has two different meanings, and that makes it particularly rich. So I'll get to it.

And so the first is wisdom. Rather than it being something that's wise, some wise idea, wisdom here is very immediate. It's a way of seeing. It's a way of understanding your experience as you're having it. So one English translator translates the word wisdom as discernment, because to be discerning is something you do in the moment. You know, it's something that has to be particular; it's situational.

You're able to see, and see clearly, and understand what's there, and tease apart the different elements. You're discerning about something, and so wisdom has to do with seeing clearly. And it's worth taking a stand on seeing clearly. And I like the idea of stand here because it

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means you get grounded in an upright, mature way. You don't know what to do. You don't necessarily understand what's happening.

You don't have conventional wisdom, perhaps, but you do have the ability to stand there and really take a deep look, to look deeply, to see. And I've found in my life, this ability to stay mindful of something when I don't understand, to take a really good look at it and see it deeply, something begins to shift. Something important seems to happen that I never could have planned, never could have understood. I become more discerning, or understanding arises, or the environment sometimes shifts. There's something that seems to happen when we stand in the middle of our life in order to look at it carefully, to know it for what it is.

Things around us begin to shift accordingly, and new opportunities open up that couldn't have happened if we didn't have that standing in the middle of all things with clear seeing. Let's just look at this. Let's be with it. And that's a worthwhile place to be resolved. That's a worthwhile place to stay grounded: seeing clearly, in wisdom.

The second is in truth. And I mean, that should be obvious, that anyone who wants to practice mindfulness is also dedicated to truth. Because to not tell ourselves the truth is to go in the opposite direction of what mindfulness is about. Mindfulness is really to see what's really true here in ourselves, for ourselves, with ourselves. And not everyone is truthful about themselves. Not everyone tells themselves the truth.

We live in fantasies. We live in assumptions. We live in projections. We create kind of fantasies about who we are. More often than not, they undermine us. Sometimes they are fantasies of conceit, that I'm better than, or something, and so we don't see honestly.

Mindfulness is the practice of honesty, to really be honest about ourselves, honestly to see in a truthful way what's happening here. And not to see the surface necessarily of what's happening, but to take time to see clearly the different layers of what's happening, the layers inside ourselves. There might be the intellectual layer. There might be the belief layer. There might be the historical layer and how this fits into the story of our life. There might be the layer of the heart and the heart's wish, the emotions we live with.

There's the emotional layer, when there might be many different aspects of these emotions. And then, more deeply, when you're most at ease, most settled, most connected to yourself, most peaceful, content, at home, everything's good in the world, you feel most connected to yourself. What is the motivation? What is the connection to that place? In what's true, what is true at that point?

The place that maybe we usually don't even connect to. We don't even feel or even know

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it exists. But there's a whole different layer of truth at the core of who we are. That comes with somehow becoming quiet enough, peaceful enough, where there's no more conflict, no more trying to get away or make something up or figure out our life. What do you know about that place?

So to take a stand on truth is just to take a stand to really be honest about all these layers, all these different dimensions of who we are, and not settle on one of them. One of the ways to limit your practice, your Buddhist practice, is to settle on one idea of who you are and what's going on. But rather, we're multifaceted beings, and take time to really sense and feel, discover all the different dimensions of what's happening for us, who we are. To be truthful.

So the third, the word I didn't tell you, the Pāli word is *cāga*, C-A-G-A, and it has two meanings. On one hand, it means something like letting go, renunciation. On the other hand, it also can mean generosity. And I like to put those two together. They don't really usually work together.

We don't think about them that way. When someone says, “Just let go, renounce,” that doesn't inspire generosity by itself. And when you practice generosity, it's from a sense of abundance, hopefully, but it doesn't necessarily feel like it's connected to some kind of letting go or renunciation. Often, maybe. But is there some way of generous renunciation?

Generous letting go? Is there some way of letting go in your generosity? There's some renunciation that brings forth generosity. So you have this beautiful quality, this beautiful feeling of generosity, that's together with something that's very profound, meant to be profound, very liberating. But it also can seem, on the surface, to be a kind of self-denial, a kind of like, “I don't count. I'm just renouncing, you know, pretend I don't exist.”

But this combination, that's to practice generosity, to practice some kind of healthy letting go, this is useful. This is a place to stand on. This is a place to be resolved. We grow tremendously in practicing generosity. We grow tremendously in learning how to let go in healthy ways.

Healthy generosity and healthy letting go are these ingredients that bring forth a lot of wisdom, a lot of understanding about our life that won't be there if you don't practice those two: generosity and letting go.

And then the fourth thing to take a stand on is peace, and peace can have different meanings. One of the meanings is non-contention, not fighting anything, non-aggression, non-assertiveness, non-conflict. Even conflict, meaning it comes from Latin, meaning to strike at something, so it's kind of a violent word. And so, have a peace of non-contention socially,

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interactively. That can also be true within oneself, that we're not in conflict with ourselves.

But also, peace means a kind of harmony. Things settle in a harmonious whole. Things settle, and nothing is agitated anymore. There's a serene tranquility, a serene sense of everything is good here. My heart, my heart's at peace.

My belly's at peace. My mind is at peace. And peace isn't a turning away. It isn't a shutting down or diminishing ourselves or pretending that we are not in the world in some way. The peace, I think, that the Buddha is pointing to is the peace that comes from non-clinging, which lends itself to a richer, fuller, clearer way of being in the world.

It's not pulling away from the world. It's learning how to be in the world in a peaceful way that then comes back to the first, that supports the growth of wisdom, clear seeing, supports the growth of our ability to be honest, supports the understanding of letting go and generosity in an important way, and supports itself. The Buddha said that tranquility fosters more tranquility, and so maybe the same is true of peace: that peace fosters peace. Kind of similar. The corollary would be that hostility fosters hostility.

So these are four things to be resolved on. Four healthy things to take a stand on. This counts. This is a place to be dedicated to, to be in love with, to stay committed to, to be oriented around. That's what I understand this word *adhiṭṭhāna*: resolve, taking a higher stand.

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