

## *Maintaining Resolutions*

*January 6, 2018*

The year is still new, new enough that you can remember the resolutions you made at the beginning of the year. And it's old enough that you've begun to run into some obstacles in carrying them out. This is when it's good to think about how you maintain a resolution, and to remember why it's good to have resolutions for the new year.

The year may be new, but we're getting older. As the body ages, you need something to compensate so that even though the body's getting weaker, you want the mind to get stronger. Because as the body weakens, the mind's going to need that strength to deal with the pains of aging, illness, approaching death. These are things we have to think about, we have to prepare for. So as the body weakens, the mind needs to be strengthened in its conviction, in its persistence, its mindfulness, and all the good qualities it needs to face up to things.

So, whatever you've chosen to take as your way of strengthening the mind this year, how is it going along? And how do you keep it going along?

There are four qualities that the Buddha talks about as going with any vow or any determination. The first is discernment, which means, of course, choosing a good goal to begin with. Once you've chosen it, then you figure out how to maintain it—knowing where your weaknesses are, where the things that might get in the way will be, and how you might deal with them. And how to make up for the weak points by taking advantage of the strengths you already have.

You have to remember as you go into any situation that you're not totally weak. You do have some strengths. You have to find where they are. Otherwise, if you focus on your weaknesses all the time, you just get weaker and weaker and weaker, and it turns into a downward spiral. So, where are your strengths right now? And how can you take advantage of them? One of your strengths is a sense of pride: that you've made this vow and you want to stick with it.

This is where the second quality comes in, which is truth. Truth doesn't mean just telling the truth. It also means *being* true. If you can't be true to your own vows, especially the ones that have to do with your own well-being, who can you trust in this world? So try to be truthful to your vows.

The third quality is *caga*, being willing to make sacrifices. Whatever gains there are in the world usually entail sacrifices. We can't have everything that we want. We have to be careful about what we choose to hold on to, and what to let go.

It's like planting trees in your garden. You may decide, "I want to have a tree from every part of the world, I want to be open-minded and have an international garden." But there are some trees that will kill other trees. You put eucalyptus in your garden and it kills off

everything else. So you have to make sure that what you put in your garden is all going to be for the good. As for things that will harm your true welfare, you've got to give them up—and learn how to be okay with giving them up.

That leads to the fourth quality, which is having a sense of peace in the mind, having the equanimity that realizes, “Whatever gains I need there will have to be some sacrifices, some things that I like. But I'm doing it for the sake of what is my true good, my true well-being.” True well-being doesn't have any internal conflicts. The conflicts are the things that are not necessarily your true well-being but you like.

If you learn how to look at things in this way, it makes a lot easier to let go of those other things. This way, you've got all the qualities you need in order to carry your vow through: the discernment, the truth, the willingness to make sacrifices, and the sense of peace in the mind that doesn't get worked up over the sacrifices, and also doesn't get worked up over the times when you fail in your vow. You just learn to pick yourself up, dust yourself off, and keep on going.

In that way, you do have something to compensate for the fact that with each new year you're getting older. As the body weakens, you can still make the mind stronger day by day.