

## *To Have a Happy New Year*

*December 31, 2015*

Close your eyes. Take a couple of good long deep in-and-out-breaths, and notice where you feel the breathing. Try to keep your attention right there, all the through the in-breath, all the way through the out-. And then the next breath, and then the next. You want to stay with this.

This is the time of year when people make resolutions. So this morning, get practice with a resolution: You're going to stay with the breath all through the next five minutes. Anything else that comes up in the mind, you're just going to let it go. No matter how much it screams at you, no matter how attractive or whatever it seems to be: You want to stay with the breath. Everything else you can just let go, let go.

We go through life in line with a Thai term, *taam yathaakam*, which means going with whatever comes up, without any real direction. But if you give direction to your life—and it has to be *you* who gives the direction—what direction do you want?

This is when it's convenient to have times like New Years, when you think about the past year—what you've been doing, what you could do better—and can make up your mind that you're going to do it better the next time around. Think about *how* you're going to do it.

That kind of determination requires strength to stick with it. It requires mindfulness, so that you can remember it; alertness, so that you can catch yourself if you're about to go against your resolution; and then ardency, the desire to really do it well. These are qualities we develop as we meditate.

So whatever you decide that you'd really like to accomplish in the new year, it's going to require the skills you develop as you meditate. As you're sitting here with the breath, you have to remember to stay with the breath and you have to be alert to catch the mind if it's going to go wandering off and bring it right back. And you want to do this well. That's the quality of ardency: that you want to put your whole heart into it.

So as you practice these qualities with the meditation, then as you get out in another areas of life you'll have the qualities well-developed, so that whatever you set your mind on, you'll be more likely to stick with it.

This is how you make the new year a good year. Look back on the past year: Every year it's the same sort of thing. We look back on the past year and see all the horrible things that happened. We keep hoping, "Well, maybe next year will be

different.” Well, it’s not going to be that much different. There are going to be all kinds of good and bad things happening.

What makes the year auspicious is that you do good with the year. What other people do with the year, that’s their business. There’s so much in the world you can’t control. But you *can* control your own thoughts and your words and your deeds if you put your mind to it.

That’s how to make the new year a good year: Regardless of how it goes in the rest of the world, your contribution is going to be a good one. Don’t let the bad things that other people do discourage you from doing goodness, because goodness is your gift to yourself and to the world around you.

So whatever kind of changes in your behavior you think would be for the good, try to think about them and how important it is to make these changes— —and *how* you’re going to go about making the changes. Anticipate some of the ways the mind is going to say No, and how you’re going to get around the No each time it comes up.

You want to think about this. This is why the Buddha said that an important part of determination is discernment: your ability to see things clearly. So anticipate problems in order to have solutions for them. At the same time work with the meditation. It allows you to strengthen the mind so that whatever your discernment sees is worthwhile doing, you can stick with it. You’ve got the mental strength to carry these things through.

So make one of your resolutions you’re going to meditate everyday to strengthen the mind, so that all the other things you’ve set your mind on doing will be able to succeed as well.