

Right Resolve & Right Concentration

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The two path factors of right resolve and right concentration are very closely related.

Right resolve is a concerted intention you keep in mind. You basically lay down the law for yourself that you don't want to think in unskillful ways, because that leads you to acting in unskillful ways. And then as you're able to start thinking in more and more skillful ways, it's easier to get the mind into concentration.

At the same time, concentration helps give strength to your resolve.

As the Buddha pointed out, you may see very clearly that sensuality is unskillful but you still go for it. What you need to resist the desire to go with the pleasure of sensual thinking is the pleasure that comes from right concentration. That gives you something else to hold onto.

This principle carries through all levels of the practice, even from the very beginning levels: You need to have a good pleasure to overcome your desires for unskillful pleasures.

This is how you can start sorting out things in the committee of your mind. When you've got the mind in right concentration, you're working with the breath, which is usually the part of you that gets hijacked by your greed, aversion, and delusion. These emotions can start getting you to breathe in unskillful ways—you can even have panic attacks—that just squeeze the mind, squeeze your nerves as they say in Thai, to the point where you end up doing something you had intended not to do.

So you're basically reclaiming the breath, taking it back, so that at the very least, the unskillful thoughts don't have that avenue open to them.

For this reason, you want to learn how to breathe in a way that's skillful, comfortable, that feels good inside, feels nourishing inside. Get so that you can tune into that, tap into that, access that, any time of the day. It's good to stop at random times in the day and ask yourself, "Where's the comfortable breath right now?"

At the very beginning, you can clearly see how you can easily wander away from comfortable breathing even though it's so nearby and can do so much good for you. So it's good to be able to make a resolve: Stop for a second and say, "I'm not going to do anything until I get that comfortable breath back." Then see how long you can carry it.

Because that's an important tool in counteracting the unskillful members of the committee. Then all you have to deal with is the thoughts.

When an emotion feels strong, it's because it has taken over our breathing. It changes your heart rate, changes the way you digest things: All kinds of things get changed in the body through unskillful breathing. Then you feel that you've got to give in to that unskillful intention just to get rid of all the symptoms you're feeling in the body. But if you can retake the breath, they don't have that avenue open to them.

Then all they have is what they tell you. Now they're going to tell you some pretty scary things, some really clever things on their part. And this is why we have right view. This is

why we listen to the Dhamma so that we can have some techniques to counteract their strategies. But you also have to learn how to think these strategies up on your own.

The Buddha talks about heedfulness: What kinds of reasons can you think about that remind you to be heedful?—that if you give into this particular type of emotion it's going to cause trouble down the line. Learn to talk to yourself in those ways. Develop those voices in your mind; make them a committee member as well.

You can also make use of pride, skillful pride in the practice. Here you are, you've been meditating x number of years and you're still giving into *that*? Still giving into *this*? Why? Why on Earth?

That goes together with the passage where the Buddha talks about different things that you can have governing your practice:

One is a love of yourself, that you came to the practice because you really want true happiness and here you are going back to something that's not so true. Do you actually love yourself? If so, why are you doing this?

Then there's love of the Dhamma. You're lucky that you've found the Dhamma. Are you going to give up this opportunity?

And then there's that third one, which he calls, "taking the world as a governing principle." There are people in the world who can read minds. What kind of mindstate are they reading in you right now if they happen to be paying attention to you? If you have any pride at all, you want to make sure that at the very least you're struggling with the unskillful states and not just giving in.

You can also make use of compassion. You realize that if you give in to unskillful states, you're not the only one who's going to be suffering. As your mind gets weakened, it makes you more of a burden on others.

So there are lots of different ways you can think to get around whatever arguments those unskillful voices are shouting at you, whispering at you.

Right resolve is the part that lays down the law. And often this is something that's overlooked. We tend to just go with the flow and say, "Well, I shouldn't hold onto my views too tightly." But that gives your defilements all kinds of room.

So remind yourself, you know that sensuality—the kinds of thinking that keep on going over and over and over sensual pleasures that you've had in the past or sensual pleasures that you'd like to repeat in the future—is something you really want to avoid, you really want to learn how to get past that.

And there's the resolve not to hold ill will. Some people find this easier than others, and you find this easier in some cases than in other cases. But you want to make it across the board: You don't have any ill will for anybody no matter what they've done.

And then finally there's the resolve not to be cruel, not to be harmful to others.

Those two go very closely together. Lack of ill will usually gets translated into goodwill. And lack of cruelty gets translated into compassion.

And of these three forms of right resolve, the latter two are the easiest to see as good things. Even if you can't bring yourself to follow through with them, it's easy to see that

they're good.

But giving up sensuality: People have a lot of problems with that one. They think, "What's wrong with sensual pleasures? Are you saying that sensual pleasures are evil? Or you're dissing an important part of human life?"

Well, you have to think about what happens to the mind when it keeps going over these things over and over again. One, it makes it harder to get into concentration, and two, it's bound to have an impact on your activities.

If you give in to sensual thinking a lot, you tend to find that your precepts start getting sloppy. And particularly the little precepts: This applies especially to monks. The little precepts are the first to go as you start getting sloppy about this kind of thinking. You tell yourself, "Ah, that doesn't matter." But it's important. Because once the little ones go, then it's easier for the big ones to go, too.

So again, this is why it's so important to have alternatives to tap into. On the one hand, this means using your insight to get past these things: in other words, pointing out to yourself the drawbacks of unskillful thinking, unskillful resolves and the advantages of learning how to abandon these things.

On the other hand, it means having something that you can fall back on that really does feel good. Because so often when we think of renunciation we think of starvation, pain, deprivation.

The Buddha says that we have to learn how to see renunciation as peace. Now how do you do that? You do that by giving the mind a really good, comfortable place to stay. This is why the first stages of right concentration include pleasure, rapture, more pleasure, more rapture, more refined pleasure. And then the pleasure of equanimity.

The mind needs something to feed on, and these stages of concentration are your food. Good food. Then, once you have better food to feed on, it's a lot easier not to go back to the old stuff.

In the beginning it may be hard. You find yourself sneaking back for your cheeseburgers or whatever. And this is when you have to keep warning yourself, "Okay, what are cheeseburgers going to do to your system?" Well, it's the same with greed, aversion, and delusion. They're junk food for the mind.

And learn to think about these things not as your true friends but more as false friends, the kind of friends that come and say, "Hey, let's go and get into a little trouble. It won't be too bad." And then when the police come and catch you, they go running away and leave you. That's one of Ajaan Lee's images.

In other words, they're not responsible at all, these voices that come whispering in your mind. They're not responsible for the suffering that can come about through giving into them. In fact, they go running away when the suffering comes.

So you have to learn how to look at these things as your enemies, as traitorous friends. And learn how to look at concentration as your true friend, look at the breath as your true friend. You've got to win the breath back so that it doesn't act as a servant for greed or aversion or delusion or jealousy or fear— so that you can tune into good, comfortable

breathing anytime in any situation. That's your first line of defense.

So these are some of the ways in which you can get some control over your inner committee. You lay down the law, then you give yourself good reasons to stick with it, and then you reward yourself for sticking with it.

That way you train your committee so that the unskillful members get starved and the skillful members get strong.

That's how right resolve combined with right concentration can help you stay on the path.