

8. Standing Firm Part 1: Introduction

September 14, 2017

In my last talk I reviewed the first 7 of the Ten Most Excellent Practices that we have been studying since February. Tonight I'm going to review the review, as an introduction to the next item on the list. I suggested that the first three practices address the roots of suffering: Generosity counteracts clinging, Decency counteracts aversion, and Renunciation specifically targets both and consequently wears down delusion. Each of these three practices can be understood as mind states that we can cultivate by intentionally acting accordingly, even if our internal state is not yet generous, decent, or free from what we need to renounce. Our actions promote the development these inner states, and these inner states then manifest in action. This is a positive feedback loop; an upward spiral constantly developing these states within us. Cultivating these characteristics in this way leads to evolution of wisdom (that is, an experiential understanding of the roots of suffering and how these roots can be removed). The more we *know* this wisdom *for ourselves*, the more deeply rooted the mind states become, and the more spontaneously the actions arise, which deepens the wisdom, and so on in its own cycle.

Having tasted the benefit of intentionally participating in this cycle, we find ourselves more motivated to put effort into it, and so we focus our energies in more intentional and beneficial ways, which is diligence. Patience follows the same course. With the added ingredients of diligence and patience, our cultivation of wisdom picks up speed. We start to notice moments when we are acting *out of* wisdom, almost as if wisdom is acting on our behalf. Thus we become aware of the possibility, and the increasingly frequent reality, of *abiding* in wisdom, as a way of being, rather than a thing to understand. This abiding in wisdom is Fully True-ness, the 7th of the Most Excellent Practices.

So far we have what appears to be a pretty self-sustaining and self-contained growth cycle. Do we really need something more? Yes. What we need next is expressed in Practice number 8: Standing Firm. Usually this practice is called "resolution" or "determination." Both are good words, but to me, "resolution" reeks of New Year resolutions gone wrong, and "determination" has too much of a striving quality about it. What this practice actually entails is more like what you see in this picture: a beautiful stone arch, standing tall, secure, and indistinguishable from the solid foundation from which it appeared.



Nothing is permanent; everything changes. This arch is slowly eroding and changing, and possibly one day will fall. But it's a lot more secure and stable than that little person underneath (me) who at that moment felt inspired and confident and determined and resolute. That little person is doing great. There is nothing in any way inadequate about the confidence and determination that I felt at that time. However, it is fair to observe that if strong winds and rain were to arise right at that moment, I would be in more danger of being swept off the cliff than would be the arch.

The next step in our evolution through these ten practices is to take our diligence and patience and root it more securely and with more resolution than ever before. So far we have been experimenting with practice. We've been checking out how it feels to act generous, or whether we are serious enough to prioritize the use of our energy for continued spiritual growth, and so on. This whole journey so far through the Ten Most Excellent Practices has been one of exploration and discovery, and I for one have found it beneficial and quite satisfying.

But sooner or later comes a turning point. It may not be now for you yet. Or it may have occurred years ago. But this turning point is part of the path, and Practice number 8 describes it. It comes when you have experienced enough to *know for yourself*, for real, in your gut, not just in your mind, that this path is worth your effort, that you trust the practice regardless how you may feel at any given time, and that you know you must to follow it, come hell or high water. This is not a commitment to be made lightly, nor is it something you decide to do because you think you *should*. It's more as if the commitment realizes itself, and then you know it's time. If you aren't making this commitment because you know that you must, then your determination will be half-hearted and your foundations will

not be secure. Don't worry about whether or not you *should* or *need to* take this step. If you are paying attention and being honest with yourself, you will know, and you will do it. And the knowing of it is in itself the commitment.

But you also need to be intentional and clear and conscious about making the commitment to stand firm, because there will come times when it is not so clear to you why you made it. Consciously choosing to stand firm in your practice now will be the reassurance you need later when you feel doubt. It is not necessary to make a formal or public commitment, though some do. And there is no point trying to make it until you are ready. When you do, you become a rock, and you will be able to withstand winds and rains and earthquakes and dragons.

If you have not yet reached that turning point, there is still intentional action to take. Standing Firm would not be on a list of the Ten Most Excellent Practices if you had no way to intentionally practice it. There are things to do to cultivate the soil, and to establish habits and views that are important now and will be helpful later.

We will talk about some of these at the retreat on Saturday. In the meantime, just keep doing your practice. Know that you can trust it, even against dragons.