



## Maintain Those Wholesome States of Mind Which Have Arisen

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It is admittedly not easy to maintain wholesome states of mind. “How often have you made wonderful promises to yourself? Remember the New Year’s resolutions or the wedding vows you made in front of the priest or friends? Remember how many times you made hopeful wishes on your birthday? How many of them did you keep? You may have promised yourself: “I will never touch another cigarette, never take another drink, never lie, never speak harshly or insult anyone. I will never gamble again, never steal, never kill any living being.” Or after one good meditation session or an inspiring spiritual retreat, you may have thought, “This retreat was wonderful. I never thought meditation was so easy. Oh, how calm and peaceful I have been during this retreat! This is what I will do in the future.”

All these are positive thoughts. But how many of them do you continuously put into action every day? These thoughts arise in your mind like the bubbles in a glass of soda water. After a few hours, the water goes flat. You lose your enthusiasm and return to your old habits. In order to maintain your initial effort, you must develop strong mindfulness.<sup>1</sup>

Breaks in being do occur. What to do? For example, you may have experienced a break in being after a long and relaxing vacation or when you return from a spiritual retreat. “While you were away, your anger, impatience, jealousy, and fear were inactive, and you felt peaceful and happy. But the moment you came home, you got an upsetting phone message, or you saw a bill you forgot to pay, or someone stepped on your toe, and all your anger rushed back. In an instant, your peace of mind was gone. Then you wondered, “How can I maintain this happy vacation feeling or retreat feeling in everyday life?”

The everyday answer is mindfulness. You must remember that it is not some other person or some difficult situation that is causing your problems. **It is your own past conditioning.** In addition to trying to maintain continuous awareness, learning to recognize the particular weaknesses in your mental habits can help you prevent unwholesome responses from arising.”<sup>2</sup>

“Remember that nothing important can be perfected by doing it only once. You have to repeat a positive thought or action again and again until your practice becomes perfect. We marvel at the skills of Olympic athletes— did they perfect these abilities in a day? How many times did you fall from your bicycle when you first tried to ride? Perfecting good thoughts is just like that. You have to practice very diligently. Whenever your effort slackens, recall occasions when you applied continuous effort until you achieved your goal.”<sup>3</sup>

There are many ways to maintain wholesome states of mind:

- Be mindful. Ask yourself, “What, in this moment, am I cultivating?”
- Study and reflect on the dharma (teachings).
- Meditate.
- Remember the big picture, maintaining perspective.
- Associate with good friends.

The Ven. Ānanda went to the Blessed One and said, “This is half of the holy life, lord: having admirable people as friends, companions, & colleagues.”

“Don’t say that, Ānanda. Don’t say that. Having admirable people as friends, companions, & colleagues is actually the whole of the holy life. When a monk has admirable people as friends, companions, & colleagues, he can be expected to develop & pursue the noble eightfold path.<sup>4</sup>

- Remember the Buddha’s words: “Do good, do no evil, and purify the mind.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Gunaratana, Bhante, Eight Mindful Steps to Happiness: Walking the Buddha’s Path p. 182

<sup>2</sup> Gunaratana, Bhante, Eight Mindful Steps to Happiness: Walking the Buddha’s Path p. 164

<sup>3</sup> Gunaratana, Bhante, Eight Mindful Steps to Happiness: Walking the Buddha’s Path p. 182

<sup>4</sup> Upadīha Sutta (SN 45:2)

<sup>5</sup> Dhammapada Verse 183