



This document is an extract from the full chapter which is available for download in the table via this [link](#) and is intended for use by participants of meetings.

The Four Resolves: Skillful effort on the path

**Cultivating the resolve to build and navigate our raft**  
**Directing our energy wisely**

*“The chains of habit are too light to be felt until they’re too heavy to be broken.” ~ Samuel Johnson*

*“We are conditioned, and we can be reconditioned – even unconditioned.” ~ Vince Cullen*

This chapter provides an overview of a crucial Buddhist practice known as the ‘Four Great Efforts’, also called the ‘Four Right Strivings’. These four resolves are vital for cultivating helpful mental states and abandoning unhelpful ones.

We will frame these as the **Four Resolves**, guiding principles that help us channel our energy wisely and compassionately away from harmful patterns and towards healing and freedom. While ‘Right Effort’ is formally the sixth factor of the ‘Noble Eightfold Path’ which we will explore in detail in the last stage of our journey, introducing these intentions early helps us to recognise

our current patterns of effort and to understand the kind of resolve we need for our journey ahead.

The Four Resolves are:

- ★ Resolving to **prevent** harmful cravings and compulsions. To recognise our triggers and to steer clear of risky situations, while avoiding the temptation to replace one addiction or unhelpful habit with another.
- ★ Resolving to **abandon** our harmful addictions and compulsions that are keeping us stuck in painful places. This is like patching up the biggest holes in our raft to prevent us from sinking.
- ★ Resolving to **cultivate** helpful, healthier and creative ways to live. In many ways, these healthy habits will replace our old unhealthy habits. For example, developing gratitude, new hobbies, healthier lifestyles and attending support groups.
- ★ Resolving to **maintain**, strengthen and ultimately embody our new healthier habits and lifestyle. For example, engagement with support networks, daily practices and ethical living.

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### Self-Reflections

Consider your own patterns of effort, intentions and resolves:

- ★ Where does most of your energy seem to go currently in relation to your well-being?
- ★ Do we put more effort into avoiding difficulty, dwelling in negativity, seeking novelty, or nurturing the good?
- ★ Which of the Four Resolves (Prevent, Abandon, Cultivate, Maintain) feels most relevant or needed for you right now?
- ★ What are your biggest obstacles to applying skillful effort, for example, lack of motivation, feeling overwhelmed, perfectionism or procrastination?
- ★ What does the word 'resolve' mean to you personally? Does the idea of

‘creating conditions’ (Batchelor quote) feel different from ‘forcing yourself’?

- ★ Can you think of a time you successfully applied one of these resolves even in a small way?

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### Journaling Prompts

Explore these intentions more deeply through writing:

- ★ **Mapping Your Efforts:** For each of the ‘Four Resolves’, identify one specific example of how you are already applying it (even slightly) *or* one specific area where you could apply it more consciously in your practice this week.
- ★ **Creating Supportive Conditions:** Reflecting on Stephen Batchelor's quote, what specific conditions in your inner life (for example, attitudes, beliefs) or outer life (for example, environment, schedule, relationships) could you adjust to better support your intentions?
- ★ **Effort vs. Striving:** Explore the difference between skillful, balanced effort and anxious, stressful striving. Where do you tend to fall on this spectrum? How can self-compassion help balance your effort?
- ★ **Small Steps:** Choose one of the ‘Four Resolves’ that feels important but challenging. Brainstorm one very small, achievable action step you could take related to that resolve in the next 24 hours. Write it down.

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### Remember to Remember

The ‘Four Right Efforts’, or **Four Resolves**, provide a vital, practical framework for channelling our energy wisely on the path away from our destructive cravings and habits and towards freedom. They offer a compassionate yet clear-sighted structure for recognising where effort is needed: preventing the

harmful, abandoning what has arisen, cultivating the beneficial, and maintaining the progress made.

Understanding these intentions is a key part of recognising the landscape of our inner world and the tools available for navigating it. While ‘Right Effort’ is a core component of the ‘Eightfold Path’ explored fully in a later chapter, embracing these resolves now provides direction and empowers us to actively participate in our liberation from the outset. They remind us that transformation requires not just passive awareness, but also skillful, courageous, and persistent effort – the energy needed to build, maintain, and propel our raft towards the safe shore.

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