



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 Second Resolve: Abandon

From Abstinence to Abandonment – Skilfully Letting Go

Patching the leaks and bailing the water

“Let go of the past. Let go of the future. Let go of the present. Proceed to the opposite shore with a free mind, leaving behind all conditioned things.” ~ Thích Nhất Hạnh

“If you let go a little, you will have a little freedom. If you let go a lot, you will have a lot of freedom. And if you let go completely, you will have complete freedom.” ~ Ajahn Chah (paraphrased)

Following our exploration of the first resolve – the proactive effort to Prevent harmful states from arising – we now turn to its essential partner: The second resolve – Abandoning. This aspect of skilful effort addresses the reality that, despite our best preventative measures, unskilful states *will* inevitably arise. Cravings, difficult emotions, negative thought patterns, and habitual impulses are part of the human condition, particularly during our journey to liberation.

The second resolve guides us in making the conscious effort to abandon, overcome, remove, or dispel unhelpful states that have arisen, skilfully and

compassionately. Gotama – the Buddha – defines the second resolve as: " ... *generating the desire for the abandoning of unwholesome, unskilful qualities; making an effort, arousing energy, applying the mind, and striving.*"

This is not about suppression or forceful repression, which often backfires, leading to more tension or later eruptions. Rather, *abandoning* here implies a skilful process of recognising the unskilful state clearly and understanding its harmful nature, applying appropriate techniques to let it go, weaken its hold, or transform its energy. It requires both diligence and wisdom.

Self-Reflections

Reflect on your experience with arisen unskilful states and the journey from abstinence to abandonment:

- ★ What specific unskilful states (cravings, emotions, thought patterns) arise most frequently for you?
- ★ What is your typical automatic reaction when unhelpful states arise (e.g., acting out, suppressing, ruminating, judging yourself)?
- ★ Does your typical automatic reaction to a triggering situation differ from a conscious act of abandonment?
- ★ Can you recall a time when you were merely abstaining versus truly abandoning a harmful pattern?
- ★ Is there a difference between abstinence and abandonment in your internal experience and sense of freedom?
- ★ Which of the techniques mentioned above (e.g., urge surfing, MARA, SOBER, ELSA, RNILT, replacement, reframing) feels most potentially helpful or accessible to you for abandoning a specific pattern?
- ★ Which abandoning technique feels most challenging?
- ★ How does self-criticism affect your ability to work skilfully with difficult states when they arise?
- ★ How might embracing abandonment – renunciation, as a liberating choice, rather than a deprivation be helpful to you?
- ★ Have you ever consciously tried to ‘abandon’ or ‘let go’ of a compelling craving? What was that experience like?

Journaling Prompts

Use writing to explore the Practice of abandoning and the shift from abstinence:

- ★ **Track and respond:** Choose one specific unskilful state you'd like to work with. For the next few days, note when it arises. Then, consciously choose one technique (for example, MARA, SOBER, ELSA, RNILT, mindful observation, replacing with kindness) and apply it. Write about the process – what happened, how it felt, what you learned.
- ★ **From can't to don't:** Reflect on a harmful behaviour you've stopped. Was it a struggle of “*I can't do this*,” or has it transformed into a clear “*I don't do this*” because you've genuinely abandoned the old way? Describe this shift in your journal.
- ★ **Consequence reflection:** When a strong craving or negative thought pattern arises, take a moment to write down the likely short-term and long-term consequences of acting on it versus abandoning it.
- ★ **Walking another street:** Reflect on Portia Nelson's poem. Where do you see yourself in that progression regarding a specific habit or pattern? What would it feel like to truly ‘*walk down another street*’ in your life, completely abandoning the old path?
- ★ **Self-compassionate abandonment:** Recall a recent time you struggled to abandon an unskilful state or perhaps acted on it. Write yourself a compassionate letter acknowledging the difficulty, validating the struggle (without condoning harmful action), and reaffirming your resolve to keep practising from a place of abandonment, not deprivation.
- ★ **Opposite qualities:** Identify an unskilful state you experience (for example, self-hatred, shame and resentment). What is its wholesome opposite (for example, forgiveness, self-compassion and appreciation)? Write about one small way you could intentionally cultivate that

opposite quality today.

Remember to Remember

"True freedom is not achieved through the absence of desires, but through the mastery of them." ~ Aristotle

This second of the four resolves, the Resolve to abandon harmful states – is where the active work of transformation truly happens. It acknowledges that challenges will arise on our journey, but it equips us with skilful means to meet them without being overwhelmed or drowning. This is not about battling against ourselves, but about a liberating release of the old, in favour of the new. It requires courage, patience, self-compassion, and the willingness to apply mindful effort repeatedly. The careful attention that we cultivate during mindfulness of breathing, is a precursor for the moderated intention we apply to the four resolves. This practice is crucial for recognising our capacity for change and directly relates to the core task in our next leg of this journey – the 'A' of Abandoning in our RAFT acronym.

By learning to skilfully patch the leaks, bail the water, and jettison the harmful cargo from our raft, we keep our vessel afloat and moving towards the safe shore. Having addressed **Prevent** and **Abandon**, we next turn to the positive construction: **Cultivating** the skilful states that actively support our well-being and propel us further on our voyage.

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