



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 Third Resolve – Cultivating helpful states

*"Little by little, drop by drop, a water pot is filled. Likewise, the wise man, gathering it little by little, fills himself with good." ~ Dhammapada 122*

*"Resolve is not about forcing yourself to act, but creating conditions that naturally lead to action. Reorganise your inner and outer life so that your mind and circumstances support what you aspire to achieve." ~ Stephen Batchelor*

### **Gathering skillful materials and strengthening our raft**

#### **Actively nurturing the good**

This vital aspect of our journey to liberation moves beyond simply managing the negative. This is where we actively begin to gather the materials and build the core structures of our raft, moving beyond simply avoiding shipwrecks. It involves consciously and deliberately making an effort to arouse, develop, and nurture positive, skillful qualities and states of mind that are not yet present or not yet fully established. This is where we actively start to build a fulfilling life – a flourishing life, a life reclaimed from cravings, aversions and confusion.

This resolve is about committing to adopting helpful, healthier and creative ways to live, recognising that in many ways, these healthy habits will replace

our old unhealthy habits. Gotama (the Buddha) describes this ‘third effort’ as an active development:

*"... a practitioner generates desire for the arising of skillful qualities that have not yet arisen; they make an effort, arouse energy, apply the mind, and strive."*

The Buddhist word ‘*bhavana*’ was originally translated into English as meditation, but this simple translation misses the depth of the concept. Bhavana, with its roots in the ancient Indian languages of Sanskrit and Pali, carries a richer meaning that goes beyond just sitting quietly, a meaning that is subtly different to the English word meditation.

Literally, bhavana translates as *development*, or *cultivation*, and *producing*, particularly in the sense of bringing something into being. In practice, bhavana refers to the intentional cultivation of positive mental states. It's the process of nurturing qualities like universal friendliness (often referred to as loving-kindness or metta-bhavana) or mindfulness (sati-bhavana) through focused mental effort.

We can think of it like tending a garden. We clear the weeds (our negative thoughts), we nourish the soil (of our minds), and we plant seeds (of positive qualities and attitudes). Bhavana is our ongoing practice of care and cultivation that allows these qualities to blossom.

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## **Self-reflections**

Consider your current efforts in cultivating the positive:

- ★ What skillful qualities (for example, patience, kindness and calm) do you feel are currently developing in your life?
- ★ What conditions (inner and outer) currently support your positive growth? What conditions hinder it?
- ★ When you think about building a fulfilling and flourishing life, what key qualities or activities come to mind?
- ★ Reflecting honestly: What positive qualities would I like to strengthen

(for example, patience, kindness and self-compassion)?

- ★ How would cultivating patience improve my relationships?
  - ★ How would developing calm help me handle cravings?
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## Journaling Prompts

Use writing to explore and plan your cultivation efforts:

- ★ **Choose a quality:** Select one specific wholesome quality (for example, self-compassion, gratitude) you wish to cultivate more intentionally this week. Brainstorm 2-3 small, concrete actions you could take to nurture it.
  - ★ **Supportive conditions:** Identify one inner condition (for example, a negative belief) and one outer condition (for example, a specific relationship) that hinders your cultivation efforts. Reflect on how you might skillfully address them.
  - ★ **Healthy pleasures:** Make a list of 5-10 healthy activities that bring you joy, calm, or connection—potential wholesome replacements for patterns of escape. How could you incorporate one of these more regularly?
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## Remember to Remember

The third resolve – cultivating helpful states – involves nurturing rather than suppressing. It infuses our journey with hope, purpose, and creativity. It shifts our focus from solely managing difficulties – constantly bailing out water from our raft – to actively building strengths and a life worth living. By consciously nurturing wholesome qualities, we not only displace unskillful patterns but also create genuine sources of happiness and resilience. This active building and gathering is essential for constructing a robust and well-equipped raft.

We can tailor practices to meet our specific needs, including seeking professional guidance if appropriate and necessary. Through our consistent

effort, mindfulness, and self-compassion, it is possible to transform our destructive patterns into a life of freedom and well-being.

Having explored **Preventing**, **Abandoning**, and now **Cultivating**, we turn next to the final resolve: the crucial effort needed in **Maintaining** the progress we have made.

*"Sow a thought, reap an action; sow an action, reap a habit; sow a habit, reap a character; sow a character, reap a destiny."* ~ Modern Proverb

*"Build your skills, not your resume."* ~ Sheryl Sandberg

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