

WHOLESOME INTENTIONS, PART 2

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Intention of Harmlessness

This is a broad aim of not causing pain, loss, or destruction to any living thing. At a minimum, this is a sweeping resolution to avoid any whit of harm to another human being. The implications are far-reaching, since most of us participate daily in activities whose requirements or ripples may involve harm to others (e.g., use of fossil fuels that warms the planet, purchasing goods manufactured in oppressive conditions). Further, in American culture there is a strong tradition of rugged individualism in which as long as you are not egregiously forceful or deceitful, "let the buyer beware" on the other side of daily transactions. But if your aim is preventing any harm, then the other person's free consent does not remove your responsibility.

Taking it a step further, to many, harmlessness means not killing bothersome insects, rodents, etc. Even as you feel the mosquito sticking its needle into your neck. And to many, harmlessness means eating a vegetarian diet (and perhaps forgoing milk products, since cows need to have calves to keep their milk production flowing, and half of those calves are male, who will eventually be slaughtered for food).

Nonetheless, we need to realize that there is no way to avoid all harms to other beings that flow inexorably through our life. If we are to eat, we must kill plants, and billions of bacteria die each day as we pass wastes out of our bodies. If we get hired for a job, that means another person will not be.

But what we can do is to have a sincere aspiration toward harmlessness, and to reduce our harms to an absolute minimum. And that makes all the difference in the world.

Intention of Non-ill Will

Here we give up angry, punishing reactions toward others, animals, plants, and things. If such attitudes arise, we resolve not to feed them, and to cut them off as fast as we can.

The Buddha placed great stress on the importance of releasing ill will. In the extreme, he said that even when we are being grossly mistreated by others, we should practice good will toward them, and wish them the best.

To be sure, that does not mean turning a blind eye toward injustice and mistreatment— of ourselves as well as others – nor does it mean turning our back on skillful actions of protection, advocacy, and betterment. It is perfectly appropriate to defend yourself, assert yourself, pursue your own interests – and to do all that on behalf of others, too – as long as all that is done in the spirit of wisdom and good will. This stance is seen pointedly and poignantly in the Dalai Lama’s reference to “. . . my friends, the enemy Chinese.”

Of course, in daily life, practicing with ill will is often extremely difficult – especially when we feel we’ve been truly wronged. For help, please see the handout, “21 Ways to Turn Ill Will to Good Will.”

Intention of Renunciation

Renunciation is founded on a disenchantment with the world and with experience, based on right view. You see through all the possibilities of experience: you see their ephemeral, insubstantial, empty qualities, no matter how alluring or seemingly gratifying. You see the suffering embedded in the experience, the "trap," as the Buddha put it. And you see the happiness, peace, and love available in not chasing after pleasure or resisting pain.

Based on this clear seeing, you align yourself with the wisdom perspective and with the innate, prior, always already existing wakeful, pure, peaceful, and radiant awareness within yourself. In so doing, you renounce worldly things and worldly pleasures. If they pass through your awareness - a sunset, a child's smile, chocolate pudding, Beethoven's 9th- fine; just don't cling to them as they disappear as all experiences do.

Renunciation is NOT asceticism, or privation for privation's sake. It is a joyous union with the path of happiness that happens to include a relinquishing, casting off, abandoning, walking away from any seeking at all of worldly gratifications.

At its heart, renunciation is simple: we just let go. Ajahn Chah: "If you let go a little, you will have a little happiness. If you let go a lot, you will have a lot of happiness. If you let go completely, you will be completely happy."

Other Good Intentions

Besides the three fundamental intentions above, what other aims or values would really serve you, and others? How about:

- Feeling more relaxed and calm
- Deepening your well-being and capacity to contribute to others
- Working through something that's been bothering you
- Giving up an addiction or other unwholesome Behavior
- Coming to terms – and to peace – with a difficult life situation, such as a major illness

Or you could shoot for the stars and focus on a primary purpose in life. Such as liberation, awakening, Nirvana, enlightenment. Or abiding in love – all the time.

EXPRESSING YOUR INTENTIONS

Once your intentions are clear, the next question is: How to express them?

There are many ways, including

- As thoughts in your mind
- As an image
- In writing
- As a collage with words and images
- Through physical expression, posture, movement, dance
- As a sense of being

When you think intentions, you know them to yourself. Putting them in explicit words is usually helps create real clarity in your mind. Some intentions co-exist as equally vital, but many times it's important to establish what your top priorities are. It's kind of like filling a bucket: you want

to get the big rocks in first, then the pebbles, and last the sand. Your most important aims are the big rocks, and if you take care of them, everything else usually works out just fine.

The nonverbal expression of intentions is through imagery. For all the emphasis in education and in our culture on language – certainly an important tool – it’s good to keep in mind that most of the brain, and most of our mental processes (especially unconscious ones) have nothing to do with language at all. A picture is indeed worth a thousand words, and pictures in your mind of your intentions – including both the path toward them and their fulfillment – are very, very valuable.

You can also write out your intentions, perhaps informally – as in a to-do list – or formally, as affirmations. These are complete sentences, positively stated, with the result already existing in the present. Like this: “I am healthy, happy, and whole.” “My family is full of love and harmony.” “I am completing my college education.” “My wife loves me.”

Collages are another powerful way to express your intentions. I have collages on the wall of my office at home that were made several years ago yet they still speak to me; I look at them, and know what I’m supposed to do.

Or you could move your body as an expression of your intention, letting it move through you as you walk or dance or whatever

Last and definitely not least, you could get the feeling of the intention in your body, and rest in that sense of being. For example, if your intention is to be loving, rest in the sense of being loving. If it is to be highly focused and productive, get a sense of being that way, and then abide there. Be the goal you are aiming for.

21 WAYS TO TURN ILL WILL TO GOOD WILL

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INTRODUCTION

Ill will creates negative, vicious cycles. But that means that good will can create positive cycles. Plus good will cultivates wholesome qualities in you.

Avoiding ill will does not mean passivity, allowing yourself or others to be exploited, staying silent in the face of injustice, etc. There is plenty of room for speaking truth to power and effective action without succumbing to ill will. Think of Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, or the Dalai Lama as examples. In fact, with a clear mind and a peaceful heart, your actions are likely to be more effective.

HOW TO PREVENT OR TRANSFORM ILL WILL

1. Be mindful of the priming, the preconditions for ill will. Try to defuse them early: get rest, have a meal, get support, talk things out, read the dharma, etc.
2. Practice non-contention to undermine the heat that creates ill will.
3. Inspect the underlying trigger, such as the sense of threat or alarm. Look at it realistically. Are you exaggerating what happened in any way? Are you focusing on one negative thing amidst a dozen good ones? Was something actually an "injury" to you? Be skeptical of your justifications; be especially wary of grievances that seem reasonable! Try to see events and your responses as just aggregates assembling and dispersing and not mattering so much.
4. Be careful about attributing intent to others. We are often just a bit player in their drama; they are not targeting us personally. Look for the good intentions in others beneath the action that made you feel mistreated. Look for the good in them.

5. Put what happened in perspective. It's impermanent and empty of an inherent, fixed, solid nature. It's also part of a larger whole, most of which is fine.
6. Cultivate the Brahma Viharas: lovingkindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity. In other words, cultivate good will.
7. Practice generosity. Much ill will comes when we feel taken from, or not given to, or on the receiving end of another person's bad moment. Instead, let the person have what they took: their victory, their bit of money or time, etc. Give to them not giving to you. Let them have their bad moment. Think of it as an opportunity for dana on your part: the dana of forbearance, patience, the gift of no cause to fear you.
8. Investigate ill will. Take a day, a week, a month - and really examine the least bit of ill will during that time. See what causes it . . . and what its effects are.
9. Regard ill will as an affliction upon yourself. It hurts you more than anyone.
10. Settle into awareness, observing the ill will but not identified with it, watching it arise and disappear like any other experience, empty of importance or solidity.
11. Accept the wound. Experience the feelings of it. Do not presume that life is not supposed to be wounding, Accept the unpleasant fact that people will mistreat you.
12. Do not cling to what you want instead of what you got.
13. Let go of the view that things are supposed to be a certain way. Challenge the view that things should work out, that the world is perfectible. Suzuki Roshi: “. . . *that is how everything actually exists in this world. Things that exist are imperfect. Nothing we see or hear is perfect. But right there in that imperfection is perfect reality.*”
14. Release the sense of self, that it was "I" or "me" who was affronted, wounded.

15. " . . . ill will is suppressed by the first jhana based on lovingkindness and eradicated by the path of nonreturning." [Footnote 14, Chap 8, *In the Words of the Buddha*, Bhikkhu Bodhi]

16. Resolve to meet mistreatment with lovingkindness. No matter what.

The Buddha: *"Even if bandits were to sever you savagely limb by limb with a two-handled saw, a person who gave rise to a mind of hate towards them would not be carrying out my teaching. You should train thus: 'Our minds will remain unaffected, and we shall utter no evil words; we shall abide compassionate for their welfare, with a mind of lovingkindness, without inner hate. We shall abide pervading them with a mind imbued with lovingkindness; and starting with them, we shall abide pervading the all-encompassing world with a mind imbued with loving-kindness, abundant, exalted, immeasurable, without hostility, and without ill will.' That is how you should train."* The Simile of the Saw, Majjhima Nikaya.

In this world, hate has never dispelled hate. Only love dispels hate. Dhammapada

17. Cultivate positive emotion, like the happiness ("sukha") that is one of the five jhanic factors. Positive feelings calm the body, quiet the mind, buffer against the impact of stressful events, and foster supportive relationships - which reduce ill will.

18. Communicate. Speak (skillfully) for yourself, regardless of what the outcome may be. If appropriate, name your experience to release it; feel it as you speak it.

Try to address the situation with openness and selflessness. Less selfing means more attentiveness, more attunement to all that's going on in the other person. And you'll be freer and calmer to be more skillful.

19. Have faith that they will inherit their own karmas one day, and you don't have to be the justice system.

20. Realize that some people will not get the lesson no matter how much you try. So why burden yourself with trying to teach them? Further, many people will never actually experience your ill will - such as politicians. So why carry it toward them?

21. Forgiveness. This doesn't mean changing your view that wrongs were done. But it does mean letting go of the emotional charge around feeling wronged. The greatest beneficiary of forgiveness is usually yourself.