

THE PERFECTION OF ENERGY

Viriya Parami

The Perfection of Energy is stated immediately after the Perfection of Wisdom: a) because the function of wisdom is perfected by the arousing of energy; b) to show the auspicious work the bodhisattva undertakes for the welfare of beings after having reached [the wisdom attainment of] the patience acceptance of their emptiness; c) to state the causal bases for exertion right after the basis of equanimity; and d) to state the arousing of energy right after the activity of wise consideration.

(A Treatise on the Paramis)

Viriya: literally, the state of a hero or strong person (*vira*). Various translated into English as vigor, energy, effort, exertion,

Viriya is one of the Seven Factors of Awakening: Mindfulness, investigation, **energy**, joy, tranquility, concentration, equanimity

It is one of the Five Faculties: Confidence, **energy**, mindfulness, concentration, discernment.

Closely related words:

Vāyamā, effort (as in *sammā vāyamā* or right effort factor of the eight fold path).

Padhāna, endeavor (as in *samma-ppadhāna* or the [four] right endeavors).

Other important words related to effort:

Atapa, ardent effort

Apammada, vigilance, heedfulness, energetic mindfulness

Quotes from the Theravada Tradition

It is for you to make strong effort
The Buddhas only tell you how. (Dhammapada 276)

The Dharma is for those who are industrious, not for those who are lazy. (Anguttara IV. 229)

Be quick in making effort. (Dhammapada 236)

From time to time someone devoted to the higher training should give attention to three things: concentration, energetic effort, and equanimity. In giving regular attention to each of these, then one's mind will become pliant, workable, lucid, and wieldy, and it will be well concentrated to overcome the taints.

(Anguttara Nikaya III.42)

What is the power of energy? Here, monks, a practitioner lives with energy set upon the abandoning of everything unwholesome and the acquiring of everything wholesome; one is steadfast and strong in effort, not shirking one's task in regard to wholesome qualities. (Anguttara Nikaya V.92)

The characteristic of vigor is strengthening and support. As an old house stands when strengthened by new pillars, so, when strengthened by vigor, wholesome states do not fall away or deteriorate. (Atthasalini I, part IV.)

Better than one hundred years lived
Lazy and lacking in energy
Is one day lived
With energy and exertion. (Dhammapada 108)

With steady effort
One should do what is to be done
Because the lax practitioner stirs up
Even more dust. (Dhammapada 313)

As if one's head were on fire
A practitioner should live mindfully. (Theragatha 39)

These are the five factors for exertion. Which five?

- 1) Confidence or conviction when a practitioner is convinced of the Tathagata's Awakening: 'Indeed, the Blessed One is worthy and rightly self-awakened, consummate in knowledge & conduct, well-gone, an expert with regard to the world, unexcelled as a trainer for those people fit to be tamed, the Teacher of divine & human beings, awakened, blessed.'
- 2) Being free from illness & discomfort, endowed with good digestion -- not too cold, not too hot, of moderate strength -- fit for exertion.
- 3) Being neither fraudulent nor deceitful. One presents oneself to the Teacher or to his wise friends in the holy life in line with what one actually is.
- 4) Being persistent in abandoning unskillful mental qualities and taking on skillful mental qualities. Being steadfast, solid in his effort, not shirking his duties with regard to skillful mental qualities.
- 5) Being discerning, endowed with discernment leading to the arising of the goal - - noble, penetrating, leading to the right ending of stress.

(Anguttara Nikaya V.53)

"There are these four exertions. Which four? The exertion to guard, the exertion to abandon, the exertion to develop, & the exertion to maintain.

"And what is the exertion to guard? There is the case where a monk, on seeing a form with the eye, doesn't grasp at any theme or variations by which -- if he were to dwell without restraint over the faculty of the eye -- evil, unskillful qualities such as greed or distress might assail him. He practices with restraint. He guards the faculty of the eye. He achieves restraint with regard to the faculty of the eye. (Similarly with the ear, nose, tongue, body, & intellect.) This is called the exertion to guard.

"And what is the exertion to abandon? There is the case where a monk doesn't acquiesce to a thought of sensuality that has arisen [in him]. He abandons it, destroys it, dispels it, wipes it out of existence. He doesn't acquiesce to a thought of ill will... a thought of harmfulness... any evil, unskillful qualities that have arisen [in him]. He abandons them, destroys them, dispels them, wipes them out of existence. This is called the exertion to abandon.

"And what is the exertion to develop? There is the case where a monk develops the *mindfulness* factor for awakening dependent on seclusion... dispassion... cessation, resulting in letting go. He develops the *investigation of qualities* factor for awakening... the *persistence* factor for awakening... the *rapture* factor for awakening... the *serenity* factor for awakening... the *concentration* factor for awakening... the *equanimity* factor for awakening dependent on seclusion... dispassion... cessation, resulting in letting go. This is called the exertion to develop.

"And what is the exertion to maintain? There is the case where a monk maintains a favorable theme of concentration -- the skeleton perception, the worm-eaten perception, the livid perception, the festering perception, the falling-apart perception, the bloated perception. This is called the exertion to maintain.

"These are the four exertions.

"Guarding & abandoning,
developing & maintaining:
these four exertions, taught
by the Kinsman of the Sun
[the Buddha].
A monk who strives
ardently at them
reaches the ending
of stress."

