

4. PERFECTION OF JOYFUL EFFORT (VIRYA)

The fourth perfection is the perfection of joyful effort in the practice of dharma. Generally, whenever someone makes a strong energetic effort to do something, even though it may be unwholesome, this is still a type of joyful effort, but that is not what is meant here. If we have this energy for our practice of dharma in study and meditation, we will progress as rapidly as a waxing moon. If we lack this energy, we may start a practice but there will be a great danger of it degenerating. Because this effort is a joyful state of mind regarding the practice of dharma, if it is present, whatever physical, vocal and mental actions we engage in will be directed and applied to developing our dharma practice. If, for example, someone has some vital work to do, then whatever else he may be doing, whether talking, thinking or walking about, thoughts of his task will constantly arise in his mind. If we have this power of right energy, all our dharma practices will be successful. And as we all wish for this success and its resulting fruit, the development of this power of joyful effort is essential. All achievements through the practice of dharma depend upon it.

In order to develop this enthusiasm, we must reflect again and again on the good qualities of the positive actions involved in the practice of dharma. The more we become aware of these qualities the more enthusiasm for our practice develops. It is like a football player — the more he thinks about the fame and financial gain he will get from playing football the stronger his determination to play well becomes. Although he gets tired, sweats and aches, he doesn't let these difficulties get him down. Instead, he throws himself wholeheartedly into every aspect of the game. In the same way, if we have the power of right energy in our practice of dharma, although we may suffer difficulties such as illness, we will not become disheartened and will continue to develop our practice of dharma with a feeling of pleasure and joy.

Here we can quote the example of Jetsun Milarepa. He had tremendous energy for the practice of dharma and although his body was little more than a skeleton covered with dark skin, he continued to practice with the utmost joy. Even though he was in such a sorry physical condition, because of his happiness and joy he would often sing songs in praise of dharma. His sister, who did not understand his great attainments, often came to ask him to do something to improve their lot in life. No one in their country was worse off than the two of them, she said. Out of great pity for his hard way of life, she came pleading and weeping, begging him to change. She did not realize that he was experiencing true bliss. Milarepa replied that there was no need to give him this sort of advice, because actually he was the happiest person in the world, which was true, for in that life Milarepa attained buddhahood. So if we have the power of this kind of right energy, we will always take joy and pleasure in the practice of dharma. Furthermore, this energy can be directed in a variety of ways; for example, having right energy in the practice of meditation or in helping others. Also, if we have

developed such energy, no one will be able to interfere with our practice of dharma, causing us to become discouraged or to give it up.

Three Types of Laziness

Joyful effort is the remedy for the delusion of laziness. Laziness has three divisions. The first kind of laziness is called 'self-indulgent laziness'. It refers to the discouraged state of mind which arises when we think, 'Yes, of course, the practice of dharma is very beneficial and necessary, but I can't do it just now because it is simply too difficult'. This attitude blocks our progress and development. If we make an effort, each of us has the ability to progress, but this kind of laziness destroys that possibility. When such feelings of incapacity arise we should shrug them off, realizing that they are a great impediment to our practice of dharma. We must encourage ourselves by reflecting that we do have the ability to progress, and that we are physically healthy and mentally able. So while we have this opportunity, we need to take advantage of it and practice.

One master said that even if someone knows he is going to die tomorrow, he should still develop his mind, study, and learn today. Although one is going to die tomorrow and today's learning may not be of much use in this life, the imprint it leaves will not decay and will benefit one in the future. It is like having something which we give to someone to keep for us for a while and which later on we will be able to make use of.

The second kind of laziness arises in us after we have begun the practice of dharma and manifests when, after a certain lapse of time, we begin to feel mentally dull and physically tired. This interferes with our practice and development, and happens very easily. For example, if we attend a dharma course, after a week or so, when we hear the gong summoning us to a lecture or meditation session, our mind seems sluggish and reluctant. Such inertia is a manifestation of this type of laziness. We can call this the 'laziness of lethargy'. Now if our dharma practice is to develop and progress, we must make continuous effort, but this type of laziness blocks such effort. When it arises we must immediately recognize it as an interference which halts our progress and development. Realizing this, we must immediately abandon it. We can contrast this with the involvements and activities of worldly life in which people work extremely hard for a short-lived and relatively meaningless goal. They are willing to make great efforts, working very late hours, and feel no laziness at all. Because its fruit is so unique, when we engage in the practice of dharma, we must generate continuous energy and not allow ourselves to fall victims to such laziness. What is more, if as a result of our dharma practice we experience a little physical suffering, we should be pleased because it is worthwhile and shows we can work hard. People who lose an eye in a war are proud of telling how it happened, as if it were a great exploit. In fact, it really isn't worth advertising at all because it is only a sign of suffering that such a

person has created for himself and others. On the other hand, if we suffer physically through our dharma practice, this is a reason for justifiable pride because it relates to an activity which will bring positive benefits to ourselves and others, now and in the future. It is important to make a sound critical assessment of these points in order to decide for yourselves whether they are right or wrong.

The third type of laziness consists of clinging to involvements and activities which are at variance with the dharma and investing great amounts of energy in them. It is called the 'laziness of clinging' — clinging to actions which are adverse to dharma and hence unwholesome. This is the mental attitude which regards any sort of dharma activity as tiring, arduous and boring, whereas one indulges in a worldly activity with no feeling of fatigue or laziness and with abundant energy. This is a very harmful delusion because it detracts from our practice of dharma, and gets us involved in unwholesome actions. Our entire life can be wasted in such actions. It is very important to investigate the perfection of joyful effort, because this provides the antidote to laziness. We should also become fully aware of the different kinds of laziness. If we do not recognize these we may confuse laziness with proper energy and think that someone is practicing joyful effort because he is always very busy with worldly activity.