

Module XV: The Paramitās, Transcendent Exertion
Talk 4, October 6, 2016 – Michael Levin
Chapter 30, PTOD p. 238-248

The experience of the fourth paramitā, transcendent exertion is one of joy. It is described as a good horse, joyful and free from laziness. Up to this moment, the path of the Bodhisattva has seemed like an uphill journey, painful and difficult. Now there is a new perspective. One has crested a hill and a vast new perspective has opened up. No longer pushed by fear of samsara, we are pulled forward by the enthusiasm of the journey toward enlightenment. Practice is now delightful.

The Sanskrit for Exertion virya. Virya is related to English words such as virtue and virile. It has a connotation of strength and heroism. The fourth paramitā has been translated as heroic perseverance.

According to Shantideva, exertion is a way of developing an attitude of delight toward the path. When you feel delighted with what you are doing, working hard evolves effortlessly. It is like falling in love: when you fall in love, you have to maintain your love affair, no matter what obstacles come to you.

Generosity overcomes stinginess or holding back.

Discipline overcomes passion.

Patience overcomes aggression.

Exertion overcomes laziness.

Alternation of shamatha and vipashyana:

Patience is shamatha practice.

Exertion is vipashyana practice. It opens up a whole new view. It is awareness practice.

Paramitās are mostly post-meditation practices. At this point, practice has penetrated to every corner of one's life, so there is no longer any place one could go to take a vacation from practice.

The paramitās are very much about how we live our life which is what we call post-meditation. Nevertheless, if we did not practice shamatha, and did not cultivate vipashyana by our study and the Mahayana practices of tonglen, lojong, and four limitless ones, not much would be changing in our lives. This would be a good point to discuss, as it is important.

Smiling at Obstacles:

The Tibetan for the fourth paramitā is tsöndrū which means joy in practice. There will be many obstacles, but we do not give up. We do not expect that others will support us. We keep going and our fear becomes fearlessness. We never lose heart.

The paramitā of transcendental exertion is free from regarding any ordinary activity as boring. Each situation is really unique and an opportunity to wake up.

The main obstacle to transcendental exertion is laziness. There are three levels of laziness, and each is a way of not realizing the sacredness of every corner of our life.

Laziness: The Main Obstacle to Exertion

1. Common laziness or casualness is ordinary laziness or slothfulness. We keep falling asleep or are unable to get ourselves properly organized to accomplish what needs to be done. It is as if we are victims of our life, but it is actually not organizing properly to accomplish things.
2. Losing heart. Being disheartened is really the flip side of gaining the fever of enlightenment. It is a form of panic, and there is no time for dharma. It can be overcome by giving up the reference points to the samsaric world that we feel attached to.
3. Degraded laziness: Being preoccupied with samsaric activities such as dealing with enemies or collecting wealth.

Three Qualities of Exertion:

1. Suit of armor: One never takes off the suit of armor which is the desire to attain enlightenment. The armor of exertion is connected with joy. Whatever we experience is like a fog and not all that substantial.
2. Action: (1) Making an effort to overcome kleshas. (2) Making an effort to develop virtue. (3) Making an exceedingly great effort to work with others.

The second of these, developing virtue has five categories which are: (a) perseverance, (b) joy, (c) immovability, (d) not changing one's mind, and (e) non-arrogance.

3. Never being satisfied: We never say, "Now I have exerted myself enough." There is a sense of not being separate from the dharma.