

# 2005-02-07 Paramis: Effort

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

effort, energy, people, develop, perfections, confidence, vitality, life, practice, buddha, important, liberation, mind, meditation, ability, capacity, helpful, called, factor, shore

## SPEAKERS

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Today's the day I want to continue on the series I'm slowly doing over a year, one, one month, one Monday a month, on the perfections. And there are 10 perfections. what's called in Pali armies is the word in Sanskrit it's part of meat does. And these are 10 qualities strengths, strengths of character, inner qualities, that are understood to be very important. supports or aids in the person's process of moving towards liberation. And in the process of responding to the world through compassion. The word parami upon Mita comes from the word, the root of the word is para. And para means other. It's all it means it's kind of ordinary work for other and by inference or By extension, it refers to the other shore, the shore and the other shore. And part of the point of liberation or liberation is a process of crossing the floods crossing the somehow the rapids of the currents of greed, hate and delusion. And coming to the other shore where run dry hard ground, we're not going to be caught up in the world winds and the swirls of addictive behavior or reactive behavior or attachment clinging. And so paramita with that kind of Route, those qualities that help in that process of making it across the floods or across these currents, the rapids and sometimes they're called perfections, because that will take you to the other shore. And the idea is once you get the other shore, you've perfected the process of crossing the river or crossing the stream or whatever. Sometimes they called the perfections. And they're not perfections in the sense that if you have to develop these 10 qualities to the absolute capacity, the human being can develop them. But you have to develop them to the point that they aid you to get across. Like, if you want to build a raft to get across the river, you don't have to build a catamaran, or try Moran or, you know, hovercraft isn't really complicated. You just have to build something that is good enough to get across to the shore. And so that's kind of his quote here and develop these qualities to that kind of points. However, since that part of the function or department basis to help us in the compassionate service to others, it could be argued that there's no limit to how much they can be developed because there's no limit to beings that need our help. So that 10 perfections, our generosity, virtue, renunciation Wisdom. And then the word for today which is effort or energy. And this is followed then by patience, and then truth, determination or resolve, loving kindness, and equanimity. And so we're about halfway through the list. And today's is the day for the

perfection of effort or energy is a little bit hard to know how to translate the word viriya into English. Sometimes just translating English is effort. Sometimes energy, sometimes isn't vigor. Sometimes it's persistence, sometimes as a heroic energy. The word viriya which is used here comes from the root Veera, which in Sanskrit and Pali refers to a hero. So it's kind of They give a heroic effort or energy is a little bit kind of in the background of this word viriya. And if you just translate it to English as energy or effort, you lose the sense of kind of this is something you know that a hero needs someone who's going to heroic effort. I kind of like the idea lately of translating as bigger as a nice kind of way, and other possibilities of vitality. So infusing our activities with vigor, vitality, energy effort. Now, energy or effort in practice is important because there is no Buddhist practice. At least I was gonna say spiritual practice, but I can't speak for all spiritual traditions. But there is no Buddhist practice without effort. And the some people limit their effort to reading the menu. And that certainly takes some effort, but it doesn't take enough to get you across. You can't read the instructor is about to build the boat and think that you'll get across you have to actually build the boat and get in the boat and get across. So you have to apply you have to kind of, you know, apply ourselves engage somehow rather than the practice. That the, the effort of applying ourselves in practice is most, the faceted or quite varied. There's many different kinds of effort and energy that a person can undertake, as they evolved in Buddhist practice. different phases of practice, different points in practice, different aspects of things we're addressing and dealing with require different kinds of effort and energy. And what this means is as someone who wants to engage in Buddhist practice, has to be able to marshal or call upon or activate their ability to do to act to have effort to engage. And they have to also monitor their effort. So that it's the right kind The given situation, otherwise they're gonna get in trouble. Now, one of the ways of learning how to use effort, the best way that I know, unfortunately, is not having anyone tell you what the right effort is in practice, but rather each person learns on their own. And the way we learn the way I learned was through trial and error. And the unfortunate thing about trial and error is that requires a lot of air. And some people have a very low capacity for air for mistakes. And one of the things that's required I believe, for successfully following the Buddhist path is a high capacity for air. So you can learn from that you learn from trial and error, you'll learn what works and what doesn't work. You learn what doesn't work by trying it. And so in my own practice, You know, there's, there's always a little, you know, not always but through these corrections that go on with effort with energy. Now I'm trying, I'm making too much effort. Now, I'm being too lazy or too complacent. And now I need to kind of make more and I need to make less. And I find finding the balance of where the effort needs to be. Now I need the effort I need to make is to not make any effort at all. And it take a lot of effort to stop making effort. And if I think that I can just stop making effort about making the effort to stop making effort. I'm sometimes fooling myself. And I do very persistent, very on top of things, to watch all the little tricks of the mind. The mind is so tricky, sometimes are so tenacious, to be involved in trying to do things. And sometimes you have to be very attentive to the mind. So to let go of the tendency of the mind to be doing you and doing doing sometimes that's the right efforts me me. There's a whole range of ways to do in private life. One of the one of the ways of looking at the Buddhist teachings are some of you know this, he has a lot of lists. And one of the ways of understanding lists is that is that he's looking, the Buddha is looking at the human being, as something like an ecological field, like an ecosystem. And ecosystems is a complex field of interactions, the different elements in the ecosystem,

they interact in different ways. And they there's different kind of balances they come into. And you don't understand the ecology of the San Francisco Bay, by only understanding something about the water or the bay, or only about, you know, one different aspect. It's a complex interaction, a field of interactions. Well, the human being is a complex field of many different factors, psychological, physical, you know, all kinds of mental factors that come into play. And so these lists different lists of what I have is kind of His way of trying to show how these different factors work together, support each other interact, and develop the person. So if you look at efforts and energy, we see that effort and energy is something that both is, is interactive with other aspects of the human field that we're who we are. And so you can see that in some of the lists the Buddha has, there's one list where viriya, this word for energy appears, where it effort appears after confidence. It follows a sequence after developing confidence are sometimes translated as faith in the five faculties. And so the, the presentation of the list there is that based on confidence, and then there can be effort and energy. And I think we most of us know this, that when there's a lot of confidence that tends to come along with a rousing of energy and effort, it's bloody easier to do something and have a lot of confidence in what you're going to do. So confidence is one of the factors that feeds into having a healthy sense of energetic involvement or engagement in the practice we're doing. Classically in Buddhism, it said, one of the things that's very important to have confidence in, is in liberation is the liberation, the awakening of the Buddha. And this is very clear when we're talking about the perfections. Because the protections are pointing towards very explicitly towards awakening and towards liberation. So it's, it's not you know, many ways of understanding Buddhist practice and how to apply it in daily life. But here we're looking at how is it these practices and these qualities support this very radical movement towards liberation. And so having confidence in the Buddhist liberation or confidence in so that's one thing, it's really something the other thing is to have confidence in our capacity to move in that direction. And that's, you know, not so easy. There's different people have different sense of personal confidence in their ability to accomplish things, semester things. And that's also a very complicated aspect of human psychology. The self perception we have how we see ourselves as someone who can accomplish things and do things. And it has to do with our past experiences and has to do with the messages we get from our society and models we have for what's possible. It has to do with our capacity for patience or capacity for many, many different things come into how we see ourselves as someone who can accomplish things or do things in this world. And it's not a fixed thing, our sense of confidence in yourself. It doesn't mean we're born in But something gets created over time. And it can be changed and worked with and developed. One of the ways of developing confidence is to develop it in small steps. So if you think that you have to kind of, you know, leave tonight, fully enlightened. It's probably a little bit too big of a step to expect right now, maybe. But if you perhaps what you're going to do tonight, maybe, is, you know, maybe before you go to bed tonight, you know, master the capacity to follow 10 breaths, or five breaths, or one breath to really master something small. It turns out that one of the ways that approves human being develops confidence is in their capacity, it is in small steps of mastery. in small steps of mastery, it also turns out that if it's too easy to master Or something that there's it doesn't feed back to developing confidence in myself. That's bad news, right? It means it has to be difficult. There has to be some effort and challenge involved in order to feel if we're mastering something in order to kind of change our sense of personal confidence in ourselves has to

be kind of tough a little bit. So it's small step, but something a little bit challenging is what kind of feeds back and developing greater confidence in oneself. The other thing to have confidence in is, is in the practices we're doing, to have some confidence, the practice we're going to follow is a practice that works for us that's going to take us where we want to go in the context of the perfections going to take us to enlightenment. Now confidence is not meant here to be kind of neutral thing. Oh yeah, you have to have kind of believe in at all so you can kind of do with confidence is actually something supposed to infuse a person with energy. That's Why energy follows confidence in this list as part of the ecology of effort or energy is having confidence in another list, what feeds into effort or energy viriya is what's called discriminating No. What sometimes usually in English, it's translated as investigation of dharmas. In other places talks to they talked about discernment, the use of wisdom. And this is where you use your capacity to understand and be discerning to be discriminating and what's going on to distinguish between useful and unuseful things to do. Helpful, helpful and unhelpful things to do. This very simple pragmatic concern is a very important aspect of early Buddhist teachings, the simple pragmatism of what works and what doesn't work And so to be able to track that and watch it, okay, this works, this doesn't work. This quality, the state of mind is not helpful, the state of mind is helpful. I spend a lot of time watching television, it doesn't seem to be very helpful in terms of developing the qualities that needs to be had in order to be, you know, in order to have the proper vigor to engage in spiritual practice. I know sometimes when I watch television, I felt drained afterwards. So to see that to know that they have the ability to investigate one's own experience, or their own honesty to investigate this works and this doesn't work, very simple thing that is said to help strengthen or arouse the energy factor, that ability to be discerning and discriminating. In the list of the 10 perfections energy, bigger follows with And with part of the reason for this is it said in the tradition, that energy helps perfect wisdom. When you have a wise understanding about something, it's the one thing to understand is something else than to really kind of live that you need energy to live, the wisdom that you have. But also the wisdom is what gives you a sense of how to use the energy wisely. What is wise and useful energy, where the energy should be channeled? There's a lot of different things we can do in human life with our energy with our with our precious vitality. And not all of them are as effective for reaching liberation as others. And so have the wisdom to know what is useful and what is not. Part of that wisdom factor is to sort through all the myriad of things a human being can do. And let's just sort let's just, you know, leave some of it out. And say sort through all the useful things to do in life, all the nice things to do in life. And there's is a lot of good things to do in the world. There's a lot of causes to work for. There's a lot of good things to do. There's a lot of wonderful things to do. And some people here in the West, are plagued with too many opportunities. Too many choices. And we get kind of depressed or upset or split, they're scattered, you know, how do we deal with them all. And part of a wise life is knowing how to sort through all the different things a human being can do. And then to choose to narrow the narrow the area to choose maybe one or two or three things that are really important for us that this is where we're going to put our time and energy into so that we can perfect it. Now in terms of developing to perfections, something as lofty as as, as liberation and awakening, I think it becomes really crucial to start making some kind of wise decisions about how we're going to align our life. After that goal, not everyone has to have that goal. But that's a theme of the series. So I can say it though. So the, you know, to really kind of sort through it all and realize you can't do it all. We can't do all the

good things out there. There has to be some kind of narrowing of the of the fields so that we can then have our energy go productively and usefully in a concentrated way. into this one thing that we're going to do, perhaps I'm in what's called the Eightfold Path. Now they're listed the good ahead. There the effort factor follows after developing ethics Being virtuous selfing Right Speech right action, right livelihood. And one of the things that Buddha said is that factor or support for energy having energy or bigger or vitality available is to be is to present yourself to he said to your teacher, but to anyone I suppose, to present yourself and fraudulently on deceitfully. Basically Be true to who you are, don't try to hide or pretend to some something different or be defensive or kind of build up a front, but to really be honest about who you are. So he said you have honesty in virtue of being a you know, developing a certain level of virtue is one of the things that helps bring support, the availability of a good kind of effort and energy to engage in spiritual life. Making sense so far. So now I can say that In the teachings of the Buddha effort, the early Buddha, the early teachings of the Buddha effort is really important, so important that you have quotes like this. It is for you to make strong effort. The Buddha's only tell you how they give you the menu or the recipe, you have to make the bread. You have to engage in the practice. The Dharma is for those who are industrious, not for those who are lazy. And then a very short little quote that a little bit surprising for the way some people relate to Dharma practice or thinking about it too dangerous quote. Because if you understand this the wrong way, you end up getting a headache or if you try flying it in the wrong way. But it says, Be quick in making effort. Quick and making effort. Don't waste your time. In another quote that goes back now 2500 2500 years that's still used to stay in the Zen monasteries. The slight variation of this as if your heads on fire, live mindfully as if your head now what does that supposed to look like? You know, images might you know, someone who's mindful or someone who's very peaceful and tranquil and going ahead and just attentive, but someone whose heads on fire is not that way. I think I thought a good image. I think even though it's used all the time, there's a little bit kind of, but the idea is that to really be aroused, to be to be really energized and really not waste time is the image here. Don't waste time. And don't waste time being peaceful. The so vigor, energy effort. It's one of the great pleasures that I know of in Dharma practice is when the vitality factor when there's a sense of vitality, strong vitality, that arises from doing the practice itself. There's something you know, there's many ways to have vitality, I can go out and go for a long run, and come back feeling energized in a nice way. And I'm not going to disparage that kind of energy. But there's something about the energy which lends itself to me at least, of kind of it's kind of like the Little bit too high, a little bit too energized or excited or something. And you can get, you know, energized by having a lot of caffeine, but also kind of leads to kind of buzz and kind of little, little edge to it, which doesn't, you know, feel so good. But the kind of vitality that I've just I felt, through meditation practice, when it kind of kicks in, comes in is not the same thing as my efforting. But I have to make effort for the vitality to arise, like you can run, you know, you know, go running, and the running is required for the juices to get flowing. But you can't make the juices yourself flowing. It's kind of like the function of the running, right? So same thing with meditation, when the meditations going really well, really strong. There's just vitality, this energy that gets arrived, arises within and a person can feel very, very kind of since it's a tremendous and dynamic dynamism within the method, usually not the popular images. Meditation, the popular image image augmentation is being really calm and peaceful. And some people some people are really pushing the calm factor.

When they meditate. Sometimes they push it too much you fall asleep. But calm and tranquility are very important parts of meditation, however, so is a tremendous sense of vitality. And these things can wonderfully coexist. And that's why if you're only focusing on common tranquility, you might be shortchanging yourself from the possibilities vitality arising. And the vitality of the image of vitality I like, is that a candle flame that is burning unflatteringly, there's no wind blowing on it to the candle flame is completely still, in a sense, just this flame that's kind of going up from the candle. It doesn't move just still it's basically still but you know, that insight is tremendously dynamic. But it's you know, it doesn't move because there's no wind blowing it. So the same thing with this energy that can arise in practice is vitality. That's feels very kind of, sometimes some people use the word adamant for the feeling of energy that can arise when people practice. One of the reasons why we do walking meditation on retreats is so that there could be a proper availability of effort or energy for the meditative process. If people just sit and meditate all day, it tends tends to be on soporific just sitting all the day to energy time drains, you people need to go back and forth, alternating between the right balance of walking meditation and sitting meditation, and then walking which brings energy back to the time of the Buddha. The Buddha walked a lot because he didn't have any cars. He had to walk every day to go for his alms to get his food. He walked around too much in northern India to teach and meet people. And up until the time he was 80 years old, he was walking hundreds of miles and he was he tracked you know, from up from the foothills of the Himalayas, all the way down to near Patna. Good walk 80 year old man to walk across northern India like that. And, and I say this because the Buddha had no, I might guess I didn't know I don't can't tell. no way of knowing. But my good guess is the Buddha could never have imagined that there was going to be a generation of people who communicated to each other through tapping on little plastic squares squares that they'd be slumped over. hunched over, on looking at these white useful these luminous screens and just sitting around all day or some people do sit around other ways. And because you could never imagine it because you live in a culture maybe that did a lot of walking people will tend to be more fit perhaps the Buddha neglected to mention the importance of exercise. The and you know what the Buddha has an eightfold path. I think that he lived in our society here, he would have come up with a nine fold and probably would have been right exercise. Because a certain level of vigor, vitality is really important for the meditative process to go really well. And so the body has to be somewhat tuned, some not not too much, not too much, not too little. Actually. Warnings have nothing to fit You know, like governors being free from illness and discomfort endowed with good digestion, not too cold, not too hot of moderate strength, fit for exertion. There was somewhere else there was a quote, but nothing to fit. I forget where that was. But this is one of the factors for effort is being physically fit. And, and now there's lots of there's examples of people who became awakened while they were sick. That's not it. But, but having when you when we have the ability to kind of keep our body toned. This is a really important aspect support for meditation practice. Now when people have barely any time at all, and you can barely squeeze in meditation or squeeze in a little bit of exercise, and it's really hard to have a sometimes a balanced life. That's why the discerning aspect of our life being discerning and wise about our priorities is really important because sometimes we have to have behavioral change in order to have the proper amount of time to live a balanced life, that supports perhaps a spiritual life. The in one important teaching the Buddha gave the one one around, one place that appears is in the Eightfold Path. The definition explanation of

right effort there, right after it is defined as being fourfold or one translate translate is the for the right endeavors. These are for since there's so many things we can do with our effort or energy. These are four areas to help make it a little bit easier for us and that is to make the effort to abandon to let go of unhelpful states of mind that are here to make the effort to prevent unhealthy, unhelpful states of mind from arising make the effort to arouse helpful states of mind that are not around right now. And then make the effort to maintain and develop those helpful states of mind which are present. So it says abandoning, avoiding, developing and maintaining are the four different kinds of efforts. So, this requires the ability to be mindful and wisely discerning to be able to track and monitor what the effect is on us of having different states of mind. Different kinds of thoughts, different kinds of feelings, what's going on and have the ability to work with it. Sometimes we work with it very, very, very large scale. If you read I don't know what but you know, if you read read horror books are see horror movies regularly. You know, and you wonder why you're always feeling kind of afraid. You know, and you look at everybody wondering is, you know, if that person is safe, you know, maybe the simplest ways of avoiding a certain amount of fear, the rising theory is to stop reading those horror books. You know, making that level of decision, you know, could be helpful and then there's much more subtle ones and that is tracking our mind, or even our thoughts. What thoughts thoughts can have a tremendous impact on our well being, in the moment even having certain train of thought can drain our energy Other kinds of thoughts can vitalize our energy and to be able to track that and watch that sometimes it's appropriate, not enough to just say, Enough of this, I let go this kind of thinking it's not useful, it's not productive and helpful. Or you know that something's not useful to you. And so you try to avoid what's going around a wrap around it. If you know that thinking about dreaming about having I don't know what, you know, some wonderful consumer product. And every time you you know, I don't know I can't, you know, every time you open certain sorts of certain magazines, you spend the next two days fantasizing about having this consumer product and nothing else happens in your life because you fantasize him or her get it. You know, that's not a useful thing to do. I think I've got enough look at that magazine. Because I don't I don't want to have that triggered in my mind. Or to appreciate the are helpful states of mind, their states of mind like loving kindness, or peace or tranquility, or wisdom, patience. There's qualities like concentration, or mindfulness. These are useful things to have to present for us. How can they be cultivated? How can they be developed? How can they be maintained and enhanced when they're there? So some of you who decided to come here tonight, and imagine that because you felt that being mindful or meditated was going to be helpful. And you thought this would be helpful place to cultivate and develop that maybe to arouse it, you would have some you've maybe had a busy day busy life. And so this kind of stops it all and kind of gets you to sit in a way that maybe you couldn't do at home. So that's a choice. Or you're going to see someone who have a difficult relationship with and you think well, you know, I think a good way of preparing for that is I think I'll do a little bit of loving kindness, meditation, or practice, so that I come with a little bit more healthful state of mind for that interaction than I would otherwise. So I'm going to allow that state of mind, we maintain it and develop it. So this kind of this process of monitoring ourselves and making adjustments and working on ourselves is one of the things that one of the teachings that Buddha gave us, they said was very important to do. Just like exercising the body, it's helpful to exercise the mind or the heart, and, and be able to have that ability, that strength or that capacity to be able to move things about in

the inner life. Some people who have never exercised the inner life, have no ability to move things or work with things or let go or break things up, evoke things. But if you start doing this in small steps. You'll find it with a practice that you'll get more and more skillful. Working with your inner life. And you don't have to take things as being fixed as the way it is. But you can actually work within change it just like you would with exercise. It's not any different. The danger of this is that a person can get the impression that this Buddhist spiritual life is all about tinkering. And there's a place for tinkering or working. But it's kind of a dead end if you're always tinkering just doing this and that sometimes was necessary is some points necessary to realize we have to let go of all efforts, let go of all attempts to build or construct or maintain or even like, even let go of the effort to let go. Just to be just develop complete. presence for what it is no need to go forward, no need to go backwards. No need even to stand still. Just presence In the midst of whatever is going on, and perhaps in that peacefulness of presence, when we is anytime there's a movement away from it. Sometimes we just let go, we let go. So the teaching of letting go can be one where we learn to persistently let go, we energetically let go, let go back into the piece. And then sometimes we don't want to even we don't want to even let go. But the practice is to energetically let be. let things be let things be. There's a time and place for different ways of practicing. A lot depends on what's going on in the ecology of the mind. When the inner ecology is in homeostasis, when it's, that's the time for making no effort at all. There might be a lot of vitality, but there's no need anymore. Before anything or against anything, there's no need to try to make something happen or not make something happen. But when the system is not in homeostasis or it's not in balance, then we need to somehow bring it into balance. And depending on how far out of balance it is, depends on what kind of effort is needed. When it's when someone is wildly out of balance because of their ethical conduct. Maybe they have to spend a heroic amount of time getting their their ethical conduct cleaned up, ask for forgiveness, practice, atone mentor, do something. But when their ethical life is basically harmonious, then that efforts not needed but maybe something else is needed to bring it things into balance. But when the ecology of the human psyche is in balance it's described in The earliest early tradition as being in a state of equanimity. And when the equanimity is strong, then the mind realizes that it doesn't have to cling or react to anything. And when you can't convince the mind and you can't tell the mind that but when the mind comes to the point where it realizes by itself, because of all the synchronicity, that it doesn't need to be for anything against anything, holding on to anything whatsoever. Then the mind lets go of itself. And why would you want the mind to let go of itself. When the mind lets go of itself, then it reaches the other shore and then it's awake. So thanks to all efforts And I hope that all of you are willing to do the trial and error work of finding f the right effort and different times and the learning process. If you remember that if things are too easy, you don't develop your confidence. People who have a high degree of confidence in their ability to accomplish things will interpret failure as a sign that either they didn't make enough effort, or they didn't have the right knowledge or skills to accomplish something and they just need to develop those people who have a very low level of self confidence when they fail. They just simply say I, they come to the conclusion I don't have the ability. I hope all of you will find how to have tremendous confidence in your ability to accomplish your own self efficacy. And in having that confidence, be able to make all the other thing. People who have a high degree of confidence in their ability to accomplish something, tend to put higher goals for themselves and people who have low, low confidence in

themselves. So my hope for all of you is that you have a high confidence in your ability and that you practice the persistence, which is one of the ways of translating this word viriya persistence to try and try again and not be afraid of failing and failing and failing and failing. Maybe not a good footing to end on but it's been James Joyce, when he submitted Dubliners, to the publishers, he was rejected by 22 publishers. There's an example. Or Anyway, there's a whole series of people who were rejected for their endeavors, sometimes for years and decades, but they just kept that working and they believed in it, they've worked on it. Continue to continue working on it. rejection and failure. Don't need to be sent reasons to give a rejection and failure is just a sign that we need to make more effort. Hang in there. And lots of things and within effort, well, I'll get the home to bed well Okay so thank you all very much.