

# GATSAL

## TEACHING



# The Perfection of Enthusiastic Effort

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The fourth *paramita* is that of *viriya*, which means perseverance or enthusiastic effort. We all appreciate that if we want to succeed in any skill we first have to practice. I knew a young boy in Australia who from early youth deeply loved the guitar: classical and Spanish guitar. Even as a young schoolboy, he would practice many hours every day on his guitar. Now as an adult he is a brilliant guitarist who wins many competitions. The point is that, although he had a natural talent for music and he loved the guitar, nonetheless he still had to practice.

If we want to be a footballer or engage in any kind of sports, or to become a dancer or a computer expert or anything at all, we need to practice. Even if one has a natural talent, one still has to repeat the same exercises over and over and over until they become spontaneous. If we can accept this about mastering a physical skill, why do we sometimes imagine that, on a spiritual path

where basically we have to completely rework our own mind, somehow it's just going to happen automatically?

Nowadays, it's popular in certain spiritual circles to say: "Oh well we already have everything, so there's nothing to be done. We already are Buddha, so therefore we don't need to do anything." This is why sometimes Dzogchen and Mahamudra are popular. People think: "Oh, you just sit and there you are. You have nothing to do. You just have to be." But do we realise the difficulty of just being? It probably takes years and years of effort to become effortless. It's like professional musicians who spend years and years practicing and practicing until finally the music plays through them. But we can't just sit down and expect that to happen without putting in so much time for just practice. When we see great musicians playing it looks completely effortless as if they're not doing anything and just the music is pouring through their fingers. But we know how many

hours everyday for so many years, they have dedicated to being able to appear so effortless!

There is a story in our Drukpa Kagyu tradition of a 'crazy' yogin called Drukpa Kunley. One time he went to Lhasa and visited the main temple called the Jokhang. The principal statue in the temple is a statue of Shakyamuni Buddha called the Jowo Rinpoche which is said to represent Shakyamuni Buddha as a youth. So then Drukpa Kunley bowed down and he said to the Buddha: "Okay, you and I started out at the same time. You became a Buddha and here I am still stuck in samsara! What's the difference between us? The difference is that you made efforts and I was lazy!"

The reason we're all sitting here in samsara is because we're lazy. Of course we must have done something right and made some efforts in past lives, otherwise we would not have an interest and connection with the Dharma now. But the point is that although we have this tremendous potential for realisation because that is our true nature. Nonetheless, unless from our side we take the Dharma and put it at the centre of our hearts, at the centre of our lives, nothing much will change, nothing will transform.

People complain that they would like to practice, but they have no time. This is one of the reasons why I chose to talk about the Paramitas - generosity, discipline, patience, effort, meditation and wisdom - because not only do these bodhisattva virtues comprise the path to Buddhahood, but they are our own intrinsic qualities which we need to develop in our daily lives. So therefore we must not think that Practice is only when we are sitting on our meditation cushion or when we come to a Centre to listen to Dharma talks or when we are doing our rituals, and so the rest of our daily life is just so much worldly activity. Because if we make this separation, then the time we give to the Dharma is so tiny, while the time which we are caught up in worldly distractions is so great.

But if we think of our Dharma perception, our understanding of the Dharma as like yeast, then we mix that yeast with the heavy dough of our worldly life and it will rise up and the whole of that dough will become light and nourishing. Instead of being a big indigestible lump, the dough rises up and we bake it and it is delicious! This is so important. Everything that we do, if we do it with awareness and kindness, if we really use all our experiences as an opportunity to bring into play

the various principles of the Dharma which we have heard and read about, if we really use our daily life as a practice, then everything is transformed.

It doesn't matter how many great Lamas we meet, how many wonderful teachings we hear, how much inspiration we gain from others, in the end it depends on ourselves, what we do with our lives, what we do with our own mind.

So this question of effort and perseverance doesn't mean a kind of heaviness and panting exertion that tires us out. It's not a joyless doggedness. When we're doing something we really love, it doesn't seem difficult at all. It seems easy because we have so much joy in doing it. The Dharma should be a cause of joy. It's like any activity: if we really enjoy doing it, then even though we devote such a lot of time and energy to it, it doesn't tire us. So if we see that everything in our lives - our family life, our time with our friends, our colleagues and society in general is our Dharma practice, and everything that happens to us is our opportunity to learn and develop - then what seemed like a pretty dull, boring, pointless existence is transformed into something profound and meaningful!

Our lives can have meaning for us. It's so important to realise that this particular human birth is our great opportunity and we won't probably get it again if we waste the chance now. This is the opening. No great master is going to come along and click his fingers and we're just going to get it. It doesn't work like that. Even if we are fortunate enough to experience a glimpse of the true state, it still needs so much time and practice to stabilise this understanding. Even if the Lord Buddha himself was sitting in front of you, all he could say would be: "Practice."

Many of the Buddha's disciples were ordinary people - they weren't all monks and nuns. They were kings, businessmen, farmers and housewives. In fact it's noticeable if we read the early Sutras, how much time the Buddha actually spent around towns, talking with ordinary people and encouraging them to transform their lives. They didn't all become monks. They just used his teachings in their daily lives and attained very high levels of realisation. So if we use our everyday lives as our spiritual practice, things will definitely change. Then our biggest problems will become our greatest opportunities.