

Right Effort

What, now, is Right Effort? There are Four Great Efforts; the effort to avoid, the effort to overcome, the effort to develop, and the effort to maintain.

1. The Effort to Avoid (*Samvara-ppadhana*)

What, now is the effort to *Avoid*? Herein the disciple rouses his will to avoid the arising of evil, unwholesome things that have not yet arisen; and he makes effort, stirs up his energy; exerts his mind and strives.

Thus, when he perceives a form with the eye, a sound with the ear, and an odor with the nose, a taste with the tongue, an impression with the body, or an object with the mind, he neither adheres to the whole, nor to its parts. And he strives to ward off that through which evil and unwholesome things, greed and sorrow, would arise, if he remained with unguarded senses; and he watches over his senses, restrains his senses.

Possessed of this noble 'Control over the Senses' he experiences inwardly a feeling of joy, into which no evil thing can enter. . . . This is called the effort to avoid.

2. The Effort to Overcome (*Pahana-ppadhana*)

What, now, is the effort to *Overcome*? There the disciple rouses his will to overcome the evil, unwholesome things that have already arisen; and he makes effort, stirs up his energy, exerts his mind and strives.

He does not retain any thought of sensual lust, ill-will or grief, or any other evil and unwholesome states that may have arisen; he abandons them, dispels them, destroys them, causes them to disappear. (*Anguttara-Nikaya*, IV. 13, 14)

Five Methods of Expelling Evil Thoughts

If, whilst regarding a certain object, there arise in the disciple, on account of it, evil and unwholesome thoughts connected with greed, hatred and delusion, then the disciple (1) should, by means of this object, gain another and wholesome object. (2) Or, he should reflect on the misery of these thoughts; 'Unwholesome, truly, are these thoughts! Blamable are these thoughts! Of painful result are these thoughts!' (3) Or he should pay no attention to these thoughts. (4) Or, he should consider the compound nature of these thoughts. (5) Or, with teeth clenched and tongue pressed against the gums, he should with his mind restrain, suppress and root out these thoughts; and in doing so these evil and unwholesome thoughts of greed, hatred and delusion will dissolve and disappear; and the mind will inwardly become settled and calm, composed and concentrated. . . . This is called the effort to overcome. (*Majjhima-Nikaya*, 20)

3. The Effort to Develop (*Bhavana-ppadhana*)

What, now, is the effort to *Develop*? Herein the disciple rouses his will to arouse wholesome things that have not yet arisen; and he makes effort, stirs up his energy, exerts his mind and strives.

Thus he develops the 'Elements of Enlightenment' (*bojjhanga*), based on solitude, on detachment, on extinction, and ending in deliverance, namely: 'Mindfulness' (*sati*), 'Investigation of the Law' (*dhamma-vicaya*), 'Energy' (*viriyā*), 'Rapture' (*pīti*), 'Tranquillity' (*passaddhi*), 'Concentration' (*samadhi*), and 'Equanimity' (*upekkha*). . . . This is called the effort to develop.

4. The Effort to Maintain (*Anurakkhana-ppadhana*)

What, now, is the effort to *Maintain*? Herein the disciple rouses his will to maintain the wholesome things that have already arisen, and not to allow them to disappear, but to bring them to growth, to maturity and to the full perfection of development (*bhavana*); and he makes effort, stirs up his energy, exerts his mind and strives.

Thus, for example, he keeps firmly in his mind a favorable object of concentration that has arisen, such as the mental image of a skeleton, of a corpse infested by worms, of a corpse blue-black in color, of a festering corpse, of a corpse riddled with holes, of a corpse swollen up. . . . This is called the effort to maintain. (*Anguttara-Nikaya*, IV. 13, 14)

Truly, for a disciple who is possessed of faith and has penetrated the Teaching of the master, it is fit to think: 'Though skin sinews and bones wither away, though flesh and blood of my body dry up, I shall not give up my efforts till I have attained whatever is attainable by manly perseverance, energy and endeavour.' This is called Right Effort. (*Majjhima-Nikaya*, 70)

The effort of Avoiding, Overcoming, Of Developing and Maintaining: These four great efforts have been shown By him, the scion of the sun. And he who firmly clings to them, May put an end to suffering. (*Anguttara-Nikaya*, IV. 14)

Source: Nyanatiloka (compiler, translator). *The Word of the Buddha: An Outline of the Teaching of the Buddha in the Words of the Pali Canon*. 14th edition. Kandy, Ceylon: Buddhist Publication Society, 1967. (Pages 55-57)