

note the emotion/thought and turn your effort toward bearing witness to physical sensations, just resting in the experience. You are now practicing patience with impatience. Bearing witness to ourselves in this way is what my teacher, Joko Beck, described as “suffering intelligently.”

2. Expand your view to include what you're leaving out of the situation. Without turning away from whatever you've been experiencing in the first step, turn your effort to a more expanded view by simply asking, “What am I leaving out?” You can also think of this step as turning your energy toward leaning into the circumference of your circle so that it expands.
3. Accept where you are. With steps one and two, you have given witness to the truth of your experience. In doing so, you have stayed connected to the experience of whatever you are engaged with, and being just this moment is the way of compassion.

Sometimes it seems that this paramita is one of the hardest of all the paramitas to practice, for it asks us to persevere in the midst of great difficulty. But Practicing Patience is more than simply enduring or getting through difficult times. It asks us to take refuge in just continually knowing that no matter how things turn out, we will engage fully in life's circumstances. So Practicing Patience asks us to cultivate determination and engage effort, which is, as it turns out, our next paramita.

*from Deep Hope,
Diane Eshin Rizzetto*

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Engaging Effort

VIRYA PARAMITA

Go straight on a narrow road with 99 curves.
—Zen koan

Wholehearted Effort

The fourth paramita asks us to explore the difference between *doing* and *engaging*. It invites us to engage our capacity for perseverance, determination, and wholeheartedness in whatever life sends our way. It is fueled by our intention to engage with our life and the world in a way that is beneficial and supports life. We may feel helpless and hopeless, but if we hold to our vow to help others, the Paramita of Engaging Effort will support us in continuing forward.

Even so, a distinction about effort needs to be made. Oftentimes our effort is fueled by the belief that if we just push hard enough and make the “right” effort, we can create the life we want. This approach is not surprising given that we are flooded with messages from our consumer-driven culture that we can purchase anything—not just with money but also with

our energy and attention: Eat this superfood and buy these vitamins for health and well-being. Buy this book that will change your life. Follow this teacher who will give you the secret to peace. Meditate with this special method. This is not to say that there are not certain things that can be of help to us, but, inevitably, there are times when our best-laid plans and hardest efforts fail to bring us what or to where we intended. To agree that life's road is windy and sometimes narrow is easy. But to walk that narrow windy road with its ninety-nine turns takes a particular type of effort. No matter what we engage in, it always comes down to just putting one foot in front of the other, for wholehearted effort is wholehearted action.

Zen master Dainin Katagiri Roshi reminds us that when we want to cross a river, we begin by taking one step forward. The idea, of course, is that we will continue taking steps; we may even decide to calculate the time and the number of steps needed to reach our goal. However, if we turn our full, wholehearted awareness toward the step itself, then one step becomes one hundred steps, and the distance between the two shores is contained within the earnest effort of that one step. In one step, we reach the other shore with wholehearted effort.¹

The Chinese character used to translate *virya* means what we often refer to as "single-minded," "vigorous," or "strong." *Virya* also means "to move forward" or "keep trekking." Not to be confused with "pushing," *virya* is a "steady as you go" effort. When I watch a toddler's determination to climb up on something to reach a toy, I'm reminded of this kind of effort. I find it when I look into my friend's smiling face as she greets me from the hospital bed where she is receiving treatment for incurable cancer.

Wholehearted effort is about fully engaged living. It en-

courages us to question our beliefs about what we think our life *should be* and to turn our effort toward full presence of *how it is*. But even though this is simple, it's not always so easy. For one thing, being fully present means being fully present to everything, and that takes effort and perseverance. This is the first step—seeing and questioning, exploring and leaning into the expectation of *should* and allowing it to fall to the side for a moment. This, of course, is easier said than done and is not accomplished without intention, effort, and determination. When we hold on to our views, we try to exclude those aspects of our life that are really invitations for us to enter into the abundance of all that life is offering us. With wholehearted effort, it becomes possible to move again and again into that more abundant connection to our lives.

Clear Intention and Vow

Someone said to me recently, "The longer I practice, the more I realize the impossibility of keeping my vows." I responded, "Wonderful. Your vows are working. Hold to your vows." I've seen the word *vow* defined as "an engine that drives human aspiration, advancement, and accomplishment," and this is certainly the case, but the function of a vow is also to support us in a basic contradiction, which is that we can never fulfill our vows completely. This contradiction, however, is not an obstacle but rather a path, a gateway for us to meet life with an open heart and clear seeing. It is a path that, in the midst of our human imperfections, helps us return to our commitment to waking up and doing what we can to meet the suffering of the world with wise action. A vow is also what fuels