

Special flash News

Virya : energy , the fifth virtuous practice of the bodhisattva by Guy Mokuhō Mercier



Buddha addressed his disciples:

*“O monks,
The disciple gifted with energy
Eliminates all that is pernicious,
Practises what is beneficial,
Eliminates what is detrimental,
Develops what is irreproachable
And keeps himself pure.”*

To speak of energy after patience in the present circumstances of the pandemic rather goes without saying.

Patience and energy are inseparable, both as practices of the bodhisattva and virtues for all beings and it is when difficulties are overwhelming that they express their essence and bring us their assistance.

The energy we are talking about doesn't come as a result of personal will (the 'me') fixated on a goal and the merits that can be gained. It accompanies the mind of awakening and puts it to work. It is the inner desire that we do not know the source of, but which leads all beings, day and night, towards the vision of their true nature “that true mind which lives nowhere and rests on nothing.”

It is more a question of learning to go with the flow of thing , without opposing them, without trying to swim against the current, and to surrender in full consciousness. Like a cork on flowing water allows itself to be carried along by the current, crossing obstacles, the passage opening up through the meanders right to the sea, without making any effort. (*Mushotoku* as zen teaches.)

It is just the same way that nature expresses itself, renewing itself each year with no other effort than the life force. The seed breaks down, a shoot pierces its way through the dark earth all the way to the light, then grows and gives its fruit, whilst demanding nothing in return.

Both patience and energy draw their power from the fifth paramita, *dhyana*, meditation, which is the gateway to true wisdom. In addition, to practise meditation, there must already be diligence, energy and attention.

“The bodhisattva must achieve the virtue of energy by not relaxing the energy of the body and mind, for energy is the root of all good dharmas (actions and phenomena)”

An exhortation to continue to meditate whatever the circumstances.

The word 'energy' includes courage, will, effort, perseverance, endurance, firmness, strength, diligence and other qualities that are necessary for all deepening and maturing of understanding of phenomena and the realisation of what is the emptiness of all things. This energy is to be preserved and prioritised, in body and mind, in view of the service we owe to all beings.

One day we discovered the practice of zazen and for many amongst us it was like a revelation, the feeling of having found the path that leads to freedom. Remember that first zazen with total clarity, an amazement, with no cause that can be analysed. But then, time erodes that initial enthusiasm in the face of the difficulty of anchoring that practice in our everyday life. The 'me' that is possessive and self centered, sets itself to finding reasons not to continue, or to limit or manage frugally this practice which it originally saw as a means of salvation.

*"It is as if, digging a well, with firm hope and a deep intuition that we will find water, we then stop when we find wetness and mud, just when it's the time to redouble our efforts!
Or when, in the firm hope of making fire by rubbing two sticks together, we drop them when we see a little puff of smoke."*)

Energy of body and mind is thus absolutely necessary for anchoring our meditation practice in our life. It was the same energy as Siddhartha needed, when he left his palace and went to find a place to satisfy his desire for awakening, when he cut his hair to go deeply into the forest, when he practised asceticism, and eventually decided not to leave his seat at the foot of the bodhi tree until he had attained awakening.

"Let my blood, my flesh, my fat and my marrow all dry up, so that I am reduced to skin, bones and muscles ; but so long as I have not obtained, in accordance with my decision, that which can be obtained by courage and patience, my energy will persist."

Do not waste energy in futile games, useless occupations, avoid all sorts of polluting activities, to preserve one's body and mind.

Do not fall into laziness : *'It is a black cloud which conceals wisdom, drowns good qualities and feeds evil ones. A lazy person loses all his good qualities, as if he has been robbed and no longer possesses anything. He does not gain what he should and loses what he has gained, he despises himself and no one likes him.'*



This advice invites us to also look carefully at the third paramita, morality, discipline, conduct, availability. For without morality and inner discipline all the advantages of patience and determination and all the merits of the path are wasted and lost.

Thanks to his energy and fervour, the bodhisattva, like Gautama on the Great Night, sees off the army of Mara, the king of demons, and unknots all the shackles, the chains that bind beings to cycles of re-birth (Samsara). The energy that is mobilized at that moment, is what rips us out of the world of illusion and the delusion of the 'me.'

'The traveller on a long journey , will, if he is persistent, reach his destination. It is not thanks to the gods, or chance or by luck that these advantages are acquired, but by personal action, whilst not trying to spare our own life. Digging the ground with a stubborn effort we find the spring. It is the same with energy : if we don't seek, we don't find.'

And also, energy gives rise to the joy of one's present existence, in the same way that the rain moistens the seed and encourages it to grow.

There is nothing that cannot be obtained for those who know how to love and practise energy."

We also know that if we don't act ourselves, we will get no result, nor satisfaction, nor even a reward ; what we don't do ourselves, will not come from others either ; and what we have done with love will never be lost.

To put it another way, simply thinking of the advantages that a benevolent and well directed energy brings, will cause our own energy to grow.

Buddhist texts distinguish several types of energy :



The energy to equip ourselves to act : at the beginning, we encourage ourselves vigorously towards our proposed action.

The energy of effort : at the moment of action, we cultivate an effort that conforms with our intention.

Energy without timidity, without retreat or satiety : we must not abandon the action undertaken in accordance with one's aspiration right until we '*sit on the throne of illumination.*' It is without timidity, because it doesn't retreat when we are tired : it doesn't fall back, because its courage doesn't retreat when faced to the criticism and insults of others : it is insatiable , because right to the end, which is awakening, it cultivates good with energy and never gives in to laziness.

The characteristics of energy are dynamism in action, ease in enterprises, firmness of will, ardour of mind, perseverance in activity.

According to the suggestions attributed to Buddha himself, energy constitutes a vehicle which transports the continuity of spiritual aspiration from life to life. It gives rise to and stimulates the assiduous and persistent activity of all good works and opens the mind to the Law of karma and the notion of its retribution.

In addition, energy is corporeal when it comes from physical strength used to practice giving (*dana*), chanting or reciting sutras and religious texts, or practising morality (*sila*). It is mental when it exercises patience (*ksanti*), meditation (*dhyana*) and wisdom (*prajna*)

It is also corporeal when it acts on external things, and mental when it brings about a particular effort on oneself.

Finally 'gross' energy , which concerns material things, the family, is corporeal : subtle energy is mental and concerns trusting faith, which leaves no room for doubt, an absence of laziness and a thirst to learn the Law.

How can we make all this useful in our daily life, if our effort should not come from our self-interested will? A good effort, or good energy, is that which allows us to fully invest ourselves in what we are undertaking. It's a question of motivation, of course, as sometimes we have no choice. Sometimes we have tasks thrust upon us which we dislike. So it's a question of acceptance, attention and not falling into either just letting things go, or laziness, or into perfectionism either.

"It's like playing a lute, said Buddha, the strings should not be too tight or too loose. An effort that is too energetic leads to fatigue and if too light, to laziness. Make a firm resolution to adopt the middle way, without allowing yourself to either struggle or give up, but in knowing that faith, energy, attention, concentration and wisdom are the fruits of a correct way, calm and regular."

If we can just do each thing to the best of our ability, in whatever circumstances, we celebrate life.

Our best effort is not constant and evolves as time passes. In doing our best, we should not judge ourselves, nor feel divided and blameworthy, or ashamed. It's a very good habit to form. We learn in this way that everything deserves our respect and our love and we begin to understand what *Mushotoku* really means, without profit, which brings us truly alive, whether acting or relaxing.

Our actions determine the type of feelings that animate us. Our actions, even the least significant, are our individual duty and responsibility. The Dharma is the secret of existence and we can only discover this secret if we plunge into action and make it sacred.



Patience and energy, determination, are the best tools of the bodhisattva. Without patience, a human being has no worth, and without energy can do nothing, neither for himself, nor for others.

"Never cease your efforts. Buddhas only teach. When you have understood the teachings and put them into practice, you will be able to cross the ocean of suffering by yourself. If your mind becomes firm like a rock and doesn't shake in a world where everything is shaking, you will have no better friend than your own mind."

Guy Mokuhô



Accompanying a family in mourning – testimony of a zen monk – Jérôme Lucas

« Allo Jérôme, Eric is about to die ? Can you come over ?

« Of course Claudine ; I am coming to get you »

Eric was a zen practioner in our dojo and was suffering from cancer, which claimed his life in the end

« Of course Claudine »

As time went by, I came to realise that « of course » was not at all obvious. Claudine had phoned me as a friend, but above as a zen practioner. This notion had not clearly appeared to me right away.

When we arrived, Eric had already gone ; so there we were, Claudine and me, in tears. I admit at that moment I felt rather powerless.

Although I had left home quickly, I had taken along my rakusu, the sutra book and encens sticks.

So as I moved Claudine away from my arms, so our eyes could meet, I told her :

« Let's sing the Hannya Shingyo, and I'll ask if we can burn some encens »

They accepted.

So I put on my rakusu, put Eric's around his neck, and the Hannya Shingyo came out, naturally.

His children arrived ; I then left to go to the waiting room, so the family could be together.

Their daughter came to join me and thanked me : a very plain « thank you » I'll remember all my life.

During the following hours, the family asked the dojo to organise a ceremony at the crematorium. We agreed and a few days later, we were there, present, with our simple means, no methods, but with our hearts open.

This phone call, in spite of myself, made me experience another aspect our practice could lead us to. I sat the first time to answer personal questions, at that time I had not really chosen Zen. A few years later, here I was together with other practioners of the dojo organising a ceremony to accompany the departure of a dead person on his family's request.

I had heard many criticisms regarding Zen rituals in Japan. I admit that I agreed at one point with the « two many ceremonies ». However when this family asked for it, how could I possibly refuse ?

When I found myself singing the Hannya Shingyo with Claudine by Eric's side, the practice was there, present : impermanence, interdependence, non- separation of all things.

Seen from the outside, these moments may seem very far from Zen, but escorting the other one who is animated by the same nature we are do not seem contradictory, as during this ceremony, complete presence and opening of the heart are really there.

This experience mainly opened up my heart, as the ceremony at the crematorium and the contemplation around Eric gave me a chance to practise giving.

So indeed, zazen is the basis of our school, but this experience showed me an aspect of zen we don't or hardly know. One the one hand, there are the practioners, and on the other hand, people who will probably never come to the dojo, but who at certain moments of their lives ask for the help of the first group, as in a way they are also touched by the teachings of the buddha.

Jérôme Gyodo

“ Un autre printemps” Jaques Soryu Alicata Zen monk/founder of the Dojo at Sete.

The present epidemic – *accompanied by an economic and financial crash*- rather accentuates than reveals a profound crisis of civilisation, a loss of meaning to our human existence. According to a recent study, almost 30% of French people talk of being in competition with their friends and colleagues and only 54% think they are doing any useful work for society, whilst at the same time 37% are unable to find a balance between their professional and personal life. Also, more than 75% say they are very worried about environmental damage (*the climate change crisis being just one aspect of it.*)

We have arrived at a point where the human species –“*guided*” by powerful men whose only creed is *profit* – cannot stop its excess.

As *Mu i*, non-fear, must be the foundation of practice, cooperation and solidarity should guide us towards a viable and desirable future. As we progressively learn to untangle ourselves from our tendency to greed, we can start to understand that events in the world of phenomena are without any real foundation, and this ‘absence of foundation’ *sunyata* is the very material of co -dependent origination.(*co – production*)

What was Kasyapa told in the “Sutra of the Heap of Jewels” ?

“ *O Kasyapa, “ Something exists” is one extreme “ nothing exists” is another extreme. What is in the middle of these extreme views, what is without matter, invisible, without support, without appearance, without name or home, that is called the middle way, O Kasyapa, the true discrimination of the dharmas.”*

It is by practicing that we can see this obsession with clutching onto an inner foundation which gives meaning and solidity to the idea of the self ; this same tendency exists in relation to a world that is preordained and independent. To put it another way, it’s our obsession with a foundation (*of what is an intangible reality*) – internal or external- which is the deep source of frustration and anxiety. What are our true needs?

Often, in our consumer society, we are presented with the glitter of artificial needs – *as we are now in a state of permanent frustration*. They lodge themselves in the wounds of our sickness and the objects become palliatives, indispensable crutches holding up a miserable me, with a personality that is not blossoming...

So , with kindness, we can face up to our greedy tendencies and that is when we can envisage an empathy that is more open and less self centered. We know that in order not to lose our balance, we must walk on our two legs:

- **Relative truth, in society and our interactions.**
- **Absolute truth , beyond questions, beyond gain and loss.**

In half- lotus we find our balance, changing the crossing of our legs, the two sides, the relative leg and the absolute leg, we harmonise the Middle Way : neither smug mysticism nor thick headed materialism. In the floating world, it’s often a challenge, to integrate, to hold together the two ends of the apprehension of the real , like two faces of the same coin ... but I can see no other way. (*‘Muss es sein? Es muss sein’*)

May this present period be a propitious moment for reinforcing each person’s faith in practice. Practice is satori, bonnos are satori. As the lotus flower takes root in the mud of the marshes, so the mind of compassion awakens.

*“ Mad flowers of
Sickness, the epidemic
Will spread
Another spring.”
Soryu.*

Jaques Soryu

Hier, assise, juste avec le poème de Ryokan – Hélène Schwartz, Sion.

Les mots qui me viennent:

assise, là
entre le phénix
et les oiseaux du monde
hasard du choix
ce lieu de mon assise
découverte
nombril aligné narines
nombril mon origine
reliée à celle qui m'a portée
narines, je suis respirée de l'intérieur, autonome j'arrive après kinhin
face aux tableaux du senpai
et du passeur,
puis assise
déposons nos couronnes
humilité,

Merci



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