

*Bodhi Leaf Publication No. 72*

# **Development of the Will**

*By Wladyslaw Misiewicz*

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# **Perfection of Energy**

*By Shantideva*



**BUDDHIST PUBLICATION SOCIETY**



# **The Development of the Will**

by

**Wladyslaw Misiewicz**

**and**

# **Perfection of Energy**

by

**Shantideva**

**Buddhist Publication Society  
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# The Development of the Will

No force in the human system can be properly used unless it is rightly directed. As the will is the only factor in man that has the power to direct or control, a thorough development of the will becomes absolutely necessary in order to have a clear understanding of its application under every circumstance.

In Buddhism will-power is truly the ability to initiate and carry out actions. It is, therefore, not an ability to determine the quality of the action which may be moral or immoral. Volition, initial application, and attention are much alike. In initial application (*vitakka*), there is application of the mind on the object. In volition (*cetanā*), there is an engagement of the mind with the object, like a general that directs soldiers in their special tasks. Attention (*manasikāra*) is like the mind being tied to the object, like a charioteer that is mindful of the horses he has tied to the chariot.

The principal functions of the mind are the will to initiate, the will to direct, the will to control, the will to think, the will to imagine, the will to act, the will to originate ideas, the will to will any action or purpose,

the will to carry through that purpose, and so on. We understand therefore the great importance of having a strong will. A powerful will is never domineering or coercing. A domineering will is weak. A strong will is deep, continuous, and persistent. It calls into action your entire individuality, and as you exercise such a will you feel as if a tremendous power from within yourself has been calmly, though persistently, aroused.

A great many people have good intentions, and they have sufficient will-power to originate those intentions, but they don't have sufficient will-power to implement them. They have the will to think, but not the will to act. Thousands of people begin with right intention, but they do not possess the power of will to continue.

We find this condition in all walks of life and in all undertakings, and it illustrates most eloquently the necessity of a strong will in every mind. But here we may ask: What are we are living for? Are we living to detach ourselves from the influence of environment, visible or invisible, or are we living to attain such full control over the powers and talents that are within us that we cannot only control, modify, and perfect our environment, but also so perfectly control ourselves that we can become all that nature intends we should become? If we are to rise in the scale, we must attain

greater degrees of self-mastery. We cannot learn to master ourselves as long as we constantly permit ourselves to be mastered by something else whereby we lose ground every day. Our characters become weaker, our standards of morality and rightness become more and more lax, and our power to apply those faculties and forces in our natures (through which we may accomplish more and achieve more) constantly decrease, both in working capacity and in efficiency. If man wants to live his own life as it should be lived, if he wants to master circumstances and determine his own "destiny," he must have the power to say under all sorts of conditions what he is going to think and what he is going to do. But he cannot exercise this power unless his own will is permitted to have absolute control over every thought, effort, and desire in his life.

Emotional excess is another cause that weakens the will, and by emotional excess we mean the act of giving way to uncontrolled feeling of any kind. To give way to anger, hatred, passion, excitability, tension, sensitiveness, grief, discouragement, despair, or any other uncontrolled feeling, is to weaken the will. You cannot control yourself through your will when you permit yourself to be controlled by your feelings, and any act that rules out the will weakens the will.

Whenever you permit yourself to become angry, you weaken your will. Whenever you permit yourself to become offended or hurt, you weaken your will. Whenever you permit yourself to become despondent or discouraged, you weaken your will. Whenever you give way to grief, mental intensity or excitability, you weaken your will. You permit some artificial mental state to take possession of your mind, and your will at that time is put aside. We should therefore avoid absolutely all emotional excess. We must not permit any feeling whatever to take possession of us, or permit ourselves to be influenced in any form or manner by anything that may enter the mind uncontrolled through the emotions. But emotion is one of the most valuable factors in human life, and should be used and enjoyed under normal circumstances, but should never become a ruling factor in mind, thought or feeling. You may permit yourself to enjoy any ecstasy at any time, provided you have conscious control over every movement of your emotions at the time.

Whenever you feel the touch of some sublime emotion, try to direct the force of that emotion into a finer and higher state of expression. Thus you will not be controlled by it, but will exercise control over it, and will enjoy the pleasure of that emotion much more.

To control our emotions, therefore, is to lose nothing and gain much. Another cause of weakness in the will is what might be called mental dependence. To depend upon anybody or anything outside of yourself is to weaken the will, because you let the will of someone else rule your action, while your own will remains dormant. Nothing, however, that remains dormant can grow or develop. On the other hand, it will continue to become weaker and weaker, like an unused muscle, until it has no strength whatever. We therefore understand why those multitudes of people, who had followed blindly the will and leadership of others, not only in religion but in all things, have practically no will-power at all. We are in this life to become "something". We are here to make the best use of what we possess in mind, character, and personality, but we cannot cause any element, faculty, or power within us to express itself to any extent so long as we are mere dependent weaklings.

In everything, depend upon yourself but work in harmony with all things. Buddhism has always been marked by its intensely practical attitude. Suffering is the basic fact of life. The Buddha's last injunction to his disciples ran: "All conditioned things are impermanent. Work out your salvation with diligence." In their long history, Buddhists have never lost this practical bent. Innumerable



misunderstandings would have been avoided if one had seen that the statements of Buddhist writers are not meant to be propositions about the nature of reality, but advice on how to act, or statements about modes of behaviour (and the experiences connected with them). "If you want to get there, then you must do this. If you do this, you will experience this." (Edward Conze).

Mental volition, or *cetanā*, is a force which finds expression in three ways: by thought, by speech, and by physical action. Since speech and bodily action have their origin in the mind, it is the intention which constitutes *kamma*, for *kamma* is willed action. "*Cetanāhaṃ bhikkhave kammaṃ vadāmi*," declared the Buddha. "Volition, bhikkhus, I say is *kamma*." The origin of good and evil is in the mind; its manifestations appear in the external world.

Another cause that weakens will-power is immoderation in anything in life. To indulge excessively in any desire or appetite, be it physical or mental, is to weaken the will. Partake only of that which is necessary and good, and observe moderation. Control your self under all circumstances, and resolve never to go too far in anything. The effects of weakness in the will are numerous, but there are two in particular that should receive special attention. First, when the will is weak, the human system

becomes incapable of resisting temptations, and therefore moral weakness or a complete moral downfall is inevitable. Character in the largest sense of the term is impossible without a strong will, and it is impossible to accomplish anything that is of permanent value without character. Second, weakness in the will inevitably implies weak mental actions: if your will is weak, you will apply only a fraction of your ability. There are thousands of able men who are failures in life simply because they don't have the will to apply all their ability. It is the power of a strong will alone that can give full expression to every talent or faculty you may possess, and it is only such a power that can push the actions of every faculty to a point of high efficiency. In learning to develop the will and to use the will, realize what the will is for. Avoid anything and everything that tends to weaken the will, and practice every method known that can strengthen the will. Do not give in to any feeling or desire until you succeed in directing that feeling or desire as you like. Feel only the way you want to feel, and then feel with all the feeling that is in you. Whatever arises in your mind and life, take hold of it with your will and direct it so as to produce even greater results than were at first indicated. Use the will consciously and as frequently as possible to push towards the point of efficiency. For example, when

you are applying those faculties that you employ in your work, try to will them into stronger and larger actions. This is a very valuable practice and, if applied everyday, will, in the course of a reasonable time, not only increase the capacity and ability of those faculties, but also increase decidedly the power of the will. Whenever you will to do anything, will it with all there is in you. If no other practice than this were taken, the power of the will would be doubled. Never give in to anything, that you do not want. When a certain wish comes up that you do not care to entertain, turn your attention at once upon some favourable desire, and give all the power of your will to that new desire. This is very important, as the average person wastes more than half of his energy entertaining desires that are of no value and which he does not intend to implement.

Every action that enters the system, whether it comes through thought, feeling, desire, or imagination, should be redirected by the power of the will and turned into higher and greater actions. Whenever you think, make it a practice to think with your whole mind. Make your thinking whole-hearted instead of half-hearted. Make every action firm, strong, positive, and determined. In that way the full current of the will can be activated, and whenever the will is used to its full capacity, it will grow and

develop. Try to deepen every action of mind and thought. Think and act with your deeper mental life. The more easily you are disturbed, the weaker your will. The stronger the will, the more difficult it is for anything to disturb your mind. When the will is strong, you live and exercise self-control in a deeper mental world, and you look upon the confusions of the external world without being affected in the least by what takes place there. “Be your own island, Ānanda; be your own refuge! Do not take any other refuge! Let the Teaching be your island! Let the Teaching be your refuge! Do not take any other refuge!”

“And the greatest of joys shall be the joy of going on.”

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## **Perfection of Energy (Vīrya-Pāramitā)**

Selections from the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, Chapter  
VII,  
translated from the Sanskrit by Nyanaponika  
Thera.

- (1) Having become patient [through practising the Perfection of Forbearance], one should cultivate energetic effort; for it is by effort that Enlightenment is gained. Just as there is no movement without wind, there is no performance of merit without energy.
- (2) What is meant by energy? It is effort for doing what is good [*kusala*]. And what are its adversaries? Sloth, mean attachments, dejection and self-contempt [inferior feeling].
- (3) Because *samsāric*suffering leaves one unmoved, sloth arises through indolence, enjoyment of pleasures, fondness of sleep, and through the desire for a sheltered life.
- (4) You who are hounded by the hunters, the passions, and are caught in the net of rebirth, are you not aware that even now you are in the mouth of death?

- (5) Don't you see that your own people are dying one after the other? Your situation is that of an ox in the hands of the butcher. How can you rest asleep?
- (7) When death has made its preparations, he will come quickly. If only at that time you give up your sloth, what can you do at such a late hour?
- (8) Then you will lament: "This work is unfinished and was just begun, and this other work remains half-done! How suddenly death appears! Oh, I am lost!"
- (12) You tender child! You suffer pain when touched by hot water. How, then, can you remain at ease, having done deeds that will lead you to hell?
- (13) You seek rewards without effort! Oh tender one, so full of pain! While living as if immortal, you are caught by death and are destroyed, you miserable one!
- (14) Having found the good ship of human birth, you should set across the great river of suffering! Oh, thou fool! This is not the time for sleep! Such a ship is hard to find again!

- (32) Having vanquished the enemy [sloth], one should make one's effort grow by the four powers of zeal, firmness, joy, and a spirit of sacrifice, as well as by full dedication and self-mastery.
- (47) First one should examine oneself [whether one possesses] the totality [of faculties required] and [only] then [should one decide] whether to begin the task or not. For it is better not to start than to turn back after one has started.
- (48) Otherwise in a future birth too there will be the same habit [of abandoning what has been started] and from that fault suffering will grow. Besides, the time spent on the work will be wasted and the task will remain incomplete.
- (52) If one's mind is weak, it will feel oppressed even by the slightest misfortune.
- (53) And when [such] dejection has made one inactive, how easily will further misfortunes occur! But if one is energetic and active, one will not easily be conquered even by great [adversities or temptations].

- (54) Therefore, with resolute heart I shall bring to fall what [tries] to make me fall. If I aspire to conquer the three worlds [by becoming enlightened], is it not laughable if I am brought to fall so easily!
- (55) For [in my path to Enlightenment] I shall have to conquer everything and must not be conquered by anything. This is the pride [and ambition that] I must cherish, for I am a son of the lion-hearted Conqueror [the Buddha].
- (60) In the midst of the multitude of [threatening] defilements of mind one should rouse one's pride a hundredfold and remain undaunted by the hosts of passion, just as a lion [will not fear] herds of deer.
- (67) One should guard oneself against the blows of the passions and vigorously strike back at them, just as in a sword fight with a skilled adversary.
- (68) Just as [in a battle] one will, full of fear, quickly pick up one's sword if it has fallen to the ground, so also, remembering the hells, one should



quickly seize again the sword of mindfulness if one has dropped it.

- (69) When poison enters the bloodstream, it will spread throughout the body. Similarly an evil thought, once it has found an opening, will pervade [and corrupt] one's mind.
- (70) Take a man carrying a vessel full to the brim with oil, and surrounded with soldiers who, sword in hand [will kill him if he spills the oil]. He certainly will be afraid of death if he stumbles. [With similar care] should one live who has taken the [Bodhisattva] vow.
- (71) As a man who has a snake in his lap will quickly get up, so should one promptly resist the approach of sleepiness and lassitude.
- (72) If, in one way or another, one has become unsteady in doing what is good, one should deeply regret it and should reflect thus: "How must I behave that this should not happen again?"
- (73) For this very reason, one should seek good companionship and take up whatever work occurs, while

considering, “How can the practice of mindfulness be cultivated in these situations?”

- (74) Remembering the Master’s [last] words on heedfulness (*apramāda-kathā*), one should make oneself alert so that one is always prepared, even before a task approaches.

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