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## **The Noble Eightfold Path: The Way to the End of Suffering**

By Bhikkhu Bodhi

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## Chapter V - Right Effort (Samma Vayama)

The purification of conduct established by the prior three factors (speech, action, livelihood) serves as the basis for the next division of the path, the division of concentration (*samadhikkhandha*). This present phase of practice, which advances from moral restraint to direct mental training, comprises the three factors of right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. It gains its name from the goal to which it aspires, the power of sustained concentration, itself required as the support for insight-wisdom. Wisdom is the primary tool for deliverance, but the penetrating vision it yields can only open up when the mind has been composed and collected. Right concentration brings the requisite stillness to the mind by unifying it with undistracted focus on a suitable object. To do so, however, the factor of concentration needs the aid of effort and mindfulness. Right effort provides the energy demanded by the task, right mindfulness the steady points for awareness.

Time and again the Buddha has stressed the need for effort, for diligence, exertion, and unflagging perseverance. The reason why effort is so crucial is that each person has to work out his or her own deliverance. The Buddha does what he can by pointing out the path to liberation; the rest involves putting the path into practice, a task that demands energy. This energy is to be applied to the cultivation of the mind, which forms the focus of the entire path. The starting point is the defiled mind, afflicted and deluded; the goal is the liberated mind, purified and illuminated by wisdom. What comes in between is the unremitting effort to transform the defiled mind into the liberated mind. The work of self-cultivation is not easy — there is no one who can do it for us but ourselves — but it is not impossible. The Buddha himself and his accomplished disciples provide the living proof that the task is not beyond our reach. They assure us, too, that anyone who follows the path can accomplish the same goal. But what is needed is effort, the work of practice taken up with the determination: "I shall not give up my efforts until I have attained whatever is attainable by manly perseverance, energy, and endeavor."[37](#)

The nature of the mental process effects a division of right effort into four "great endeavors":

1. to prevent the arising of unarisen unwholesome states;
2. to abandon unwholesome states that have already arisen;
3. to arouse wholesome states that have not yet arisen;
4. to maintain and perfect wholesome states already arisen.