

Satara Iddhipāda

Four bases of spiritual power



Venerable UdaEriyagama Dhammajiva Maha Thero

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Translator's Preface

This collection of essays form translated excerpts of *dhamma* talks given by Most Venerable UdaEriyagama Dhammajiva Maha Thero, Abbott and Chief Preceptor of the Mitirigala Forest Hermitage, Sri Lanka at a non-residential retreat in Melbourne, Australia.

The talks evoke compassion in those in lay life, striving to assimilate the *satipatthāna* meditation practice amidst household obligations and chores. Filled with practical hints and instructions, the teachings bring to life the four spiritual bases (*cattāro iddhipāda* commonly referred to as *satara iddhipāda*) and aim to map a pathway for those striving towards insight.

Venerable Dhammajiva Maha Thero lucidly articulates practical aspects of the four spiritual bases, describing how they intersect with one's meditative journey.

The teachings are not a theoretical dispensation, articulating the four spiritual bases through a linear presentation. Rather, they aim to foster a practical background, the conditions and supportive factors offering valuable reflections for a *yogi* steeped in their pursuit of liberation.

In order to preserve the original teachings, any repetition has been retained without edition. It is hoped that the practical instructions contained in this brief collection of teachings serve as a useful foundation to those dedicated to the Buddha's teachings in genuine search for enlightenment.

Translator and Editor, Melbourne Australia

Vesak Full Moon Poya Day, 2019

Chanda Iddhipāda – Developing zeal to strive in the practice

Listening to the *dhamma* is a precious aspect of a human birth. Communication of *dhamma* is a rare privilege.

When we attentively listen to a *dhamma* teaching we feel as if the Buddha is near us. There is proximity and a continued association felt through the teachings.

Meaning of ‘iddhipāda’

Iddhipāda is a compounded term composed of “power” (*iddhi*) and “base” or “constituent” (*pāda*), the supportive factors towards spiritual enlightenment.

At times, it is referred to as the four bases of power, the four paths to spiritual power or the four bases of spiritual success and variously translated as the “means of accomplishment” and the “path to spiritual power”.

In the progress of insight (development of the path to awakening (*bodhi*)), we come into contact with the 37 qualities related to awakening (*bodhipakkhiyā dhamma*).

The four pathways to spiritual power (*satara iddhipāda*) are a part of the 37 factors of awakening.

Sequentially, making reference to the 37 factors of awakening: the four foundations of mindfulness (*cattāro satipaṭṭhāna*) - contemplation of body (*kāyānupassanā*), contemplation of feelings (*vedanānupassanā*), contemplation of mind (*cittānupassanā*) and contemplation of mind objects (*dhammānupassanā*) are discussed first.

This is followed by the four right efforts: exerting effort to prevent the arising of unskillful mind - states, to abandon unskillful mind - states that have already arisen, exerting effort so that skillful states can arise, to sustain and increase skillful states that have already arisen.

These qualities are followed by the four pathways or bases to spiritual power (*satara iddhipāda*) and the five spiritual faculties (*panca indriya*) and five spiritual powers (*panca bala*) are considered next.

Each of the four pathways to spiritual power, *chanda* (conviction or zeal to strive in the practice); *virīya* (ardent effort); *citta* (mind and consciousness) and *vīmaṃsā* (investigation of *dhamma* or investigative inquiry) align with our individual character traits. By knowing them, we realise their practical benefit in assimilating the path, know what is useful, what is practical and suited to our character traits.

The Buddha had the rare ability to know an individual's character trait and to teach accordingly, to impart instructions suited to their character traits.

During the Buddha's time, many became enlightened by listening to one or two stanzas and some realised the *dhamma* instantly in response to a rhetorical question posed by the Buddha. This was a special ability of the Buddha.

We no longer have the Buddha in our midst. Through our progress in the four pathways to spiritual power (*iddhipāda*), we can discern our character traits, or, at least, know our inclination, whether we are bent on conviction to strive in practice (*chanda*); ardent effort (*virīya*), determination or strong resolve (*citta*) or have an investigative, inquiring mind (*vīmaṃsā*).

Each person is bent towards at least one of the four bases of spiritual power, although they are not in isolation. When we discuss our meditation experience (practice) with the teacher, over a number of discussions, the teacher is able to make an intelligent guess about our character trait(s) and inclination, the spiritual base, that is directing our practice.

Arousing zeal to strive in the practice

When one listens attentively to the teachings, reflecting on them, knows the benefits and value of the *satipaṭṭhāna* practice, one exerts ardent effort to commence the practice, to repeatedly and

closely observe objects arising in the present moment, in the four foundations of mindfulness (fields of observation).

Through this application of effort, one blocks the arising of unwholesome mind states in order to develop and cultivate the arising of (and sustaining) wholesome states.

Then, one is endowed with faith (*saddhā*) in the Buddha's teachings and zeal is aroused to strive in the practice (*chanda*), to note objects arising in the present moment, continuously and without delay.

In this way, wholesome states of mind are cultivated with ardent effort (*virīya*), determination and resolve (*citta*) to progress in insight, through repeated investigation of *dhamma* (*vīmaṃsā*), towards awakening (*bodhi*).

Often, those bent on faith (*saddhā*) develop *kusalacchanda*¹ to realise awakening, applying the theoretical knowledge gained by listening to *dhamma* teachings and reflecting on their meaning and benefits to undertake the practice.

It is not a coincidence that one develops conviction to embark on an internal inquiry, to commence the practice with conviction to strive towards enlightenment. The spiritual inquiry is backed by a

¹ Both terms - *chanda* and *kusalacchanda* are used interchangeably, denoting the same meaning, i.e. developing or arousing zeal to strive in the practice.

foundation built on a theoretical and reflective understanding of the benefits of the *satipaṭṭhāna* practice. It is a stepped journey.

Proceeding along the path in this way, one will first turn to a trusted spiritual friend (*kalyāṇamitta*) for guidance to develop faith and confidence in their teachings. This trust is established through continued association and after repeatedly and attentively listening to their teachings.

There is a clear distinction in mere listening and lending one's ear to listening attentively and respectfully, to understand the teachings theoretically, to reflect on the teachings to realise the benefit of mindful attention.

Based on such conviction and reflective acceptance, one then commences the practice to apply effort to observe presently arising objects in the four fields of observation.

There is a clear development here, a spiritual progress, to develop faith and to strive with conviction towards a realisation of the Buddha's teachings - *kusalacchanda*, a support in one's path towards enlightenment.

Understanding the benefits of *sati* and developing it without giving in to habit and worldly pursuits is a matter specific to an individual. The effort required to reap the desired results cannot be quantified. Results in the practice do not necessarily equate to

the effort exerted. The practice is not about supply and demand as we estimate with reference to worldly pursuit or gain.

Progress of insight is a gradual process, a step by step assimilation of the path with the aid of morality (*sīla*), concentration (*samādhi*) and wisdom (*paññā*) – not induced by a pill or an injection; and is only possible with repeated application of effort to continuously observe the presently arising objects in the four fields of observation.

Progressing on a discovery of truth

A useful example of one's progress towards the discovery of truth is depicted in the *Canki Sutta*, where 500 *brahmins* and the Chief of the clan, *Canki* visit the Buddha. During the visit, a dialogue ensues on the final realisation of truth.

The Buddha never opines in his speech, setting forth with his views as set in stone, asserting opinion as dogma. Rather, there is reciprocal discussion with the listener, engaging in impartial discussion and paving the way of *dhamma*.

In the *Canki Sutta*, the Buddha explains how one develops conviction to strive in the practice, forging trust in a spiritual friend to progress towards the discovery of truth.

The *sutta* considers how spiritual association is formed by associating with the spiritual friend, knowing that he is purified

from states of greed, hatred and delusion, so that faith can be placed in him.

Filled with faith, one visits and pays respect to him; gives ear to hear the *dhamma*; memorises it, examines the meaning of the teaching he has memorised; and by examining the meaning, gains reflective acceptance of the teachings.

With reflective acceptance of the teachings, zeal springs up. With the arousal of zeal, one applies one's will, scrutinising the reflective acceptance of teachings and strives resolutely, to realise the truth, by seeing it through penetrative insight and wisdom.

The Buddha concludes his discussion with *Brahmins* by explaining that through repetition, development and cultivation of those same things, there is final arrival at the truth. Because one strives, one could arrive at the truth; and the arousal of zeal is what propels an individual to apply will to strive in the practice.

Our understanding of *dhamma* is informed by our character traits, background, preferences, *kamma* or inclination so that two persons, listening to the same *dhamma* teaching, would take home two different messages.

Listening to the same *dhamma* teaching for a second time may convey a separate (different) message (that is different from) the previous occasion. It is clear how our understanding of *dhamma*

is limited and depends on our character, inclination, preferences, *kamma* and how our reflective acceptance is limited to what we have heard and understood.

The *sāsana* is for those with wisdom and necessary conditions to develop faith (*saddhā*) in the Buddha's teachings. Wisdom propels us to take the teachings to heart, understand what we have attentively listened, (and then) realising its value, we are convinced to act, and aroused by zeal, to strive in the practice, progress in *kusalacchanda*.

The story of *Raṭṭhapāla*

Another example of zeal and conviction to strive in the practice could be gleaned from the story of *Raṭṭhapāla*, the wealthy clansman, during the Buddha's time.

One day, *Raṭṭhapāla* travelled to the city, *Thullakotthita*, for business, and sat in an assembly where the Buddha was teaching.

Listening to the Buddha, zeal arose in *Raṭṭhapāla*, having understood the *dhamma* taught by the Buddha, a strong conviction arose in him that it is not possible to practise in worldly lay life to become totally perfect and pure, but it is necessary to renounce worldly life and take on the life of an ascetic and enter the order of *bhikkhus*.

The Buddha refused admission to the order of *bhikkhus* and requested that *Raṭṭhapāla* seek his parents' permission.

Returning home from his business travel, *Raṭṭhapāla* conveyed to his parents that he wished to renounce worldly accomplishment and pursuits to cultivate the practice wholeheartedly. Both parents, knowing how important it was for their son to preserve the wealth, refused permission. *Raṭṭhapāla* was refused permission twice.

On the third occasion, he said that he was left with two choices in life: either to face death (end his life) or to cultivate *kusalacchanda* and commit to a life of striving in the practice. Announcing this, *Raṭṭhapāla* went without food for seven days.

Fearing for their son's (life) well-being, *Raṭṭhapāla's* parents entrusted his friends to convince him to give up fasting. Failing in their efforts, the friends suggested to the parents that *Raṭṭhapāla* be allowed to renounce lay life, but with a commitment that he will eventually return home. *Raṭṭhapāla's* parents hoped that he will become disenchanted with *bhikkhu* life and return home and conceded to the suggestion.

Receiving his parents' consent, *Raṭṭhapāla* went forth; and within a short period of time, became fully enlightened. He visited home on *pindapatha* as a fully enlightened being, free of all fetters. All attempts by his parents and past wives to restore him to a worldly life were without success.

Resolve and will to strive in the practice is an internal urge and cannot be induced. It is a moment of triumph when zeal is aroused, when one exerts moral restraint, committing to the practice with the aim of final realisation of the truth. By developing *chanda* to strive in the practice, one's aspiration is aligned with *nibbāna*.

So we begin to strive with repeated, close observation of objects arising in the present moment in the four fields of observation. We commence the practice with a contemplation of the body (*kāyānupassanā*), observing the breath, the four bodily postures, i.e. sitting, walking, standing, lying down, the changing of the four postures and the movement of feet in walking.

This is followed by a contemplation of feelings, the mind, mind-states and mind - objects. Whenever desire, lust or aversion arises, by knowing that they have arisen, such unwholesome mind - states will pass away, taking their own course, without proliferation.

Striving with ardent effort, we direct the mind to presently arising objects, continuously noting them with aim and effort, repeatedly, uninterrupted, so the mind is free from *kilesa* or by tempering the further arising of *kilesa*.

With mere faith, one could change one's method of practice and go after numerous beliefs. But, when zeal is aroused, one applies

will to strive towards realisation, with reflective acceptance of the Buddha's teachings, knowing the value of the task.

Continued practice with zeal, unwavering commitment and striving is *chanda* or *kusalacchanda*, the first base of spiritual power that lends towards enlightenment.

It is developed when effort is applied continuously, to repeatedly observe bodily activities, feelings, the mind and mind - objects arising in the present moment, attentively and closely, completely and with immediacy.

Viriya Iddhipāda – Exerting Ardent Energy

Faith or belief is superficial and without a foundation, penetrative insight or conviction.

With mere faith, one could stop short in their pursuit of liberation by resorting to performing acts of generosity only. If shaken, even that could be diminished.

By developing confidence in the Buddha's teachings with reflective acceptance, one exercises moral restraint and directs the mind to a presently arising primary object.

Aiming to retain the mind on the object, the mind does not wander or run after external beliefs; instead, moral fear (shame) (*hiri*) and moral dread (fear) (*ottappa*) develops, defilements (*kilesa*) are kept at bay and wholesome mind- states are cultivated.

Practising with moral dread (shame) and moral fear, with continuous effort to observe the object repeatedly and closely, the mind stays calm and collected on the object. Effort is developed to strive, like a flame that is protected from the wind, which only remains alight and is galvanised in its force so long as a candle continues to burn.

With ardent effort (*virīya*), directing one's mind to the primary object repeatedly, one develops concentration (*samādhi*) and the mind falls calm and collected in a one-pointed state of awareness, secluded from hindrances (*nīvaraṇa*).

The Buddha had steadfast effort, a dedicated perseverance and continuation in his aim to realise *dhamma* in spite of numerous obstacles throughout the journey.

Amongst *yogis*, it can be readily seen that some practise without exerting much effort, trying to find short cuts to realise their goal. Such *yogis*, keen on sugar coated pills, struggle to persevere in the practice, eventually giving up due to lack of effort.

Effort is mentioned in 9 instances in the 37 factors of enlightenment (*bodhipakkhiyā dhamma*). First, in the four right exertions: to prevent the arising of unskillful states, to abandon already arisen unskillful states; to enable the arising of skillful states and for the further sustenance (development) of arisen skillful states.

This is followed by a mention of effort in the four bases of spiritual power (*iddhipāda*); the five faculties (*pañca indriya*), the five powers (*pañca bala*) and the seven factors of enlightenment (*sapta bojjhaṅga*) and the noble eightfold path.

Exerting effort – Tips and traps in the practice

Of the four right exertions, it is no coincidence that the Buddha first considered the prevention of unskillful mind-states from arising and the abandonment of already arisen unskillful states, to then progress to discuss the development and sustaining of wholesome mind-states.

To refrain from wrong-doing and to prevent unwholesome mind-states from arising (*sabbapāpassa akaraṇaṃ*) is foremost amongst the four right exertions.

Before embarking on a task, ask yourself whether it is your duty to do so? Whether it is expected of you? Even if this is the case, consider whether you are capable of attending to it or have the capacity to attend to it? Even if you have the skills and capability to attend to the task, then, consider whether it is your preference to do so.

Generally, success is bent on determination and resolve, to undertake a task fully and completely. You must like the task, have a preference to undertake it, to see it through, not only because you feel duty-bound or have the capability to do so.

Of course, mere failure to attend to tasks without this inquiry is laziness. Pause and reflect on a task entrusted to you before committing to it, ask yourself whether it is your responsibility (or

duty) and within your capability or if it is your preference. This indicates that you are acting with wisdom.

Time, strength and capability are not infinite, so we must reflect wisely before taking on responsibility, to preserve energy and apply effort to what is wholesome and beneficial.

Moral restraint is necessary for the practice, so one must act with moral dread (shame) and moral fear to lay the requisite foundation to commence the practice, to direct the mind towards the primary object, observing it immediately, without delay.

Being born as humans at a time when the *dhamma* is present, why do we delay in taking on the practice wholeheartedly? This most precious and rare opportunity is lost if we are reborn in a lower realm.

A lazy, indolent person will continue living immersed in worldly pursuit without striving and fail to make use of this valuable opportunity. By speaking with (associating with) those bent on worldly (material) pursuit, one is never encouraged to take on the practice or proceed towards the supermundane level.

This practice is an individual task, an inward journey, a progress towards *cittavivevka* (a mind secluded from hindrances); isolation from the sense sphere, towards a mind that is calm and one-pointed, where insight develops.

Aim at isolation and seclusion in life. Being in a group, one's effort is tempered as collective thought tends to interfere with the individual journey of inquiry. When we socialise or are in a group, we do not maximise our time for the practice. When a river is wide, the flow of water is slow. Being in a group or a crowd, the practice does not gather momentum as your valuable time and opportunity is taken away.

It is normal to become less popular as one starts to prefer isolation and seclusion to social events. One may even be criticised for being different from others, for going against societal norms, going against the grain.

Knowing the limits of our strength, time and capacity, we must preserve our energy, mobilising it where it is most beneficial; not being immersed in sense desire and chasing after numerous sense objects. Those bent on sense desire would not know supermundane happiness as they have not taken any steps to go against the grain.

As human beings we have a discerning capacity of the mind. Yet, many immersed in the sensual world fail to exert effort, dabbling in pleasure, sense desire and forego an invaluable and rare opportunity, having received a human birth.

Separating ourselves from the sense sphere temporarily or permanently requires exertion of effort. It is not easy in a society bent on sensual desire. Moving from one object to another is

sense desire and this is living in the sensual world. Being with one object is a special quality of a human being, the ability to continue striving with the primary object. So we are presented with an invaluable opportunity.

Obstruction from hindrances

Continuing to direct the mind to observe an object, repeatedly, completely, without delay, one exerts ardent effort, knowing the effect that hindrances have on mind- states by obstructing the calming of the mind.

Hindrances lie dormant as long as one remains immersed in sense desire, when the mind is distracted and scattered. When the mind is directed to a primary object, repeatedly observing it, hindrances activate to counter the mind's progress.

As a result, restlessness or sceptical doubt may arise in a scattered mind, or sloth and torpor to retract the mind, or sense desire to distract the mind's attention away from the primary object.

In the beginning, laziness (sloth and torpor) hinder the practice, operating as the most potent internal enemy.

Aiming and directing the mind to the object (*vitakka*), retaining the mind's attention directly on the object and discerning its' nature, obstructs the arising of sloth and torpor (*thīna middha*).

When the noting mind is aimed face to face with the object, the noting (*vitakka*) is effective, and sloth and torpor are absent; due to *vicāra* (sustained application), sceptical doubt (*vicikicchā*) is removed. When the mind is aimed face to face with the object, knowing it clearly, there is certainty, no more doubt.

When progressing away from sense desire, repeatedly exert effort to observe the primary object continuously, uninterrupted, as much as possible.

Retaining the mind on the primary object, away from sense desire, requires ardent effort, as you are going against habit of chasing after desirable objects and sounds. Continued striving to cut through the boredom, blandness and bewilderment that arise in the practice is sustained through application of energy (*nikkhama dhātu viriya*).

Try to associate the wise, those bent on seclusion and meditation practice, listen to *dhamma* talks regularly and work to a timetable. These are necessary conditions for continued practice, whether at home or at a meditation centre.

The practice needs to be energised to avoid any slacking in continuous striving or stagnation in spite of the effort made to commence the practice.

Balancing effort in practice

Without effort, repeated and ardent effort, progress towards insight is not possible.

It is necessary for *yogis* to know when to apply effort and when effort interferes with a calm and collected mind - when mindfulness is steadfast and gathers momentum.

At most times, a river will flow peacefully, have an even flow. But, if a stone is thrown to the water, there might be turbulence. It is necessary for the flowing water to continue without interruption, in order to preserve an even flow.

To align the balance, frequent discussion with teachers is necessary.

In the beginning, one may either exert too much effort and deviate from the target or fail to apply energy continually to direct the mind towards the primary object.

Effort needs to be balanced so that, initially, effort is applied to direct the mind to the primary object, to observe it repeatedly. As the practice gathers momentum and the mind falls calm and collected on the object, is one-pointed, then, effort must be exerted in a more relaxed (less active) manner.

It is like nurturing a child. As an infant, it is necessary to have continuous watch over the child, to carry and to hold the child, to protect from danger. As the child grows, there needs to be a healthy detachment, so as to not interfere with the child's activities, and to support their independence, compared to the constant watchful eye cast over an infant, requiring continued parental supervision and association.

When entering the first *jhāna*, *vitakka* (initial application directing the mind to an object) and *vicāra* (sustained application of the mind against the object) are necessary. It is *vitakka* and *vicāra* that keep hindrances at bay, enabling a person to experience the energising effect of *pīti* (rapture), the calming of *sukha* (happiness and bliss) and *ekaggatā* (one-pointedness).

To experience *pīti* and *sukha*, it is necessary to drop *vitakka*. To progress from the first *jhāna* to the second *jhāna*, *vitakka* and *vicāra* needs to be dropped. Otherwise, one fails to experience rapture (*pīti*). It is essential to know when to drop *vitakka*. Otherwise, it can be a hindrance in the practice. Knowing when to apply energy and when to stop is an important junction in the practice.

The aiming must be refined in the first *jhāna*. It is necessary not to be caught up with rapture when it is experienced and instead, to observe it, to simply know it, not becoming immersed or absorbed in it.

When the observation of the in-breath and out-breath or the rising and falling of the abdomen become subtle and refined, and the mind falls calm and collected, active noting is no longer necessary. Doing so might interfere with the calm mind. To know when one must retire and allow the practice to gather in momentum is wisdom. It is necessary for effort to be balanced with wisdom.

Achieving this balance is difficult as our lives are spent immersed in sense desire. Wisdom-based effort is balanced effort. Initially, effort is required to direct the mind to the object, to repeatedly align it with the object, so that the object could be closely observed, immediately and completely, without delay.

As the mind falls calm and collected on the object, applied effort must become less active, reduced in force, become refined and passive. Be guided by what you observe. If it is no longer necessary to actively note, become a passive observer and allow the practice to develop and gather momentum.

When energy is galvanised, do not apply effort; just allow it to gather momentum on its own accord, to develop in force and consistency. Use wisdom to balance it.

It is like driving a car. As a learner driver, it is an experience to apply the first gear and then transition to the second gear, then the third and so forth. With repeated practice, it becomes habit to progress from the first gear to the second and to the third,

fourth and so forth, as the car continues to move and the speed escalates.

The practice is the same, more energy is needed at the start to separate oneself from the sensual world, and then, to retain the mind on the primary object, away from hindrances and defilements. When the practice gathers in momentum, you must just allow it to unfold, without interference or interruption. With repeated practice, the transition of energy from initial application to sustained application and fulfilling application of energy becomes a habit.

Being immersed in duty, appointments and responsibilities, you might miss this valuable and rare opportunity in a human birth. Make effort to repeatedly observe an object, so that it becomes a part of your lifestyle and becomes habit.

Progress to insight is a rare opportunity for a human being. Being born as humans, we are able to develop continuous mindfulness so that the mind becomes calm and collected, one-pointed, and wisdom could arise.

If you fail to undertake the practice, you will continue to be immersed in sense desire, without control over your mind, hold rigid and fixed views bent on misperceptions and continue to develop unwholesome qualities. Aim to get some respite from mental proliferation and thoughts, and to be with the object of meditation.

We need to become mindful, pause from engagement with sense desire, mindfully, becoming aware of sensory contact and exert effort to gain seclusion from sense desire, to progress on the Buddha's path. This is how we cultivate a beneficial and wholesome life that is free of defilements.

To do this, ardent effort must be exerted to repeatedly observe all presently arising objects without delay, with determination, to strive in the practice.

Cultivating a lifestyle conducive to the practice, and doing what is only necessary, helps us to progress in the path and maximise opportunity for the practice.

A lifestyle which is supportive of the practice enables us to make significant advances, to strive and mobilise energy to realise our spiritual goal. With a change in lifestyle, there will be commitment and progress in the practice. Try to cultivate a lifestyle that allows for continued practice.

By treating the practice as optional, we fail to exert the requisite effort to strive, missing an invaluable opportunity, only available in a rare human birth.

So cultivate a lifestyle conducive to the practice and make the effort to develop right livelihood (*sammā ājīva*), which will serve as a support for progress in the practice.

Citta Iddhipāda – Mind and Consciousness

The four bases of spiritual power fuel our progress on the path.

Our inclination towards any one of the four bases of spiritual power could change over time. One might initially be bent on a particular spiritual base, for example, *chanda* (zeal to strive in the practice) and with time and advancing of age, be bent on the investigative factor (*vīmaṃsā*), to progress in the practice.

Balancing Effort and Concentration

The four bases of spiritual power (*iddhipāda*) must be balanced.

Concentration (one-pointed state of mind) and effort are separate aspects and must be carefully balanced.

Walking meditation is bent on effort, whereas sitting meditation is bent on faith, concentration and wisdom. To balance the spiritual bases, it is necessary to balance walking meditation and sitting meditation in one's daily practice and routine.

Effort is mobilised when one develops concentration (*samādhi*), although too much effort can hinder the development of concentration.

Developing a one-pointed state of mind (concentration) and engaging in sense desire are two opposite ends of the spectrum.

It is common for those bent on sense desire to frequently change objects, to desire after sense objects and fail to retain the mind on a primary object.

Immersed in sense desire, wishing to see pleasant sights, to hear pleasing sounds and to experience bodily comforts, a person bent on *kāmacchanda*, may behave like a mad monkey, jumping around without much discipline, wandering after numerous sense objects. Such a person might feel isolated, defeated or impoverished when focussing the mind on one object.

Being in a forest, there is very little distraction through the senses. There is an absence of diversity in sight or sounds, so life in the forest is content for a *yogi* wishing for isolation.

Once, a *Brahmin* (*Hatthaka Ālavaka*), a prince who was adopted by the king - sees the Buddha lying down in the forest on a bed of leaves. The *Brahmin* inquires whether the Buddha is cold at night and has slept peacefully. The Buddha responds that he had uninterrupted sleep even whilst sleeping on a bed of dry leaves at night, due to an absence of sense desire when the mind is one-pointed.

For those bent on sense desire, it is difficult to arrive at a one-pointed state of mind as they are constantly immersed in activity, chasing after sense objects, which obstruct the development of one-pointed awareness of the mind.

A change in lifestyle is necessary to be content with life's unfolding without aspiring towards sense desire or seeking after it. Developing an austere lifestyle bent on simplicity helps protect the one-pointed state of mind developed in the practice.

It is like cultivating a plot of land. If we plant seeds, but fail to uproot weeds in time to protect the growth of seedlings, grass and weeds will be overgrown - ultimately the weeds may grow wild. To protect the seedlings, we need to weed out the grass so that the seeds can sprout, and give the necessary conditions for their cultivation.

Similarly, the necessary conditions to develop one-pointed awareness (concentration) must be cultivated. In the beginning, *yogis* must exert energy to develop concentration. When concentration develops, effort must be balanced, so that the one-pointed awareness is not interrupted.

Applying less effort when the mind is calm

A useful analogy here is rowing a boat out to the sea. One must know exactly at which point the boat should be set out to the sea. Often there are seven roaring waves followed by a small wave at which time the boat must set sail. Once it sets sail, the fishermen paddle far into the ocean where the waves are no longer strong, and there is calmness in the deep ocean. It is necessary to paddle to set sail, but as the boat sails to the deep ocean, where the waves no longer have force, less effort is required.

The practice of meditation is similar. At the beginning of the practice of *ānāpānasati* meditation, effort must be exerted continuously, to note the presently arising object, but, when the breath subsides and the mind falls calm and collected on the object, it is necessary to balance and relax effort.

Noting a long in-breath requires more energy, but a shorter breath, a more subtle breath, requires less exertion of energy. One who thinks that the same level of energy is required may exert too much energy to note the shortened in-breath or out-breath, interrupting the internal progress by exerting disproportionate effort.

Once you sail to the deep ocean, the water is calm, more tranquil, and the effort in paddling needs to be reduced; you can take a rest, knowing the calming of waves and set sail smoothly without creating turbulence.

Balancing energy to correct proportions to develop concentration is an important skill to harness in the practice.

During the time of the Buddha, Venerable *Assaji* was in the habit of countering adverse situations through absorption. Once, Venerable *Assaji*, steeped in *jhāna*, became very ill, and was unable to transcend his pain through absorption. Closer to death, his concentration reduced in force due to the grave illness and his mind became scattered.

The Buddha visited Venerable *Assaji* and queried why he had difficulty coping with the pain. Venerable *Assaji* responded that his mind was scattered, that he needed to take refuge in the Buddha, as otherwise, he would die with a scattered mind. The Buddha explained to Venerable *Assaji* that with well-developed *sīla*, one could progress to *samādhi*, and with balanced effort and continuous development of faith, concentration could be developed. The Buddha advised that absorption is not the essence of the *dhamma* and if Venerable *Assaji* has well

developed *sīla*, it is a sufficient foundation to progress to enlightenment.

Without knowing how to navigate one's energy, one could obstruct the development of concentration, failing to nurture it by balancing effort, not knowing when and how the force of applied faith needs to be reduced when the mind falls calm and collected on the object.

Until one reaches this stage in the practice, one needs to apply effort to progress in the practice. Developing one-pointed awareness, a *yogi* experiences immeasurable non-material pleasure, and it can be addictive; so it needs to be balanced with effort.

To become aware of presently arising objects and to gain seclusion from hindrances, one must commence the practice with *kāyānupassanā* (contemplation of the body). When *kāya* subsides in one's awareness, one should know this is progress and without questioning it or experiencing bewilderment, to develop the courage to see cessation of *kāya*, and remain unshaken, generating *chanda iddhipāda* and apply ardent effort to progress in the practice.

An invaluable opportunity

We are born during an era of *Buddhahood*, as humans, when *dhamma* is alive, have spiritual friends (*kalyāṇamitta*) and with the possibility for ordination if we so wish.

In spite of these auspicious circumstances, if we continue to chase after sense desire, we fail to mature in the *dhamma*. We miss an invaluable and rare opportunity.

Be accountable for your lifestyle trends and know where effort is spent, your duties and engagement with relatives and how effort should be balanced with concentration to make use of this valuable opportunity to strive in the practice.

In order to support the one-pointed state of mind with balanced effort, make a change in your lifestyle, practise right speech, right contemplation and right effort, to progress on the path.

Do not associate unskilful people and waste time seeking after sense desire, missing the opportunity to develop skilful qualities and to associate the wise.

Vīmaṃsā Iddhipāda – Investigative wisdom

In the material realm, we seek after money. We get it and then, there is no value in it, there is no satisfaction or an end to desire.

We seek after education and professional accolades – we achieve them and we no longer care much for such success. It is not sufficient and we continue to seek after more worldly pursuit. Inevitably, death takes place without any contentment.

This is the nature of the cycle of rebirth. Worldly beings have a very narrow approach to pursuit – immersed in competition, cutting others out, developing unwholesome mind states for temporary satisfaction.

To experience (non-material) pleasure, one must give up *āmisa sukha* (material pleasure) temporarily. Only a person who has heard about (non-material) pleasure, knows that it can be experienced or has experienced it and will work towards *nirāmisa sukha* (non-material pleasure), towards a consciousness which is not connected to the senses.

Experience of (non-material) pleasure

As the mind becomes one-pointed, one is able to transcend *kāma saññā* and reach *citta samādhi* (concentration). Giving up material pleasure and having a separation from the hindrances is necessary to experience non-material pleasure. Once you experience *nirāmisa sukha*, you must try to prolong the experience.

If your habit is to immerse yourself in sensual pleasure, you will never attempt the practice. With the presence of *chanda iddhipāda*, one has zeal to strive in the practice.

As long as one remains in *rūpa loka* (material realm – realm of sense objects), it is difficult to appreciate the non-material realm, the formless stage, the baseless nature of the material realm.

Only a person with *vīmaṃsā* wisdom could progress to a formless state of awareness, where an object is not available or cannot be perceived and appreciate the progress from a gross to a subtle experience, where an object is no longer available and cannot be perceived.

Sense desire is tempered when the mind becomes one-pointed, and one progresses to a calm and collected mind. Not everyone who practises will experience *cittaviveka*, a seclusion of the mind from hindrances.

When one reaches a state of formless perception with an investigative capacity of the mind, one is able to transcend what is seen, enabling one to observe phenomena beyond the lens of a self.

This is possible with *vīmaṃsā iddhipāda*, the investigative wisdom, where one is able to reach a formless stage where the object ceases in the mind's awareness, to reach a subtle and refined state of mind, to not attach to formless perception and retain one's attention with investigative awareness.

To transcend attachment to formless perception and detach from it, knowing its baseless nature, is a valuable and rare realisation.

Whenever the mind diverts from the breath, there is engagement with the sensual world (*kāma lokha*).

If one's attention continues with the breath, it gradually fades in one's awareness and the gross breath is experienced in a subtle form. This is how the practice progresses. With *vīmaṃsā* wisdom, one knows that the breath gradually becomes subtle like the echo of a bell, like the sound which fades with time, becoming more and more subtle.

Investigative wisdom in the practice

In the practice of *Ānāpānasati* meditation, with continuous awareness, the breath gradually ceases in one's awareness and there is no longer an apparent object to note, but subtle awareness, when the breath ceases. Through this, one could observe its impermanence.

It is like the sound of a bell once struck; if one continues to listen, one could observe the gradual fading of the sound with continuous awareness and observe it to the end, to a complete cessation. By observing a cessation of the breath in the practice, we observe a cessation of *kāya (rūpa)*.

The mind becomes gradually freed of defilements when mindfulness gathers in momentum. In the beginning, we observed a tangible object. As it ceased in our awareness, we do not see its form - there is no apparent object available, only one-pointed awareness.

When the breath is continuously observed, its' cessation could be seen, and when there is no longer a tangible object that could be

seen, there is an apparent disappearance of the object. This state of awareness must be observed with an investigative mind, with wisdom, (*vīmaṃsā iddhipāda*), to progress further in the practice.

To continually observe a cessation of the object is the *yogi's* task. A cessation of the object is cessation of *rūpa*. To just be aware when there is nothing tangible to observe, is progress in the practice.

At this stage, investigative wisdom is necessary to develop the path further. When investigative wisdom is present, obstacles and challenges in the practice are overcome. Then, one is able to positively steer the practice without self-criticism or judgment. Instead, one retains continued focus on the awareness, knowing well that all errors in the practice are a learning to assimilate the path towards deeper insights.

When we have *vīmaṃsā* wisdom, we are able to accept deviations in the practice, we don't treat it as a difficulty or a failure, but realise that by being transparent about mistakes and deviations, is the starting point for improvement. All mistakes are an opportunity to reform character. There is forgiveness in confession.

Accepting mistakes, one makes a firm resolve that, from this day forward, one will correct the mistakes without judgment or disparagement with a view to retaining mindfulness away from deviations. Practising with *vīmaṃsā* wisdom, there is forgiveness and opportunity for correction. Accepting the difficulty in retaining the mind with an object, to know that mindfulness has gaps and accepting the impermanence of mindfulness is *vīmaṃsā* (investigative awareness).

When the experience is dull and monotonous, one is aware of the experience of monotony. When there is uplifting surge of rapture, one is aware of the uplifting experience. In a state of awareness where nothing tangible is there to observe, maintaining continuous attention on mind states is to practise with investigative awareness.

When one is able to mindfully observe the object, even for three to four moments, becoming aware of the power of being in the now, aspiring to strive further, wishing to increase the span of mindfulness with ardent effort, one progresses in the practice to develop wisdom.

Investigative wisdom is living in the present moment without resorting to prior knowledge and ideology, and instead, having the flexibility and agility to respond to the present.

When the mind is secluded from hindrances, if a *yogi* is committed to strive amidst all obstacles in the practice, the presence of investigative wisdom is apparent.

The practice is one of gradual progress. So we must develop faith and exert ardent effort to strive in the practice, know the value of concentration, to strive towards realisation. In doing so, balancing faith and wisdom is investigative wisdom. It is a *yogi's* task to reach an equilibrium by balancing faith, effort, concentration and wisdom to realise their goal.

When there is investigative concentration (*vīmaṃsā samādhi*), whatever the posture, one knows and continues with mindfulness of the posture, always retaining the mind in the present moment. *Vīmaṃsā* knowledge is that the truth lies in the

present and retaining the mind in the present moment, continuously, mindfully, from one moment to the next.

To know that living is being in the present moment, not being immersed in the past or the future in worldly pursuit is investigative wisdom.

Aim to make mindfulness a habit, persistently observing all postures and presently arising objects, from one moment to the next, without any sense of achievement or gain, to just remain in a state of awareness. Until you are able to harness this state of development, realisation of path and fruition consciousness, *nibbāna*, may not be possible.

Assimilating the practice through trial and error, time and again, repeatedly, one develops investigative wisdom, the capacity to reach a balance in faith, effort, concentration and wisdom. With investigative wisdom, the four bases of spiritual power must be balanced.

If one knows the value of a human birth, the value of developing a life bent on the practice, retaining the mind in the present moment, being aware of the postures, their change from one to another, from one moment to the next, just becoming aware of the present moment, the mind does not hanker after the past or the future. This is practising with investigative wisdom. That is, to know the value of awareness, become mindful of one moment to the next, even when form ceases and one remains in a state of formless awareness.

Anything done with intention and aspiration is based on *tanhā* (desire), *māna* (conceit), *diṭṭhi* (self-view) - the motivations for

action. It is possible to live without desire, conceit and self-view. This is the path cultivated by *yogis*.

If you have trust in an act, just do it without inquiring about a cause or a result. When the sun shines on a flower bud, it blooms, but it is not possible to force it to blossom. In a similar way, if you cultivate the conditions, results will just unfold. This is to progress closer to *vīmaṃsā* wisdom.

So continue to practice. Make the most of this auspicious opportunity. Having received a rare gift of a human birth at a time when the Buddha's teachings are available, continue to strive.

