

Four Bases of Power

To make our life purposeful and fruitful, an essential underlying factor – *strength of mind* – is called for. Without fortitude of mind, we will not succeed to the degree we could in our endeavours. And a focused and productive life will escape us.

Interestingly, the Buddha taught how to develop a mind of resilience and courage – a mind with the ability for concentration. He gives four principles in the *Samyutta Nikaya* (Chapter 51), in the Pali Canon. These are known as the four *Iddhipada* or paths to power. They are also referred to as the four bases of power.

To have strength of mind, then, four mental qualities need to be developed. These four bases of spiritual power are:

Desire – intention, aspiration, purpose, will

Persistence – effort, energy

Intentness – consciousness, thoughts, mind

Ingenuity – analysis, investigation, contemplation

Desire frees us from *laziness* which may creep in one of several ways, such as: (1) keeping ourselves busy with non-essential pursuits; (2) losing interest when we don't see immediate results; and (3) lacking right confidence, thinking "I can't do it".

Even with strong desire, without *persistence*, success will elude us. Simply wanting to do something is not enough – we have to take action. Consistent effort is needed. Otherwise, desire or intention becomes impotent. An example is continuing to develop wholesome mental states, and ridding ourselves of unwholesome ones.

Even if we exert persistent effort, we also need *intentness* – being conscious of the necessity to keep going. For instance, thinking about our practice, keeping it in mind, and remaining mindful of feelings and thoughts.

Ingenuity (or analysis) involves examining ourselves; noticing any tendency to fall into bad habits or wrong practice; learning to work with an imperfect mind; and balancing our mental faculties. Whenever we gain a degree of success, we also need to be mindful of basking in contentment and not advancing further.

This set of four mental qualities is one of the seven sets of qualities attributed to the Buddha as conducive to Enlightenment.

In closing, the *Samyutta Nikaya* (in the *Viraddha Sutta*, SN 51.2), highlights the significance of these four mental qualities:

"Bhikkhus, those who have neglected the four bases for spiritual power have neglected the noble path leading to the complete destruction of suffering. Those who have undertaken the four bases for spiritual power have undertaken the noble path leading to the destruction of suffering."

And from the *Iddhipada-vibhanga Sutta*, Thanissaro Bhikkhu translates: "These four bases of power, when developed and pursued, are of *great fruit and great benefit* [emphasis mine]." A fitting closing to answer the question: What do we need to make our life purposeful and fruitful?

Source: "Iddhipada-vibhanga Sutta: Analysis of the Bases of Power" (SN 51.20), translated from the Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu. *Access to Insight*, 1 July 2010, <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn51/sn51.020.than.html> . Retrieved on 8 September 2013.)

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