

Bases for Success

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When we built the chedi, the spired monument at Wat Dhammasathit, inside it we placed a rock. The top surface of the rock was a sculpted Buddha's footprint. On the side of the rock, Ajaan Fuang had the word in Thai for the four bases for success—*iddhipada*—carved into the rock.

Now, part of the reason was that there was a play on words. The word for footprint or foot, *pāda*, is also the word for base. But another part of the reason was that the four bases for success were what enabled us to build the chedi. As Ajaan Fuang said, without them, nothing would have happened there. It'd still be an empty hillside. But because of them, the chedi was established. As the Buddha himself said of his own case, his powers as a Buddha were established on the bases for success. And because they're related directly to the practice of concentration, it's good to think about them.

In Thailand, they like to apply them to every aspect of any endeavor. When you finish your education, the Thai idiom is that you succeed in your education. So they talk about the four bases of success as being necessary to finish your education. But in the Canon they're specifically related to concentration, and as we remember, concentration is the heart of the path. If you neglect these bases for success, the Buddha says you're neglecting the noble path as a whole. So it's good to keep them in mind.

There's the base of success which is concentration founded on desire and the fabrications of exertion. There's the base of success which is concentration founded on persistence and the fabrications of exertion. The fabrication of exertion is there in each case; it basically means right effort. The other two bases are concentration founded on intent and concentration founded on circumspection.

That makes it sound like there are four different kinds of concentration. But in each case, you've got right effort involved, and right effort involves desire, intent, and persistence. To be right, you also have to have some discernment into what is skillful and what's not. So the difference among the four bases seems to be more a question of emphasis as to which factor is going to be strongest in your concentration. Because all four have to be present.

You see them all in the factors for the first stage of right concentration, the first jhana. Desire: You're thinking largely about the pleasure and rapture that are going to come when the mind settles down. But of course, for desire to be

properly focused, it has to be focused on the causes. If you focus simply on the results, you can sit here and think for hours about how much you'd like to have the results, but they're never going to come. They won't have any foundation. So you've got to focus on your efforts.

In this case, the effort is to have singleness of mind or *cittassa ek'aggatā*. Sometimes this term is translated as one-pointedness of mind, but there's nothing in the term that refers to "point." When the Buddha gives his analogies for concentration, they're always expansive, and always mention a full-body awareness. When the rapture and pleasure come, you let them fill the whole body. You work them through the body in the same way that a person making dough for bread would work the moisture through the flour.

So we're not after one-pointedness; we're after singleness: one single perception, one single object filling the range of your awareness. In this case, it would be the breath filling the body, and that's the one thing you're working on. That's what the effort is all about. Any hindrances that come up—in other words, anything that would distract you from this one object—you've got to put aside. And you do everything you can to keep the mind with the breath.

This is where you bring in *citta*, or intentness, which is basically the same thing as directed thought. You don't think randomly. Your thoughts are directed, and you keep the mind on one topic. You give your full attention to this one topic.

Then finally, you bring in *vīmaṃsā*, which refers to the mind's discursive, discerning faculties. Ajaan Lee translates it as "circumspection." It can also be translated as your analytical qualities and your ingenuity—the active part of the mind that's looking, thinking, and evaluating. This, of course, is related to evaluation as a factor for right concentration. As you're trying to stay focused on one thing, you're paying full attention to that one thing and you use your discernment to evaluate: How well is it going?

There's a dialogue between the directed thought and evaluation. You focus on the question: Is the mind settling down? If it's not settling down, where is the problem? Is the problem with the breath, or is the problem with the mind? Sometimes you direct your thoughts straight at the breath; sometimes you have to focus back on the mind. Then you evaluate what's going on. Is the mind ready to settle down? If it's too anxious, what can you do to get it more settled? If it has too much energy, what can you do to calm it down? If it has too little energy, what can you do to energize it?

This is the work of evaluation: working on this as a skill and seeing it as a problem that you want to think through. Meditation does require thinking. It's like a carpenter trying to fit two pieces of wood together so that they're perfectly

snug. Sometimes you sand this piece of wood; sometimes you sand that piece of wood. Try to fit them together. If they don't fit quite right together, you take them apart and sand them down again. You're sanding either this piece, the breath, or that piece, the mind, until they're just right for each other. Then you put them together.

That's when the mind becomes one. Then you can do what you can to maintain that. Now, as you maintain it, the more active side, the discerning side becomes less and less active. You don't need to do so much directed thought and evaluation. There's simply the effort to stay with one object at the same time that you're enjoying the rapture and the pleasure. If the rapture and the pleasure seem too much, you can let them go, and there's simply equanimity.

In this way, the mind settles down the way you want it to. You have some success in your meditation. You often hear it said that there are no good meditations or bad meditations, that you're not supposed to judge your meditation, but that's not how the Buddha taught. The quality of *vīmaṃsā* basically entails your powers of judgment and recognition of the fact that meditation is a skill. It is something you master. When it doesn't go well, you try to figure out why it's not going well. When it does go well, you try to maintain it. Without engaging in too much thought, you try to figure out why it's going well and how it can go better.

So it is possible to succeed in meditation. That's why we're here. It is a skill that can be mastered. And as you master the skill, you find that you bring all the elements of the path together:

- Right view in seeing that the training of the mind is going to make the difference between suffering and not suffering.
- Right resolve: You decide you want to find happiness in a way that doesn't involve sensuality, doesn't involve ill will, doesn't involve any harmfulness. You've got it right here with the concentration.
- Right speech in this case would be the speech of directed thought and evaluation as you talk to yourself about the breath.
- Right action, right livelihood—everything you do to give rise to a sense of well-being: That provides the food for the mind.
- Right mindfulness is keeping your object in mind.

And there you are: Right concentration with all of its requisites.

It's in this way that following the bases for success helps to bring the noble eightfold path together. And the noble eightfold path makes the practice complete, all centered around your breath and around the mind right here. Because that's where the problem is, that's where the solution is going to be

found. And it's in getting firmly established right here that you're in the right place, both to understand the problem and to figure out the solution, because this is where those qualities of *vīmaṃsā*, your powers of judgment, do their work.

First, they do their work in getting the mind to settle down. Then they rest as the mind settles down more and more fully. Then they're brought back to figure out where there is still any stress here in this solid state of mind, in this practice of concentration—because after all, it is fabricated, and we're looking for something unfabricated. So you use your powers of judgment to figure that out.

It's in this way that the bases for success help you to succeed not only in getting the mind concentrated but also in solving the bigger problem of why it is that the mind, even though it wants happiness, keeps creating suffering for itself. When that problem is solved, then the work is done.