



## National Journal of Hindi & Sanskrit Research

ISSN: 2454-9177

NJHSR 2025; 1(61): 79-81

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## Viriya As A Competency In Dhamma

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### Introduction

"Viriya" is a term in Dhamma, commonly translated as energy, diligence, or effort, and is considered a crucial factor in spiritual development. It represents an enthusiastic and joyful engagement in wholesome activities, driving one to accomplish virtuous actions. Viriya is also linked to the concept of right effort in the Eightfold Path and is one of the seven factors of enlightenment.

Viriya is closely related to other concepts in Dhamma like the five spiritual faculties (bala) and the seven factors of enlightenment (bojjhanga)

Gautam Buddha became a Samma Sambuddha by attaining full enlightenment through the realisation of the four Noble Truths by his own effort, with no help from a teacher. The Buddha has consistently emphasised the significance of one's effort (*viriya*) required to cultivate and successfully complete the path of liberation to attain Nibbana.

The Buddha's own profound determination and effort is well indicated by his resolution on the night of enlightenment when He sat down to meditate under the Bodhi tree:

"Though only my skin, sinews and bone may remain, and my blood and flesh may dry up and wither away, yet will I never move from this seat until I have attained full enlightenment"

Effort becomes a wholesome mental factor when it is associated with a wholesome consciousness based on the three wholesome roots of non-greed, non-hatred and non-delusion. It is an unwholesome mental factor if it is associated with an unwholesome consciousness based on the three unwholesome roots of greed, hatred and delusion.

Viriya refers to the general quality of energy, effort, or vigor, while Padhana, often translated as "exertion" or "endeavor," specifically denotes intense effort or striving. Viriya provides the energy and effort, while Padhana channels that energy into a focused and sustained spiritual practice. Competency signifies skills, knowledge and ability for necessary performance on the role. Degree of efforts /striving would be a measure of one's viriya so vital for any performance.

### Narrative On Viriya In Sutta

In the Kitagiri sutta of the Majjhima Nikaya (Collection of the Buddha's middle length discourses), the Buddha has indicated the degree of effort and determination that one requires in order to attain the supreme goal of Nibbana;

"Gladly would I let the flesh & blood in my body dry up, leaving just the skin, tendons, & bones, but if I have not attained what can be reached through human firmness, human persistence, human striving, there will be no relaxing my persistence"

In the Canki sutta of the Majjhima Nikaya, the Buddha has emphasised the importance of right effort in one's spiritual journey towards the final attainment of the liberation/ Nibbana.

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“Exertion is most helpful for the final attainment of the truth. If one didn’t make an exertion, one wouldn’t finally attain the truth.

Effort (*virīya*) is the fifth of the ten perfections (*parami*) which are wholesome qualities to be developed or wholesome actions to be performed with the sole purpose of gaining enlightenment. A lot of prominence has been accorded by Buddha to the significance of effort (*virīya*) in one’s spiritual journey toward enlightenment that it is included directly or indirectly in all the seven groups of requisites of enlightenment comprising 37 wholesome factors of enlightenment (*bodhipakkhiya dhamma*): Four foundations of mindfulness (*satipatthana*), Four types of right effort (*sammappadana*), four bases of mental power (*iddhipada*), Five spiritual faculties (*pancha indriya*), Five spiritual powers (*pancha bala*), Seven factors of enlightenment (*sapta bojjhanga*), The Noble Eight-fold Path (*ariya atthangika magga*).

In the *Satipatthana* sutta of the *Majjhima Nikaya*, the Buddha has described contemplation of the seven factors of enlightenment including effort as a means of developing mindfulness of mind objects (*dhammas*).

In the *Sangiti* sutta of the *Digha Nikaya*, the Buddha has described **four types of effort**.

1. Effort of restraint (*samvara-padhanam*), 2. Effort of abandoning (*pahana-padhanam*)
3. Effort of development (*bhavana-padhanam*) 4. Effort of preservation (*anurakkhana-padhanam*)

The *Padhana* Sutta in the *Sutta Nipata*, focuses on the concept of *padhana*, meaning exertion or striving, particularly in the context of *Bodhisatta*’s struggle to overcome *Mara*’s temptations for sensual pleasure and achieving *Nibbana* i.e. enlightenment. As Buddha ultimately defeated *Mara* through his unwavering efforts and mindfulness, the *Padhana* sutta is a guide to both monks and laities alike for overcoming hindrances and cultivating wholesome qualities.

Effort which does not have in it any element of unwillingness is called *sammappadana*. It is also called *atapa-virīya*

*Dhamma* provides the following four types of right effort called ‘**Cattāri Sammappadanani**’ in Pali.

*bhikkhu anuppannānaṃ pāpakānaṃ akusalānaṃ dhammānaṃ anuppādāya chandaṃ janeti vāyamati virīyaṃ ārabhati cittaṃ paggaṇhāti padahati; uppannānaṃ pāpakānaṃ akusalānaṃ dhammānaṃ pahānāya chandaṃ janeti vāyamati virīyaṃ ārabhati cittaṃ paggaṇhāti padahati; anuppannānaṃ kusālānaṃ dhammānaṃ uppādāya chandaṃ janeti vāyamati virīyaṃ ārabhati cittaṃ paggaṇhāti padahati; uppannānaṃ kusālānaṃ dhammānaṃ ṭhitiyā asammōsāya bhīyyobhāvāya vepullāya bhāvanāya pāripūriyā chandaṃ janeti vāyamati virīyaṃ ārabhati cittaṃ paggaṇhāti padahati.*

1. He generates his *chanda*, exert himself and rouses his *virīya*/ effort to restrain /prevent the development of *papaka* and *akusala* i.e. unwholesome mental states that have not arisen.

Buddha has taught the need to put effort to restrain the six internal sense doors of the eye (*cakku*), ear (*sota*), nose (*ghāṇa*), tongue (*jivhā*), body (*kāya*) and the mind (*mana*), so that the sense objects received by the six sense doors do not result in covetousness or displeasure which are unwholesome mental states.

2. Effort to abandon the unwholesome mental states that have arisen.e.g. thoughts of sensual desire, thoughts of ill-will and thoughts of cruelty.

3. Effort to cultivate the un-arisen wholesome mental states. The *Kusala* i.e. wholesome mental states that need to be developed and maintained with right effort include the seven factors of enlightenment (*satta bojjhanga*); mindfulness (*sati*), investigation of *dhammas* (*dhamma vicaya*), energy or effort (*virīya*), rapture or joy (*pīti*), tranquillity (*passaddhi*), concentration (*samādhi*) and equanimity (*upekkha*).

4. Effort to maintain the wholesome mental states that have arisen. The *Akusala* i.e. unwholesome mental states that have not yet arisen include the five mental hindrances of sensual desire (*kāmacchanda*), ill-will (*vyāpāda*), sloth and torpor (*thīna middha*), restlessness and remorse (*uddacca kukkucā*) and sceptical doubt (*vicikicā*) that can negatively affect the development of concentration.

*Dhamma* lists **four bases of mental power called *iddhipada*** in Pali.

1. Desire or will to act (*chanda*) 2. Effort or energy (*virīya*)
3. Consciousness or mind (*citta*) 4. Investigation or discrimination (*vimamsa*)

In the *Iddhipada Vibhanga* sutta of the *Samyutta Nikaya*, the Buddha has described six types of mundane and supra mundane mental powers that one is able to attain by successfully cultivating the four bases of mental powers. *iddhi vidhā*, *dibbha-sota*, *ceto-pariyaya-nāna*, *pubbenivāsanussati-nāna*, *dibba-cakkhu*, *asavakkhaya-nāna*. The first five are mundane mental powers which are not indications of one’s liberation. The sixth power of the ability to know the extinction of mental fermentations is the only supra mundane mental power which indicates one’s liberation.

As against the psychic powers such as performing miracles or the ability to read others’ mind, the Buddha considered the miracle of giving instructions (*anusasana prathihāya*) to transform someone by abandoning unskilful qualities and developing skilful qualities as the most important psychic power.

In the *Viraddha* sutta of the *Samyutta Nikaya*, the Buddha has stated, “Monks, those who have neglected the four

bases of spiritual power have neglected the noble path leading to the complete destruction of suffering.

In the Chandasamadhi sutta of the Samyutta Nikaya, the Buddha has stated three aspects to effort as a base of mental power: exertion, concentration due to exertion, volitional formations of striving. These are the basis for potencies endowed with concentration due to exertion and with volitional formations of striving”.

### Viriya As One Of The Five Spiritual Faculties

Dhamma mentions **five spiritual faculties** called *pancha indriya*

1. Faith or conviction (*saddha*) 2. Energy or effort (*viriya*), 3. Mindfulness (*sati*) 4. Concentration (*samadhi*) 5. Wisdom (*panna*)

Among the five spiritual faculties, the faculties of faith and wisdom are paired together while effort and concentration are paired together in a reciprocal relationship. There has to be a balance between faith and wisdom as well as between effort and concentration to facilitate spiritual progress. The faculty of mindfulness acts as the moderator to make sure that each pair maintains the correct balance without resorting to either extreme which can adversely affect the spiritual development.

In the Aggi Sutta of the Samyutta Nikaya, the Buddha has advised the monks that when the mind is restless due to the mental hindrance of restlessness and remorse (*uddacca kukkuccha*), it is the wrong time to practise effort. Similarly, when the mind is sluggish due to the mental hindrance of sloth and torpor (*thina middha*), it is the right time to practise effort.

When the five spiritual faculties are fully developed and are unshakable, they become five spiritual powers (*pancha bala*) and, are able to withstand and deter the arising of any opposing factor.

- Faith controls doubt
- Effort controls laziness
- Mindfulness controls heedlessness
- Concentration controls distraction
- Wisdom controls ignorance

The Buddha's Noble Eight-fold Path (*ariya atthangika magga*) can be broadly divided into 3 groups:

1. Morality (*sila*), consisting of Right speech, Right action and Right livelihood
2. Concentration (*samadhi*), consisting of **Right effort**, Right mindfulness and Right concentration
3. Wisdom (*panna*), consisting of Right view and Right intention.

Depending on the stage of a particular task there are **three types of effort**:

1. Effort required to begin a particular action (*arambha dhatu viriya*)

2. Effort required to sustain an action in spite of obstacles (*nikkama dhatu viriya*)

3. Effort required to continue till the completion of an action (*parakkama dhatu viriya*)

In the Sona sutta of the Anguttara Nikaya, when Venerable Sona was just about to give up the monastic life as he could not succeed in his meditation practice due to the excess effort that he applied. Buddha replied, too much effort will lead to restlessness (*uddacca*) while too little effort will lead to sloth and torpor (*thina middha*) both of which are mental hindrances affecting the meditation process

### Conclusions

It is observed that Viriya or efforts has found its importance in many factors of enlightenment. When we are engaged with Viriya, we enthusiastically and joyfully take part in meritorious activities. Effort has been one of the parami for a Bodhisatta to fulfil. Buddha's own efforts over 6 years for defeating Mara and attaining enlightenment (Padhana) is unparalleled and noteworthy. For cultivation of wholesome mental states, four types of efforts need to be put in and pursued.

Effort is one of the four bases for mental power (Iddipada) and also; one the panch indriya which when becomes unshakable becomes panch bala.

As such, Viriya is one of the noteworthy competencies with which not only monks but laities too would overcome laziness and get energised to put in more efforts to achieve the aspired mental state full of enlightenment.

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