

# 'The Four Factors of Accomplishment' (Iddhipada)

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**W**hen you want to make a cup of milk tea, you may need four key ingredients; tea, hot water, milk and sugar. You have to stir the mixture well before you take a small sip. Then you can enjoy it! According to one of the Buddha's teachings, whatever we would like to accomplish in our lives; we need to have the right ingredients; the desire to act, strength or energy, mind and investigation or inspection. Vice President of the International Institute of Theravada, Venerable Watagoda Maggavihari Thera said.

In Pali we call them Iddhipadas: Chanda (zeal), Viriya (effort), Citta (mind) and Vimamsa (investigation). In the Pali term iddhipada, the morpheme "iddhi" means success or accomplishment in spirituality and the moreheme "pada" means base or basis. The whole term is rendered into English as "bases of accomplishment" or "bases of spiritual success". It can be said that cultivation of these four qualities to some extent is essential for the success or accomplishment of any task in one's domestic, social, professional or religious life.

The final spiritual goal of practitioners of Theravada Buddhism is Nibbana; liberation from all sufferings and the cycle of repeated births and deaths (Samsara). In Theravada Buddhist Scriptures, Nibbana has been described as a supra-mundane state which is the highest bliss and eternal happiness devoid of suffering of birth, disease, old age, death, grief, lamentation and despair.

According to the Buddha's teaching a person should develop at least one of the four aforesaid Iddhipadas for the development of certain mundane and supra-mundane achievements during one's spiritual progress.

What are the accomplishments explained in the Buddhist teachings? Word for accomplishment in Pali is Iddi; There are five types of accomplishments.

According to Venerable Maggavihari Thera, the first accomplishment is the act of Abhinna (Abhinna). It is the accomplishment of deeply understanding things that should be understood in terms of its intrinsic nature, that is to say the actual characteristic of realities that truly exists. For instance, consciousness has the characteristics of knowing an object having delimited and separated it from other objects. Craving (Loba) has the nature of attaching to an object.

If something really exists, it has its own intrinsic nature. Knowing the realities in their intrinsic nature is called Abhinna. Sometimes the word, Abhinna is used for supernatural powers such as levitating, knowing others; minds and so on. But here the term refers to the act of knowing realities in their true nature. In Theravada Abhidhamma we have 72 realities. Knowing them in their intrinsic nature is the act called Abhinna. In the act of Abhinna one has to overcome the concept and understand the realities in their true nature.

One can understand realities by learning, conceptualizing or through intellect. But here the accomplishment means knowing it on a practical level. Therefore a person who has accomplished this level of Abhinna, to a greater degree, very seldom has defilements regarding anyone or anything.

Not knowing things in their actuality or considering things wrongly is our habit. In order to know the realities in their existing nature, one has to be mindful and has to have a deep understanding. Only then one will be able to accomplish this task of Abhinna. It is indeed not an easy task. Just merely having the knowledge on realities would not suffice someone to have accomplished this act of Abhinna.

The second accomplishment is the act of Parinna (Parinna). In the act of Abhinna, a person knows an object is its intrinsic nature. On the other hand, the act of Parinna is involved in knowing the three universal characteristics of realities.

There are three universal characteristics: impermanence (Anicca Lakkhana), the nature of causing suffering (Dukka Lakkhana) and non-selfness (Anatta Lakkhana). Five aggregates (Panakkhandha), that is to say Consciousness (Citta), Mental factors (Cetasikas) and Matter (Rupa), which really exist, all possess these three attributes. They arise and pass away. Therefore, they are with the nature of impermanence. In other words, they undergo the phenomenon of impermanence.

With the act of Abhinna we get to know what there is. There are reali-



Ven. Watagoda Maggavihari Thera

ties that exist in their intrinsic nature. It means realities have their inbuilt quality which cannot be reduced any further into other ingredients. These realities except the unconditioned reality called Nibbana possess three common characteristics of Anicca Lakkhana, Dukka Lakkhana and Anatta Lakkhana. They arise and pass away. So they are impermanent. In order to progress in the path of insight (Vipassana) one has to know the nature of impermanence. Realities arise and pass away. They, not having existed before, suddenly pops up, due to causes, and vanishes quickly. Therefore these realities are impermanent. They are under the phenomenon of impermanence. At the same time, they cause suffering, mental and physical pains. As impermanent realities are out of our control they are called non-self realities. Non-selfness is the nature of a reality that cannot be controlled. Though we understand the realities in its intrinsic nature, one has to have a much deeper understanding to know these three phenomena associated with realities or the phenomenon under which these realities exist. Mind and matter undergo the three phenomena of impermanence, nature of causing suffering and non-selfness. Hence conditioned realities are not permanent. Having arisen they cannot exist forever. They do not have the nature of causing the ultimate happiness.

## UNIVERSAL CHARACTERISTICS

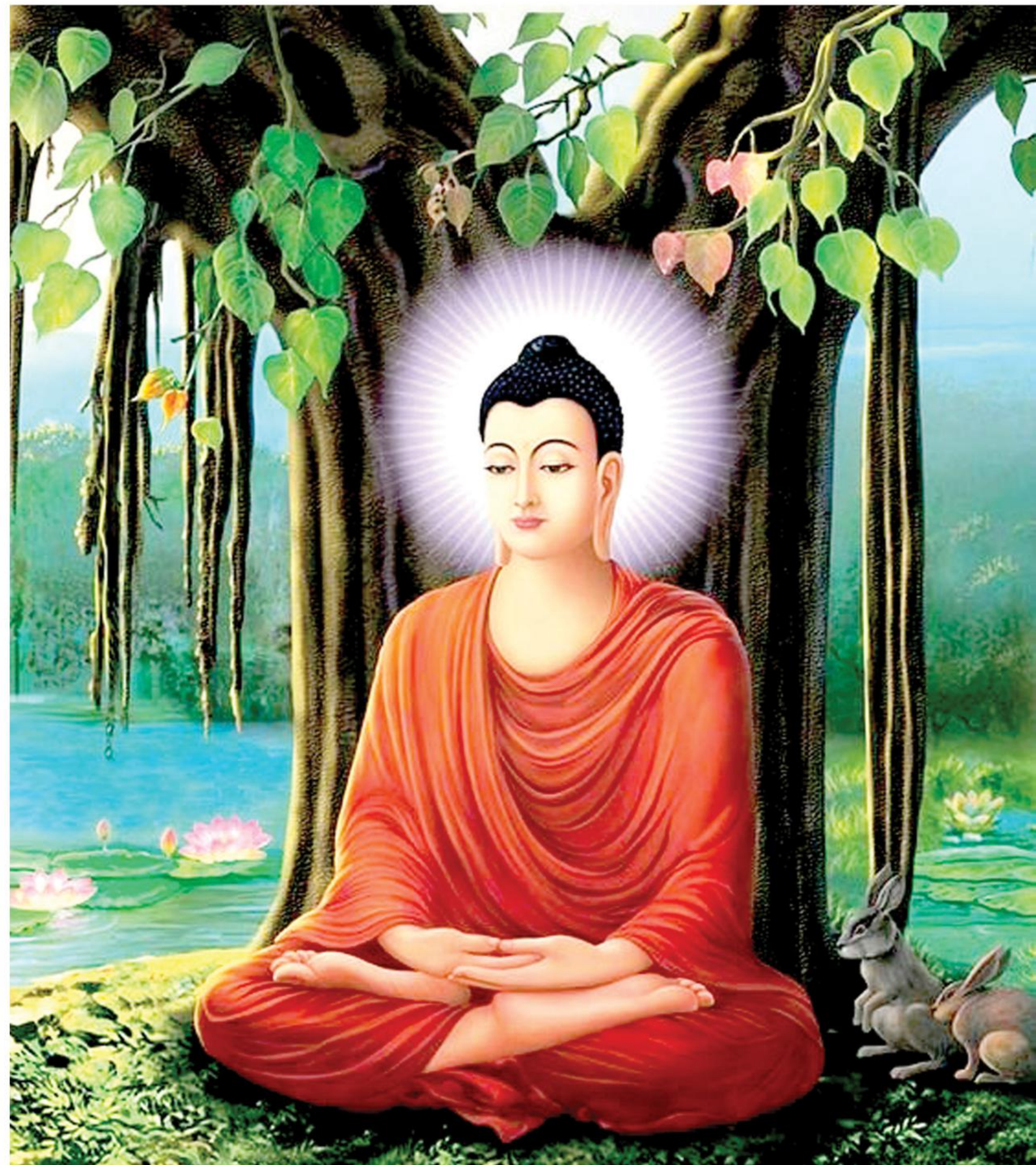
There is a certain kind of satisfaction they give us, but it is temporary. They are not controllable. In order to know the universal characteristics of realities one has to have a deep and sharp wisdom. If someone is capable of achieving this level of understanding it is an accomplishment in Buddhism. It is called the act of Parinna which is much deeper or advanced than the act of Abhinna. The third accomplishment is the act of abandoning that should be abandoned (Pahana). According to Buddha's teachings, if someone wants to attain the perfect liberation, he or she has to abandon unwholesome qualities such as hatred, craving, ignorance, laziness, jealousy and stinginess. There are various abandonments such as suppression, temporary suppression, deeper suppression and full eradication. Total eradication is not an easy task.

To do that one has to know the realities in their intrinsic nature and their true universal characteristics not just for one or few times but for many times to the level till the ignorance (Moha) is removed. Ignorance ignores these true characteristics of realities and considers that we are living in a blissful world safely. In order to remove this wrong consideration we have to keep on looking into the realities in their true nature. Only then latent ignorance that has existed in our mind stream throughout the entire Samsara which veiled the truth can be removed. That needs lots of courage and practice. It's a great achievement. When one has eradicated the entire range of defilements by removing ignorance he or she is called an Arahant (fully enlightened person).

The fourth accomplishment is the development of spiritual realities that should be developed (Bhavana). What is to be removed are the Akusalas (unwholesome quali-

ties). What is to be developed are the wholesome qualities (Kusala) such as the moral conduct, the act of giving, charity, loving kindness, compassion, deep understanding, insight, knowing realities in their true nature, and knowing the true characteristics. All these acts are done by certain mental elements that are wholesome and always lead to better destinations (Sugati) or complete liberation (Nibbana). Capacity of these wholesome states can be enhanced. It is true that unwholesome qualities can also be developed to a certain level. But no unwholesome quality can dispel wholesome quality permanently. An unwholesome mentality may prevent the arising of wholesome mental states. But there is no possibility that one develops unwholesomeness to its peak and completely forever abandons wholesome qualities. Such a phenomenon does not exist. Therefore, the Buddha recognized that Akusala can be completely removed or dispelled by developing Kusala.

The fifth accomplishment is the attainment of what needs to be attained. In this regard, we specially refer to the Nibbana (Nirvana), the unconditioned reality (Sachchikarana). Nirvana is the abandoning of suffering that is about to happen. It means getting rid of the potency of suffering. As long as we possess definitions even though we are in the current existence we are bound with the suffering that can arise in our future lives. We are not freed from the suffering that would follow after our death. If we die suddenly



without eradicating defilements we are sure to be born somewhere else. Therefore we are bound with suffering. Suffering referred to here has not arisen yet. But there is a possibility for this suffering to occur as we do possess the causes of this suffering - defilements (Kilesa).

## CESSATION OF SUFFERING

Getting rid of that suffering (possibility of suffering) is called Nibbana. Another term for this liberation is Anuppada Nirodha or Anuppanna Nirodha. Cessation of suffering that would have happened had the causes prevailed. It is not an easy task to attain this state.

For that one has to remove the causes of rebirth. In order to do that he or she has to develop the capacity of wholesomeness. During the process one understands the realities in their true nature. Only then one will be able to attain this Nirvana.

These four-fold acts - Abhinna,

Parinna, Pahana, Bhavana and Sachchikarana - are the spiritual accomplishments mentioned in Theravada texts. These accomplishments cannot be attained by simple means or by a simple effort. For that one has to have great mental energy, mental strength, and mental stamina. In the end, we are going to accomplish these tasks by ourselves. Not even a Buddha can take us there. It is true that guidance is important. But in the end ultimately we are the ones who have to reach these accomplishments. In this daunting task, there are four mental factors that lead us toward these accomplishments. They are Chanda, Viriya, Citta and Vimamsa.

**1. Chanda** - The desire to act to achieve a certain goal. The Pali term Chanda can be translated into English as intention, zeal, aspiration, inspiration, will or wholehearted desire to attain, reach, fulfill or accomplish a certain task. No task can be started or accomplished without this primary requirement of

desire which will help one to persevere to face any possible distractions or obstructions. The desire here is of such a firm nature that nothing internal or external can negatively affect its progress until its full accomplishment.

**2. Viriya** - Effort, the mental energy that doesn't let us give up a certain task that we have already initiated. The Pali word 'Viriya' means a skillful attitude of engaging in wholesome activities without giving up.

**3. Citta** - the mind that is inclined towards accomplishments. If we are to accomplish a certain difficult task we cannot forget it. We always keep it in our mind as one of our goals. It is sort of a self-imposed responsibility. "Citta", meaning consciousness or mind, is an essential component as a base of mental power in one's spiritual journey along with other three factors. Even if one has strong desire and effort in carrying out a particular task one also needs to be always conscious and mindful of the task in hand in order to carry it out till its full accomplishment. One needs to make a total commitment to the wholesome task in hand without allowing the mind to stray away from the task. One has to be thoughtful and mindful of the ultimate spiritual target on a continuous basis to know where one is at a particular stage of the entire process. When wholehearted attention is consistently paid to the task in hand it will inform the disciple when more effort is needed and when perseverance is called for in order to complete the task successfully.

**4. Vimamsa** - Investigating wisdom: In English, Vimamsa has several meanings such as investigation, discrimination, examination, reasoning, ingenuity, analysis and wisdom. It is the most significant factor of the four factors of accomplishment in terms of its role in facilitating the process of liberation from suffering and enlightenment. A spirit of investigation is necessary throughout the process of developing the mental powers and also maintaining and facilitating the other three bases.

As it was mentioned in the descriptions, without having at least one of these spiritual qualities it is not possible for someone to reach these accomplishments. Not only these accomplishments even without any of these factors a person would not be able to do something significant in their lives. For example, if someone wants to conquer the world on the unwholesome side, he should still have any of these factors. Due to the immense significance in the spiritual journey towards enlightenment the Buddha included these 'Four Factors of Accomplishment' among the Thirty-Seven Requisites of Enlightenment: Bodhipakkhiya Dhamma.

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