

The Five Indriyas and their Near Enemies, by Dhammaloka

The Energy Axis: Virya and Samadhi

Virya – on the mundane level vitality, energy, promptitude, directed effort and discipline, and on a more spiritual level the Four Right Efforts, spiritual mastery, selfless Bodhisattva activity

–

must be balanced with

Samadhi – on the mundane level concentration, keeping focus, stability, and on a more spiritual level meditative absorption, dhyanas, deep spiritual receptivity.

1. Virya – energy in pursuit of the good

Restlessness or wasted energy: A state of experience lacking both focus and purpose; there is no real concentration and probably not much vision and deeper understanding either. We may lean towards excitement and short flashes of enthusiasm, but we are unable to maintain focus and take our activity to deeper levels.

Mindfulness makes an end to our wasting energy by

1. the recognition that in fact we waste energy - with body, speech or mind
2. stopping and cultivating the opposite
3. introducing periods of silence, stillness, and retreat into our lives
4. moderation with regard to sensuous pleasures
5. guarding the doors of the senses

Blocked energy: A state in which there is a certain sense of stability and firmness, even direction, but the energy is sort of frozen and dead. While there is some concentration, it lacks richness and glow. Being like a volcano covered with snow, or even an ice cap. Putting it generally, in this state of blocked energy we lack the fluidity, aliveness, lightness and joyful vitality that is part of virya proper.

Mindfulness resolves blockages by

1. bringing awareness to ourselves, in particular to body and feelings,
2. in 'body-wise' training systems like yoga, Tai Qi, Kum Nye, bioenergetics, relaxation techniques,
3. directly mental approaches like various samatha practices of meditation
4. engaging in creative – or at least productive – work or leisure activities,
5. engaging in genuine communication.

Virya proper finds its most glorious expression in the activity of the Bodhisattva, who

- without any hectic or restlessness, tirelessly works for the good of all

- like an elephant, playfully turns from one activity to the next,
- is engaged in the joyful *lila*, the game/‘sports’ of Enlightenment, without any purpose, fully happy in himself, but always magically furthering the welfare of beings
- is a living embodiment of the *tejas*, the fiery energies that have been brought to life through spiritual practice and in particular meditation.

The Buddha **Amoghasiddhi**, in the Mandala of the Five Jinas, embodies the perfection of viriya.

2. Samadhi – Concentration/Meditation

Forced, or rigid concentration: Here both energy and concentration are strong, but the energy applied is too **coarse**. It lacks inspiration, lightness, subtlety, and flexibility. There is probably a lack of trust, in the sense of *sraddha* in our mind – and we try to compensate that with wilfulness. It’s a very wide-spread state – very much enhanced by the crudeness of entertainment, media, leisure industries, that value strong, rather than deep experiences.

Mindfulness provides balance by:

- Relaxing, allowing oneself to enjoy life a little more, taking time to stop and enjoy;
- Extending both focus and breadth of attention – in work, taking in the whole while keeping a light awareness of the details of what you are concentrated on;
- Opening oneself to the rhythm and flow of one’s movements; bringing attention to the breath in ordinary activities – relaxing into the breath, allowing gut energy to spread through the whole body;
- Turning away from heavy sports to more refining physical activities like Tai Qi, Yoga, Kum Nye;
- Spending time in nature and experiencing her healing qualities;
- Opening oneself to the higher arts – music, visual arts, literature;
- Looking for genuine communication, in particular with friends in the Sangha;
- Attending meditation retreats with a programme that isn’t overly strict (rather a good balance of meditation, ritual, communication, Dharma study)
- Participating in practices of mantra chanting, puja, etc.

Dullness: Here, the mind is quiet and stable, but it isn’t particularly attentive. There is little energy in the experience which may be fairly pleasant, but rather vague – a sort of fog, tending to sleepiness and, perhaps, boredom. One somehow just can’t be bothered to really engage and take an initiative.

It’s a little bit like being drugged – pleasantly unawake. With dull concentration, you only partly participate in life – and there is a high price to be paid. **Life just bypasses you.** It’s very important to recognise this state – traditionally, particularly if we experience this in meditation – dull concentration is regarded as a positively dangerous state which we must escape from as quickly as possible.

Antidotes:

- wake up – in quite a physical sense -, brighten up your experience, bring colour and detail to awareness;
- bring the body to life, perhaps go for a walk or even a run or engage in some competitive sports;
- think about what is happening to you and where it will lead, in particular think about impermanence and that your life will end;
- engage in communication, allow yourself to be challenged;
- apply uncompromising dead-lines to your work and even other activities.

Samadhi proper means that you are able to fix your mind wherever you choose to. While there is a very strong sense of continuity and concentration, it is at the same time light, vibrant and alive – a deeply satisfying and enriching experience of integration and wholeness. You are full of energy and at the same time and deeply filled with peace.

In the Mandala of the Five Jinas, this state is represented by **Ratnasambhava**, the yellow Buddha of the South.

The Consciousness axis: Sraddha and prajna

Sraddha – on the mundane level confidence, optimism, inspiration, mundane vision, and on a more spiritual level spiritual vision, faith in the Three Jewels and one's own capacity for Buddhahood -

must be balanced with

Prajna – on the mundane level, intelligence, mental and intellectual clarity, and on a more spiritual level, insight, spiritual understanding, intuitive wisdom.

3. Sraddha - Faith

Sentimentality (emotionality) is a state of attachment that may be strongly felt but it doesn't go deep. A kind of greed-approach to the Dharma. One may feel touched and quite excited about the Dharma and one may be keen to meditate, but one doesn't really want to learn about it. In a sense, one refuses to change and one refuses to apply one's critical intelligence to the teaching.

Antidotes to sentimentality/emotionality:

- Develop a genuinely questioning mind, exercise your critical faculties and learn to think clearly – even develop a positive kind of cynicism of not believing anything before you have yourself thought about it and tried it out;
- Check your enthusiasm; look closely before you give your heart;
- Learn to listen to those parts of yourself that give you a kind of warning (think back of previous experiences where your sentimentality has lead you astray – how did this inner voice try to make you aware?)
- Take up Dharma study

Fanaticism: Fanatics have invested so much emotional energy in their belief, and they have identified with it to such an extent that they can't bear others not sharing in the same belief. Here, faith lacks both depth and breadth of experience and understanding. It's a rather self-centered kind or totalitarian madness: The ego has been taken over by the content of one's belief – in this sense one has become a slave – whether of god, money, the family or whatever. Fanaticism is hard, proud, pushy, and does not recognise any nuances. It sees reality in terms of black or white.

Antidotes:

- Broaden out and relax; remind yourselves that the truth remains the truth even if not everyone may believe in it;
- Develop the capacity for empathy and love; learn to appreciate difference and diversity as an expression of the richness of life;
- Bring to awareness the fact that any teaching of truth can be no more than a pointer to that truth but not the truth itself; one should never take it literally;
- Rather than trying to grasp what you believe as if it were a weapon or a banner, you need to let go of yourself into the truth of the teaching, gradually being permeated by the truth, allowing it to transform you.

Sraddha proper is the deep resonance of what is best and Ultimate in ourselves with what is Ultimate in the universe, and the heartfelt longing to fully waken up to this Ultimate whatever this waking up may do to our ego. Sraddha naturally seeks expression in giving (oneself) and Going for Refuge (to the Three Jewels).

Perfected Sraddha is embodied by Amitabha, the red Buddha of the West in the Mandala of the Five Jinas.

4. Prajna - Wisdom

Cynicism is an attitude of “knowing it all only too well” and because of that an inability to believe and open up to Reality on a deep and heartfelt level. Cynicism is bright, perhaps even brilliant, but nevertheless quite superficial. Cynics may have a sharp and well-trained intellect, able to make connections and to quickly spot flaws in an argument – they particularly enjoy to attack those bending towards sentimentality.

Cynics are cut off from deep levels of feeling and experience. Having lost touch with life's deeper currents they mean to “stand above” everything. And they try to cover up their loss of connectedness and deeper meaning by constantly telling themselves and others that no truth is to be found anywhere. To them, life is absurd, meaningless, a joke.

Antidotes:

- Recognise that this is the state you are in; recognise how it operates habitually, mechanically, and superficially;
- Slow down the speed of thinking and allow the concepts to touch your heart;
- Reflect on whether there may be an element of fear or worry making you hold back from applying the teaching;
- Enjoy the higher arts – though not so much with an emphasis on their ‘performance’ aspect, but rather open yourself to their ‘message’ aspect;

- Deepen communication and, in particular, build deeper friendship with those of a more loving, or emotional temperament;
- Practice the various practices of bowing.

Dogmatism: Dogmatism denies both the tolerance and the flexibility/adaptability that have been so characteristic of Buddhism throughout history. Dogmatism is a stubborn insistence on particular interpretations of the doctrine as true regardless of context and circumstance. It may form a very unholy alliance with fanaticism. The prajna-element in this state is distorted. While cynics may change his or her position in a rather promiscuous kind of way, dogmatics are fixed in certain opinions and view, taking the teaching in a literalistic and, perhaps, fundamentalist way.

A soft form of dogmatism as a near enemy of prajna can be scholasticism, the tendency to get lost in mere intellectual analysis of the teaching at the cost of practicing it and opening oneself to its transformative power. Basically, they treat the Dharma as an object.

Antidotes:

- Change your attitude from one of “knowing” to one of “learning” and “discipleship”;
- Think of yourself as sick and of the Dharma as medicine;
- Relate the doctrinal concepts to your experience;
- Engage with other Buddhists more as human beings than as ‘professionals’;
- Engage in devotional practices – puja, chanting, etc.; learn to bow.

Prajna proper means **opening oneself and being fully sensitive to Reality** – not only on an intellectual level, but with all one’s being. With full and clear awareness, one allows Reality to take possession. It’s an experience of surrendering to Reality – with clear and appreciative awareness.

Perfected Prajna is embodied by Akshobhya, the blue Buddha of the East in the Mandala of the Five Jinas.

5. Smrti – mindfulness.

Mindfulness proper includes the other four indriyas. It is

- full of energy and vibrant, dynamic aliveness,
- focused and directed (even if we practice a broad and general sense of mindfulness),
- inspired and open to let go of ourselves into truth, and
- very clear, sharp, and illumined with understanding.

Perfected sati is embodied by Vairocana, the white Buddha of the Centre in the Mandala of the Five Jinas.