

# 2012-07-16 The Four Roads To The Sacred

Fri, 8/21 8:19AM • 38:13

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

desire, effort, people, buddha, sacred, buddhism, psychic powers, important, meditation practice, practice, mind, helpful, buddhist practice, quality, discerning, seeds, roads, suffering, meditation, capacity

## SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

There was a custom of the Buddha that he would, it seems to be that he often would not reject other people's teachings. But he would redefine him for his own purposes. And so there were a number of, you know, ideas and concepts back end in his time, that he would just, you know, redefine. So like one of them was the term Brahman. It seems to be that in the wider world of his time, the word Brahman meant kind of an upper class person who, by birth, there were, you know, people were born into different castes, and the Brahmin was the preschool class that often held themselves as being the high caste. And the Buddha was quite happy to use the word Brahmin. But He then said a Brahmin is someone who lives with ethical purity, regardless of how they're born. And so I don't know how the Brahmins felt about that back then. But so as an example of how he took words and, and, you know, didn't bother with rejecting the word, but just kind of redefined it for himself. And so there was a word back in ancient times, that meant psychic powers. And some of you might have heard the word that Sanskrit is rddhi in Sanskrit and Pali in that language our tradition is preserved in it, the word is iddhi. And, and so the Buddha took this word as well, and he kind of didn't say, you know, reject the idea, or the word, but rather redefined it for his own purposes. And, and he's kind of defined it, we define it in the way that I think I've heard it from tradition where someone would ask a Zen master, you know about miracles. What's a miracle? You know, can you do miracles? And there's a message Oh, yeah. And then chopping wood and carrying water are miracles. So, you know, back back then in ancient times, I suppose I mean, in India, China, chopping wood and carrying water was a pretty common, very, very common thing. It's like, you know, if you asked someone today, you know, about miracles and say, Yeah, I wash my dishes. You know, and I sweep my kitchen floor. Those are miracles.

So psychic powers. So the Buddha then define, he said, there's four psychic powers, that and these psychic powers for that when it's translated into English to this title and these are called iddhi-pādas and powder can mean road like the Dhammapada, the path of the Dhamma. It could also mean steps. And, and so the iddhi-pādas, or the steps or the road to these psychic powers, but the way that it's come down to our time and in, in, often translated in English, it's the four roads to success, or the four roads to power. And what's dropped from this idea as the Buddha redefined, it is the idea that involves psychic powers the way we think of it, but rather, maybe there are other things that are quite miraculous and wonderful and, you know, involve, you know, tremendous psychic power of great consequence maybe. Or maybe if I'm allowed to redefine the Buddha, you know, maybe we can I can say it Use these words the iddhi and translate English as sacred for roads to the sacred, because that's a word that many people in the West like. So the four roads to the sacred, what's sacred, what are the sacred things? And so, the four things in the Lang in the Buddha gave our desire, effort, the quality of your mind and your capacity to investigate or be discerning. Those are psychic powers. And in my kind of redefining, those are sacred powers, as a sacred things the road to the sacred is through those are with

those. And I say that, that you know, you don't hear that often Buddhism talking about desire, being sacred, or desire being a road to success or road to power.

But desires are very important. Part of human life. And it's a miracle that we should have desires. I mean, we used to be back a few generations, just as amoebas right kind of globs that didn't have many desires. And somewhere along the evolution, we started having the capacity to anticipate to project into the future to monitor ourselves regulate ourselves, see what we need to see what's going on. And, and in with that kind of more complicated mental processing came also the capacity to have desires to want something. And in what way is desire sacred? In what way is it a useful part of this kind of roads to power roads to success. Buddhism often gets the gives the impression that desire is bad to have sometimes in popular presentations of Buddhism, it's a kind of simplistic presentations. It says We're taught that there's suffering, and the cause of suffering is desire, and you better stop having desire. And if you and then Zen people like to make it a paradox and say, well, wanting to be free of desire is just more desire. And so that's, you know, just even then you're in trouble. But, so one way or other desire sometimes gets a bad rap about how, but in fact, the Buddha was more nuanced. And, and he had different words for different kinds of desire, and the desire that he defined as being the source or the cause of the condition for suffering. He called in Pali tunda. And the desire which is part of this road to success, the sacred desire is Chanda. And time is usually is also the Pali word For thirst to be like thirst. thirst is like a craving like a drive and you're really thirsty. Then you kind of All you think about is water or something to drink. When you're thirsty for power, there's a tremendous amount of addiction and greed, attachment, maybe to the power. So it's the, it's the desire that has driveness that's part of it. A compulsivity, that is the source of suffering. But there's other forms of desire. And, and so sometimes other forms of desire called chanda. In this list, it's called chanda. And it's the desire for hear from in terms of Buddhism itself. It's that desire for practice a desire for liberation, the desire to be free of suffering, desire for compassion, a desire to alleviate other people's suffering. These kinds of desires are essential part of the Buddhist path, and I think they can be seen as being sacred Very important. And if we're too dismissive of desire, saying all desire is a problem, then which I've seen people have that attitude, then they relate to any desire they have as being somehow I'm not supposed to have a Buddhist, I'm not supposed to have a desire, even the desire for liberation is you know, bad and you know, just not supposed to have any desire just enough posted kind of, I don't know what you're supposed to do, but without, you know, it's just Heaven forbid you have a desire. And, and then you bring it to them, people come to IMC, pretending they have no desires. But even coming here requires a desire, you know, we wish So, but the but this idea that it's can be sacred because it's connected to something very precious and very important. That human capacity for the heart, the mind, to be at peace, to be settled on itself, to feel deeply at home, contented. So that it's not craving or agitated or afraid, not caught up and preoccupied with itself, not preoccupied with anything but just settled and open and present and available is one of the most beautiful things that anybody could have. When we wish other people be free of suffering and really have a sense of how full the capacity of freedom of suffering is what it really is and depths of the heart. It's a, you know, it's a wish that for them in that there's not much, you know, there's not much not a greater freedom from suffering than the deep abiding sense of the heart at peace settled on itself.

And we might wish that for someone else, but there's also the wishes for ourselves, is a beautiful thing. It's a profound thing. It's a precious thing. And provided that it's held in the right way, provided we hold it, we relate to it the right way. And it's possible to have a worthwhile desire and to hold it with attachment and craving and expect It's possible to hold it, measuring it, using it to measure ourselves and our sense of self, our ego, or identity or how we want to represent ourselves how we judge ourselves. It's possible to kind of get all tangled up with it in a way that causes a lot of extra suffering. But in a simple form, without all the expectation and the clinging and measuring ourselves and defining

ourselves by it, the desire to be free desire to practice their desire to not suffer desire to find peace, desire to have love and compassion is a wonderful thing for human beings to have. And part of walking in the Buddhist path is to be able to separate out your desires from the unhealthy desires, unhelpful desires, from the healthy ones. And then even when you have healthy and helpful desires, to sort out the ways of holding it, the ways of relating it, so that having that desire Doesn't tie your knots doesn't come back and bite you because you hold it the wrong way. But even more so that having the desire, an outbreak and desire is nurturing and supporting for you. So it's kind of feels good to good to have the desire, it feels right if you not only just feel right and good, but it helps you feel good about yourself. This is a good desire to have, it's good to want to be at peace, it's good to want to be free. It's good to want to cultivate myself to be a better person, it's good not to be caught up in things it's good to be of service to the world around us to have grown by compassion. And so to actually use as a source of kind of an A feeling feeling good or settled or content or happy with who we are. So the first of these four sacred roads of the sacred or the four roads, the power, depending how you translate it, road to success is desire and In fact, you probably can't have a serious spiritual practice of any kind, without some kind of desire as part of it. Even the desire to have no desires, the desire, the desires, just kind of let go of it all, is kind of a desire. You can't have your life exactly as it is, without any change whatsoever, and have a spiritual life of any kind at all. because it requires some change. And even if it's totally completely accepting your life as it is right now, it probably involves some change because probably the things you're not accepting. And so even that involves some kind of change and, and, but to end to want that change, so and to then not only to want it to want the change to want the practice to want freedom to want in order to hold it the right way to sort out how it's held unhealthily to get behind it to honor it to expected to listen to it is a hard thing to do. There's a lot of messages that people hear in our society what you're supposed to do, and, and what a successful life is. But to listen very deeply, to what is the desire, what's your deepest desire? What's your deepest aspiration, deepest wish, if you're able to separate out all the inherited desires, or all the inherited shoulds insurance, so you can really listen deeply and listen below the pursuit of pleasure. Listen below the pursuit of power status, listen below this, the pursuit of security, what is it that deep down? What is it that you really most want? So that's one part of the task, I think in Buddhism is to do that kind of deep listening. And it takes a while because sometimes you come to a Buddhist, clear Buddhist teachings. It's very easy to hear it. There's one more should it's one more group of people, teachers saying, This is what you should do. If you have if you respect the person for something you think that person knows what he or she is saying you might get hooked in the wrong way. And that's not really listen to yourself in a deep way. And it's one of my preferences if you're listening to Buddhist teachings you don't listen to it kind of isn't one more external thing to take on like a dress like set of clothes. But you see it as teachings to help you find a way to listen deeply listen to yourself quite deeply what's there if you get settled? what's what's the what's what's your heartfelt desire? What do you most want or what's most important for you?

So that listening is very important but the other thing is to have energy for it. You know to have some real you know, people nowadays in the last decades or whatever love the word passion, and it's not uncommon people come to me and say, Well, this Buddhism stuff it seems okay but where is it you know, you know, all this you know, non attachment and letting go of desire. Is there room for passion? And the Buddha didn't have to worry about this word because the English word. But he did, in many places in the, in this in his teachings emphasized, especially to his monastic students, you should have strong desire and strong desires that passion, strong desire, and encourage them to awaken their desire and habit desire for practicing for liberation. So it's one thing to have a desire and so you know, liberation is good. I have the desire for liberation for freedom, you know, it's good thing to have I'll get to it. Give me char city, but not today. Right? It's a famous, give me practice, but tomorrow, you know, give me meditation practice and next year. You know, it's a lot of work to do this practice if you don't get you know, but to have strong desire to be successful than anything you need to have certain The level of

this strengthen your desire. So part of this roads to success for the Buddha is to not only have desire, but to have strong effort and concentration and focus around the desire. So in terms of doing Buddhist practice, what is your desire? What's your relationship to your desire in practice? is it's really coming from deep inside of yourself, or it's just you believing someone else's idea of desire, and is your desire and what and how much is behind your desire? How much follow through is, is there a desire? Can you apply yourself more? And it's not an all or nothing thing. It's not like, you know, yes or no, but rather, it's a matter of degrees. And it's certainly a mistake to think Well, yes, now I'm gay. I'm gonna listen to this talk. I'm gonna go home. I'm going to do the Olympic level, you know, application of effort for my practice. You'll probably burn out by tomorrow morning. But, but maybe you can turn Then the volume of your efforts and your energy a little bit more, you can be more inspired. And say I'm gonna, you know, follow through more. So, you know, I said this maybe too many times, but the effort so anyway said, so maybe take that away. So. So that's the first is desire, road to success you have to have some kind of desire. The second road to success is effort to make effort this is you know, strong after this get behind your desire and apply yourself to act. It's one thing to have a desire and not act on it. And other thing to have a desire and to act on it. And I know that in my mind, I've had a lot of desires. I haven't acted on some of those desires you should be very happy I didn't act on and some of those desires probably would have been good if I'd acted on them. But I was lazy. I was afraid to act on them. I was concerned clicked about acting on them and I didn't follow through and things that I would have been better to find done. So they say, of applying oneself. And so this is where, you know, just a little thing I like to say sometimes that say it this way today, that Buddhist practice doesn't work whatsoever, simply doesn't work, unless you do it. I usually say it about mindfulness, I say mindfulness, mindfulness doesn't work at all. If you don't do it, it requires doing and I know there are there are people I've known, whose idea of doing Buddhist practice, or mindfulness practice and meditation practice is mostly been wishful thinking. You know, they're gonna get to it or Yes, it's really great to read the book. Yes, I understand it. It's really great. It's gonna transform me. Yes. But you know, there's never any really follow through is no action. There's no application, no endeavor, no engagement and so on. Very important if you want to be successful in whatever you do, if you want to fall, there's, there's the acting. And for some people, that's really the big challenge in their life.

The so I would like to say in my redefinition of this, that effort is sacred can be sacred, done for the right purposes, and done in the right way. And so this has to do with having the right desire the right purpose, but then also practicing at the right effort is very important. I have practiced meditation practice in ways that only gave me headaches. And because I was striving I was pushing I was expecting I was kind of wrapped up in funny ways around it. And that's wrong effort is not helpful. I've also engaged in meditation and other endeavors with great joy. Just simply enjoy, simply because I was I was doing it, just the effort of it. I wasn't very necessarily great. It was just so delighted that I could do it, how lucky it's like you know, sometimes if you go for a hike maybe, and you get into the rhythm of the hike in the walk and just feel so good that you're doing it just like wow, just to do it is good. Finally, off out of the couch and I'm walking, it's good to have that and so sometimes just just engage in something as good, just engage in practice, and independent of whether you succeed in it or regretted it. And that kind of approach to endeavoring and efforts in Buddhism, Buddhist practice I think is really helpful that you can kind of try to fall back on doing it as good or find a way that just doing it is good and don't get too wrapped up in the results. Results are important. But you know, it could be wrapped up and concerned about it and measuring it is not so helpful. So I love the little analogy or story of the farmer she goes out to her field to see how the corn is growing. You know, she just planted the seeds and she wants to see if the corn is growing. Then you know, the seedlings are just coming out of the ground, and she wants to see if they're growing well, so she pulls them out of the ground. And then you see how well they grow. But then you can't put the corn, it's not going to transplant well, so you can't put it back and grow it. So if you're constantly measuring how far you've gotten, and you're far enough, have



you succeeded, you might actually be like pulling the corn plant out, you might not be able to transplant yourself back into the practice so well. So there's a whole set of set of skills and understanding and wisdom that's needed together with effort. So that effort is nurturing and meaningful and supportive and not stressful. There's an art to their skill and knowing how to make effort, so it's balanced, and how to make efforts so that it's not unbalanced in the moment and how we do it. But how it's balanced with not making effort. You know, make a lot of effort maybe you need also need to spend a lot of time resting, recovering or fallow time. And how do you go back and forth between mean that if you make too much effort, try too hard. And just think you have to make more effort. You might just exhaust yourself. But sometimes you need to spend to recover in order to come back and have good effort. You need to have a lunch break, and come back. So when I was first started a meditation practice. When I was 20, I learned about Zen masters doing Zen meditation. I was learning Zen Meditation at the San Francisco Zen Center, and then went there for two weeks to be a guest in to live there two weeks and learn about it. And, and what they did at Zen center, how they practice meditation, they meditated twice a day, morning and evening, but never on Sunday. So six days a week, but never on Sunday, to know where I'm at. No one ever explained to me why they didn't meditate on Sunday. But, you know, I was 20 years old, I look you know, so this is how they do it. And so when after those two weeks, I left and started my own meditation practice at home. I just thought, Well, that makes sense. Know what sense but and so that became my custom I would meditate six days a week but never on Sunday. And, you know, it's probably a good to have or the other thing I had, I don't know if this is, you know, works for everybody else. I mean, some people maybe have the opposite. But this is what I did. I would some point started going off on meditation retreats, seven incense center, seven day retreats, and in the week or two before going to retreat, I'd stopped meditating. And I can tell you it wasn't exactly logical OR rational, like I knew what I was doing, but that's what I did. And I tend to I tend to be a little bit optimistic, you know, in nature, so, you know, pretty positive spin on things.

So I kind of interpret that as being kind of, that's how it got me kind of cleared out and opened up and ready to do it was to just not do it for a while kind of kind of clear the cobwebs or clear clear out all my associations meditations, my thoughts what I'm doing and just kind of start fresh was Maybe my idea. Other people seem to benefit a lot from actually ramping up how much they meditate before retreat, they find that to meditate once a day, usually they'll do two, and then they get close to retreat three times a day, and kind of warm up that way. Some people that works for people, but for me, it worked really well to just, I just stopped. So they send you a balance of rhythm of going back and forth as part of effort. The third of these sacred practices sacred approaches is, is the quality of your mind. caretaking for your mind. So the first thing this requires is monitoring your mind which requires mindfulness. What's the state of your mind, the state of your being? How are you? Are you stressed? Are you relaxed? Are you filled with aversion and anger? Or are you content and happy? Are you filled with greed and desire or are you you know, content or Loving or relaxed about how things are, you know, how are you and why this is important isn't it's important just to know what's going on, but this quality of the state of your mind is is that is a Think of it as the soil in which a seed is going to grow. So if you have a barren soil, your seeds not going to grow. If you are trying to grow if you're trying to grow corn and your field is flooded, the corns not going to grow in a flooded field. You have to wait till it drains out. If you you know there's you know, if the soil is completely dry, your seed won't grow as well. You need the soil has to be the right condition. And, and most of us can't make the seed sprout. You can't stand above it and instructive seeds Thou shalt wrath now, you can't you know, or you can't. It's complicated, I think biochemical process and probably none of you understand even the mechanics of that bio chemical process to even have any guess of how to kind of tease that make that happen. But what you can do with a seed is you can create the conditions for that seed to sprout. And so when so you create the good soil, you water, just the soil, just the right amount. Some seeds require a little bit extra help conditions to make them grow. But you create the conditions for it to grow well. And the same

thing for us that if you want to grow if you want to be successful at something, and almost anything in life, especially a spiritual practice, there's there's what you do, and but it's also the conditions you create for the spiritual practice. Because to a great extent This in Buddhist practice, that inner growth that happens in Buddhism, the cultivation of mindfulness of concentration requires both effort on your part. But it also requires caretaking to the quality and condition of your state of being of your mind. And to help try to create the conditions so much so that maybe that's the I think sometimes that's the biggest thing you can do. You can have an intention, you have a desire, it's all very important. You can make efforts important. But the important significant changes that happens through Buddhist practice doesn't come because you tell yourself to change doesn't tell yourself because you do something. But it happens because you create the conditions for that change to happen. There are already beautiful, wonderful seeds inside of you, that are just waiting to sprout, if you can create the conditions for it. So part of the reason why in Buddha in Buddhist meditation practice you want to be relaxed and not stress is a relaxed mind is that better soil for the seeds to sprout. So to caretake, to the quality of the mind is very important. And then we do what we can to help create a good quality of mind, a better quality of mind. And, you know, it's not that easy to, you know, to change the quality of your mind, the state of your mind, your mood, you know, you know, you can't kind of just push a button and you know, go from being depressed to being happy, just because you've been told it's a good idea. But you might be able to tip the balance or you might be able to lean in one direction, you might be able to change a little bit.

I've had the experience and I've read people who give this advice sometimes that the posture you take in your body affects your mood, and not dramatically and maybe you know, if you're terribly depressed maybe doesn't make a difference, but I've been depressed Maybe it's somewhat mild. And then I remember the first time I saw this, I was a college student and I was feeling really depressed for me whatever that in no way Do you hear the story? Maybe you think he couldn't have been so depressed, but I was feeling pretty depressed and I was just kind of like the person couldn't slouch lower in the couch than I was, I think like my shoulders were down in the, you know, crack, you know, I was gonna you know, Lima legs route. I was like, you know, sunk, despaired and given given up and everything. It's like, Oh, just you know. And the posture was so dramatically poor. And that at some point, I got curious notice that and I said, what happens if I sit up straight? So I sat up straight, and immediately I felt better. That was something that was quite something to see that. So you know, even you, maybe you have no control over your state of your mind. Like you can't just turn a switch. With maybe you can sit up straighter Maybe you can change your posture in a way. And maybe that maybe turns the direction of your mind a little bit changes the mood a little bit. There's a variety of small things you can do. If you think it's, you know, all or nothing, then you're in trouble. But you have some ability to change it, and you change the conditions, in trying to improve the quality of your mind take responsibility for it, certainly don't be the victim of or the slave of poor qualities of mind. All of us will have poor qualities of mind from time to time. But to be the dictum of a slave of it is that oh poor me or to act being pushed around by it or assume this is how it is, this is a done deal. You know, our hope is with strong mindfulness practice, you can feel the state of your mind the quality of mind if it's poor, and unskillful, that you have the wherewithal to not be caught in it or not be pushed around by it or Not be oppressed by it. And so it's you know, so they take caring for the quality remind is part of is a part of the sacred stuff. It's a sacred thing, the quality of your mind, your mind, your heart is very important. And so this for the third of the four roads of success, the four roads of these psychic powers, these miraculous powers is to be a caretaker of the quality of your mind. The Cheetah and then the fourth of these is usually translated into English as investigation. discernment. Sometimes it's people who are really Paulie scholars have said that actually the word the Mum, sigh, maybe it's better translated to English as discrimination, discrimination in the sense of being discerning and being able to discern, discern the differences between things. And this ability to discern the differences between different things is actually a key component part of mindfulness practice, and Buddhist practice to be able to discern the

difference between what is a helpful or healthy thing to do and act on and what is not, is healthy or useful to act on. So too, you know, if you feel angry at someone, and you just want to kind of yell at them, to have the ability to recognize, you know, to have the discernment, you know, this is not a useful thing to do. I think this is not helpful for me or her person to be yelling and screaming off the top of my head, I think that there's probably more useful things to do. And then and then have the ability through that discernment, to not act on what's unhealthy, but to act on what's healthy. And so that that that you know, that's on a gross level, like yelling at someone, and also very subtle levels in the mind, and maybe they're all you only see in meditation. In meditation, you see that your mind starts having a certain kind of goes down certain train of thought. A certain kind of illness moves in a certain direction. So I think if I, this thinking about that is not helpful. Focusing on this right now is not helpful. And so he's I let go of that, I'll come back to my breathing, I'll come back to the present moment. And so there's a recognition, this is not helpful. Some kinds of thinking and meditation can be helpful. So this is helpful to discern and be discerning between desire which is helpful to have and desire which is not helpful to have is part of the role of this investigation, to be discerning about what kind of effort is helpful to have and what is not helpful to have, as part of this investigation.

to notice what kind of quality of mind is helpful to have was not helpful to have as part of this discerning so this ability to make a distinction distinctions like this is crucial for Buddhist practice because you're supposed to become your own teacher. And the only way you can become your own teacher If you if you have the ability to read yourself, I love when you give me a chance people give me a chance. No one's been angry with me yet. But if someone comes up to me and says, you know, can you give, can you recommend a really good book in Buddhism to read, if I if it seems appropriate to get half a chance to do it, I like to point to them right in their heart and say right there. That's the book you should read. And because I you know, sooner or later, that is the book, you're supposed to read your own heart, your own mind, what's going on here. That's where the teachings are found. And you you read that book through your power of discernment discrimination, investigation, what's here. So finally, this idea of being discerning or discriminating or investigating, seeing more clearly here is a tremendous protection in doing Buddhist practice, because you can then you can notice when you're doing Buddhist practice when you becoming stressed out by it Or when you're becoming too complacent and lexical about it. When you're caught in when you're not caught, So how do you make effort? How can you make greater effort, maybe courageous effort to stay relaxed? being relaxed and the right way is important. How can you make it past it's possible to be very vigilant, very diligent to stay not caught. And to stay relaxed, stay calm. And you might seem like a paradox to have both together. But I think the it's to make strong effort to let go to make strong effort not to be caught to make strong effort to be present in a relaxed way is You know, is really helpful for this whole process. Or some people here in the West, there's people use language of willpower, or will. Buddhist teachers in the West English speaking Buddhist teachers almost never use the word will or willpower. But if they prefer language like willingness rather than will, because we'll seems like too much ego involved in striving and pushing. But to have a strong will, to be willing to have a strong effort to be accepting and present for how things are. They can go hand in hand these things in Thailand, I've been told, these four qualities of success are referred to regularly in the culture there, as for things which are helpful are needed for success in any endeavor whatsoever, not just Buddhist practice. need to have desire, need to have effort and energy need to have the quality of the mind if it's really crucial. And there needs to be some level of investigation of learning from the experience looking what's going on and learning from it, recalibrating. finding your way through it. And for me today, I'd like to call these sacred as a way of maybe a little bit encouraging you to appreciate the value of your capacity or desire and effort and honoring the quality of your mind and your investigation. These are sacred. These are very special, very precious, very important capacities you have and exercising those capacities in the right way. It will bring you tremendous benefit. So I hope this made some sense. I wish you well with it. Thank you