



## Overview of the Four Superpowers

### Accessing our inner potential

#### Four skills for a purposeful life

*‘Just as the river Ganges slants, slopes, and inclines towards the east, so too a person who develops and cultivates the four spiritual powers slants, slopes, and inclines towards freedom.’ ~ Gotama (The Buddha)*

*‘Success is the sum of small efforts, repeated day in and day out.’ ~ Robert Collier*

Having explored the terrain of recognising life's inherent challenges, grounded ourselves in ethical commitments (the Five Gifts), and explored mindfulness of body and self-compassion, we now recognise a potent source of inner power essential for our journey: the Four Bases of Power which we are calling our ‘Four Superpowers’. These Four Superpowers – *Noble Desire*, *Courageous Energy*, *The Heart’s Compass*, and *Fearless Investigation* – provide the energy, focus, motivation, and wisdom necessary to transform our struggles and successfully navigate towards freedom.

In our RAFT metaphor, these superpowers represent the power driving us forward:

- ★ **Noble Desire** is the spark igniting our motivation to fulfil our aspirations.
- ★ **Courageous Energy** is the persistent energy propelling our raft.
- ★ **Heart’s Compass** acts as our caring navigational gyroscope, keeping us focused and balanced, maintaining our direction.
- ★ **Fearless Investigation** serves as our intelligent diagnostic system, adapting and guiding our progress.

Like an alchemist transforming base metals into gold, these creative attitudes empower us to turn life's challenges into opportunities for growth. They invite us to engage with our journey in a playful, balanced, and caring way, transforming every moment into an opportunity for healing and awakening.

### **What are the Four Superpowers?**

- ★ **Noble Desire – the power of aspiration:** Noble Desire is the wholesome energy of aspiration, enthusiasm, and commitment. This is directed towards our meaningful goals. It's important that we distinguish the difference between Noble desire and craving. *Craving* is driven by a sense of lack or by aversion, whereas *Noble Desire* motivates us through our intrinsic values rather than through fear or obligation.
  - Practice tip: Regularly visualise your goals for this journey, you may wish to articulate affirmations or write in your journal, and connect deeply with what genuinely inspires you.
- ★ **Courageous Energy – the power of persistence:** Courageous Energy is the persistent, balanced, and courageous application of our energy. It enables us to persevere despite challenges, which results in consistent and effective actions.
  - Practice tip: Break your goals into achievable, manageable steps. Celebrate each small victory to maintain steady progress and avoid burnout.
- ★ **The Heart's Compass – the power of focus:** The Heart's Compass represents our capacity for compassionate awareness and stable focus. This allows us to remain present and emotionally balanced.
  - Practice tip: Incorporate brief mindfulness exercises throughout your day, using breath and body awareness to ground and centre yourself, fostering stability and emotional resilience.
- ★ **Fearless Investigation – the power of inquiry:** When we cultivate Fearless Investigation, we develop reflective curiosity and adaptive learning. Fearless Investigation represents wise reflection, caring curiosity, and critical thinking.
  - Practice tip: Maintain a daily reflective journal, specifically note triggers, your automatic thoughts and feelings, and the consequences of your responses. Then, ask "What can I learn from

this?” to build insight and develop wiser strategies for your journey.

### **Practical integration with the ‘Four Resolves’**

Each superpower directly underpins our journey by supporting one or more of the Four Resolves:

- ★ **Noble Desire** fuels our resolve to *cultivate* healthy and meaningful activities and connections.
- ★ **Courageous Energy** reinforces our resolve to *prevent* triggers and actively *abandon* harmful habits.
- ★ **The Heart’s Compass** stabilises and grounds us, supporting the resolve to *maintain* consistent, beneficial practices.
- ★ **Fearless investigation** guides our ongoing adaptive strategies to successfully manage cravings and respond wisely to life's challenges.

### **Navigating tricky waters: applying the Four Superpowers for maintaining course**

The bonds of compulsion are hard to break and drifting from our chosen course is a common part of moving away from suffering; this does not mean we have failed! Instead, it is an opportunity to refine our awareness, strengthen our resolve, and deepen our insight. By applying the Four Superpowers along with key Buddhist principles, we can develop a long-term strategy for maintaining our course.

### **Understanding relapse from a Buddhist perspective**

*“There are those who have begun  
on the journey to freedom  
yet return, out of craving, to bondage.” ~ Gotama*

In Buddhism, returning to the dangerous shore can be understood through Gotama’s insights into the cycles of craving and clinging. This cycle can be interrupted with mindfulness, effort, and wisdom.

1. **Craving arises:** When we are triggered by thoughts, emotions, or external

cues.

2. **Clinging:** Our mind then fixates on the desire.
3. **Result:** We might fall overboard if our mindfulness is wobbly and our raft is not steady.
4. **Suffering:** Regret, shame, and distress will inevitably follow for ourselves and others.

Breaking this cycle is key to our long-term freedom.

### **Applying the Four Superpowers for maintaining course**

★ **Noble Desire:** replacing craving with wholesome motivation. Noble Desire means wholesome desire, not just avoiding unhelpful habits, but actively moving toward a fulfilling, meaningful life.

- Practices to strengthen Noble Desire
  - Find positive replacements: Instead of focusing on what you are avoiding, focus on what you are gaining (better health, clarity, relationships).
  - Use the power of gratitude: At night, write down one way your life is better without unhelpful habits.
  - Engage in a purposeful activity: Meditation, service, creativity, or learning something new – these activities shift the mind toward fulfilling engagement.
  - Seeing the impermanence of urges and the benefits of staying mindful cultivates joy in freedom.

★ **Courageous Energy:** strengthening our energy and effort. A return to our old harmful patterns often occurs in moments of low energy, stress, or boredom. Courageous Energy develops the mental strength to persist on our journey to freedom despite the challenges.

- Practices to strengthen Courageous Energy
  - Create a daily structure: Have a routine with meditation, physical activity, and nourishing food. A structured day prevents impulsive behaviour.
  - Small daily goals: Instead of thinking “I will never succumb again,” set a more constructive daily goal: “Today, I will stay strong.”

- Engage the body: Exercise, yoga, qigong, or walking meditation – physical movement channels energy away from craving.
- Logging progress: We learn that the effort to stay free becomes easier with practice over time.

★ **The Heart's Compass:** strengthening inner resolve. Losing our way will happen when our determination weakens. The Heart's Compass provides a strong, caring, stable, and unwavering commitment to staying on course.

- Practices to strengthen The Heart's Compass.
  - Daily affirmation: "My journey is towards freedom. Every moment I choose clarity over craving."
  - Visualisation practice: Each morning, visualise yourself making wholesome choices and experiencing peace instead of regret.
  - Recommit after every slip: If falling overboard happens, immediately reset your intention rather than spiralling into guilt. It's easier to get back on our raft immediately after a slip than if we allow the vessel to drift away.
  - Reinforcement: Regularly reinforcing the thought "I have abandoned this habit" strengthens our resolve to stay free.

★ **Fearless Investigation:** investigating and preventing triggers. Destructive habits often operate on unconscious patterns. Fearless investigation helps us break habitual loops by cultivating insight into cause and effect.

- Practices to strengthen Fearless Investigation
  - Identify high-risk situations: Reflect: "When am I most vulnerable?" (stress, loneliness, certain people, places). "What is the deeper need beneath my craving?" (comfort, distraction, excitement).
  - Keep a mindfulness journal: After an urge, write: "What triggered this craving?". "How did I respond?". "What can I do differently next time?".
  - Mindfulness of craving: When an urge arises, observe it without reacting. Label it: "This is just a craving, not who I

am.”. Watch how it arises and fades – all urges are impermanent – “*I see you Mara!*”

- Honest self-investigation: when we look at our patterns with courage, honesty and resolve, we can rewire our minds to change our relationship with old unhelpful triggers.

### **Navigating slips with wisdom and without self-blame**

If a slip happens, it does not mean failure – we can use it as part of our learning process.

- ★ **Acknowledge the slip without guilt** (Courageous Effort): Instead of “I failed,” we can say “I made a mistake, but I am still on the journey. A slip is part of learning – not a reason to quit.”
- ★ **Analyse what led to the slip** (Fearless Investigation): Ask: “What were the early warning signs?”. We can learn from it, we can use it to strengthen our future resolve.
- ★ **Recommit immediately** (the Heart’s Compass): Get straight back on course “This moment is a new beginning.” Resolve to return to your daily practice right away – do not wait for *the right time*.
- ★ **Remember the long-term vision** (Noble Desire): One setback does not erase all progress you have made. Keep moving forward towards the safe shore.

Maintaining our course is not just about resisting urges – it is about building a life so meaningful that the pull of unwholesome habits diminishes. When the Four Superpowers are strong, our desire, courage, heart, and fearlessness, in the service of freedom become stronger than any momentary urge.

In the chapter on the ‘Resolve to Prevent’, we have already explored a number of different techniques that you may find helpful when faced with a strong urge or compulsion.

### **Self-reflections**

As we cultivate these Four Superpowers, we often find our relationship with the journey shifts from struggle to an inspiring exploration. Let us explore this transformation together through these reflections:

- ★ What inspires you deeply and evokes wholesome desire in your journey?
- ★ Where do you most easily apply energy, and where do you encounter obstacles?
- ★ Describe your typical state of focus or mindful presence.
- ★ How regularly do you reflect and adapt based on experience?
- ★ Which of the Four Superpowers, (*Noble Desire*, *Courageous Energy*, *The Heart's Compass* or *Fearless Investigation*) would be most helpful for you at this moment.
- ★ What truly motivates your journey towards freedom and well-being?
- ★ What small, courageous action can you commit to today to support your path of healing?
- ★ How can you maintain presence and compassionate awareness, especially when facing triggers or challenges?
- ★ What insights have you gained from reflecting on your experiences, setbacks, and successes?

### **Journaling prompts**

Explore these themes in writing, remembering to be kind to yourself.

- ★ **Igniting Noble Desire:** Describe your most heartfelt aspiration for this journey. How can you nurture this wholesome desire without it turning into a form of grasping or craving?
- ★ **Applying Courageous Energy:** Identify and commit to one small step requiring courageous effort. Reflect on how this felt and its outcomes.
- ★ **Calibrating The Hearts Compass:** Note conditions that support your focus and presence. How can you intentionally create more of these supportive conditions?
- ★ **Engaging Fearless Investigation:** Choose a recent challenge and journal reflectively on what you can learn from it, and how you might approach similar situations differently.

### **Supporting material: scientific and philosophical perspectives**

For those interested in the scientific and philosophical underpinnings of the Four Superpowers, the following overview highlights some key connections.

- ★ **Neuroscience:** Noble Desire relates to intrinsic motivational pathways, Courageous Energy, to sustained effort and executive function in the prefrontal cortex, The Heart's Compass to attention and emotional regulation networks, and Fearless Investigation to insight and flexible cognitive strategies.
- ★ **Psychology:** Noble Desire aligns with Self-Determination Theory; Courageous Energy corresponds to grit and perseverance studies; The Heart's Compass relates to mindfulness and flow states; Fearless Investigation aligns with reflective practices in insight-oriented therapies. Psychologically, these powers align with therapies such as ACT, DBT, MBCT, and MBRP, reinforcing intrinsic motivation, sustained effort, mindful presence, and reflective learning, essential for lasting transformation.
- ★ **Philosophy:** Virtue ethics underscores the importance of intentional effort (Courageous Energy), clarity of intention (Noble Desire), stable attention (The Heart's Compass), and reflective inquiry (Fearless Investigation) in leading a meaningful life. Philosophically, these superpowers resonate with ancient Greek philosophy and Buddhist teachings, highlighting intentional effort, clarity, mindful awareness, and wise reflection as pathways to a meaningful, flourishing life.

These diverse perspectives collectively affirm the profound power of these Four Superpowers as we navigate our journey to freedom.

### **Remember to remember**

The 'Four Superpowers' – *Noble Desire, Courageous Energy, The Heart's Compass, and Fearless Investigation* – represent profound capacities within each of us. Recognising and cultivating these potentials actively transforms our journey from passive hope into an empowered and creative process. These inner powers equip us not only to overcome our struggles but to build lives rich in meaning, joy, and freedom. Embrace them, nurture them, and allow them to guide your courageous journey from suffering to lasting liberation.

*"... these four bases for spiritual power, when developed and cultivated, lead to going beyond from the near shore to the far shore." ~ Gotama*



*“The secret of change is to focus all of your energy not on fighting the old, but on building the new.” ~ Dan Millman.*

Through cultivating and integrating these powerful qualities, we nurture a life of creativity, resilience, and profound well-being, confidently steering our raft towards the safe shore.

### **Sutta references**

- ★ **Iddhipada-vibhanga Sutta (SN 51.20 - Analysis of the Bases for Spiritual Power):** Provides a detailed breakdown of each of the four *iddhipada*.
  - **Summary:** Defines each base (desire, energy, mind, investigation) coupled with concentration and volition (*padhāna-saṅkhāra*). It explains how developing these leads to various spiritual powers and ultimately liberation .
- ★ **Iddhipada Samyutta (SN 51 - Connected Discourses on the Bases for Spiritual Power):** A collection of suttas exploring various aspects of the *iddhipada*.
  - **Summary:** This section contains numerous suttas detailing the cultivation, benefits, and importance of the four bases of power for achieving mastery and crossing over suffering ('from the near shore to the far shore').
- ★ **Mahāparinibbāna Sutta (DN 16):** The Buddha mentions the *iddhipada* near the end of his life.
  - **Summary:** The Buddha states that anyone who has highly developed the four bases of power could, if they wished, live for an aeon, highlighting the immense potential attributed to mastering these qualities.
- ★ **Viriya References (from previous chapters):** Suttas discussing *virīya* as a faculty/power (SN 48.50) or as Right Effort (SN 45.8) are also relevant here as *virīya* is one of the *iddhipada*.

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