

*Question 33:* Many Buddhist monks in ancient times had various psychic powers, such as the “divine eye.” Is it OK to aspire to have a psychic power, such as opening the Third Eye, if we are diligently practicing the Dharma?

*Answer:*

Arahants and ordained students of the Buddha experienced psychic powers as a *byproduct* of their spiritual development in purifying their minds. When a person *hopes* to gain psychic power, it is a desire. When he or she engages in spiritual practice with the expectation of getting psychic power, it is a desire, just like lust or greed, and therefore a hindrance on the spiritual path. A human being is capable of developing psychic powers in several ways. The pure way is when the mind becomes pure and clear from sustained practice of morality, virtues, mindfulness and meditation, and psychic powers appear as an unintentional byproduct. The other ways -- such as when a power is bestowed by a teacher, or gained by chanting mantras or other yogic practices -- are extremely risky. These powers do not indicate that the person having them is saintly or spiritually advanced. At first, powers may be sought in order to help others, but innocent intentions are slowly swayed and skewed. Having such powers without an extremely pure mind, desires can multiply very fast, because there are more possibilities, and more fascinating things to discover in the metaphysical world, including gaining more psychic powers. The ego can increase with more and more stealth as other people become awed. Anger mixed with psychic powers is particularly dangerous. There are countless people over the ages, across various cultures and religions, who have fallen from the spiritual path into various types of greed, lust, delusions, and “the dark side,” after gaining psychic powers. There are movies, such as “The Revenge of the Sith” from the Star Wars series, and “Milarepa,” which demonstrate how power easily corrupts the mind. Gautama Buddha’s cousin Devadatta obtained very impressive psychic powers and misused them, and ultimately tried to kill the Buddha.

One way to deflect the mind from seeking psychic powers is to remember that there are much more pleasant experiences from meditation, such as attaining jhanas, than from psychic powers.

If a person already has psychic powers, then it is extremely important for him or her to work diligently on purifying the mind: noticing the defilements (negative thoughts) and working on eradicating them, and developing virtues such as humility, detachment, equanimity, compassion and universal love.