

Reflections on Desire

Lord Buddha pointed out to us that karma, at its root, is based upon desire. Root out these desires, he tells us, and you will release your consciousness from the wheel of birth and death—you will reach the shores of Liberation and Nirvana.

Rooting out desire, however, is not as simple as this formula seems. There are multiple levels of desire; desire seems to increase endlessly. So let us see if we can penetrate deeper into desire, where it arises, and ultimately, how we free ourselves from its clutches—when this is appropriate.

Levels of Desire

We can classify desire based on the level of the mind from which it arises.

Ego-driven desire – This type is based on the pursuit of pleasure and to avoid pain. It is powerfully attached to the objects of desire. Contact with sense objects creates new desires. This desire is rooted in the passions of lust, anger, greed, attachment, and egotism. Desires arise quickly, but they are often not formulated into any plan to achieve them. This level may resort to magical thinking or highly unlikely scenarios (e.g., winning the lottery) as a way to achieve these desires; upon attaining them, the individual is often unsatisfied that the object of desire is not what one expected or imagined.

Self-driven desire – This type is goal-oriented: it seeks to fulfill a plan to achieve a discrete goal or objective, or to fulfill a personal dream. It is able to sustain effort for a long period to attain this objective, and it uses intelligence to overcome obstacles or difficulties that arise while attempting to achieve it.

Spirit-driven desire – This type is also called aspiration. This seeks to make spiritual progress and draw closer to the Divine. In some cases, this type of desire may pray to uproot material desires and cravings in the interest of making spiritual progress and purifying character. This type of desire arises from the spiritual heart.

Purpose-driven desire – This desire seeks to fulfill one's Soul Purpose and the Will of God. Aligning with this type of core desire connects one with Agya, the direction of the inner spiritual Master. Following this guidance ultimately leads the Soul to work out its remaining karma and to progressively travel each step of the Path to Liberation.

Listening to the Voice of Desire

Desires drive human beings. Without desire, you do not pursue family or career, set goals, and challenge yourself to greater achievements—personally or spiritually.

So if you are to go deeper into this exploration about desire, you must identify (1) what are your desires, and (2) what are your dominant desires that drive your current life.

To uncover what these desires are that operate in each of these four zones, we will do a meditation on the levels of desire.

Meditation on the Levels of Desire

Focus your attention on your ego. Ask, “What is it you desire or want?” Listen for its response. Write down what it tells you verbatim. Then ask, “Of these desires, which are the most important to you?” Underline or check the most important desires.

Focus your attention on your Self. Ask, “To what goals or objectives have you made a commitment?” Listen for its response. Write down what it tells you verbatim. Then ask, “Of these goals and commitments, which are the most important to you?” Underline or check the most important goals.

Focus your attention on the spirit. Ask, “For what do you yearn? To what do you aspire?” Listen for its response. Write down what it tells you verbatim. Then ask, “Of these aspirations and yearnings, which are the most important to you?” Underline or check the most important ones.

Focus your attention on the Soul. Ask, “What do you know as your purpose? Which part of that purpose have you chosen to manifest in this life?” Listen for its response. Write down what it tells you verbatim. Then ask, “Of these elements of your purpose, which are the most important for me to enact during this period of my life?” Underline or check the most important ones.

Attitude towards Desire

The attitude you hold towards these desires reveals something about your character. For example:

Those who have a sense of entitlement—e.g., that they deserve to have everything they want, regardless of how it may impact them or other people—may appear to you as narcissistic or arrogant.

Those who deprive themselves and put off their own desires may appear to take the stance of being a martyr; they commonly act co-dependently in their relationships, ensuring the needs of others are met, but they ignore their own.

Those who accrue far more than they could ever want or need—then justify it—may appear to be using intellectualization and rationalization to avoid looking at why they need to have so many things.

Those who have inner conflict about their desires—they desire what their conscience tells them they should not desire—may appear to have an inner split between a good self and a bad self, and they are ever embroiled in struggling to have their virtuous side triumph over their bad side. It seems that they are at war with themselves.

Those who are overcome by powerful cravings and addictions may feel powerless over their certain desires, and may surrender and ask for God's help.

Those who see their desires as games may use skillful or clever means to attain them. If they view these desires as games, it is not uncommon for them to not value the attainment of the desire, but to regard it as a trophy or plaything, and to readily abandon it.

Those that view desire as a means to accomplish the purpose of the Soul and to complete the karma of human life offer the fulfillment of each desire upon the inner fire as a sacrifice. They aim to transmute these impressions of karma so that they may ultimately be free.

Since your desires are not of only one type, it may be that you simultaneously hold several of these attitudes. In this next meditation, you will monitor them.

For this exercise, your objective will be to notice whether you hold certain desires in this context or not, and not to judge whether that is right or wrong to hold them in that context.

You will monitor your reactions when you imagine that someone is challenging you for holding this desire. [You might, for example, question whether you are entitled to it; if you should be denying yourself; if your attitude really is justified; if you genuinely need to be resisting the desire you fight against; if you truly are powerless against the craving; if obtaining desired objects might not a game and it might have real consequences; or if you need to be so serious and sanctimonious about your desires.]

Meditation on Your Attitudes about Desires

Notice which of your desires you hold with an attitude of *entitlement*. Observe your reactions and behavior when someone challenges you about having this desire. [Ask: “Are you really entitled to this?”]

Notice which of your desires you hold with an attitude of *self-abnegation*. Observe your reactions and behavior when someone challenges you about having this desire. [Ask: “Do you really have to deny yourself what you desire?”]

Notice which of your desires you hold with an attitude of *justification*. Observe your reactions and behavior when someone challenges you about having this desire. [Ask: “How do you justify that when someone else is suffering?”]

Notice which of your desires you hold with an attitude of *inner conflict*. Observe your reactions and behavior when someone challenges you about having this desire. [Ask: “What would happen if you didn’t fight against that desire?”]

Notice which of your desires you hold with an attitude of *feeling powerless over the desire*. Observe your reactions and behavior when someone challenges you about having this desire. [Ask: “How do you know that you really are powerless over this craving?”]

Notice which of your desires you hold with an attitude that *what you desire is just a game*. Observe your reactions and behavior when someone challenges you about having this desire. [Ask: “Why do you think this is big game? Don’t you think that having these desires has consequences on yourself and other people?”]

Notice which of your desires you hold with an attitude of *sacrifice and dedication*. Observe your reactions and behavior when someone challenges you about having this desire. [Ask: “Do you need to be so serious and sanctimonious about this desire?”]

Inquiry about Desire

Now that you have monitored your attitudes about your desires, and your reactions when these attitudes are challenged, we can now probe deeper into what desire is—how it motivates you; and what it might be like, if you were without desire. Let us begin this inquiry.

- What does it mean to desire? When you say, “I want this,” [select one desire to examine] what are you seeking? What does this desire push you to do? Be? Have? Experience?
- What would it be like to be without that desire?
- What does it mean to be desireless?
- Is there an optimal level of desire? Might you desire too much? Too little? What is the right amount of desire?
- How do your desires drive your life?
- Can you be creative without desire?
- Can you achieve a goal without desire?
- What does it mean to fulfill a desire? Does this complete this desire? Or does it return in another form? Or does it spawn another desire?
- What would it be like to have no desires drive your life?
- How do your spiritual desires impact your life? How do you enact a spiritual desire?
- What does it mean to fulfill a spiritual desire? How is that fulfillment different than achieving a material desire? Is the satisfaction the same, or different?
- What would happen if all of your spiritual desires were fulfilled?

As you begin to think more deeply about desire and how it impact you, you might consider that some desires are an integral part of your life, indeed, are part of your very identity—and to abandon these desires would force you to forfeit any meaning and value that you derive from living, and to deflate any motivation you have for taking action.

You may have also discovered that certain of your desires are not truly necessary, and that drive you to invest your time, energy, effort, and attention for something—that in the long run—has little or no true value for you.

Strategies to Work with Desire

We will next look at your strategies for dealing with desire. Some desires you want to keep, as they motivate and drive your life, embody your dreams and aspirations, and bring your life moments of enjoyment, happiness, and fulfillment. These are desires that you own, embrace, and work to achieve.

Some desires you may regard as hindrances, or an aspect of your nature you want to change or eliminate. For these, you might adopt a strategy to eliminate or dissolve them.

If you affirm the desire as something you wish to keep, you might

- Fulfill the desire as a part of your life plan, or as an objective for your spiritual practice
- Learn methods to deal with the obstacles that arise that keep you from fulfilling this desire, or learn the skills and knowledge that will enable you to achieve the desire
- Use affirmation and visualization to recruit the assistance of your Subconscious and Superconscious mind to help you attain the desire
- Pray to the Divine or your spiritual Master to grant this desire, and help you overcome your obstacles to achieve it

If you discern that the desire is harmful or presents a hindrance to your personal or spiritual growth, you might

- Practice austerity or penance, with an aim to reform this aspect of your nature
- Use discernment to illumine the false assumptions and illusions embedded in the beliefs associated with the desire, and thereby remove the motivation for wanting the object of desire
- Detach from the ego and live in union with a spiritual essence to freeze the creation of new desires, or practice Vipassana to objectify desire
- Follow the Will of God in each moment to avoid creating new desires
- Dissolve the seeds and impressions of desire in the unconscious mind through using a transformational meditation technique

You may have learned additional strategies that you use to work with the desires that you have owned, and those you consider to be harmful.

Meditation on Your Strategies for Working with Desires

What strategies do you use to achieve those desires that you feel are an integral and necessary part of your personal and spiritual life?

What strategies do you use to uproot those desires that you feel are harmful, or are hindrances to your personal and spiritual growth?

The Practice of Vipassana in Uncovering and Relinquishing Desire

Some Buddhist sects use the practice of Vipassana to establish mindfulness; to develop the eight virtues; and to uncover the role of desire in creating suffering, and to relinquish it. In the state of mindfulness

- Your attention is collected and present.
- It is established in the present moment.
- It monitors the content of awareness arising in this moment.
- It notes the moment-to-moment arising, maintaining, and passing away of content entering conscious awareness. Monitoring the content of awareness in this fashion gives rise to the realization that all phenomena are impermanent.
- As attention shifts to different levels of the mind, it experiences distinct content—unlike that which arises on other layers of awareness. This practice develops discernment for diverse types of phenomena.
- When your attention monitors your pain and suffering it develops empathy and compassion for your own and others' suffering. When your attention monitors your happiness and joy, it similarly wishes others might also experience happiness and joy.

Through the practice of Vipassana, the meditator comes to experience that the attention can

- Uncover the roots of buried issues in the unconscious mind
- Process and release pain and muscular tension
- Transcend the field of contemplation once it has processed all content on that level of the mind

Through long-term Vipassana practice, the meditator uses Vipassana as a skillful means (upaya) to achieve the eight virtues: equanimity, balance, poise, serenity, patience, kindness, empathy, and compassion.

The Eight Virtues that Arise from the Practice of Vipassana

What are the markers of the eight virtues of Vipassana?

- Equanimity – This is the ability to regard the changes of life without becoming emotionally upset or excited.
- Balance – This is the ability to find the “golden mean” or “middle way” between extremes. This takes the form, for example, of (a) finding the optimal mood between the extreme “high” of mania and the extreme “low” of depression; (b) the sweet spot of cognition between the frenetic mental activity of worry and the paucity of cognition of apathy and despair; and (c) the harmonious energy state between over-stimulation, which exhausts the body, and the enervated state of torpor and fatigue, which delays or hinders effective action.
- Poise – When you are established in the state of balance, you experience harmony. When you act while in a state of harmony, you experience poise.
- Serenity – As you spend more time in the state of harmony and poise, you experience the state of inner peace, or serenity.
- Patience – As you remain for longer periods of time in a state of equanimity, balance, poise, and serenity, you no longer feel inwardly rushed or pressured. You can perform each action with attention and patience.
- Kindness – As you monitor your own suffering and observe the suffering of others, you are moved to take action to assuage the suffering of others through acts of kindness.

- Empathy – As you monitor your own suffering and observe the suffering of others, you begin to empathically feel the suffering of others.
- Compassion – As you monitor your own suffering and observe the suffering of others, you begin to wish that your own and others' may be taken away, and that they begin to experience happiness, peace, and serenity. By regarding yourself and others in this manner, compassion is born in the mind.

The Role of Desire in Producing Suffering

Through the process of monitoring the mind over long periods of time, the meditator comes to realize that the perturbations of the mind arise from desire.

- Desire brings about craving for objects to bring it pleasure and delight, or to attempt to avoid pain or suffering.
- Desire fuels expectations for ideal or perfect outcomes, which produces dissatisfaction and unhappiness when these expected outcomes are not experienced.
- Desire breeds frustration and anger, when it cannot obtain what it desires, or what it expected did not come true.
- Desire fosters impatience, as it places a pressure to act more quickly to obtain the objects it covets, or the outcomes it wants.
- Desire multiplies the wish to obtain more pleasures, to accrue more possessions and coveted objects, and to acquire more money to obtain these additional pleasures and objects.

This leads to the insight that

- Unfulfilled desire is at the bottom of depression.
- The uncertainty of obtaining objects of desire and the possibility of their loss underlies worry.

- The inability to predict whether outcomes will be favorable or ill leads to anxiety.
- When desire is hindered or thwarted, it breeds frustration and anger.
- Desire for pleasure and release is at the core of lust.

The meditator further realizes that as desires multiply, so do the perturbations of the mind; and as desires decrease, so do the troubles and worries of human life, also decrease. This leads to an inquiry into why desires arise, and what would be the outcome if all desires ceased.

Therefore contemplating upon that state—which is void, shining, clear, and free of all desire—you uncover that state of untrammelled and eternal peace that is called Nirvana.

In this voidness, there is no fame, no wealth, no romance, no pretense, no knowledge, no possessions, and no attainment. In this void, there also is no more darkness—only compassion exists, infinite and unbounded.



Thank you for attending our webinar today!

