

# Desire by itself is not a problem

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*Steer the turbulent waters of desire with dharma and prasada-buddhi*

Karma yoga/Topic of Karma (chapter 3...continued)

No one can refrain from performing action, not even for a minute. Why? Look at yourself....One day you decide that you have been working hard and so you want to sit at home and chill. So you sit at home... On the first day, even though you thought you would sleep up to 9, you are up at 7.30 by force of habit. You toss and turn in bed for some time and then you wake up, chill out all day long, you decide not to go to work, not to do any chores...you relax, you watch TV, but by evening you are bored. You then decide to meet a few people, you call up friends and by the second day you are calling up colleagues and discussing work even though you had decided against it....Or you end up doing things at home. If your wife is not a career

woman, you end up driving her crazy by doing things she doesn't want you to do. Nobody can really remain completely without doing anything, because the internal pressure of desire, boredom etc will push one to action.

And if you do have a lot of desires inside and you are choosing not to act upon them, the desire still remains. You will end up fantasizing about those desires and how you can enjoy them without doing anything about them. This is what Krishna calls a *mithyachara*, a hypocrite, because he's posing as a great spiritual person who does not have any desires or not getting involved in any action, but his mind is a volcano of desires and sooner or later it will explode. Therefore, it's better to live the life of a karma-yogi, figure out your priorities, then work to fulfil those desires (which are appropriate) in the spirit of karma-yoga. That would be a better way to live your life. Krishna always cautions against hasty *sanyasa* because if one takes *sanyasa* but does not have the maturity for it, the problem of desires still remains. The person wants to do a lot of things but doesn't have the field of activity, and that's an ideal situation to get frustrated in life. Therefore, Krishna seems to be making a plea to people to follow the life of *karma-yoga* over *sanyasa*.

Meditation is also advised. Does it help?

the mind can be covered by desire the way a flame is covered by smoke or as a mirror with dust on it—you cannot puff the dust away, the mirror here needs polishing

Meditation alone can't handle desires. In fact, the mind which is free of desires will naturally become contemplative, and action is the order of life. Life does not reward how good you are or how capable you are; it rewards you for what you have done. If you want something, do something. Desire by itself is not a problem, how you go about fulfilling it is what matters. If you have chosen the appropriate actions, in keeping with *dharma*, and living the life of *karma-yoga* with *prasada buddhi* etc –we have covered this in earlier posts in this blog—there is no way you cannot gain this knowledge. In fact, Krishna goes on with examples of people in the past like Janaka etc who gained *moksha* even though he performed a lot of action. It's a mistaken notion that actionlessness is spirituality.

Swamiji, how has this notion come about?

This notion has come about because people wrongly equate *sanyasa* with doing nothing. *Sanyasa* is focused, intense pursuit of this spiritual wisdom and not just doing nothing.

Janaka lived a life of action, Krishna himself lived a life of action and one of them was a king, the other a king-maker. In fact, all the *rishis* were married men, they used to run *gurukulas* and the whole education system was based on that. There is no way that a life of spirituality, a life of seeking *moksha* is incompatible with a life of action, a life of fulfilling desires. You can do both and, as I have said previously, it would be the scenic route.

Towards the end of the chapter Arjuna asks an interesting question.

*Arjuna uvaca*

*Atha kena prayukto yam papam carati purusah*

*Anicchannapi vrsneya baladiva niyojitah (Ch 3, verse 36)*

*Arjuna said:*

*Varsneya (Krishna)! Impelled by what does a person commit sin, as though pushed by some force even though not desiring to?*

Duryodhana in fact said—I know what is right, I can never do it, and I know what is wrong but I can never avoid it. It's almost as though there is something inside a person impelling him to do the wrong thing. Krishna says: at the bottom all that makes you do the wrong thing is your desire for it—desire and anger. If a person's desire is blocked and cannot be fulfilled, the person becomes angry at whatever is blocking it. Krishna advises us to handle our desires. There may be certain desires which may be inappropriate for a person, that is where one has to connect one's desires with one's priorities and see what is that unfulfilled need that is expressing itself as desire. For example, a happily married man desires his neighbour's wife. This man should examine the unfulfilled need that his marriage is not fulfilling; this equips you to deal with the issue in your relationship instead of chasing other people's wives. If he examines it in the spirit of *karma-yoga*, he's going to find out what is unfulfilled in his relationship and then he can set it right and make his relationship healthier and stronger.

Krishna also mentions that the mind can be covered by desire in a threefold manner...The Buddhist teaching on this subject is quite similar. Krishna says that the mind can be covered by desire the way a flame is covered by smoke or as a mirror with dust on it—you cannot puff the dust away, the mirror here needs polishing— or to the foetus in the womb. In the last example, one has to wait for nine months for the foetus to grow to see results. The desire that is like smoke is easy to handle, the one that is like the foetus in the womb has to be taken care of in the spirit of *karma-yoga*. Therefore, each one has to determine the level at which one's desire is and handle it. The Buddhists give a similar comparison with respect to the impression of the desire in my mind—it can be like a line drawn on water which disappears as soon as it is drawn, or like a line drawn on sand which has to be wiped out, or like a line carved on rock which has to be chipped away, which takes time and effort. Which is similar to the examples in the *Gita*. Live a life of *karma-yoga*, grow bigger than your desires and gain the knowledge that frees you completely from the hold of desires. All desire is meant to make you a happy fulfilled person fundamentally. Once you discover the fullness that you are, the ananda that you are, then all your desires get reduced to a few preferences.

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