



# Breaking the Fetters of Desire

By Swami Jyotirmayananda

**P**rofound insight into *kama* or desire comes from a study of the three *gunas*, or modes of the mind: *sattwa*, *rajas* and *tamas*. A mind that is *tamasic* is characterized by delusion, dullness and negativity. When desire mixes with *tamas*, the result is the worst and crudest desire possible—desire for revenge, for harm to come to others, etc. When the mind is *rajasic*, it becomes externalized, distracted, restless, and gives rise to desires for more wealth, fame, power and many vanities of life.

A *satwic* mind is filled with harmony, goodness and purity. The desires that arise when the mind is pervaded by *sattwa* are desires for good association, for reading scriptures, for having simplicity in life so that one can devote more mental energy to spiritual pursuit. *Satwic* desire is not harmful; rather, it is essential for spiritual progress. Therefore, the form of desire that an aspirant must

shun is desire that is opposed to *dharma* (the basic ethical value of life), desire that is unduly *rajasic* and *tamasic* and thus opposed to one's spiritual movement.

Unfortunately, most human desires are expressions of ignorance and imperfection. Therefore, the pursuit of those desires is characterized by pain, frustration and failure. A mind infested by desires cannot rest in peace.

Desires are much like a net in which human consciousness is trapped. The bird of the human soul wishes to fly into the regions of freedom, but caught in the net of desires, it suffers untold miseries.

All miseries and afflictions proceed from desires. The external and internal conditions of life are manifestations of your desires. A person seeking peace, prosperity, Self-realization and immortality must learn the art of studying, purifying, and sublimating his desires.

Every unfulfilled and frustrated desire brings to the unconscious an impression of tension. With each impression of tension a portion of willpower is locked up. Thus, the more one desires, the less one's will is able to execute thoughts into actions. The more one desires, the poorer one becomes with respect to peace and tranquility.

## The Fisherwomen and the Flowers

Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa told a parable to illustrate the illusion created by human desires. Once three fisherwomen were returning home, but, being late, they decided to ask for a place to sleep at a house along the way. The person in the house wanted to be as hospitable as possible, so when he prepared a place for them to sleep he decorated the room with jasmine, rose, queen of the night and other fragrant flowers.

After tossing fitfully from side to side for an hour, one of the fisherwomen said, “What a foul smell! I cannot sleep at all!” Another fisherwoman, having the same problem, said, “I have an idea. Let us put our fishing nets over our noses, and then sprinkle them with water so that we may breathe in the wonderful fragrance of fish and shut out that foul flower smell.” And so they did, and they all slept peacefully.

**E**ven so, human beings could abide in the fragrant mansion of the Lord amongst Divine flowers of virtues. However, instead they maintain the mask of desires and shut out the heavenly fragrance. Instead of resting blissfully in peaceful surrender, they prefer the fishy foulness of worldly vanities.

Do not act like those fisherwomen. Learn to renounce your inner attachments to worldly things that are mortal and perishable. Learn to be attached to God, the Immortal Being within. Thus you can enjoy the heavenly fragrance that never fades and experience the bliss that never diminishes.

### **The Trammels of 99**

A parable is told to demonstrate how desire is the great enemy of peace:

There was once a blacksmith who labored hard, but enjoyed his work immensely and always sang joyfully as he worked. When his rich neighbor heard that singing, he became extremely jealous. “How can it be,” he thought to himself, “that with all my wealth, I can’t even sleep due to worries and anxiety, and yet my poor neighbor is always so happy? Though he works so hard, hammering iron sheets close to a hot fire, still he enjoys his life and his work!” Unable to bear this situation a moment longer, the jealous neighbor thought and thought, and then came up with a simple plan.

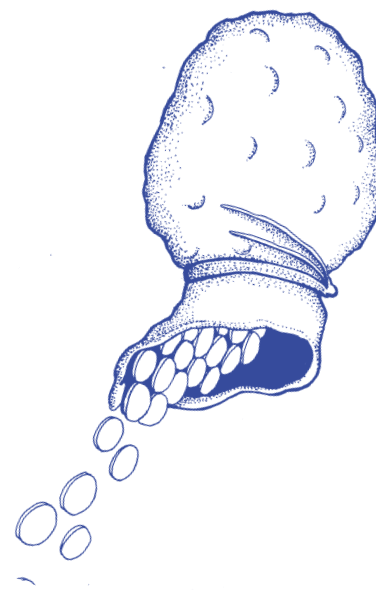
Putting his scheme into effect, the neighbor secretly threw a bag containing ninety-nine dollars into the shop of the blacksmith. When the blacksmith entered his shop, he found the bag and wondered how it had got there. Unable to solve the mystery, he decided to keep the money and make good use of it.

Then the idea came into his mind, “It is only one dollar less than a hundred. It would have been nice if it was a hundred.” So the next day he worked hard and, instead of just earning one dollar, he brought the total up to one hundred and twenty four. Then

he thought to himself, “If the amount I had was one dollar more, it would be an even mathematical amount.” So the next day he worked hard again, and the pattern continued: always needing a little more to make a nice round figure.

As the days passed, the blacksmith lost the peace and joy with which he used to work and there were no more songs. Of course, the neighbor was delighted, because his plan had worked out just as he had hoped!

One day the blacksmith suddenly realized that he was becoming sick and weak and restless. Then he thought to himself, “All the trouble started from that ninety-nine.” With a great sense of relief, he gathered that money and threw it over to the rich man’s place, thinking that he could surely make good use of it.



In the Hindi language, there is a proverb that was inspired by this story: “Do not be entangled by ninety-nine.” The moment you get caught by the illusion of needing more of something to be happy you become entangled — like the blacksmith — in a joyless pursuit.

Desires for things which are perishable are full of vanity. Desire Self-realization alone. Desire the development of spiritual values and virtues. Desire the betterment of humanity. Desire to become desireless.

### Don't Be Trapped by Your Desires

In some parts of India, monkeys are trapped by a clever device. A jar with a narrow neck is filled with fruit and placed in a spot that monkeys frequent. Being interested in the fruit, a monkey puts his hand into the jar and grabs the fruit. Then having made his hand into a fist, he cannot take his hand out since the neck of the jar is too narrow. He can easily let the fruit go and release his hand, but he lacks this sense due to his desire to possess the fruit, and is caught.

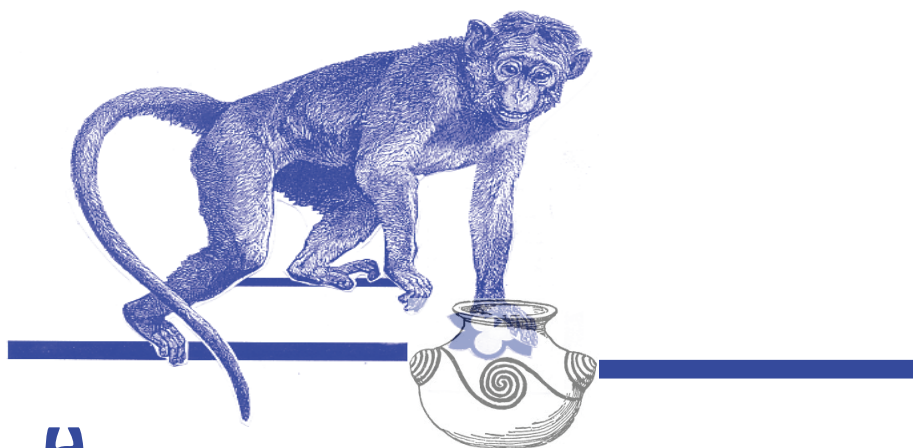
Even so, human consciousness puts its hand into

the narrow jar of egoism in order to catch the fruits of worldly enjoyments with the fingers of desire. Open your hand and let the fruit go. You will be released from the narrow prison of embodiment. You will realize, “I am all that exists. I am the eternal, infinite Truth.”

Chemically speaking, diamonds and coal are both nothing but carbon, but there is a big difference between the two. Desire for the world is like coal. Desire for attaining God-realization is like a diamond. Worldly desire can be transformed into spiritual aspiration—just as mere coal is transformed into

diamonds—when a constant effort is directed to control *kama* and to redirect it in a proper way. Renounce worldly desires by serving humanity, by developing devotion and by practicing profound enquiry. Let your mind be a channel of Divine Will. Perform actions with a sense of dedication to God.

When your heart is purified, it will become filled with sublime desires—desires that are expressions of Divine Will for the good of humanity. These desires do not bind or entrap the soul. Rather, they are like heavenly flowers blowing freely in the breeze, spreading their sublime fragrance everywhere.



### Human consciousness

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