

In Srimad Bhagavad Gita, *kama*, *krodha*, and *lobha* are referred to as the triple gates to hell. In previous issues we have started to close the first two gates! Now the third gate—*lobha* or greed—is awaiting our attention. If it is not closed, there is no security for the human personality.

Due to ignorance (*avidya*) and inadequate philosophical insight, the minds of most people abound with innumerable desires. The constant pressure exerted by these desires weakens the will and causes that all-devouring, gluttonous demon of greed to thrive in human personality.

Greed and craving are, figuratively speaking, an insult to all that is Divine. One suffering from the disease of *lobha* defiles Divinity and drives Divine Grace away from their heart. This is well-illustrated in the following story about a misguided devotee:



The Sooty Buddha

In Tibet there is a temple with a thousand Buddhas, and a devotee selected one of the many Buddhas for his worship. Every day he would bring some costly incense and a gheefed lamp and place it before

his chosen Buddha. However, he observed that the fragrance of his incense would drift towards the other Buddhas and this upset him. What he bought was very costly and he felt it should all be for his own Buddha and not anyone else's.

As he pondered the situation with great frustration, he came up with an idea to prevent the fragrance from going to the other Buddhas. He was a bit of a carpenter, so he brought some wooden boards and created a wall all around his Buddha.

The Art of Positive Feeling Part Two



Overcoming Greed



by Swami Jyotirmayananda

Now he started burning his candle and incense and was very pleased to see every bit of the fragrance and light that he offered going right to his own Buddha. However, within a week, much to his dismay, his Buddha became black due to all the smoke that was confined within the walls of his shrine.

If you are the kind of person who wants all happiness in life for yourself and none for others, you are like that man striving not to let any fragrance go to any of the other Buddhas. Walling yourself in with “me and mine” constricts your soul and limits your happiness. The Buddha, or the spirit within you, becomes sooty with selfishness. When you turn within yourself, you find no happiness, just sorrow. On the other hand, if you adopt a process of activity that opens your heart and frees the soul instead of constricting it, you will find that when you turn within, the Buddha within your heart shines bright and your spirit is joyous.

The Interrelation of Desire, Anger, Greed and Delusion

In Chapter Two of Srimad Bhagavad Gita, verses 62 and 63, Lord Krishna suggests the powerful interrelation of *kama* (desire), *krodha* (anger), *lobha* (greed) and *moha* (delusion):

“By constantly dwelling upon objects, one develops attachment to them. From attachment there arises desire. From desire there is born anger.

“From anger there arises delusion, from delusion loss of memory. From loss of memory one loses the function of pure reason, and from loss of reason one heads towards destruction.”

As these verses suggest, a degrading chain of events, which is all too common in human life, commences with a simple thought about

an object (in Vedantic terms, “objects” refer to persons and other living creatures as well as inanimate objects) that promises some form of happiness. At first you merely take a fleeting fancy to the object; then day after day you reinforce that fancy by thinking about the object again and again. Soon your mind develops a psychological leaning or inner attachment called *sanga*, towards that object. When there is *sanga*, your reasoning is affected and you feel that you cannot live without the object. Thus the desire (*kama*) to possess the object becomes established within your mind. From that desire anger is born.

“Anger” in this particular context has a special interpretation. It means agitation in the mind. When there is desire, two things may happen. You may have fulfillment of the desire, or frustration of the desire. In both cases there is agitation.

When there is fulfillment of a desire, agitation first takes the form of elation. A person becomes elated because anything that is unreal—such as the deluded understanding that objects are the source of happiness—cannot settle in your mind in a natural way. It always creates a reaction.

That is why when people become suddenly prosperous or successful, they often don’t know how to handle it. Immediately, they plan a drinking party with feverish antics to handle the elation. In broad terms, that elated agitation is also a form of *krodha*.

Further, if a desire is fulfilled it does not die away. Rather, it usually leads to greed or *lobha*. Why should a person become greedy if his desire is fulfilled? Shouldn’t he be happy that he desired something and now he has attained it? Unfortunately, whenever a desire is fulfilled, the mind begins to use simple math-

ematics: “If I received an ounce of happiness from this object today, I will have more and more happiness from it the longer I cling to it. If this one object has yielded one ounce of happiness, then a hundred objects will yield a hundred ounces. If I have succeeded in acquiring one type of pleasure, why shouldn’t I succeed in acquiring other pleasures?”

The agitated mind fails to realize that happiness is not quantitative. You cannot gather an ounce of happiness here, and an ounce there, and thus accumulate a storehouse of happiness. Happiness, in fact, is qualitative.

Thus if desire is fulfilled, two forms of agitation can develop: the initial elation of getting what you wanted, and the all-consuming greed that ensues because you want more and more of it.

If desire is unfulfilled or frustrated, the agitation of anger develops. You immediately want to blame someone or something for keeping you from having what you desire. As your frustrated desires become suppressed, the agitation of craving (*trishna*) invades the mind. If you didn’t satisfy some desire, then your imagination convinces you how much you are suffering because of this lack. Thus, the desire becomes craving.

So, *kama*, *krodha* and *lobha*, (desire, anger and greed) are intimately related. Further, the mind that is invaded by these demoniac qualities becomes afflicted with delusion and loss of pure reason, and easily follows a degrading and self-destructive course of action that yields nothing but misery and despair. This truth is well-illustrated by the following story from the Middle East.

The Merchant Who Was Blinded by Greed

There was once a merchant in the Middle East who had many camels — animals which

used to be the sole mode of transportation in desert lands. Just as today people rent cars, in ancient times people rented camels. So, whenever travellers wanted to conduct business in the desert, this merchant would rent them as many camels as they needed.

One day an ascetic who possessed mystical powers came to the merchant and said, “I need many camels and your assistance for a special project that will make you rich. Would you like to help me?”

“Of course,” replied the merchant. “What type of assistance do you need?”

“I have come to know about a great treasure of precious jewels, gold and silver and I will need your help to dig it up as well as thirty camels to carry it. As payment, I will give you one camel load of treasure as your very own. This will make you so rich that you will not have to work anymore for the rest of your life.”

The merchant accepted the offer eagerly and they set out across the desert. With the help of the ascetic’s special psychic powers, they located the exact spot where the treasure was buried and dug up many treasure chests full of diamonds, rubies, emeralds, gold, and silver, which they loaded onto the thirty camels. They then prepared to depart.

The merchant was thrilled beyond words with his one camel-load share of the treasure. Never had he seen precious stones and metals in such abundance, and he hurried homewards to secure his wealth. But on the way he thought, “That ascetic is getting almost all the treasure, and he’s just a mendicant. He doesn’t have a wife and children as I do. What is he going to do with all that treasure?”

So he went back to the ascetic, who was leading the other camels laden with jewels, and said, “You are a mendicant, a man of God. What are you going to do with all this treasure?”

The ascetic, partly because of his wisdom and partly because of his common sense in realizing that he was all alone and that the merchant was much stronger, responded, "You are right, I don't need so much. You can have nine more camel-loads if you like."

Eagerly, the merchant took the additional camels laden with treasure and set out again for home. After a little while, though, he began to think, "Wouldn't it be better to take more of the treasure? After all, the ascetic is a man of renunciation. Such a treasure will just distract his mind from his prayers and austerities!"

So he turned back once again and said, "Why should you get so much treasure? If you take so much, your mind will become distracted and you won't devote your time to meditation; you may even fall from the spiritual path. I think that it would be better for both of us if we divided the treasure fifty-fifty."

Trying to appease the merchant's increasing greed, the ascetic answered, "That's alright with me. Go ahead and take what you have asked for."

So the merchant loaded up the additional treasure and departed. But then again he thought to himself, "Why should I leave any of the treasure with him? As a mendicant, he doesn't know how to manage money. I'm a merchant and I will know how to handle it in a much better way. I'll be doing him a big favor by freeing him from the pressure of these material responsibilities." So the greedy merchant went back again and said to the ascetic, "Why do you need more than one camel-load of this treasure? It will only be a burden to you in every respect."

"Alright," responded the ascetic. "Take everything but one load and go on your way." So the merchant departed again and then was again overcome by his greed for that last camel-load. Hurrying back to the ascetic, he said, "With your psychic powers you can find

treasure buried under the earth any time you want! For all the work I have done I should have the rest of the jewels for myself."

"Fine," the ascetic said, sensing that the merchant's greedy desires would drive him to beat him up if he didn't agree to his demands. "Take it all. I'll just keep this little box that we found along with the treasure. The ointment inside will be enough for me."

While the merchant was preparing again to depart, his mind wouldn't let him rest: "That mendicant let me have the entire treasure with no hesitation, yet he clings to that box. There must be some secret in it. I've got to go back and find out what's so special about that box." So he went back to the man again and asked, "Please tell me what's in that box. What secret does it hold?"

It's a magic ointment. If you apply a drop of it to one of your eyes, you will be able to see all the buried treasure anywhere in the world; then you'll be able to recover however much you want."

"Please apply a drop to my eye and let me see for myself. I want to see if this ointment really works." So the ascetic applied one drop to his eye and immediately the merchant saw treasures everywhere, wherever they were buried. He was ecstatic. "This is fantastic! Please apply the ointment to the other eye also." But the ascetic refused. "No, the virtue of the ointment is that if it is applied to one eye, it will reveal all the treasures; however, if it is applied to both eyes, it will make a person blind."

The merchant wouldn't hear of this. He was positive that the ascetic was hiding some secret. He reasoned that if one drop in one eye gave so much, think of what another drop in the other eye would give. He insisted and pleaded with the mendicant. Finally the mendicant relented. "Very well, I shall apply the ointment to the other eye, but understand that I do so at your

own risk. I have already warned you what will happen.”

The moment the mendicant applied it to his other eye, the merchant became stone-blind. The ascetic laughed, packed up all the treasure that had been the merchant's, and rode off, leaving him blind and miserable.

The merchant lived the rest of his days in a pathetic and frustrated condition because the only way he could make a living was through begging. When people came to give him alms, he would say, “I shall accept your gift if you will box my ears first; then you can give me whatever you like.” This entreaty appealed to many crude people who took great delight in slapping and hitting him.

One day the king of the country came to him in disguise. He thought that the phenomenon of a blind beggar asking to be beaten before taking alms was very strange; so he brought him to the royal court and asked him, “Why do you ask for such gross treatment from people? I will not tolerate it; it is uncultured.” Then the poor man told the king the story of how he had brought such misery upon himself through his uncontrolled desire and greed. Hearing the sad tale, the king understood and, of course, granted him royal favor that made his life easier.

THIS STORY PRESENTS an exaggerated but quite true description of greed. Just like the merchant in the story, every soul in the world process wants to have objects of enjoyment. If this natural need is kept under control by a proper understanding of life and its goals, it does not lead to problems. Unfortunately, however, the human mind tends to be forever discontented with whatever it has in the world, and greedily desires more and more.

The idea that you will become more comfortable, more relaxed, and more fulfilled by acquiring more and more possessions,

fame or power is based upon illusion. No one finds peace and contentment by having more of anything, except philosophical understanding!

Nothing can bring you true contentment except the philosophical understanding that an all-knowing God has provided for you all the important ingredients for your evolution. Every day, at every moment, the Divine Computer has worked out the exact situations that must be presented before you and the resources to deal with them effectively, such as your body, your mind, your intellect, the people around you, and all your circumstances.

In order to be truly prosperous you must have a good internal disposition: a mind that can relax, an intellect that can reflect, a heart that can turn to God. If that type of internal wealth is there, then you are truly prosperous. But if you have only outer prosperity and internally you are hollow, then your prosperity is a kind of joke played by Nature.

In order to curb greed and promote true contentment, you have to understand philosophically that the purpose of human life is to attain Enlightenment, or God-realization. You can enjoy objects of the world, but, as the story of the blinded merchant suggests, you should not have both your eyes directed toward them!

One of your eyes should be kept towards God, the other towards the world. The eye that is directed towards God is your intuitive intellect. If you have intuitive intellect, then you have an eye that is intact.

The world-process is like the ointment: you never apply it to both your eyes, the physical as well as the mystical. You have to keep the mystical eye open. If you apply the ointment of the world-process to the mystical eye too—if you allow your intellect to be colored by the world—then you go stone-blind. All your

achievements become nothing. But if you keep your intellect intact by not letting the world touch it, then you enjoy the world. That is, although you live in the world, you have a sense of detachment and freedom that lets you know that you are above the world.

The ascetic was a spiritual teacher who tried to give the merchant this understanding. But the merchant wasn't ready, so he succumbed to inordinate greed and had both eyes blinded. As the fate of the merchant indicates, every desire that you go after with intense greed will box your ears! Some twist or painful experience is always implied in the fulfillment of uncontrolled desires.

Like the blind man, the soul that is deprived of the mystical vision of the Self experiences degradation. Led by greed, the soul is unable to discover its unity with the Absolute. But when the flame of greed and craving is extinguished, you possess double consciousness: an internal, intuitive vision that "I am one with God," and an external, pragmatic vision that allows you to live with practical reality.

Although you live in the world, you possess a dimension to your personality that allows you to see beyond it. Not to become totally immersed in the world is the great secret behind all religious and spiritual philosophy. Everyone is led by a process that forces them to be in the world. Everyone is compelled to do certain things, to undertake certain projects, to discover certain talents, to achieve certain things in the world. But if you lose sight of the inner Self as you do all these, then all your achievements become nothing, and you end up feeling humiliated like the blind man who had lost all the treasure.

On the other hand, if you discover that transcendental dimension within yourself, you will perform your duties with purity of mind, and

you will not embark upon a project because of uncultured desires, egoism and pride. The work you do will bring about harmony and peace, and it will be auspicious for humanity. The quality of your work will be spiritual; it will carry a heavenly fragrance.

In addition, you will develop an awareness that you are not the doer. Even though you might be working hard to accomplish things in the course of your daily life, inwardly you will feel that you are ever free and untouched. Even if the greatest calamity were to befall you, it wouldn't shake you. Storm clouds gather, thunder rumbles, lightning flashes, but the sky remains unaffected. Like the sky, you are ever untouched.

If that vision were to enter your heart and linger there, your life would be extremely joyous. Referring to the parable, it would be like getting the entire treasure and the box of ointment at the same time and yet keeping one eye safe. But if you do not keep one eye safe—the inner spiritual eye—you wander in a land of illusion, groping in darkness, tumbling from embodiment to embodiment.



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