

Craving Never Ages

Bhartrihari says, “*Trishnaa na jeer-naa, vayameva jeerna,*” which means, “Craving does not age; it does not decay, but we ourselves continue to age.” In fact, as a human being ages, his craving seems to become more and more youthful. This understanding is well-illustrated by the following story about an aging king:

Once in ancient times there lived King Yayati, who, like others of his day, had lived a long, long time. One day Yayati noticed old age approaching, and although he had enjoyed the sensuous pleasures of life intensely during his life, he suddenly became worried that now he would be devoid of pleasures. He saw a dark future brooding over him and was overcome by despair.

However, it so happened that a sage had given him a boon because of some good karma



performed years before. That special boon gave him the power to exchange ages with any younger person willing to do so.

Remembering that boon, King Yayati asked his young children if any one of them would take his age in exchange for their youth.

One of his children, who possessed great dispassion towards the pleasures of life even at a tender age, replied, “Father, I will be glad to exchange my youth for your age.” And so the exchange was made and Yayati became young again, and again he lived a life of intense pleasure.

But time passed on as it must and King Yayati again found his body aging. However, his craving for pleasure was still as strong as ever! Thus he realized the impossibility of ever satisfying

The Art of Positive Feeling *Part Three*



Overcoming Greed *(Continued)*



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one's worldly desires by merely having more and more experiences. Finally filled with *vairagya* (dispassion), he composed the following poem:

“Craving is like fire, and enjoyments of the senses are like oblations of ghee (clarified butter) poured into the fire, making it blaze higher and higher. Who could ever quench fire by feeding its flame? The urge for pleasure cannot be fulfilled by all the pleasures of the world.”

As the story aptly conveys, one who pursues a quantitative concept of pleasure will never be satisfied. He simply continues to hanker for more and more, yet is never fulfilled. Greed is described as a wolf and yet it is even hungrier than a wolf. Even a wolf has a limited stomach, but greed has no limitation.

The Folly of Comparing Yourself to Others

A greedy person is not aware of his own resources. He is only aware of what others have, and always thinks that others are better off than he is. He becomes like “a dog in the manger.” A dog sees food in front of other dogs and thinks that that food is much better than his. As a result, he goes on barking instead of enjoying what he has.

The following adaptation of an ancient story illustrates this point quite graphically: Once a man devoted himself to intense austerity. As a result, his Deity came before him saying, “Ask for any boon and you shall have it.” The man replied, “May I be rich and prosperous.” Hearing that, the Deity, who wanted the devotee to gain spiritual understanding as well as material wealth, said, “Everything that you ask will be given to you. In addition, your neighbors in a

one block radius from your home will receive double of whatever you are granted.”

At first the man could not understand the implications of his Deity's words and he was quite pleased with his good fortune. He went to his home, an ordinary home, and said, “Let there be a mansion with a nice roof.” Immediately everything became as he requested and he admired his mansion with amazement. Then he looked out the window and saw that his neighbors had double—two-story mansions.

Then he said, “Let there be a beautiful garden blooming around this house.” So it happened, but the neighbors received flourishing gardens twice the size of his all around their houses.

As a result of his neighbor's double prosperity, the man's heart began to burn with jealousy every time he asked for something. Finally, his mind became so upset that he came up with a diabolical plan. First he willed, “Let there be a well in front of my house.” Of course, the others received two wells. Then he said, “Let me be only one-eyed!” His scheme was that by wishing to become blind in one eye, all his neighbors would become blind in both and readily fall into the two wells that adorned their property. However, that boon was not granted by the Deity. Rather, to teach the greedy and jealous devotee a spiritual lesson, he was left with one eye and a well, while the neighbors all had two eyes and two wells and everything flourishing around them.

As the story reveals, there is so much illusion involved in trying to secure happiness through wealth. A greedy person is always comparing himself to others, and what he has gained is never enough.

A millionaire is very happy until he meets a billionaire; then he feels like a little rabbit before him. Since there are always people who surpass you in some way or the other in wealth, health, looks, power, or fame, the human heart can always be discontented.

Thus, Yoga teaches the importance of not comparing yourself with others. Everyone has been given the best situations for their advancement and is unique. What you have been given no one else possesses in exactly the same way.

Asteya and Aparigraha— Nonstealing and Noncovetousness

In Raja Yoga, *asteya* and *aparigraha* are two of the five great yamas or ethical restraints. *Asteya* implies freedom from desiring, misappropriating or stealing the possessions of others, and *aparigraha* is noncovetousness. In the Old Testament of the Bible, these appear as the eighth and the last of the great Ten Commandments: —Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not covet. *Asteya* and *aparigraha*—non stealing and noncovetousness—are closely related sister virtues that are both directed towards the removal of greed.

The Psychological Basis

The urge to steal results from a blend of greed, selfishness, and lack of control over the senses. Afflicted with the illusion that happiness comes from objects, one can be overwhelmed by the urge to get for himself those things which seem to be giving happiness to others.

A thief steals because he feels that he cannot be happy without the objects he craves and his mind lacks the patience to earn them in a righteous way. His mind may at first tell him, “You

can get those things by working for them,” but then his mind quickly changes its perspective and says, “Why should you work? Why not just enter into a crowd and pick a pocket or two! Or you can just sneak into a house, showing a little gun and a masked face, and get what you want. Who is going to catch you?”

The greedy mind does not see the darker implications of that action. It does not see who will get hurt or what others will feel if they have lost things that they have loved or worked hard for. Due to intense selfishness, the mind behaves like a depraved vulture and promotes indulgence in falsehood.

If a person is dominated by a highly intense and perverted form of greed, he chooses this path of *steala* or stealing. On the other hand, if the greed is more moderate, a person tends toward *parigraha*, or covetousness. Adopting methods that are normally considered righteous, he continues to crave objects and accumulates more and more of them, hoarding them beyond his needs. Such a person is not stealing from others, nor misappropriating what they already possess. He simply is obsessed with the idea, “If I have more and more I will be happier.”

Afflicted by covetousness, you strive incessantly to multiply your possessions. Instead of having two pairs of shoes, you have fifty pairs; instead of having a few sweaters, you have a hundred sweaters! As a result, all year long you have to watch over your things to see that they don’t get mildewed or moth eaten!

Afraid to lose all the possessions that you have acquired, you become tied to a place, tied to objects. You are a constant caretaker of things that you are not going to use—things that simply become a source of endless headache for you!

Further, there is a great illusion involved in the idea that by acquiring more and more possessions you will become secure and comfortable. It is like chasing a mirage in order to quench your thirst.

If you were to study your life and the lives of people around you, you would realize that “more” doesn’t necessarily mean “happier.” A person who is poor thinks that if only he had sufficient money in his hands, he would be happy. But the moment he becomes richer, he wants to have more and more and never feels contented. Normally, as wealth increases, discontent increases in direct proportion unless you have developed spiritual insight.

Effects of Covetousness on Society

From the social point of view, a person who develops covetousness disturbs the harmony and economic balance of society. Why should one person hoard so many more things than he can use, when those things could have been utilized by others? It is unethical that many are deprived of the conveniences of life while others hoard far beyond any reasonable need. Such hoarding negates the fact that the same life flows in all. It is a form of violence. You are hurting others by developing exaggerated greed, and causing imbalance and disharmony in society.

On the other hand, if people were infused with the virtue of noncovetousness, the ideal would be simple living and high thinking. The ideal would be to go after the greater treasures of life—the spiritual values—and then material wealth will become subservient to spiritual wealth.

In a more cultured and elevated society, there would be an entirely different kind of

greed—greed for the attainment of spiritual virtues. One would crave for more and more sincerity, more mental peace, more goodness, more gentleness, more control of mind. People would be extremely discontented with their psychological and spiritual limitations, and hanker to become better and better every day!

If this ideal were practiced, there would be peace in the individual who practices it, and they would radiate and promote happiness and peace in the environment around them. This would lead to a higher level of culture for the individual and for society.

The Secret of True Prosperity

When you are greedy your will becomes weak. As a result of this weakness, you may not be able to get the very objects that you greedily desire. Or if you do get them, they will become a source of pain.

There is a strange law operating in the Divine plan: If you do not deserve an object towards which you have developed greed, that object will repel you. Even if you succeed in possessing it, that object will be painful because it will create many mental complexes.

Thus, you will not really be happy if you get an object because of greed. On the other hand, if you do not have greed, then all the objects that you need in your spiritual evolution will come to you automatically. An interesting parable is told to illustrate this point:

A devotee was practicing meditation and had a strange vision when he invoked Goddess Lakshmi, the Goddess of Prosperity. The Goddess, whom he expected to appear before him in a luminous and radiant form, appeared with Her forehead badly bruised and Her feet terribly sore. The devotee, seeing Lakshmi Devi in this

strange condition, asked, “Goddess, how is this possible? How can you, who are the giver of prosperity to all, have your forehead bruised and your feet swollen and sore?”

The Goddess replied, “Devotee, I will answer your question and reveal to you a great secret. There are so many worldly-minded people who crave for me and pursue me, and yet do not deserve me. And I have to go on kicking them from morning until night. Imagine how much my feet hurt because I must go on doing that day after day!”

“And then there are some rare souls who have truly renounced greed and who tread the path of spirituality. They are so dispassionate that they don’t want me at all. In the Divine Plan, however, they must have some of my wealth in order to help mankind. So I go to their doors and, adopting the Eastern method, I repeatedly bow and strike my head against the thresholds in order to persuade them to accept me. This goes on day after day, so now my forehead has become terribly bruised!”

The parable shows that if you are devoid of greed, you attract the Goddess of Prosperity. Who wants to bestow Her blessings. On the other hand if you pursue objects through greed, then the Goddess of Prosperity goes on kicking you, as it were. Crave wealth, and wealth will renounce you. Renounce craving, and all the wealth of the world will pursue you.

A person who is free from greed is able to command matter and all material needs. They are the master of matter and use matter according to their need. But when the mind is weakened by greed, one allows themselves to be used by matter. If you are the master of your possessions, you are prosperous. If the possessions are possessing you, then you are not prosperous.

If you perform your self-effort in the world without being attached to material prosperity, you will draw prosperity by commanding it. Nature will give you everything that you deserve. In a mysterious way, what you need will come to you, and you will be able to use your prosperity well.

On the other hand, if you draw wealth out of greed, that wealth will make you fearful because you will always be afraid of losing it. Further, you will want to assert that you are wealthy, and that will make you conceited and arrogant. If worldly prosperity comes to you when you are psychologically dependent on the world, it results in tremendous illusion, and makes you insensitive. In this case, it is more of a curse than a boon.

External or material prosperity is not healthy unless it is accompanied by internal prosperity. Unless your material success is accompanied by the development of Divine qualities within your personality, it is not healthy prosperity. People can become externally rich without having any inner wealth at all. When this happens, they are certainly not prosperous in any real sense.

If you burden a donkey with sandalwood, the donkey doesn’t enjoy the sandalwood. It becomes only a load to carry. Similarly, if a greedy person acquires a lot of wealth and has no cultured idea of what to do with it, that wealth is just like a load of sandalwood on a donkey’s back.

All that most wealthy people feel during their life is the pressure of their wealth, the burden. And carrying that burden they depart, leaving the load they had carried to be used by somebody else. Can that be called prosperity?

The Fruit of *Asteya and Aparigraha*

If one is free of greed and truly established in non-stealing, he has discovered the secret of abundance. Raja Yoga says, “*Asteya Pratishthayam Sarva Ratnopasthanam*”—“When a person is established in non-stealing, he acquires the power of attracting all jewels and pearls—all wealth—to himself.”

All the wealth of the physical, psychological and spiritual world flows to one who is imbued with the true spirit of renunciation. They become blessed with true contentment, peace and harmony. The practice of *asteya* opens one’s heart to the abundance of Divine consciousness and leads them to the treasure of treasures: Self-realization!

Similarly, if you stopped chasing after things beyond your need, what would happen? Raja Yoga says, “*Aparigraha—sthairye janma kathanta sambodhah.*”—“By attaining perfection in non-covetousness, one acquires the knowledge of past births.”

If you were to root out the subtle seeds of greed from your unconscious and unburden your mind of *parigraha* (covetousness), then that mind would reveal to you that you are a spirit—a traveller who has moved again and again from one embodiment to another—and you would have a clear memory of your past lives.

But under the pressure of attachment to possessions and strong identification with your body, you can’t remember this great fact. Tied down to your body and its possessions, that subtle instinctive sense that brings to you the memories of past lives is obscured.

That special power of the mind to remember the past incarnations is veiled by your present

attachments. Because you become so attached to the objects around you, you cannot imagine that in other lives you were completely detached from them and had nothing to do with them. Your mind becomes so entangled by the realities that have evolved in this present personality that you are unable to imagine that you previously had different personalities, and in each personality you had different relationships and realities around you.

The moment greed is eliminated and the mind relaxes, you begin to develop the awareness, “I am a spirit and this world is not my final stay. I am in transit. As a personality I exist in this world for only a short time.” When you fly in a plane, you exist in the plane for only a limited time. Then the plane must land and you must walk out to reach your destination. Similarly, in all your embodiments you are in transit, and you must walk out of those embodiments to attain Liberation, to enter into *Brahman*—the ultimate destination of every soul.

So, the practice of non-covetousness first brings forth that hidden insight into the nature of your spirit and the manner in which it moves from one embodiment to another through karma. You understand that the realities to which you become attached come and go like waves in the ocean of millions of embodiments and, like waves, they will pass on without affecting you. You will continue to incarnate, led by your karma.

With further purity of mind you understand that your innermost spirit is not an individualized entity. The real nature of your spirit is the Self—the Universal Spirit. When you realize intuitively, from the depths of your being, “I am That, I am the Absolute Self,” you attain Liberation and the process of reincarnation terminates.