

The Problem with Desire

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Jonathan: Thank you so much for this wonderful teaching. I would like to ask a question around “desire is unnatural.” For an enlightened person, would enjoying the senses, e.g. ice cream, be a form of desire and would this produce *vasanas*? Please talk around enjoying oneself before and after enlightenment.

Sundari: Hello, Jonathan, thank you for your feedback, much appreciated.

There is nothing inherently “unnatural” or wrong with desiring any object, even ice cream, as long as it is not opposed to *dharma*. One never stops desiring because to be alive is to desire. Krishna says to Arjuna in the *Bhagavad Gita*: “I am the desire that is not opposed to *dharma*.” You need to have a strong desire for *moksa*, for instance, or you would not be qualified for it.

The Buddhists believe that desire is the cause of all suffering – which is true. But the solution is not the futile attempt to rid oneself of all desire. The solution is to understand what is behind desire. That is the only way to be free of desire. When it comes to gratuitous sensual desires, such as ice cream – or sex, for instance – one has to use dispassion and discrimination, because indulging them does lead to and builds *vasanas*. It is always a question of motivation. Do you want ice cream or sex or anything else because you feel empty, bored, greedy, dissatisfied? If so, they will not give you what you are looking for, which is fullness – and an end to suffering that desire causes. The temporary bliss one does feel when a desire is satiated is the mistaken belief that the bliss of fulfillment comes from the object, whereas what has actually taken place is that the pressure of desire is no longer present, so the fullness of the self is briefly experienced. No matter what the desire is, what is behind it is always a desire for the self masked as a desire for an object or a result, which is also an object.

The question to ask is always “Who desires this and why?”

The problem with desire is that all actions create *vasanas*, which are the seed for another action. Thus one gets trapped in the chain of action-desire-action. The difference between knowledge and action is brought about by *maya*, the power in awareness that makes the self seem to be a doer. Desire for and pursuit of knowledge is the rediscovery of the actionless self, and requires renunciation of one’s sense of doership. Pursuit of action, on the other hand, involves a sense of doership. So the two pursuits are opposite in nature.

Both powers, renunciation and action, exist in everyone. Individuals constantly act and they constantly let go of things they no longer value or desire. The only issue is the nature of that which is to be renounced. If an individual wants freedom, which Vedanta defines as freedom from dependence on objects, renunciation becomes a problem because individuals value things that conflict with the desire for freedom. And liberation requires a very subtle renunciation: renunciation of the renouncer, the one seeking freedom.

The “enlightened person” knows that as your true nature is whole and complete you are the fullness that needs nothing. There is no need for more, better or different. You can enjoy the

presence or absence of objects; it makes no difference to you. You can indulge in ice cream or not. Either way, you are happy before, during and after you either get or don't get what you desire. You will not be seeking pleasure – which IS inherently dissatisfying – because if you are seeking pleasure that means you do not know that pleasure, *paramaa sukka*, is your true nature.

In fact, as stated, it is the seeking itself, the desire for the object, that causes the agitation in the mind, the dissatisfaction and the suffering.

Once self-knowledge has obtained in the mind, this is the only time objects can really be enjoyed for what they are because one no longer needs them to feel full. As we have determined, objects do offer a limited kind of bliss – so when you no longer need them to deliver more than they are capable of, you enjoy them without fear, for what they have to offer: temporary bliss. So one is always satisfied. One sees everything as the self, the ice cream, sex, a good meal, etc. (or lack of them) and enjoys life, giving thanks for one's many blessings, as transient as they are. *Isvara's* world is truly beautiful when seen from the perspective of the self.

I hope this helps

~ *Namaste*, Sundari