



## DESIRE

### Desires – Bhagavad Gita Ch.III, v.36-41

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*Om Shri Paramatmane Namaha*

**Bhagavad Gita, Chapter III, verse 36:**

*'Arjuna said: Now impelled by what, Krishna, does this man commit sin, even involuntarily, as though driven by force?'*

This is the question. Why is it so that there is a force behind him which impels him to commit something which is wrong? If this was a problem for Arjuna, who was the great disciple of the greatest Guru of all time, it definitely must be a problem for all seekers. It was his problem also and it is a problem for all seekers on the path at one time or another.

In some respects this is the ultimate question which remains to be solved in one's life. The solution of this question determines one's success or failure on the spiritual path.

From a practical point of view, following the path of spirituality, this is the question of questions! Arjuna says that one does not want to commit sin, and yet sin is committed. What is this force that compels a person to commit sin? What is the cause?

This question is directly relevant to all those who happen to come to that stage of evolution from where the spiritual journey begins. There is a stage, when not much thought is given by the individual to right and wrong, to sin or virtue. Before that stage, the real spiritual journey does not start. People may be engaged in various religious ceremonies, but the motives here are different. The motives are still worldly - in the name of religion. Spiritual journey starts when one seeks to solve one's individual problem of inner conflict and one wants to have permanent happiness and peace of mind in life. One comes to the conclusion that some habits are bad and some are good. Bad deeds should not be committed and one should have only the good actions in life. I mean to say that, unless the individual adopts this level of morality, his spiritual journey will not start. However, when one tries to be moral, the problem will not be solved, because, as long as there is an effort to become moral, immorality stands in the background. But gradually one begins to differentiate between right and wrong, morality and immorality, sin and virtue, and then one realises what is right and what is wrong. However, it often happens that a bad action is committed, even after one recognises that it is wrong, and has an inner feeling that one does not want to do it. One has that much knowledge, and understanding has developed to the extent that one knows that a particular thought or action is definitely wrong.

Arjuna asks why it happens like that. This is a crucial question. What is that force - *impelled by what does the man commit sin, even involuntarily?* The knowledge of sin

is there - one knows it - even before or at the time of committing the act. But even then one is forced to do it. So, My Lord, tell me about this great riddle of life!

If one is not aware of what is right and what is wrong, there can be an excuse. But the problem is that one is aware! One does not want to do it, yet one does it! *As though driven by force*, involuntarily - one does not wish to do it, but one is forced to do it as if driven by some force. This is the question. Now here is the reply.

Bhagavad Gita, Chapter II, verse 37

*'The Lord said: It is desire begotten of the element of rajas,  
which appears as wrath;  
nay, it is insatiable and grossly wicked, know this to be the enemy in this case.'*

Desire is the enemy. Desire is the motivating force behind all those actions which the doer knows to be sinful but is still compelled to carry out.

Now this very desire, this element, also becomes wrath (anger). Basically it is desire. Therefore, in the beginning it is desire (*kama*) but to that Krishna has added another element - anger - because anger is the progeny of desire. Anger always arises on account of desire - there is no doubt about that. If there is no desire, there can be no anger. Whenever there is any hurdle (obstruction) to the satisfaction of someone's desire, at once there is anger. Someone wants to satisfy a desire, but the desire is not fulfilled - at once this desire changes into anger. In this way desire and anger are connected. Desire is the basic cause of all such activities.

The strongest desire in human life is the desire to have union with the opposite sex. The attraction between male and female is the strongest desire. This must be understood for all time. Therefore, it becomes the greatest compelling force for unimaginable and innumerable actions which are known as 'sin'. Wars took place in world history simply because a certain king wanted to possess a particular woman. Wives kill their husbands simply because they have developed a desire for a paramour outside of their marriage. This is the motive and innumerable examples testify to it.

It has to be like this because it is through this desire that this whole of nature comes into existence. One of the greatest problems in human life remains how to be free from this sexual desire - the attraction between the male and the female.

Krishna says: "O Arjuna, the force that drives people to do something wrong is none but the force of desire, element of desire inside." It is also mentioned in the same verse that this desire is begotten of the element of *rajas*. I have explained several times that all this manifested nature is composed of three primary elements (*tamas*, *rajas* and *sattva*) and according to their proportion in any human being, a man is known primarily as either *tamasic*, *rajasic* or *sattvic*. Everyone has traces of all these three elements, because these three constitute what is known as 'nature.' But of the three, in each person one element predominates over the other two, and this is the quality by which that person is known. He who has more of the *tamas* is known as '*tamasic*' and so on.

Thus desire is born of *rajas*. Those who have a predominance of desire, are *rajasic* by nature. He also says that desire is insatiable and can never be satisfied. The more you try to satisfy a desire, the more you are possessed by that desire. Wise men have said that if someone tries to satisfy his desires by enjoyment, it is like someone trying to put out a fire by pouring clarified butter (ghee) or petrol into it. Petrol ignites and creates more and more fire. Someone who tries to put out a fire like that will increase

the fire. The more you try to satisfy your desires by enjoyment, the stronger the desire for enjoyment becomes. Therefore, the Lord has said that they are '*insatiable and grossly wicked*'. They are wicked in the sense that they will keep deceiving you again and again. "If I have this person as my partner, at least the desire for sex will be over for all time." The desire will not decrease. You cherish this dream only until you get the other person and as soon as you get him or her, the person becomes unattractive and you start to seek a new one. It is a common tendency for the mind to work in this way. The new car you buy is new only on the first day that you have it. On the next day, it is already old! It is the problem of the human mind, which seeks newness everywhere. Therefore, the Lord says that this element of desire is grossly wicked. Do not be deceived by it, if possible.

Then in the last sentence, the translation reads: '*Know this to be the enemy in this case.*' Desire is your real enemy. It is desire that compels one to do something wrong. If you analyse it, you will find that almost all crimes are committed due to the element of excessive desire. After all a thief is one who wants to become rich quickly and has the desire for money. The killer is one who thinks that he will be happier if his or her enemy is out of the way. It is desire in one form or another. When the desire is excessive, crimes are committed. When it is not so excessive, even then there is an absence of peace in the heart.

What does this desire do and how does it make our lives miserable? All this has been explained very nicely by Lord Buddha and also by Christ. Buddha clearly said that desire is the cause of all misery and Christ said the same. All such men experienced the truth and, having experienced the truth, their wisdom became the same.

What does this desire do? How does it create problems for us? We find the answer in the next verse.

Bhagavad Gita, Chapter II, verse 38

*'As a flame is covered by smoke, a mirror by dirt and the embryo by a membrane, so is knowledge covered by it (desire).'*

Our real existence is knowledge, consciousness and bliss. This knowledge is covered by desire as a flame is covered by smoke.

There are three examples: if you try to burn wood, the flame is there, but smoke is covering it and you are unable to see the flame. As the smoke does not allow you to see the flame, so desire does not allow you to have wisdom. When a mirror is covered by dirt you cannot see your face. In the same way, if knowledge is there, that means Self-realisation. You come to know who you are. But desire, like dirt, stops us from seeing the truth of your own Self. The third example: when a baby is born, the embryo is covered by the amnion. The baby is born wrapped in the amnion and the nurse has to remove it. In the same way, true knowledge is covered by desire.

Bhagavad Gita Chapter II, verse 39

*'Arjuna, knowledge stands covered by this eternal enemy of the wise, known as desire, which is insatiable like fire.'*

This desire is the eternal enemy of the wise. What is the battle about? On the one side stands the army of desire, and on the other side is the army of knowledge. And

the army of desire keeps on defeating the army of knowledge. This is why he calls it '*the enemy of the wise*'. When desire is there, there is no wisdom. Wisdom and desire are hostile to each other. And it is '*insatiable like fire*'. Desire is like fuel to fire. The more fuel you put on to fire, the more the fire ablazes. In the same way, desires increase when one wants to satisfy them. Because ignorance has no limits - it depends upon knowledge as to how the fire can be extinguished. How the fire can be put out depends upon knowledge. A person who does not know how the fire can be put out may bring a can of petrol to put out the fire! He will only make more fire.

The same applies to sexual desire. The more you try to satisfy it, the more you feel it.

Now the question arises: In the totality of your being where is this demon of desire situated? Where is it located and where can we find it in our own being? The answer to that is given in the next verse.

Bhagavad Gita Chapter II, verse 40

*'The senses, the mind and the intellect are declared to be its seat. Screening the light of truth through these, it (desire) deludes the embodied soul.'*

Where does it exist? It exists on all the levels of your existence except the spirit. This is to be noted here and I will now explain it.

In our existence there are five senses of perception and five instruments of action. Then the thinking instrument, also known as mind, is sometimes counted with them - it is known as the inner sense. The senses and the mind provide a sort of abode for the desires. If someone tries not to see a beautiful woman - he may close his eyes but his mind still imagines the woman. The desire is not only in the senses but also in the mind. Shree Rajneesh said that he knew a professor at the university who strictly followed the path of morality. His attraction to females was a problem for him so he used to carry an umbrella so that he could not see the girls. But he only held the umbrella up after he had seen the girls! All such tricks do not help.

There are many examples of people trying to cut themselves off from the temptations of society. Ascetic sects are to be found everywhere. All such attempts are unsuccessful because, even though you cut off your senses from objects of the world, what can you do about your mind? So the Lord says that the senses, the mind and not only the mind but also the intellect, are declared to be the seat of desires and '*Screening the light of truth through these, desire deludes the embodied soul.*'

You can understand 'the mind' as the centre of thoughts and desires - memories and future planning - but mostly desires. Intellect is that part of our being through which we are enabled to take decisions. This decision taking faculty is superior to the faculty of thinking. The more a person is capable of taking quick and correct decisions, the more evolved that person is considered to be. The faculty of discrimination - deciding what is right and what is wrong - also belongs to the intellect.

Actually, it is very difficult to translate cultural and spiritual concepts from one language into another. These concepts are expressed in the Sanskrit language, which is one of the richest languages in the world. We have many Sanskrit words which are hard to translate because there are no proper equivalents in English. I say this because we are still not fully acquainted with the full definitions of words like 'mind' and 'intellect' even in the terminology of medical science. They say that the brain is a

physical entity and we can agree with that. Then they say that the mind is non-physical, but in many books you will find the term ‘mind’ being used for the centre of desires and thoughts as well as sometimes for the *Atman*. Anyway here the meaning of ‘mind’ is the one part of your being through which you have the inner element of desire and thinking. Another part is that through which you decide what is right and what is wrong and you take a decision. The faculty of taking decisions belongs especially to the intellect, which is a higher faculty.

The Lord says that this desire exists not only in the mind but also in the intellect. So what to do now? It exists also in the intellect, the instrument through which you take decisions. When that very instrument through which you take decisions is tainted by desire, your decisions are likely to be wrong. What is to be done? Your hands are already dirty, and with dirty hands you are trying to wash your handkerchief or towel, and you think that it will be clean but your hands were already dirty when you washed it - can you clean it? - you at least need to have clean hands. So the intellect with which you decide between what is right or wrong, itself contains an element of desire. What is to be done then? The senses, the mind and the intellect are declared to be the seat of desire and through these the light of truth is screened. Due to the element of desire, one is unable to see what the truth is. And then what happens? ‘*It deludes the embodied soul*’.

For better understanding, a distinction can be drawn between the spirit and the embodied soul. The spirit is the purest existence. By ‘embodied soul’ we mean that our own purest existence, on account of desire and ignorance, gets trapped by bondage like a bird in a cage. It is all due to ignorance and desire. All efforts are directed to breaking that cage of ignorance. This is what happens. Then what should be done? The Lord gives the answer in the next verse.

Bhagavad Gita Chapter II, verse 41

*‘Therefore, Arjuna, you must first control your senses, and then kill this evil thing which blocks jnana - knowledge of the Absolute (that is God, the Spirit or Atman) and vijnana - knowledge of manifested Divinity.’*

Some explanation is needed here. There are two words here - one is *jnana* and the other is *vijnana*. The meaning of these is important to understand. *Jnana* is truth in its purest form as it is. It is translated here as ‘knowledge of the Absolute (the Truth)’. So if somebody wants to have that Truth in life, he has to control the senses and kill this evil desire. Only then will one have the experience of the Self. Without doing this one will not be successful. *Jnana* means ‘knowledge of the Self or the Absolute’ and *vijnana* means ‘the experience of Self-realisation.’ So the Lord says that one has to kill this evil of desire if one wants to have knowledge of the Absolute (Self) and the experience of Self-realisation.

Before this has been given the sequence of the development of desire - how it develops, where it resides in the body, in the senses, in the mind, in the ego, etc. Therefore one must control one’s senses. The practice will begin from the senses. One has to finish this desire from the outside. One has to finish it! Desire is the bondage. Desire has to be replaced by discrimination. Desire creates bondage. Desire motivates towards degradation, but discrimination shows one what is good and what is bad. Desire is the element which obstructs true knowledge.

The method is to start from the crudest and least subtle - that is the senses - as much as you can. It is not written there, but it is implied - whatever you can. The

tactical implication is that you should try to discipline and minimise whatever enjoyments you are having at a particular time. Try to curtail them. This is the starting point.

*'Therefore, Arjuna, you must first control your senses, and then kill this evil thing.'*

The start has to be from the senses - from the outside world. Take this as the starting point. So the Lord says that one has to kill this evil of desire if one wants to have knowledge of the Absolute (Self) and the experience of Self-realisation. How it will happen is described in the next verse.

The Lord tries to inspire Arjun to be brave and conquer the element of desire. '*Therefore Arjun, you must control your senses.*' If you want to get rid of desire, you start from the senses. If you feel an excessive desire for sweets, then the first thing is - do not eat them! Rein in your desire and have control over your palate! That is the only way. Suppose you are sitting in meditation, and somehow you hear the noise of someone's footsteps, and into your mind comes the thought that maybe a very beautiful lady or a handsome man is approaching. You want to open your eyes to see. But you should not open your eyes. The first thing to do is to start from the senses. But this is only the beginning. You have not opened the eyes to see who the person is, but then, more ideas come. When you open your eyes, one more impression has gone inside. So the Lord says: "*Therefore, Arjun, you must first control your senses and then kill this evil thing* (that obstructs the Truth)."

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