



July 2005 Contemplation Theme

Desire & Destiny

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There are two types of desire. I will call the most common one the “passing desire.” It is a desire that arises from an inner feeling of being incomplete. This inner feeling makes you sense you lack something, which makes you desire something to complete you. It is a desire to get something from outside of you, which gives you a sense of fulfillment that lasts for only a short time. It might be a desire that is easy to fulfill, maybe to eat something or to phone somebody. It might be something that takes longer: a desire to spend more time with somebody or to go a particular place on vacation. It could be a long-term process, like the desire to be successful in your profession or to support someone who is going through an illness. This type of desire may even feel like a compelling need for something, because it arises from an inner sense of being incomplete. This is the source of almost all of your desires and it motivates all of your actions. You are trying to fill up the bottomless well inside, the well of “lack.”

There is another type of desire, which I will call a “true desire.” It arises from a deep inner sense of fullness. This desire is a recurring desire. It keeps coming back to you, arising from somewhere profound within you. It is not really a desire; it is foreknowledge of your own destiny. Swami Rama Tirtha was the first enlightened master to ever visit and teach in the USA, and he explained the difference in one of his lectures, almost 100 years ago. This inner impulse arises and propels you into action, but it is not arising from a sense of incompleteness — it arises from your own Self. It is the reason you were born and the purpose of your life.

The tricky part is to be able to tell the difference between these two types of desire. One thing you can look at, in order to tell the difference, is the type of action they lead you to do. Usually, something that makes only you happy is a passing desire. When you go to the refrigerator for that late night snack, just stop for a moment and ask yourself, “Who is going get happiness from this snack?” Something is going on inside that doesn’t feel “better,” so you want something from outside to make you feel better. This means that your action is arising from feeling incomplete, and wanting something to complete you.

The uncomfortable truth is that if you don’t indulge this desire, it goes away. It is a passing desire. If you don’t indulge it, you will be uncomfortable for a few minutes; the desire might even last as long as 10 minutes, but it goes away. This desire for a snack probably isn’t real hunger. Even if you skipped dinner, you don’t need to eat at that late hour. In fact, late night meals create long-term health problems. The reason that skipping the snack is uncomfortable is because you feel the sense of incompleteness that gives rise to the desire. This inner sense of incompleteness is very uncomfortable. However, it doesn’t last long. This is why I call it a passing desire, because if you don’t indulge it, the desire just fades away.

A passing desire arises because you feel incomplete inside. When you act on the desire, you are distracted from the inner feeling of incompleteness. This makes you feel happy, briefly. When your happiness wanes (which it does), the hidden feeling of incompleteness surfaces again, so you come up with another passing desire. You are looking again for something to distract you.

The true desire arises from an inner sense of fullness. It is completely different. It has a different feeling to it and a different purpose. Your own Self is a unique, specialized, individualized form of consciousness. When you are operating in your life from this deep inner base of self-knowingness, you express something into the world that only you can express. Like a plant blossoms forth flowers, you are built to blossom forth a unique form of consciousness into the world. The impulse to do this arises in you over and over again. This true desire is foreknowledge of your destiny. It is the purpose of your life.

Sometimes you don't believe this inner impulse. It might be something well outside of your usual sphere of activities, or something so big that you don't believe that you could do it. I didn't, myself. I always knew I was here to teach, but I never allowed myself to recognize a desire that had been arising in me since childhood. I remember the first time it showed up as a visual image. I was meditating on an airplane, and I got a full visual display of a yoga center near the ocean. It was a big place, with many yoga rooms and many classes going on at once. I put it out of my mind, not believing that I could undertake such a grandiose project. Two or three years later, I was looking for a room to teach yoga in, and walked into the room that I had seen in my vision. I recognized it immediately, and signed the lease even though it was three times bigger than I thought I could handle. Master Yoga began there and has been growing ever since. It has grown much bigger than my mind would ever dare to desire — but still it is not a surprise to my Self. It is like watching a favorite movie for the 15th time, very familiar and still very enjoyable.


This external blossoming of what is already full and complete within you is the reason you were born. This is not a way of getting your fulfillment from outside; it is how you let your own inner fullness be expressed into a tangible form in the world. Along the way it fills all your senses while it eliminates all other desires. This is your true desire.

How can you tell what your true desire is? As a starting point, you can look at the type of action it leads you to do. Usually it is something that benefits others. And it usually feels quite easy, almost organic, when you do it. But this, by itself, does not weed out the passing desires. Unfortunately, a passing desire can masquerade as a true desire. So, looking at the type of action you do is not enough, because it is too easy to get a sneaky fulfillment of your passing desires by making others happy.

Here's how it works: you do something to make another person happy, so they like you, so you feel better because they like you. Your motivation for helping them was still arising from a sense of incompleteness, because you wanted their good opinion of you to make you feel better. Or you feel better because you have an ability to help them, and you love to use your ability (a type of showing off). Or you feel better when other people are happy — you feel better when everyone is happy, so you work to make them happy. This is dependency on having your environment be perfect, like only being happy when the outside temperature is in a certain range. It gets very sneaky and very hard to catch this in yourself.

The ultimate test for what kind of desire you are experiencing is to see where it arises from in yourself. If it arises from unhappiness, need, incompleteness, or if you are waiting until your desire is fulfilled so you can feel better, it is a passing desire. If it arises from joy, like a blossoming forth from your own deeper essence, or if it is a desire that has been bubbling up for your whole life, it is a true desire.

Caution: just because something is a true desire does not guarantee it will be easy or successful in the world! You may have to learn how to do new things in order to bring your blossom into full bloom. I am still learning about not-for-profit organizations, fund raising and community-building, which are needed to make Master Yoga Foundation a successful organization. You will have to use your mind and body to make that deeper impulse into something tangible in the world. Yoga helps with that, too, because the Bhagavadgita defines yoga as, "Skill in action." In this way, your life in the world becomes yoga, too. So, in every moment you are doing more yoga.

Namaste, 

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