

Desire & Samsara

By definition, 'desire' can be a strong feeling of wanting, to have something or wishing for something to happen. Western philosophers have generally viewed desire as fundamental to human life. To be human is to desire what we do not have.

Desire and the Wheel that goes round and around is *Samsara*. It is sometimes referred to as karmic cycle, reincarnation, transmigration, and cycle of aimless drifting, wandering or mundane existence.

Desire motivates each of us in many important ways: physical desire, want in hunger and thirst; intellectual desire through called curiosity; sexual desire as lust; economic desire through materialism called consumer demand.

Remove these expressions of desire, and human life as is familiar or customary in the present, would cease to exist. The millennial culture in general, and our economy in particular are built on our desire for things and experiences we do not have. The result of such desires is samsara!

The concept of *Samsara* has roots in the post-Vedic literature. It appears in a developed form, but without mechanistic details, in the early Upanishads. The full exposition of the *Samsara* doctrine is found in Sramanic religions Buddhism and Jainism; and various schools of Hindu philosophy after about the mid to 1st millennium BC.

The *Samsara* doctrine is tied to the karma theory of Indian religions, and the liberation from *Samsara* is at the core of the spiritual quest of Indian traditions, despite their internal superficial disagreements. The liberation from *Samsara* is called Moksha, Nirvana, Mukti or Kaivalya.

The 15th-century Indian mystic Kabir, who influenced Hinduism's Bhakti movement and had his verses included Sikhism's scripture Guru Granth Sahib, is today revered by both Hindus and Muslims> he has argued that "desire constitutes the true wealth of humanity."

A leading 20th-century interpreters of Kabir and spiritual teacher named Eknath Easwaran, explained in a videotaped lesson. Kabir viewed desire as having four stages.

The vast majority of people, Kabir says, are born with countless desires: too many desires to pursue any one of them with conviction or dedication. Most concern the superficial aspects of life, such as personal appearance or personal possessions. People who have many desires are the poorest of people, Kabir says, and they seldom achieve any success in any field. Their lives are also the saddest, because they are the most superficial, dominated by too many desires that matter too little. There are other people, Kabir goes on to say, who are born with some desires, and these are usually people who lead what are considered successful lives. No matter what field of endeavor they choose, they manage to accomplish at least modest goals, because they are able to focus on only some desires.

A fortunate few individuals, however, have only a few desires. Out of these come the geniuses: great scientists like Madame Curie and Albert Einstein, great musicians and poets, great humanitarians and political leaders. These individuals have very few desires, and thus they will make their mark in whatever fields they commit themselves to.

Finally, a few rare individuals have only one desire. These are the great mystics—spiritual leaders who often practice meditation, which being a demanding discipline, is reactively designed to reduce one's number of desires. Over time, says Kabir, meditation can reduce a person's desires from countless to many; then from many to some; from some to a few; and from a few to only one. As the number of desires becomes fewer, the desires themselves become less superficial and more profound. *Kabir also describes a pattern of emotional development that corresponds with the decrease in the number of desires.* People who have many desires, he says, often have volatile emotional lives. Their emotions go up; they come down. They get upset easily; they calm down quickly. None of these emotional conditions lasts very long, however; one of the great advantages of being superficial is that you are never upset for very long because the things that upset you aren't important. But neither are your satisfactions important or enduring. Nothing lasts long, because nothing matters much.

People whose desires are few, in contrast, have passion. Whatever field of life they commit themselves to, they have a tremendous passion to persevere and to succeed. Driven by a longing that is spread among only a few desires, passionate people often achieve great things.

The final step in the emotional progression occurs when all of a person's passions—personal ambition, the pursuit of pleasure, the need for prestige, the preoccupation with profit—become melded into one flaming passion that sears the heart. *Kabir calls this singular passion devotion.* In the mystical tradition, devotion leads to the discovery of the self. Simply put, as we move from having countless desires, to having many, to having few, to having one, and as we move from emotion to passion to devotion, we discover who we really are, and what really matters to us. One way of paring down the list, as Kabir noted, is meditation. Another is adversity, known in the mystical tradition as suffering. When life becomes difficult and uncertain, superficial desires fall away, and what remains is what really matters to us. People who have experienced extreme hardship—soldiers in combat, women living under oppressive regimes, prisoners of conscience, slaves, victims of torture—all report more or less the same thing about the consequences of suffering. When life itself is uncertain, only one thing matters: survival. Life becomes exceedingly simple, its purpose crystal clear. The many desires of life are purified by the fires of adversity; what remains is the one thing that both demands and deserves complete devotion.

Whether through meditation or through adversity, we begin by asking what it is that we want. Then we ask which of these things we can be passionate about.

Finally, we ask to what we can wholly devote ourselves, even our lives. In the end, the process of self-discovery begins with a very simple question: what else do *you* want?

There is no more work to do in this state! Just as fire burns straw, this desire of reveling in the Universal burns up all other desires.

Hereafter, a recitation of Om correctly done, is enough to burn up all sins, and put to rest all desire and make one calm, quiet and satisfied within our self, become calm in our mind and feel fulfilled with what we are and what we have.

The **chant of Om should go together with the thought of the Universal. It is a japa and a dhyana combined.** The *nama* (name) which is Om, being Universal, merges into the *rupa* (form) which is also Universal. There cannot be two Universals; there can only be one Universal.