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THE GREATEST CONQUEST

It is an inescapable law of earthly existence that all creatures are subject to growth, decay and death. From birth to death, it is just a one-way journey and there is no way of reversing it. No wonder why Time is considered to be the devourer of the world, *Kalo jagadbhaksakah*. In fact Yama, the Lord of Death, is also called *Kalah*.

Is there anything that is an exception to this law or that defines the ravages of time and remains unaffected? Raja Bhartrihari says there is indeed one, and that is “*desire*” in the human heart, which not only does not attenuate with time, but remains ever fresh, even when the ageing body is afflicted by infirmities. In a verse in *Vairagyasatakam*, Bhartihari says:

वलीभिर्मुखमाक्रान्तं पलितेनाङ्कितं शिरः ।
मात्राणि शिथिलायन्ते तृष्णैका तरुणायते ॥

*Valibhirmukhamakrantam palitenankitam sirah
Gatrani sithilayante trshnaika tarunayate.*

The face is all wrinkled, grey hair covers the head, limbs have grown weak, but *desire* alone grows even younger.

Indeed, *desire* springs eternally in the human breast. Sadly, this is mankind’s greatest misfortune, because as the sages have declared from very ancient times, *desire* is the root of all life’s problems and miseries. *Desire* is the first among the six internal enemies that man has to deal with and is the most formidable of them all. If only one can conquer this enemy, life is bound to be one of unbroken felicity. “Overcome this difficult-to-conquer enemy of yours lurking in your heart in the form of *desire*”. This was Sri Krishna’s advice to Arjuna (*The Gita*, 3.43).

Desire, whether it be for wealth, satisfaction of the senses, for name and fame, is nothing but the expression of the ego. Elimination of desire is possible only when the ego is totally dissolved in one’s true Self, which is all-pervading and eternal. Once that state of identity with the eternal Self is reached, even the most desirable and alluring of all things fails to hold any attraction. Acharya Shankara, in his *Upadesa Sahasri* says:

ईश्वरत्वेन किं तस्य ब्रह्मेन्द्रत्वेन वा पुनः ।
तृष्णा चेत् सर्वतच्छिन्ना सर्वदैन्योद्भवाऽशुभा ॥

*Isvaratvena kim tasya brahmendratvena va punah,
Trshna cet sarvataschinna sarvadaynyodbhava subha.*

[For the knower of the Self], of what use is Lordship of the world, *Indrahood* or *Brahmahood*, if all inauspicious *desires*, the cause of misery, are entirely up-rooted?

Therefore sublimation of desires in one is the greatest of all conquests.

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