

Will & Desire

Desire is the key to life, because desire is power. The deeper the desire, the more power it contains. The Upanishads say:

You are what your deep, driving desire is.

As your deep, driving desire is, so is your will.

As your will is, so is your deed.

As your deed is, so is your destiny.

Desire can be thought of as a river. For the person with many small desires, the water trickles in many different directions. There is not much power in a trickle, and little desires often fail to reach their goal. But then, just because they are little, it does not matter much if many of them get nowhere. What matters is the sense of futility that builds up in a person whose desires are many and trivial. Like rain that falls on a mountain peak, running down the slopes on every side, vitality is dispersed; life itself is fragmented.

On the other hand, there are people whose lives are molded by one all-consuming desire, as overwhelming as a mighty river. If you have seen a great river like the Ganges or the Mississippi in flood, you know what power it can have; anything in its path is swept away. Similarly, the man or woman who has unified desires sweeps all obstacles aside.

Wherever you find great success in life, it is due to the intense unification of desires. Some years ago I read an interview with Margot Fonteyn, one of the greatest ballerinas in the world. When the interviewer commented on her effortless grace, she replied in effect, "It is effortless now. Behind the grace and spontaneity you see on the stage, there is the cruelty of the bullring." Years and years of grueling practice, day in and day out. I don't know if you have seen a ballet teacher in action; what I have seen reminded me of a galley slave master, standing in front of these earnest, dedicated children lined up at the practice bar and saying all day, "All right, now, kick! One, two, three, four..."

Some of the best ballet schools, I understand, are as rigorous as boot camp. There are no vacations; you can't afford the lapses. No ice cream after school; you can't afford the extra pounds. And none of the other little pleasures that teenagers take for granted. Everything is ballet, ballet, ballet. That gives an idea of how deep young Margot Fonteyn's desire for excellence must have gone. It is not that she didn't miss having friends and vacations and ice cream; I am sure she did. But much more, she wanted to become a great ballerina. "You are what your deep, driving desire is." It shapes your will; it shapes your destiny. -Eknath Easwaran



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