

The Four Desires

All human beings have desires. Buddhism is sometimes misunderstood because it teaches the quenching of desires. If these desires are removed from us, we humans are in a vegetative experience. It is good to have desires, if we are able to control them.

We all have four basic desires from which other desires form. They are 1) the desire not to die, 2) the desire not to suffer, 3) the desire to be free and 4) the desire to live in utopia. These four desires are common for everyone in the world.

In our daily lives, everyone is trying to reach one or all four of these desires, sometimes without realizing it. For example, death is inevitable to all of us. However, when we look over the long history of human life, life expectancy has increased every several decades. This is due to us striving to live longer through development and improvement of medical treatment, food distribution, i.e. grocery stores and sanitation. The benefits help make our lives easier as well as improve our health which leads to longer life. Also, the will to live have seen people survive many disasters and accidents. “Yes, I am hurt, but I do not want to die like this or die here.” is one statement often repeated of the survivors.

We all have a desire not to suffer, however the rich and the poor experience hardship in their daily lives. Everyone has suffering of some type, from the mental to the physical. To minimize suffering and hardship, there are many ways to stop through cessation of the act or event or through escapism. Escapism could be seeking solitude, running away or taking any number of new fancy drugs, both legal and illegal that help numb the senses. Ultimately suffering can only be removed by deep reflection on the

cause of the suffering. Is it my lifestyle? Is it the way I speak or treat people? Is it external forces? This reflection is difficult and a life long process.

The desire to be free is very strong and it would be great if we could do anything we want at any time with no one else telling us what to do. However, living in a society, we cannot be absolutely free. We have rules and guidelines to follow otherwise chaos will ensue. We also seek freedom in religion, philosophy, ethics, morals, literature, speech and publication. The First Amendment gives us the right to say what we want. Others around the world are not so fortunate. Their government restricts and oppresses speech. The desire to speak though is powerful. Look at the mini uproar in Iran several months ago. The protesters went to the internet to get their messages out. And if you watched the news, the demonstrator's signs were in English, not Persian. This was to help get our support in helping the Iranian people be able to get their right to freely speak, through government and worldwide pressure.

The desire to live in a utopia is strong. We want to live peacefully and not be bothered by other people, crime and misunderstanding. Through developments in the constitution, economy, politics and law enforcement, utopia is just a bit closer. We are all still striving to make this community and the world a better place to live in harmony. Some people went ahead and created their own communities or communes, to be able to live how they wished. Some were successful, many more failed after several years. Modern vs. traditional societies. There are pluses and minuses for both sides. Maybe the Middle Way is the best way.

The purpose of living in this world is to fulfill these four desires. It is important to realize that we are striving to meet these goals in our daily lives. We are concerned about

our health and hygiene. If we are in pain, we go to the doctor to make us better or turn to alternative sources to help decrease the pain. We do as we please and want to live peacefully. We must also be conscious of how we tackle each of the four desires. There is an easy path for all of these, but more likely than not, not the correct path. We are here to learn a lesson due to our past karma. We need to change that karma so we do not repeat it in our future lives.

So the best place to start is to sincerely repent and chant the Odaimoku. By chanting, we can erase our bad karma and help us live better lives. The calmness will help bring about insight which will guide us through each of these desires.