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Desires and Wants

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Desires and Wants

When desires and wants are thought of as having the same meaning, we will have difficulty answering a question such as: "What do you really desire in life?" We could probably draw up a list of personal qualities and material things that we want, and perhaps distinguish between those that are essential and those that are not. But our desires are often less well known to us, and we might think of them in the limited context of romantic novels, where desire is used as a word indicating mere emotions. Desires are a deep, but calm and peaceful force within us, powerfully affecting our decisions and actions.

Desires are not one-time and forever concepts or rules, but are the present inner articulation for ourselves of the major attractions we have towards fulfillment in our lives. Desires run deeper than wants, which can in their turn be strongly influenced by immediate direct appeal of our senses. We can live quite well without many of the things we want, but life has little meaning if we are not actively pursuing our life desires.

Our deepest desires are of great importance for directing our lives in this direction rather than that. If, for example, we want to be recognized by others as a valuable, worthy person, we might decide to "show off" one or other of our skills, talents, or abilities. But, to take the example to a deeper level of desire, we might also be aware that a more important value to us than being recognized is to be honest and authentic, and so we might spontaneously reveal something of ourselves without making any attempt at "looking good."

We are usually able to easily identify at least some of our wants, but recognizing and articulating even one or two of our desires can take conscious efforts on our part. If we reflect on where our thoughts and feelings come together when we attempt to answer a question such as "what do I most earnestly desire," we will move forward in identifying the sources of our best energy and in obtaining a sense of direction in life. In the progression of reflection, consideration, and prayer while we seek to more clearly identify our deepest desires, we will learn much that is positive about ourselves, even if disconcertingly new.

We discover, recognize, or bring to consciousness our desires, not by the exclusive use of reasoning and thinking. Only by attending to how we feel about what we think, are we able to avoid getting lost in mere wishes and in issues that do not sustain us or motivate us. Desires are of both heart and mind, and are fundamentally spiritual.

Some people speak of “following their dreams” as a way of talking about their operative desires, indicating that intuition and inspiration are as much a part of our awareness of desires as are linear searches in our souls. Literal dreams, that come to us in sleep, sometimes reveal to us desires that we had not yet been able to articulate in our waking hours.

If we wonder how our deepest desires originate within us, the prime suspect should be God, always inviting us towards fulfillment of our unique personhood, but never forcing us to live from desires rather than wants.