

Essential Spirituality by Roger Walsh
**Practice #1: Transform Your Motivation: Reduce Craving and Find Your Soul's
Desire**
Chapters 5, 6, 7, 8, 9

OVERVIEW of PRACTICE #1

Transform your motivation: Reduce craving and find your soul's desire

Keywords: desire, craving, attachment

Humans have many "wants," "desires," and "cravings." Many times, these are for things that do not bring authentic happiness and deep meaning in life. The first practice consists in the effort to reduce and eliminate "lower" desires. It then continues to enable one to search for one's deeper, nobler and higher desires—the ones that bring us genuine meaning and authentic happiness.

Sample Exercises: Frustrate an addiction; Recognize pain as feedback; Dedicate an activity to a higher purpose

1. The Secret of Happiness (Chapter 5, Page 31)

Summary:

Spiritual practices are rewarding because they not only make us happier, but ultimately open the door to bliss, a type of happiness that is infinitely more profound and satisfying than any other usual fleeting pleasures.

The first practice is about how to change our motivations to know happiness and bliss.

Key Points from Chapter 5:

1.1 Mistaken ideas about what brings happiness (Page 32)

- Society and media want you to think that it is possessions that bring true happiness, when this is not the case
- All great religions on the other hand have a crucial fact: no outside sensation or possession can ever give us a full or lasting satisfaction.
- Obsession with wealth distracts from what is truly important in life

1.2 The science of satisfaction (Page 33)

- We live in a time in human history where we have access to many resources, but according to psychologist David Myers, it only makes us a 'little bit' happier

- More and more money and possessions do not necessarily bring more and more happiness.

1.3 A balanced life (Page 34)

- Pleasures of life are not inherently bad and you can enjoy them
- Many of the monotheistic religions refer to the pleasures of life as gifts from God
- The fatal mistake is believing that the pleasures of life are the best or only source of joy
- It is important to have a comprehensive, balanced view – a philosophy of life – that recognizes and honors the appropriate pleasures and accords each an appropriate place in life

1.4 The four aims of life (Page 34)

- Hinduism acknowledges four major aims of life: *artha*, *kama*, *dharma*, and *moksha*
 - *Artha* is the acquisition of material possessions and of all the things necessary for a comfortable and contributory life.
 - *Kama* is sensual pleasure and love
 - *Dharma* is a word rich with meaning but in its essence referring to the broad range of moral and religious duties
 - *Moksha*, provides the context and balance for the first three and gives profundity to Hindu philosophy and life. *Moksha* is spiritual release, enlightenment, or liberation, and is the ultimate goal

1.5 The curse of craving (Page 35)

- All great religions regard craving as a major cause of human suffering
- The great religions have long pointed out that we can become attached, even addicted, to practically anything: money, power, fame, sex, status, beliefs, food, clothes, self-image-the list is virtually endless.

1.6 The Four Noble Truths (Page 37)

- These are the discoveries of the Buddha which form the very heart of Buddhism
 - 1) Life is imbued with difficulties and suffering.
 - 2) The cause of suffering is attachment.
 - 3) Freedom from attachment brings freedom from suffering.
 - 4) Freedom from attachment and suffering can come from practicing the Eight-Fold Path, which centers on ethics, wisdom, and meditation.

1.7 Strategies for handling attachments (Page 39)

- Strategy 1: Try to satisfy attachments
 - Such as: eat, own, copulate, or consume as much as possible.
 - Whatever we crave, we try to get. With this strategy we attempt to fill our sense of internal deficiency with external stimulation: with pleasant sensations, more possessions, and greater power
 - One eventually realizes *experientially* that these substitutes will never satisfy
- Strategy 2: Change your mind
 - Change your mind about what you think you need
 - Happiness lies not in feeding and fueling our attachments, but in reducing and relinquishing them.

- Summarized in the Buddha's third noble truth

2. Exercises to Reduce Craving (Chapter 6, Page 42)

Summary:

Reducing craving is rewarding but also demanding. Reducing attachments is usually a long-term process that takes more than a single exercise, or even several exercises. However, when specific exercises are combined with consistent spiritual practice, attachments gradually weaken over time.

Key Points from Chapter 6:

2.1 Exercise 1: Recognize pain as feedback (Page 42)

- Psychological and spiritual sorrows are rooted in attachments.
- Sorrows then become valuable feedback because mental pain is like physical pain.
- Recognize attachments to release them.
- Think of some situation in your life that feels painful or the next time you feel mental pain--whether it be fear, anger, jealousy, or anything else--stop what you are doing and look for the attachment that underlies it
- Recognizing attachment gives us the choice, do you cling and suffer? Or do you relinquish the attachment?

2.2 Exercise 2: Examine the Experience of Craving (Page 43)

- Spiritual traditions recommend deliberately examining the sensation of craving itself.
- When you next notice your-self captured by a craving, take the opportunity to analyze it carefully and to identify the components of the experience. Stop whatever you are doing. Then carefully explore the experience. See if you can identify the underlying emotions, body sensations, thoughts, feelings, and tensions.
- Awareness can weaken attachments and cravings.

2.3 Exercise 3: Reflect on the costs of craving (Page 44)

- Reflection means pondering or thinking about an issue or experience in order to understand it and yourself better.
- It is a tool for developing wisdom
- Begin by thinking about an attachment that is running your life
- Then consider all the time and energy that go into acquiring it. Reflect on the effort and money that you sacrifice
- Recall the painful emotions that accompany it, such as anger at people who stand in your way, depression when you feel hopeless about getting what you crave and worry about losing it once you have it.
- Simply allow these costs and any accompanying insights to come into awareness
- The goal of this exercise is to understand, not judge or condemn

2.4 Exercise 4: Recognize underlying thoughts and beliefs. (Page 45)

- Beneath the emotions and sensations that accompany addictions lurk destructive thoughts and beliefs.
- Identifying these thoughts helps in overcoming addiction.
- When we recognize thoughts like, “I need to have something to be happy.” They lose their grip on us.
- Once you recognize you are being run by an attachment, stop whatever you are doing. Take a moment to relax and breathe deeply.
- Then take several minutes to see what you are telling yourself about your attachment.
- Then, begin to recognize that the thoughts and beliefs that perpetuate our attachments are ridiculous, need not be believed. They certainly don't have to be obeyed, and can be replaced with healthier ones.

2.5 Exercise 5: Indulge an attachment **(Page 47)**

- When indulgence is used occasionally and skillfully, with careful awareness and in the context of a spiritual practice, it can sometimes be very valuable.
- Mindfully indulging or frustrating an attachment offers an opportunity to learn a great deal about it.
- The key to success in this, and many other spiritual exercises, is to be as aware as you can of your experience while you indulge.
- Cravings can fill the mind with fantasies, overwhelm good judgment, and consume enormous amounts of time and energy. When you indulge them, it may prove nowhere near as satisfying as imagined.

2.6 Exercise 6: Frustrate an addiction **(Page 49)**

- Choose something you are attached to—perhaps cigarettes, certain foods, or television—and decide to go without one for a specific time period, such as a day.
- During the exercise, bring as much awareness to your experience as possible, observe the sensations
- Many people start this exercise feeling fearful about being deprived but are pleasantly surprised to find that they manage better than expected.
- The exercise not only helps understand and weaken addictions but can also strengthen willpower and self-esteem.

3. Find Your Soul’s Desire: Redirect Motivation (Chapter 7, Page 51)

Summary:

People worry that relinquishing attachments will leave them apathetic or joyless. This is false. This belief comes from confusing desires with attachments. Desires are a necessary and natural part of life; attachments are an unnecessary source of suffering. Since they are different, desires remain when attachments are relinquished. When you relinquish attachments, you are left content and able to follow higher motivations.

Key Points from Chapter 7:

3.1 Higher Motives **(Page 52)**

- Without cravings more mature motives, which are healthier, more refined, and ultimately far more satisfying than the desires that usually preoccupy us.
- These are called “higher motives” or “meta motives”
- Cultivating these motives is a central goal of spiritual practice
- No matter what other desires we satisfy, as long as the yearning for enlightenment goes unfulfilled, we will suffer from divine homesickness
- If we do not honor and express our meta-motives, we may well stunt our growth and suffer from "meta-pathologies."
 - Including: a sense of meaninglessness and nihilism about life, an attitude of cynicism and distrust of others, a lack of values and guiding principles, a feeling of alienation from society, and hopelessness about the future.
- Not about giving up ordinary pleasures and pastimes, but the attachment to them.

4. Exercises to Redirect Desires (Chapter 8, Page 57)

Summary:

There are exercises and techniques to assist in the shifting the habits and redirect your heart and mind.

Key Points from Chapter 8:

4.1 Exercise 7: “Think long-term” – aka, Think from “the perspective of eternity” (Page 57)

- Find a quiet, comfortable place to sit where you won't be disturbed.
- Begin by taking a few minutes to breathe slowly and deeply. Allow yourself to relax more and more with each breath
- The ability to relax like this is a valuable skill for dealing with stress and tension of any kind
- Begin by thinking of a long period of time, perhaps a period of many years. Then think of a longer period of time. Then think of a still longer time. When you are ready, double the time. Then double it yet again. Now think of eternity.
- From this all-encompassing, eternal perspective, look back at your life and ponder the following questions:
 - What is really important in your life?
 - What really matters?
 - What would you be better off doing more of?
 - What would you be better off doing less of?
- Take a moment to see if there is any other vital information this eternal perspective can offer you.
- When you feel complete, open your eyes and bring your attention back to your environment. Write down any insights.

4.2 Exercise 8: dedicate an activity to a higher goal (Page 59)

- Taking a moment before an activity to choose our motive can transform the activity and ourselves.
- Select one activity to dedicate each time you do it.
- Choose an activity that you do regularly and would like to dedicate (it can be anything).

- Each time you begin or end the activity, simply pause to dedicate it.

4.3 Exercise 9: Discover your future self (Page 61)

- Begin by giving yourself time to relax.
- Imagine yourself as you would most like to be at some future time, perhaps a few years from now
- Imagine yourself living where you would most like to live and having done the things you most want to do.
- See yourself having achieved what you want, having learned what you want to learn, having made significant contributions to others, and having healed old relationships and established satisfying new ones.
- As you visualize your future self, look to see where you are and what type of environment you are in.
- Imagine being your future self and ask, "Of all the things I have done, what makes me most happy?" Allow a moment or two for an answer to arise from the wisdom in your mind and take time to savor and reflect on the answer.
- Then ask:
 - Of all the things that I have done, what makes me most satisfied?
 - What is the most valuable thing I have learned?
 - What is the best thing I have done to help other people?
 - What are my most satisfying relationships like?
- Once you have responses, then ask:
 - In order to achieve these goals, what strengths and capacities do I need to recognize in myself?
 - In order to achieve these goals, in what ways do I need to stop underestimating myself?
 - Finally, ask yourself: What could I do now to begin achieving these goals?

5. The Higher Reaches of Desire (Chapter 9, Page 65)

Summary:

As we mature, we seek people, things, and activities that nourish the soul. Spiritual practitioners realize that they can increasingly turn inward to contact their own feelings to see what they truly want and what will bring true satisfaction. Following "your bliss" is part of that, bliss is more than just pleasure as it is a taste of one's own spiritual nature.

Key points from Chapter 9

5.1 The delight of effortless being (Page 66)

- Reducing attachments and redirecting motives is a struggle, but also cumulative
- Transforming motivation by reducing craving and finding your soul's desire is an essential spiritual practice.
- Actions express happiness and the sacred instead of acting to find happiness or the sacred.
