

Ambition-

A Servant or Master?

*"Intelligence without ambition is
a bird without wings".*

- Salvador Dali

Every human being lives with ambition. Just think, what would life be without ambition? Ambition is the fuel which drives us towards our desired destination. Ambition is far beyond desire and is born when our desire meets the firm resolve. Ambition throws challenges. The bigger the ambition, the more roadblocks we must expect on the way.

Ambition, to me, is the 'spark within' which ignites the desire. It is a prime moving force which motivates us to work towards our goal. Ambition keeps us energized, excited & ebullient to attain our goal. However, the road to destination is not a bed of rose. You meet tough challenges on the way. Please keep in mind that our ambition has to overtake fear to make our lives worthwhile.

The words Goal and Ambition are frequently used interchangeably. But they are not the same. Let us understand the subtle difference.

A young school student has the ambition to become a doctor. Ambition creates a pathway for him to realize his dream. But more than just having a direction, he will need to work hard, show dedication & practice perseverance to become a doctor. Ambition is the path, whereas effort and perseverance are the vehicles to reach the goal. The goal is the destination.

Ambition is not what one 'would do' but what one 'does'. The stronger drive to fulfil the ambitions differentiates successful people from

others. As long as we are in control of our 'aims' and 'guiding principles' to realize our ambitions, as long as we are not causing harm to ourselves or others and as long as our means are pure – we are the MASTER of our aspirations.

Unfortunately, ambition often stretches into overambition. It is difficult to set a definition for an overambition. The trouble sets in when we become greedy and run after unrealistic desires. Still worse, we do not hesitate to resort to unethical, unfair, corrupt or selfish means to fulfil our aspirations. We get so much consumed that we suffer burnouts, stress and mental breakdowns. Our relationships with our dear ones get hit. I have witnessed tragic downfall of successful businessmen because of greed and overambition. This happens when we allow ourselves to become the servants of ambition.

Our ambition impacts others too. Mahatma Gandhiji's ambition was to get freedom for India. Adolf Hitler's ambition was to rule over the world. What a stark contrast in the approach - Nonviolence and empathy of Gandhiji vs merciless killing of thousands by Hitler. Napoleon Bonaparte explains very well: "Great Ambition is the passion of a great character. Those endowed with it may perform very good or very bad acts. All depends on the principals which direct them."

We need to learn a balancing act to be able to discriminate between ambition and overambition.

Alan Lightman quipped: "If a person holds no ambitions in this world, he suffers unknowingly. If a person holds ambitions, he suffers knowingly, but very slowly."

Let us explore further.

What could be the connection between ambition and devotion to God? If our ambition is only for fame, position, prestige or sensual pleasure, it will not leave any place for others or God in our minds. But it takes a different dimension if our ambition is to contribute to the world's well-being (like Mother Teresa's).

In chapter 3 of Bhagwat Geeta, Lord Krishna cautions us about unhealthy ambition.

आवृतं ज्ञानमेतेन ज्ञानिनो नित्यवैरिणा ।
कामरूपेण कौन्तेय दुष्पूरेणानलेन च ॥

(The knowledge of even the most discerning gets covered by this perpetual enemy in the form of insatiable desire, which is never satisfied and burns like fire.)

We must ensure that both, the means and end are pure and ethical.

It is up to us to take a call – whether we want to be the MASTER of our Ambition or a SLAVE!