



The Four Desires: Creating a Life of Purpose, Happiness, Prosperity, and Freedom

By Rod Stryker

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“Desire is here to stay. The challenge we all face, and which I intend to guide you through, is to learn how to take into account the full measure of who you are and use the positive force of all four of your soul’s desires to lead you to your best life.”

—Rod Stryker

According to ancient Yogic tradition, your soul has four distinct desires:

- The desire for purpose, the drive to become who you are meant to be
- The desire for the means (money, security, health) to prosper in this world
- The desire for pleasures like intimacy, beauty, and love
- The desire for spiritual fulfillment and lasting freedom

Learning to honor these four desires is the key to happiness, and to a complete and balanced life. But how can you discern what will truly satisfy your desires? How can you increase your capacity to achieve them? What if your desires seem to conflict with one another? Is it really possible to live a spiritual life while also wanting material pleasures and success?

For more than three decades, master teacher Rod Stryker has taught yoga in the context of its deepest philosophy. His course, called The Yoga of Fulfillment™, has helped thousands recognize their soul’s call to greatness and to achieve their dreams. Now, in this wise and richly practical book, he has distilled those broad teachings into a roadmap for becoming the person you were meant to be. It is filled with revealing true stories, provocative exercises, and practices for unlocking your inner guidance. And even if you’ve never done a yoga pose, you can follow this step-by-step process to:

- discover your soul’s unique purpose—the one you came into this world to fulfill.
- recognize the goal(s) you need to focus on at any given time and enliven your capacity to reach them.
- overcome self-defeating ideas and behavior.

- recruit your deepest energies and strengthen your resolve to meet any challenge.
- learn to live with joy at every stage of your growth.

The Four Desires is nothing less than a complete path toward living your best life possible—a life that is rich in meaning and in means, a life that attracts and emanates happiness, a life that is your unique gift to yourself and the world.

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Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #44981 in Books

- Brand: Delacorte Press
- Published on: 2011-07-26
- Released on: 2011-07-26
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.60" h x 1.00" w x 6.50" l, 1.32 pounds
- Binding: Hardcover
- 352 pages

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Editorial Review

Review

Praise for Rod Stryker and *The Four Desires*

"...Deftly outlines the essence of the human condition and explains how to work with our desires—instead of against them—to find long-lasting happiness in both the material and spiritual realm...Stryker serves as a marvelous guide, one who teaches us not only how to progress on the path, but also how to light our own way. His writing is engaging and even entertaining...*The Four Desires* will give you a road map for your spiritual journey—and for the ups and downs of everyday life, too." —*Yoga Journal*

"A compelling and inspiring guide to finding happiness in every aspect of life....a gateway to a new level of fulfillment." —*Yoga International*

"Rod Stryker's teachings have given me a whole new lens with which to see the world and my own potential; his teachings are sparks in a powder keg. My life has exploded with beauty, mystery and depth under his tutelage." —Jennifer Nettles, Grammy award winner, songwriter, lead singer, Sugarland

"*The Four Desires* is a provocative interactive workbook for living your best possible life. The end game here is to know your highest, most authentic self, and create a road map to living out your dreams. (Who wouldn't want that?) Stryker is a masterful guide, and the journey he creates is fun—and abundantly fruitful." —Kaitlin Quistgaard, editor-in-chief, *Yoga Journal*

"Rod Stryker is one of the truly bright lights of modern yoga. He connects to the sincere seeker's heart, while his straight forward scholarship emboldens the mind. *The Four Desires* is an outstanding book, advancing the integrity and luster of modern yoga." —John Friend, founder of Anusara yoga

"*The Four Desires* is a rare accomplishment: a book of valuable, profound wisdom that is easy to learn from, live by, and love. I will be carrying a dog-eared copy of it for years." —Mark Bryan, author of *The Artist's Way at Work*

"For decades, Rod has led yoga practitioners on the path of inner and outer fulfillment. *The Four Desires* offers practical and profound teachings from which people of all backgrounds can benefit. It is a treasure that is destined to become a classic." —Shiva Rea, creator of Prana Flow yoga

"Read *The Four Desires* slowly, savor its wisdom, and then do the exercises to help embody that wisdom. It will help you live your best life." —Erich Schiffmann, author of *YOGA: The Spirit and Practice of Moving Into Stillness*

"Profound enough for the advanced practitioner yet accessible to anyone looking for guidance on their journey, *The Four Desires* is filled with the wisdom and authority of Rod Stryker's years of practice, study, and teaching." —Sally Kempton, author of *Meditation for the Love of It*

"Anyone seeking inner healing and lasting happiness must read this book." —Pandit Rajmani Tigunait, chairman and spiritual head, Himalayan Institute

“Rod Stryker guides us to uncover the beauty, power, and purpose of our lives. This insight leads us to live more meaningfully and richly. This book is an incredible gift to have as both teacher and student, and I am excited to use it as a resource for my own continued growth and self-discovery.” —Seane Corn, yoga instructor, co-founder of Off the Mat, Into the World

About the Author

Rod Stryker is the founder of ParaYoga®. Widely considered one of the preeminent yoga and meditation teachers in the United States, he has taught for more than thirty years. A longtime resident and teacher in Los Angeles, he now lives in Colorado with his wife, Gina, and their four children, Jaden, Theo, Asha, and Atreya.

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chapter 1

The Power of Desire

Ten years before I met Dean, he was at the top of his career as a broadcast journalist. After more than a decade covering a variety of conflicts in the Middle East and Asia, he was now appearing nightly on network television. Just when it seemed that he had attained everything he had ever aspired to and spent his life working for, Dean's life as he knew it came to a devastating end. He had experienced various levels of excruciating pain for the past six years after suffering a fractured vertebra and declining surgery. But now he knew that something was terribly wrong. Rushed into emergency surgery, he woke from general anesthesia to a doctor standing over him, giving him the grave news that the operation had "failed" and that Dean would be "permanently disabled."

Unable to sit, barely able to walk, Dean returned to the States, literally and figuratively a broken man, his spirit as broken as his spine, his career over. Within months, he was little more than what he described as a man "pickled on painkillers."

Over the next couple of years, little changed-until his wife gave birth to their first child. His time celebrating Finn's birth was cut short, however. Dean's health, which had been deteriorating since the failed surgery, had taken a turn for the worse. Tests revealed a new, life-altering diagnosis: cancer. His prognosis was "a year or two to live." With his physical pain and mental torment more severe than ever, Dean's doses of prescription painkillers were increased and now included a morphine drip.

Months passed with Dean bedridden and in all but a hopeless state. Then, with less than a year to live, Dean had an epiphany. Lying in bed with his young son playing nearby, the nightmare of the past few years and the weight of dying suddenly came crushing down on him. He was overwhelmed by the realization that he was moving irreversibly toward fulfilling the doctors' prognosis; he and his son-the most precious thing in the world to him-would soon be separated forever.

Suddenly, as though breaking through the dark cloud that had been overshadowing his whole life the past few years, Dean saw himself through the eyes of his son. If nothing changed and he was to die, Finn's only memory of his father would be that of a man who had committed to nothing other than being a helpless victim. Dean realized that he had so succumbed to self-pity that his son had never seen his father do or be anything that Finn could look back on and be proud of. It was not Dean's fault that he broke his back or had cancer, but Finn had not seen him even try to make the best of the time he did have- that was Dean's responsibility. Someone somewhere in the world had it worse than he did, Dean realized, and someone somewhere was doing better than he was with far less.

Dean immediately made a resolution. He would change. There was no way to know if he would survive cancer or ever be an able-bodied father who could play baseball with his son, but he made a commitment nonetheless. For however many days he had left, he would be a living example to his son of how a man could, or in Dean's eyes should, live his life. He would face the circumstances in his life exactly as he would want Finn to face his own future challenges.

A few days later, Dean found himself doing yoga for the first time in a class that was being offered at his rehabilitation center. Within minutes, he knew he had, in his words, "found his path to healing." He had no way of knowing whether the healing would be spiritual and physical or just spiritual, but he sensed that it was the beginning of a new chapter in his life.

Driven by his resolve, Dean immersed himself in learning everything he could about well-being, spirituality, and cancer therapies and applying what he learned. He consumed books on diet and nutrition, yoga, spirituality, positive thinking, visualization, and meditation. He dramatically changed his lifestyle, inside and out. He willed himself to practice yoga and meditation for hours a day-in the beginning, crawling out of bed to get onto his yoga mat.

As the months passed, things began to change. Dean could sit up for ten, then twenty, then eventually sixty minutes at a time. Soon after that, he was able to walk to the kitchen. He cut back on his pain medication and eventually stopped it altogether. More victories came. Eventually he was able to drive. And then came the one change that meant more to him than any of the others: he was able to lift and hold his son. Miraculously, and to his doctors' amazement, Dean had healed his broken back. But his transformation didn't end there. A short time later, about the time he was supposed to be dead, Dean received a new diagnosis: he was "cancer-free."

Dean's story is extraordinary. A person can do all that he did (and more) and still not be cured of cancer or heal a broken back, but his is more than a story about beating the odds. It is an illustration of the power of desire coupled with the willingness to use every resource available to achieve a goal. It is a telling reminder of just how potent you can be in affecting your destiny. Viewed from a different perspective, Dean's story can also be seen as ordinary, in the sense that it portrays the very definition of what constitutes a human being, what in Sanskrit is called a kama yoni, which means "the species which has the privilege of performing actions and which thus can change the course of its destiny." By seizing his resolve and taking positive command of all the resources available to him, Dean was embodying the principle that defines us and sets us apart from all other species.

This idea was eloquently expressed by French essayist Charles Du Bos, who I believe conveyed the essence of all yogic teachings as well as the formula for achieving a truly fulfilled life when he wrote, "The important thing is this: to be able, at any moment, to sacrifice what we are for what we could become."

Take a moment to consider who you would be and how much better our world would be if more of us would "sacrifice what we are for what we could become."

Dean came to one of my Yoga of Fulfillment workshops after he had healed physically. Wanting a clearer understanding of what had transformed him, he was hoping to make use of the same power to overcome the current challenges in his life. Working with the processes of the Yoga of Fulfillment allowed Dean to see that having to face the prospect of imminent death, of being permanently separated from his son, had been the catalyst he needed to be willing to change his life. His intention to be "a living example" to his son for whatever time he had left altered the course of his destiny.

Dean's miracle-like accomplishments had everything to do with his willingness to sacrifice what he was in order to become what he could be. It began by him acknowledging his desire and finding a specific goal that he knew deep in his heart was absolutely worth achieving. Dean's overriding desire was to give his son a father he could love, respect, and perhaps even one day emulate. The Yoga of Fulfillment helped him realize that he had intuitively applied the principles that the ancient tradition teaches are key to achieving our goals. Once he learned the principles, he was able to apply them systematically to successfully meet the new challenges in his life.

Dean's intuitive unearthing of a singular and compelling purpose for his life combined with his all-consuming commitment to fulfilling it is a powerful illustration of a profound truth that was something of a credo for my first teacher, Mani. Drawing from an ancient scripture, he would constantly repeat, "A person can achieve almost anything, can surmount any difficulties, if they can harness their power."

The good news is that you don't need to be facing life-and-death circumstances, as Dean was, to harness this power. As Mani reminded me time and time again, you have extraordinary power to accomplish extraordinary things-enough to "achieve almost anything" and "surmount any difficulties"-if you are willing to formulate goals and learn how to direct your innate power toward achieving them. The foundation for achieving any and all that you aspire to is the power of desire.

Desire Is Everything and Everywhere

Desire touches everything in the natural world. It is easy to lose sight of just how powerful, pervasive, and integral desire is to the world in which you and I live. If not for a spark between your biological father's sperm and biological mother's egg, you wouldn't exist. Thanks to one particularly desirous sperm, you are in your present form, reading these words. Congratulations. You are, in fact, the winner of an intense competition between millions of other microscopic sperm desirous of impregnating an egg.

At your birth, more than your mother's desire was necessary to bring you into the world. If you were born naturally, you actively engaged in a most intense sequence of what are unmistakably willful and desirous contortions to pass through your mother's birth canal. And just in case the sum of your and your mother's desires had not been enough to bring you into the world safely, it would have been necessary to rely on the desire of doctors and other caregivers to intervene. "Man is verily formed of desire," the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad reminds us.

Desire's role didn't end when you came into the world. Desire compelled you to lift your head and then to roll over and later to stand; once you were able to stand, desire compelled you to walk, then to run. Thanks to desire, you sought to develop the skill of language, in large part so you could more clearly ask for-if not insist on-the things you wanted as well as to participate with those around you. Speaking, and later writing, provided you more freedom and capacity to pursue your desires in life. You are who and what you are because of desire.

God of the Old Testament had desires. His desires were the first sparks that created light and life, day and night, heaven and earth, and the stars. Before any of them existed, according to the Judeo-Christian tradition, each was a flicker of desire in the eye of the Almighty. The same concept is found in the spiritual traditions of India. The Yajur Veda, for example, one of the four original Vedic texts, tells us that divine desire, or kama, created the world. Without this desire, the world could not exist.

The Vedas teach that desire is ever-present. It is with you at every step and with every breath you take. Desire precedes your every action, since before you can do, you first have to want. I can't lift my arm, reach

for a drink of water, or do anything else without first wanting to; thus every action you have done or will do—including those that are sparked by your subconscious—is preceded by a desire.

Desire is also the seed of every thought. The tradition teaches that before you can have a thought, you first have to have a desire. Imagine how many thoughts you have had in your lifetime and you'll begin to have an idea how many desires you have had.

"As long as one has a body, one cannot renounce action altogether," says the Bhagavad Gita. Thus, for all practical purposes, as long as you are acting, thinking, or speaking—as long as you are alive—there is no end to desire.

Desire, the same thing that possessed the part of you that at one time was the sperm to fertilize the other part of you that was the egg, is the same thing that compels your lungs to breathe, your heart to beat, your kidneys to function, your body, in all its complexity, to work as an integrated whole. This same spark also fuels your desire for spiritual and lasting fulfillment and motivates you to seek fulfillment in every facet of life.

To paraphrase T. K. V. Desikachar, a renowned author and widely considered a leading voice for the ancient tradition of yoga, the first step in yoga is the desire to be better. Alain Daniélou, a highly respected authority on Vedic wisdom, in his book *Virtue, Success, Pleasure, and Liberation*, cites Madhavacharya: "On the physical, as on the intellectual and spiritual plane, all creation, all invention, all imagination is the fruit of desire."

Even the Buddha, who, it is fair to say, transcended desire, preached what he called the Middle Way or Middle Path, which is the path, according to the Buddha, that led to the state of enlightenment. He described it as the balance between the extremes of sensual indulgence and total renunciation. It is also worth noting that a deep and profound aspiration was what moved the Buddha to pursue and eventually achieve enlightenment. In other words, without a highly evolved desire to overcome suffering and the pain of impermanence, he would not have achieved sublime exaltation; he would not have been moved to search for a way to end his own suffering and then, after he achieved it, to alleviate it in those he saw around him.

Desire is here to stay. The challenge we all face, and which I intend to guide you through, is to learn how to take into account the full measure of who you are and use the positive force of all four of your soul's desires—dharma, the desire to become who you were meant to be; artha, the desire for the means to help you fulfill your dharma; kama, the desire for pleasure of all kinds; and moksha, the desire for freedom and a connection to the Eternal—to lead you to your best life.

chapter 2

Two Kinds of Fulfillment

The Oxford American Dictionary defines fulfillment as "satisfaction or happiness as a result of fully developing one's abilities or character," and as "the achievement of something desired, promised, or predicted." It's worth noting that both aspects of this definition are attainment-oriented, something you feel whenever you satisfy a want or desire, or reach a goal.

You first experienced this kind of fulfillment early in life when, for example, you were provided with milk in response to your cries. This kind of fulfillment continued, evolving into the elation you probably felt on Christmas morning if the presents you hoped for were under the tree, the pride of receiving the merit badge

you aspired to as a Boy or Girl Scout, the pleasure of buying something you really wanted, the excitement of your first kiss or your first sexual experience, the high of a promotion at work, the thrill of your stocks going up, the joy of discovering that someone you are attracted to feels the same way about you. The more you've desired something, the longer you've waited for it, the more of this kind of fulfillment you are likely to experience when it's finally yours. At least for a while.

Users Review

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