

## APARIGRAHA: FREEDOM FROM GREED

By Robert Butera, e-RYT, M.Div., Ph.D.

*What does it take to sustain a meditation practice? As much as we may want the benefits meditation brings, we inevitably face the resistance of our ingrained habits and thoughts. Bob Butera says that the main reason people struggle with meditation is directly related to Yoga's time-honored precepts for living well. In this article, excerpted from his book, Meditation for Your Life, he explores the precept of aparigraha and how to cultivate any and all of the yamas and niyamas.*

The amount of thought distractions generated by human desires relates to hundreds of situations in your daily life in terms of material items, the usage of possessions serves us in the moment. However, the amount of time cleaning, caring, buying, paying off, locking, attaching to, dreaming about and remembering those same possessions creates an inordinate number of thought disturbances. This is known as being “possessed by possessions” or as “possessive possessions.” In other words, the human mind may be overly concerned with material items.

Meditation theory teaches that the human mind lacks stability. The slightest event can wreak havoc on emotions and thoughts. Because change is one of nature's constants, the mind is constantly pushed in many directions. The change from morning to night is normal; no one has an emotional crisis when the sun sets. In our wisdom, we understand that the sun sets each evening and that time is moving perpetually.

The psyche starts to disconnect from wisdom when our earthly possessions change like the night to day. Look around your home and recognize that all—yes, a hundred percent—of the items in the room have changed in the past year. Everything is a year older; even your hundred-year-old desk is now one year creakier. The mind does not accept that every possession is changing, so we become mired in attachments to things remaining constant. Hence we worry as our concerns lead to a state of possession by possessions.

Due to the power of the mind's desire to possess things, many monastic traditions include a vow of poverty. Poverty could be defined as “non-possessiveness of material items.” This vow serves as a reminder that the material world is in fact temporal and that a more divine consciousness exists.

A secondary and more insidious type of thought generated by the desire for things is the fantasy or dream of having something that you do not yet own. Now the irony in this illusion is that ownership of material items is impossible in the first place. So, if I follow the American dream of having my own home, car and all those technological devices, then my dream is a double illusion. First of all, dreaming disregards the present joy that exists right now. And secondly, ownership is impossible. This may sound strange and is not the way our culture operates, but stay with the discussion just a little longer.

Dreaming of future happiness based on having a thing causes us to forget that happiness is derived from a spiritual perspective that exists in the here and now. Meditating quietly brings inner peace. Just ask any billionaire if he or she is happy and they will say that money cannot bring you happiness; and recall that the happiest billionaires give away the majority of their money to charity.

Ownership is a human concept to keep material items organized in human society. In order to make sure that each person reaches work on time, our society assigns a car to individuals by offering ownership. This permits the car owner to wash, register, maintain and drive the car. In reality, owning a car means caring for a car. The owner of the car pays for the luxury of quick travel with money and time. Think of your possessions as an extended family that you care for. See how much thought, time, energy and money goes into living the materially wealthy life. If you are not wealthy enough to have a butler, driver, maid, cook and personal attendant, imagine the amount of time involved in training, consoling, disciplining and hiring new employees demands—you might even need a manager for all of the caretakers who oversee all of your possessions!

### Exercise 1: Releasing Possession's Possession of Your Mind

1. Write down a list of your major possessions.
2. Notice which of these possessions are necessary and which are luxury items. Keep in mind that almost all possessions are a luxury, such as a car, TV, hot water, running water, phone . . . you get the idea. Non-luxury possessions are food, clothing, housing and things essential to basic survival.
3. Examine each possession in cost, time, cleaning, security and other concerns. For example: An automobile costs some amount. I clean it twice a month. I get a repair and oil change four times a year. I pay insurance. I take the time to lock it and have concerns for theft. I feel some emotion when it breaks down. See where this is going?
4. As a reality check, devise a new way of relating to your temporary possessions. Examine if you should buy more or let go of possessions, or downgrade to less expensive versions. Remember that the possession is not really yours and that you are only caring for the temporary item.
5. Experience peace of mind on the level of possessions.

**Exercise 2:** Removing Happiness from Dreaming of Future Possessions

1. Make a list of things that you want in your future. Things like a new home, car, boat, a secure early retirement plan or a fancy wedding are all quite common and perfect for this exercise.
2. Notice how the capitalistic culture promotes materialism down to lectures given by popular gurus on achieving material wealth. Understand how these thoughts were ingrained in your thinking.
3. Rewrite your goals with “peace of mind” at the top followed by other rational plans, and that further material goals must fall in line with the “peace of mind” step.
4. Sit quietly with a sense of freedom from the “happiness” of material items.

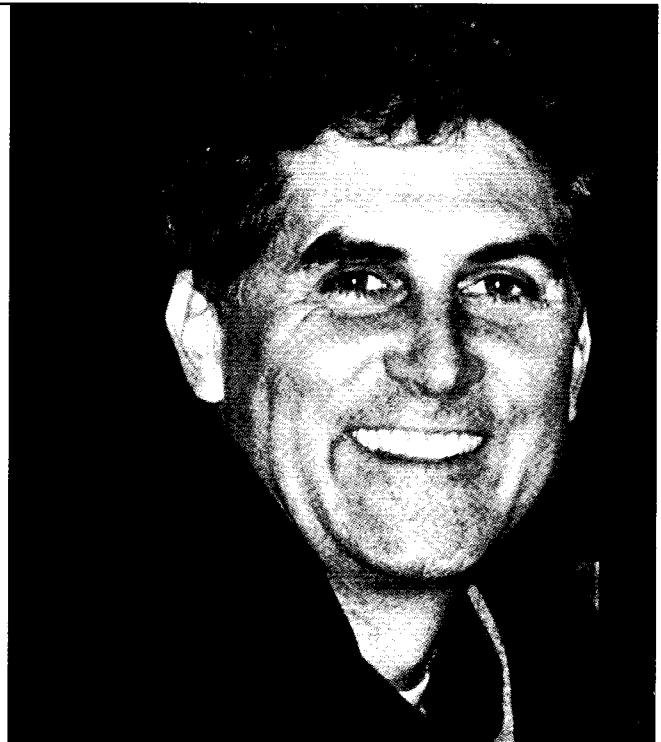
When the above exercise reaches a deep level in the consciousness and the attachment for desires lessens, moments of silence may occur. While there may be possessions around, when the attachment to these possessions drops away, silence prevails. These items may be cleaned after meditation practice. Cultivation of mind takes precedence over the rush of materialism. The silence offers no outward sign of success, and there are no inward fireworks or applause. There is silence.

**Exercise 3:** Cultivating Virtue (Use this exercise to cultivate any of the *yamas* or *niyamas*.)

Determine one virtue that holds power for you and simply hold that virtue in your mind. Compassion is a good example, however virtues akin to love, joy, acceptance, peace, faith and others work just as well depending on your situation. This practice holds the virtue in the mind and lets that virtue be the lens for an interpretation of a situation that occurs in your mind. View your own thoughts in terms of virtue. Practice this exercise briefly in the morning as a reminder to handle daily events with this truthful approach. In the evening, review events of the day from this truth lens and reframe any disturbing situations.

If a persistent thought keeps appearing in your meditation, begin to work with the roots of that thought in a journal or in a method that helps you gain a deeper understanding of the unconscious thought or feeling. As you make progress with these disturbances, you will be able to reengage the mind quieting. Without facing these issues, meditation can turn into a self-defense mechanism.

1. Notice your first reaction to a situation. Be careful to learn the roots of your reaction versus simply replacing the reaction with a positive.
2. Reflect on alternate responses to the situation through the lens of your chosen virtue.



*Dr. Robert Butera*

3. Hold onto the virtue each time that you reflect on that situation.
4. Remember that these steps are for your internal mind's peacefulness. You then determine your actions as you see fit for the situation. You may still reprimand a child, but you would express boundaries or punishments with love. You may still discuss an unjust situation with a coworker, only you will do so with compassion.

**Exercise 4:** Reflection Meditation or Journaling

Observe life from a spiritually based perspective akin to compassion or your virtue of choice. Treat your own internal thoughts in the same manner and notice how you may remain unaffected by a stressful life situation while meditating without ignoring that situation. Try to practice at least a few minutes twice per day, even if one of the sessions is only for a few minutes.

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