

1. Fire

*The Embers.
Faint they may become
Yet always there.*

*A gateway are the Embers.
Stoke, and coax them
Gently, but resolutely.*

*At times, by pure desire.
At others, by lack thereof.
A gateway are the Embers
To the Fire of the Soul.*

*When found
Be consumed only
By the Pure Fire.*

*Of its Raging Twin
Beware.*

Commentary

Fire reflects desire. In many cultures and teachings, though perhaps most prominently, in the Yoga idea of *Chakras*¹, the fire element is the symbol of the navel chakra. The seat of desire. Easy to see when one considers the lure of food and how it relates to the stomach!

An ambition that is too *fery* ends up burning even what is sought after. The lack of happiness one finds at the end of a journey, having burnt everything along the way to get there, is typical in current society.

On the other hand, a lack of drive is also commonplace. People who have no desire to achieve anything, either physical, or spiritual floating about aimlessly through.

In this universe of duals, desire must be counterbalanced by curbing excessive desires. To focus on desires that matter. Such self-control begets a will of Fire.

Fulfilment of Desires: Physical and Spiritual

The one management theory that has stuck with the author is Maslow's Hierachy of Needs. See Fig. 1.1.

The pyramid agrees with ancient ideas of fulfilment — that one must satisfy body, mind, and spirit.

¹ Simplifying: there are 7 major energy vortices, called *chakras* — 'wheel' in sanskrit — on the spirit body, and many smaller ones which act as a gateway to taking in and releasing energy, like pores on the skin, regulating many psychospiritual and physical functions of the body. See <http://healing.about.com/cs/chakras/a/learnchakras.htm>, for example.

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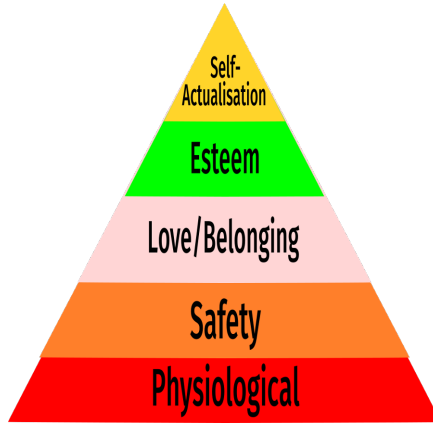


Figure 1.1.: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

When one's stomach is hungry, one can't think beyond this primal need to survive, but slowly as base desires for survival are satisfied, inevitably we seek more. Unfortunately, this need is translated, by some, to seek more physical fulfilments rather than going deeper into oneself!

While the representation shows a hierarchy, spiritual progress is made *in parallel* to worldly progress, and in the most difficult of situations — indeed, major progress is made in difficult situations.

Arguably, the world is a vehicle for spiritual progress, for otherwise, one has no gauge to measure spiritual progress against. Can one claim to have learned patience if one is constantly blowing up at circumstances?

Except, perhaps, in cases where one's worldly endeavours are actively destructive to society — and perhaps it is then time to change

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jobs! — there is no major conflict in seeking both spiritual and physical fulfilment. One finds that seeking the spiritual tends to affect one's worldly behaviour anyhow.

Breaking Patterns of Desires

Practices such as fasting, or more generally, applying constraints for a fixed amount of time, have many physical and spiritual benefits. It is the most straightforward approach of measuring willpower, of curbing desires.

If one is a big foodie, constraining food will be the challenge. If one is a big movie person, reduce going to the movies or watching television for a fixed period.

This is the core idea behind such *spiritual tools* — to provide an *alternative* view or feeling, to break a pattern, by, for a pre-determined period of time, stopping what one does almost automatically.

Finally, while the author focuses on desires, such practices have benefits far beyond just curbing desires. At the very least, one starts to think about how else to apply the time now available.