

The Greed Syndrome

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Starting with a case study, this article explores the topic of greed. Greed is looked at from various angles, highlighting the mixed emotions it evokes. Although hailed as a motor of economic growth and human progress, at the same time--especially when it is uncontrolled--greed is a major cause of economic crises (as recent history has amply demonstrated). Attention is given to the personal implications of greed. Unfettered greed is compared to an addiction, like drugs, sex, food or gambling. Furthermore, as greed encourages people to only focus on what's important to them—at the expense of social conventions and values--it can be associated with dysfunctional patterns such as megalomania, callousness, arrogance, and unethical and immoral behavior. Greed may even lead to criminal activities that harm others. From an evolutionary point of view, greed can be seen as an extension of the survival instinct. Like animals, Homo sapiens is concerned with securing enough resources to overcome difficult times. Although greed may have a neurological basis (referring to the “high” that greedy people experience in their monomaniacal pursuit of wealth), from a psychodynamic perspective its origins are often found in faulty parenting. Traumatic beginnings at the developmental stage, such as the untimely death of a parent, parental discord, divorce or other difficult experiences, can all contribute to the genesis of greed. Alternatively, its origins may be found in parental neglect. In other cases, caregivers have the financial resources to provide for the developing infant but use the giving of “things” as a substitute for care and nurturing. In these dysfunctional forms of caregiving, the child is left feeling that he or she is not good enough--that something is missing. To compensate for this psychological void, some children (and later as adults) become fixated with the acquisition game, seeking comfort by constantly obtaining more. Acquiring wealth offers a way to eliminate feelings of insecurity and of keeping score; it becomes the only thing worth living for. But despite their pursuit of wealth, there is never going to be enough. Acquiring more becomes an end in itself. From the point of view of personality structure, when observing greedy people we often see a cocktail of different character types: a sprinkling of the antisocial personality and the narcissist, with some obsessive-compulsive elements thrown in for good measure. In addition, this article offers advice on how to recognize the signs that we are dealing with greedy people, as well as various suggestions on how to help them overcome their compulsion.

Keywords: Greed; Addiction; Deficit; Dysfunctional Parenting; Neurological; Acquisitiveness; Evolutionary; Psychodynamic; Narcissistic; Anti-social; Obsessive; Symptomology

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The covetous man is always in want.
--Horace

Greed is a bottomless pit which exhausts the person in an endless effort to satisfy the need without ever reaching satisfaction.

--Erich Fromm

Greed has been with human beings forever. We have a number of things in our species that you would call 'the dark side,' and greed is one of them. If you don't put certain structures in place or restrictions on those parts of our being that come from that dark place, then it gets out of control.

--Michael Moore

Introduction: the tale of Pavel

Pavel felt that he had had a good day. At a recent board meeting of the Raler Company, he had managed to push through a salary and bonus packet worth \$20 million. He was quite pleased with the fact that his CEO-to-worker pay ratio stood now at four hundred. Although it was not the highest amongst the CEOs in the Fortune 500, he wasn't doing too badly. But in spite of his formidable pay packet, it did grate on him that leaders in other listed companies were making more than he did.

However, he had other irons in the fire. His purchase of the most advanced Gulfstream corporate jet made him feel better--at least for the moment. What also put him in a better mood was his spending spree buying artwork for the company, although he hadn't made it clear to the dealer who was the real owner. Also, he derived a modicum of pleasure from getting Raler to pay for his \$10 million penthouse in New York (along with \$4 million in renovations and \$3 million in furnishings). His son's \$2 million birthday party (presented as a PR event for the company) was seen as an additional perk. The \$6 million bonus Pavel had given himself to offset an old loan made by the company was yet another benefit that he felt came with the job. (In a generous moment, he had convinced the board to introduce a loan forgiveness program that benefited a number of other key executives.) Adding to these various financial windfalls was his expense account. The way he had set it up gave him unlimited opportunities to charge for many personal items, including a yacht rental of \$20,000 last summer. To Pavel, luxuries had become necessities.

He did wonder, however, given the considerable time he put into his work, whether he deserved more. After all, wasn't he the one that had put Raler in such good shape? Wasn't he the mover and shaker of whatever happened in the company? In reflecting on his perceived contribution, he felt some disquiet as to whether he was being treated fairly--financially. Heightening his sense of dissatisfaction was the fact that he still wasn't a member of the billion-dollar club. How, he wondered, could he ever reach that milestone. What could he do to acquire even more wealth?

Acquiring wealth was one thing, but holding on to his money was another matter. Giving wealth away was not Pavel's thing – he deserved to hold on to what he had. It was up to other wealthier people to dabble in charitable activities. As a matter of principle he avoided charitable events to which he was invited like the plague. His preoccupation was with having more, not less, although strangely enough, whatever he earned it never felt sufficient.

Death put an end to that sense of never having enough. In the midst of a heated discussion about a takeover bid, from which he stood to make a real financial killing, Pavel had a stroke from which he did not recover. Acquiring more wealth had, at last, become immaterial. At the funeral, some whispered that his single-minded pursuit of money must have killed him. For Pavel, life without money had seemed incomplete, but ultimately money without life was pointless.

Greed and its vicissitudes

Pavel exemplified the greed and excesses that are the hallmark of many executives. The behavior he personified is nothing new; greed has been a subject of debate for as long as the acquisition of wealth and power has been an integral driver of human nature. It has characterized human endeavor for as long as our species has been on earth (Goldberg, 1994; Newhauser, 2000; Balot, 2001; Gigantes, 2002; Callahan, 2004; Wang, 2011; Tickle, 2004; Oka and Kuijt, 2014). The financial sector, in particular, is no slouch in this regard. For obvious reasons, greedy people are attracted to this area of business. Who can forget the

infamous Gordon Gekko, protagonist of the film *Wall Street*, declaring: “Greed, for lack of a better word, is good. Greed is right, greed works. Greed clarifies, cuts through, and captures the essence of the evolutionary spirit. Greed, in all its forms; greed for life, for money, for love, knowledge, has marked the upward surge of mankind.” But whatever the arguments made by Hollywood’s *Wall Street* impersonators, greed isn’t good for everyone (Melleuish, 2009; Sutherland, 2014). As many have learned the hard way, it can have devastating personal and societal consequences.

Throughout history, greed has had a mixed press. Philosophers still struggle with the notion of how much greed society will tolerate. While it has been hailed as a motor of economic growth and human progress, uncontrolled greed has been the cause of much misery, as recent economic history has dramatically illustrated (Brummer, 2014; Cassidy, 2002; Leveine, 2005; Hamilton and Micklethwait, 2006). What benefits the few doesn’t necessarily benefit all. When executives receive excessive compensation, it’s far from clear that it benefits society as a whole.

Despite this, our culture places a high value on materialism, and, by extension, greed. Thus notwithstanding greed’s darker side, we idolize people who drive expensive cars, possess yachts and private planes, wear designer fashions and live in luxurious homes. Ironically, this doesn’t mean that we are prepared to discuss the topic of greed--not comfortably at least—to judge from a review of the literature. It’s fair to say that greed is the price we pay for an economic system based on the pursuit of self-interest.

Should we simply assume that greed is an inevitable part of society? Must we accept the idea that society couldn't function without greed? Do attributes such as ambition and having a solid work ethic neutralize the darker side of greed? The jury is still out. What is clear, however, is that the need to acquire accentuates individualism, has a negative impact on social cohesion, and removes the boundaries of what can be called ethical behavior.

It is said that "fraud can be viewed as the daughter of greed", and indeed many business practices and enterprises are based on the principle that the one person's advantage involves disadvantaging someone else. As a rule, there is no punishment for such behavior, even though it may be driven by malicious intent (Belk, 1985; Kasser, 2002; Lammers and Stapel, 2009). Hence the question is whether an economic engine fueled by self-interest and the profit motive can be expected to be fundamentally fair and morally just. Isn't there always a danger that greedy people only focus on their own fulfillment, while ignoring social norms and values? Maybe we should accept the fact that greed can *do* good, but not that it *is* good. Perhaps it is even fairer to say that limitless greed is not only bad economics, but also negatively affects a person's mental health.

From a personal point of view, we could say that people obsessed by greed are likely to lose out on the richness of life. Unable to confine their needs to what is really important in the art of living, their only concern is to accumulate and hoard as much as possible at the cost of everything else. To quote Horace, "He who is greedy is always in want." This monomaniacal pursuit may even result in illegal or criminal actions, such as the abuse of public trust, fraud, theft or

damage to others' well-being. We have seen how people obsessed by greed can resort to the kind of behavior exemplified by investment broker Bernie Madoff's fifty-billion-dollar Ponzi scheme, and by those who caused the Wall Street collapse, the AIG scandal, and the bursting of the sub-prime housing bubble. These so-called "Masters of the Universe" engaged in unethical practices due to unbridled greed, which blinded them to the harm that their behavior could do to others. As the saying goes, "Some people take what they need from the orchard. Others pick the orchard clean." We live in a society that celebrates having more, but not "having enough". And given their inability to set limits, greedy people will never have enough.

What is greed?

Greed has been named as one of the seven basic character flaws or "dark" personality traits that plague humankind. In the sixth century, it was Pope Gregory the Great who drew up this list of transgressions that were seen as fatal to spiritual progress. He was not the only one concerned about this flaw; greed has been condemned since time immemorial, as it undermines the fairness on which the welfare and stability of the community are built.

Throughout history, all of the major world religions have recognized that suffering and evil are caused by excessive desire or desires that have a selfish purpose. For example, in the Bhagavad Gita it says, "there are three gates to self-destructive hell: lust, anger, and greed (Bhagavad Gita, 16:21). The Torah cautions people never to become a slave to property. The Bible warns about the dangers of wealth, the corrupting influence of money, and has few good things to

say about its pursuit: “Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions” (Luke, 12: 15). Buddhists view the craving for things as a fundamental hindrance to enlightenment. The Koran warns about the corruptive nature of wealth and the *fitna* (trials) and evil that may accompany it (Goldberg, 1994; Tickle, 2004).

Like lust and gluttony, greed is a sin of excess. As a personality characteristic, it usually manifests itself as an irresistible craving to possess more of something (money, material goods, power or other symbols of wealth) than is needed. To greedy people, the acquisition of possessions is central – it ends up being the only thing that counts. And as the example of Pavel illustrates, greedy people need material things to be happy; wealth is essential to be seen as successful.

Ironically, however, the pursuit of wealth becomes a Faustian bargain. As I mentioned before, it will never be enough. Greedy people will always want more, like a hunger that’s never sated. They don’t realize that to acquire for sake of acquiring is akin to the way cancer cells grow. And given their single-minded preoccupation, greedy people become takers, not givers. To get more, they are prepared to do anything – to chase every financial opportunity whatever the cost. No wonder that philosophers see greed as a vice, a source of immoral behavior and misery (Gigantes, 2002).

Greed as an addiction

In attempting to explain greed and its vicissitudes, we know that possessions can bring pleasure, but also that pleasure can become addictive. Given greed’s ability

to provide transitory pleasure, no wonder it has invited comparisons with addictions such as drugs, sex, food or gambling. But as is the case with all drugs, a “fix” gives only a temporary high. Greed “junkies” always want more of what gets them high, more of what gives them pleasure, more of what enables them to escape from anxiety, from suffering, or from themselves. But as with those other addictions, greed can also destroy lives and sever ties. Greedy people neglect their families. No wonder that greed becomes a source of great unhappiness and will make for a very lonely life. No wonder it raises existential questions such as whether it makes sense to build a fortune while tearing down relationships?

There may also be a neurological dimension to this need for experiencing a high. Although still in its infancy, our understanding of the neurophysiology of greed suggests that the pursuit of wealth (and the power that comes with it) may have an affect on the brain’s reward system, which if over-stimulated for prolonged periods of time may develop cravings that become increasingly difficult to satisfy, as is the case for drug addicts. Greedy people, in being successful at what they do, may experience a testosterone “rush” which in turn stimulates dopamine in the brain’s reward system--the chemical messenger that supports addictive behavior. They will thrive on the temporary highs (or dopamine releases) that they receive each time they close a deal, turn a profit, or “make a killing.” But, given its temporary nature, they always want more (Tancredi, 2005; Knutson and Bossaerts, 2007; Lammers and Stapel, 2009; Bendahan, Zehnder, Pralong, and Antonakis, 2014; Mussel, Reiter, Osinsky, and Hewig, 2015). We may even hypothesize that due to this chemical high, their common sense and self-control are suspended.

Psychological dimensions

Taking another point of view, what can be said about greed's psychological underpinnings? Surprisingly, there is little in the psychological literature about this very common human tendency, which may well have to do with its profoundly negative reputation. Greed isn't a topic we like to talk about. This may explain why greedy people use a host of strategies to disguise their greediness, often resorting to high-minded statements such as seeking to better humankind, while concealing their real motives. From a psychological perspective, greed can be seen as a form of irrational behavior, turning into a psychological disorder when it becomes too pronounced, i.e., an addiction.

Evolutionary reflections

From the evolutionary point of view (wealth being an important signifier of power and status), greed can be seen as nothing other than a biological imperative, albeit stemming from the darker side of human nature. Like animals, we are concerned about having enough to survive in times when resources are scarce. Hoarding offers an evolutionary advantage by creating a safety net. Seen from this angle, we could interpret greed as deeply rooted in human nature, and therefore may understand why it occupies such a central position (Goldberg, 1994; Gigantes, 2002) – it is nothing more than an extension of the survival instinct.

However, we should also bear in mind that humankind is a social animal. Self-preservation extends beyond the personal to the public domain, encompassing

family, friends and even strangers. The preoccupation with the self creates a tension between the drive to fulfill our personal appetites and the collective need to contain this drive. For the survival of the species, we boost our personal chances of survival by helping others, who may help us in turn. Given this need for cooperation, to depict greed as nothing more than a basic survival mechanism is too simplistic. Being too greedy may actually become counter-productive. As social beings we need to take this factor into consideration. Indeed *Homo sapiens* has followed this imperative through various forms of social organization ensuring that greed does the least harm.

Psychological reflections

Taking a psychodynamic perspective, we know that all infants are born with a natural desire for love, care, attention and social interaction. In some cases, however, caregivers who are supposed to take on this role are either absent or unavailable, be it following the untimely death of a parent, sickness, divorce or other difficult circumstances (including a lack of financial resources). Alternatively, children may be exposed to willful neglect (something that can occur for many different reasons). There are also instances where the caregivers have the financial resources to do what they are supposed to do, but substitute material “things” for care and concern. But by acting in this way they also communicate that they cannot give the child what it really needs -- love and affection. When that happens, it should come as no surprise that these children (and later as adults) never feel satisfied.

Depending on the family set-up, greed is often rooted in past, unmet infantile

needs, where lack of attention, care and recognition plays a major role (Weil, 1953; Smith et al. 1999; Nikelly, 2006). What I notice when seeking to decipher the background of greedy people is that they are often driven by a fundamental sense of deprivation, of something lacking within, contributing to low self-esteem. Unconsciously (as children), they are troubled by the belief that they are insignificant; that they lack importance or value, which makes for a very negative outlook on life. The distinct lack of parental love and support to which they are exposed creates deep feelings of anxiety, vulnerability, and insecurity. Deep down, such people (starting as infants) are haunted by a belief that they are not good enough.

This feeling becomes part of their inner theatre, fuelling an urge to find substitutes for what they feel they may be lacking. Their early negative experiences leave them in a constant state of being needy, of never feeling satisfied, laying the foundations for poor socio-emotional adaptation. The drive to acquire has become a survival mechanism for these people. No wonder they become fixated on the acquisition game. No wonder that seek comfort by obtaining things to eliminate these feelings of insecurity. No wonder that they imagine that material acquisitions will mask (both from others and from themselves) the woeful deficits in their core self-image. Unfortunately, however, they are embarking on “mission impossible”.

Through their material pursuits greedy people hope to feel valued and worthy, but (as can be seen time and time again) chasing material aggrandizement offers only temporary fulfillment. It turns out to be a futile attempt to fill a spiritual and

emotional void within, simply a way to numb a festering psychological wound. Once they have become slaves of the acquisition game, happiness is a mirage. They will never get a “fix” that permanently satisfies them. Instead, they may fall prey to symptoms such as depression, anxiety, a general restlessness, an inability to concentrate, sleep disturbances, hypochondriacal complaints, and all kinds of obsessive preoccupations (Weil, 1953). Like Pavel, ever-greater financial gains are required to sustain the cherished illusion that they are of value. Here the pursuit of wealth becomes the ultimate way of keeping score, but the “ante” for getting enough of the object of their craving will be continually raised. There is never an end to it. The process by which greedy people acquire riches becomes an end in itself.

Moreover, in their pursuit of wealth they often become insensitive to the needs of others. Their feeling of never having enough not only ruins their own lives but can cause serious collateral damage (Callahan, 1994; Kets de Vries, 2006). Exceedingly competitive and aggressive, they take every opportunity to make a profit -- the kind of behavior that doesn't make them nice people to be with.

Yet, as I suggested earlier, our materialistic society turns a blind eye to greed. Indeed in certain circles an addiction to money is even seen as a positive trait, despite its potential to do harm. All too often, the excesses of greedy people are hailed in publications such as *Forbes Magazine*, *Fortune*, and the *Wall Street Journal*. Perhaps idealizing money is a defense against the guilt and shame associated with its darker side--the way it has been acquired. As in the case of Pavel, we are good at rationalizing why we do what we do.

Personality types

Studying the personality types of greedy people we often see a “cocktail” of different ingredients: sprinklings of the antisocial personality and the narcissistic personality, with some obsessive-compulsive elements thrown in for good measure (American Psychiatric Association, 2013; Millon, 2011). Antisocial types can behave atrociously, act like predators, manipulate others for their own benefit, and frequently tell lies and break the law. Narcissists suffer from a sense of entitlement and are selfish by nature. They aren’t the kind of people who reciprocate in their dealings with others; they aren’t into sharing. In many instances they are exploitative, manipulative, selfish and withholding. Invariably they want to know “What’s in it for me?” They are into getting rather than giving. As a defense against whatever hurt they have experienced in life, they have developed an inflated image of themselves that is not supported by reality. Thus it shouldn’t come as a surprise that many narcissistic individuals live in a state of self-delusion where rules are for others, but not for them. Whatever their psychological baggage, money and wealth become an important measure of self-esteem, a way to keep score about their self-worth.

This cocktail of personal characteristics may nurture a “hoarding mentality” whereby these greedy people end up with far more money that they could possibly ever need, use or deserve. Their *modus operandi* becomes accumulating money simply to allay their anxiety, with no intention to spend it (Klein, 1957). But, as with Pavel, despite their endless pursuit of wealth there is never enough to satiate their greed, to reach a state of contentment. The hunger for more will

always return, propelling them like a game in which the “winner takes all”. Not having a balanced perspective between wants and needs gives them a skewed perception of the material world.

Beyond greed

The Greek philosopher Epicurus once said, “Wealth consists not in having great possessions, but in having few wants.” For greedy people, there is a disequilibrium in their need system. Not only does greed hurt everyone else, it especially hurts the greedy person. Because of their fixation with material things – or losing them – they alienate everyone around them. Greed not only destroys friendships and relationships, it is the cause of bigger troubles such as corruption, hostility, even war. Paradoxically, it is far from the best way to look after one’s interests.

As many philosophers have suggested, the happiest people are not the ones with the best or the most things, but those who most appreciate what they have. When we can never get enough of what we don’t really need, we are looking into an abyss; we can never be at peace with ourselves. We make decisions that we will regret later, failing to realize that money does not bring lasting happiness and peace of mind. In more ways than one, greed is the mother of incapacity. If allowed to become our inner default setting, it fosters a deep negative sense of self that contaminates our emotional life.

Studying greedy people, what's needed is a more healthy form of selfishness; the kind that helps people suffering from greed not only take care of themselves but others. To transcend their obsession, they need to get rid of the idea that they can never be a whole person without acquiring; to accept that they need to look for other ways to fill the void they experience inside. But getting them to do so is difficult; habits aren't easy to change, especially ingrained habits. However, if they are willing to admit that their present life is not satisfying, the best way to start is to identify signs that they are in trouble, so that they come to realize that there are better ways of managing their life.

Recognizing the signs

I find the following indicators very helpful in identifying the greed syndrome:

1. Overly self-centered behavior is the first give-away, of the kind described in Dicken's *A Christmas Carol* in the person of Ebenezer Scrooge, a miserly businessman who has no place in his life for kindness, compassion or charity. Like Scrooge, greedy are all about "me, me, me." They have little regard for the needs and feelings of others. Every conversation has to revolve around them; if not, they become bored or irritated.
2. Envy and greed are like twins. While greed can be defined as an excessive desire for possessions (such as wealth and power), envy can be defined as an extreme desire to get what belongs to others. Whatever the differences, greedy people are very much prisoners of envy. As they covet what others have, they will do anything to take whatever they envy from

others, because they have to “win”: winning means obtaining what other people have, beating their opponents. But even when they do win, it is never enough. If you notice that envy is a person’s main preoccupation—the driver of their actions – you can assume you are dealing with a greedy person.

3. Greedy people struggle with the concept of empathy. Caring--being concerned about the feelings of others--is not part of their repertoire. Instead what prevails is contempt for others. Such people find it difficult--if not impossible--to relate to how others feel. No wonder they behave callously, that they have no qualms about causing pain. They are strangers to the notion of gratitude. Their inability to empathize, their lack of interest in others’ feelings, and their unwillingness to take responsibility for their actions when things do not work out, makes them very difficult to be with.
4. Greedy people look at the world as a zero-sum game. Instead of thinking that everyone benefits as the pie gets larger, they see it as finite. They must always have the biggest piece – and they believe they deserve it. Whenever they spot an opportunity, they will try to take advantage of others. Small wonder, then, that they are unable to maintain long-lasting relationships.
5. Greedy people are highly talented in taking things that don’t belong to them, including the credit for work done by others: they excel at

maximizing their own contribution at others' expense. Furthermore, to get what they want, they are experts in manipulation. They can be charming, but their principal agenda is to have people around them that feed their ego. If that's not the case, they are quick to tear others down; they are experts in making others feel bad. Ironically, however, as "takers" (not "givers") this doesn't make them feel better.

6. Greedy people think short term; they are blind to how costly their actions may be in future. Greed compels them to take anything they believe is rightfully theirs, whatever the consequences, leaving others to cope with the fall-out. The only thing they care about is their present needs. As leader of a corporation, a greedy executive is more interested in getting a bonus than in making investments for future innovation--or than sharing whatever benefits accrue with other employees. But if the company is not doing well, the greedy executive will be the last to take the blame and share the pain.

7. Greedy people are not good at maintaining boundaries. In the pursuit of their material needs they will compromise their moral standards to achieve what they believe they deserve, cheating included. They are always looking for loopholes or ways to outsmart whatever rules and regulations have been put in place to prevent this kind of behavior. They excel in offloading the cost of the common onto others.

8. Greedy people are never satisfied with what they have. They know no limits. They always want new things instead of enjoying what they have, and are never gratified by their achievements. They always want more, and to get it they constantly shift focus.

Should you recognize any of these patterns in yourself, the time has come to take stock. Perhaps you should ask yourself whether you really want to continue or learn to be thankful for what you have.

Interventions

I have learned from experience that foolish decisions that come about due to greed may turn out to be a blessing, or at least a catalyst for change. Often, a serious personal setback creates an opening, or sends a warning sign. In particular, health issues or serious interpersonal problems may help a greedy person recognize that they need to deal with important life issues in a different way; that their compulsive striving to acquire more is not rational; that the idea that there will be enough is nothing more than a pipe dream, and that being the richest person in the graveyard is worth nothing. Diogenes got it right when he said, "It is the privilege of the gods to want nothing, and of godlike men to want little."

Unpleasant things that disturb life's balance may help greedy people realize that they are on a self-destructive course; that they have a defective form of self-protection; and that they are confusing wants with needs. The challenge is to learn how to be selfish in a less self-destructive manner. They need to reframe

their negative outlook on life more positively; to learn what it means to nurture their soul rather than to chase endlessly after illusions (Pizzigati, 2004; Kets de Vries, 2009, 2014).

To create the motivation for change, people obsessed by greed may have to embark on an inner journey (perhaps helped by a coach or psychotherapist) to uncover the unconscious sources of their single-minded pursuit of wealth. Doing so implies dealing with the childhood traumas that they have not worked through. They may have to deal with unresolved conflicts, cope with pent-up emotions and anger, work through unfulfilled dreams, and alter the various defense mechanisms they resort to.

During this complex inner journey, they may come to realize that their single-minded pursuit of wealth will never bring them lasting peace of mind--the happiness that they so desperately want. They need help to learn what living really means (Norton, 2014; Kets de Vries, 2009), to become less alienated from themselves, and from what is really essential in life. Preoccupied by greed, they need to recognize that vital issues such as love, emotional intimacy, unconditional acceptance (and self-acceptance), and "rich," satisfying relationships are passing them by. But as mentioned before, to transcend the developmental stage in which they are stuck, they need to do serious work on themselves.

Greedy people need to realize that they have a choice; that there are other ways of living, and be more conscious of why they act the way they do. They may learn

that the way they lead their present lives is based on faulty assumptions. They need to reject the notion that “more is better.” They need to step back and ask themselves whether other options exist than mindlessly following their craving for more. They need to find ways to move on from egoistic strivings to more altruistic ones--the opposite of greed is generosity--and to discover for themselves that kindness trumps greed; that we can only be rich if we are able to give.

To have greedy people move out of their regressed state, they also have to recognize their trigger mechanisms, the catalysts for making them do what they do. They need to learn what gets them into overdrive with respect to greedy thoughts and actions. They would also do well to avoid people like themselves, who are obsessed with always having more--people who bring out the worst in them.

While on this inner journey, they may discover that the more they are able to mature psychologically and spiritually, the less selfish their desires. As many studies have shown, what makes us happy (beyond a basic level), are not material things, but strong friendships, family interactions, and more free time (Veenhoven, 1984; Myers, 1992; Haybron, 2008; Kets de Vries, 2016).

Greedy people need to pay attention to their inner thoughts, feelings, impulses, perceptions and needs; to learn that life is not merely about acquiring and holding onto things (which are merely substitutes for what life is all about). To develop a rich inner life is what really counts. The most important things in life,

such as intimate relationships, take time--but they have to work on making these happen, and to actualize their innate creative potential. It may also be a good idea for them to “rationally” reflect on what is enough: the kind of income that’s needed to make for a satisfying life. Rather than being obsessed by the idea that others are making more than they do, it is better to accept that there will always be others who will make more.

As I have also suggested, greedy people need to learn how to be selfish in a different way. They need to realize that inner peace and contentment pay richer dividends than a whopping cash flow. They also need to learn to express gratitude to people who help them, to reach the conclusion that greed harms while generosity has the opposite effect. They need to recognize the value of contentment and simplicity; to stop themselves from acting as soon as a selfish impulse comes to mind. Rather, they should take the option that is best for everyone, and realize that they have always a choice between greed and generosity. The time has come to unlearn their conditioning for acting greedily.

It may also be helpful for them to discover their altruistic side--the pleasure of giving to others – and its transformative power (McWilliams, 1984; Post, 2005). A developmental re-education program through altruistic activities could have an enormous impact. Altruism contributes to self-esteem in that it compensates for narcissistic vulnerabilities. And in taking this route, inspiration may come through altruistic role models. Choosing this option, however, requires persistence, patience, humility, courage and commitment--but it’s one which they ignore at their peril, as Pavel discovered.

As a form of protective reaction, Pavel would have done well to have read Tolstoy's story, "How much land does a man need?" In this cautionary tale, Tolstoy expands on the true essence of human character and our insatiable hunger for more. Essentially it is a parable about the perils of human greed. In it, a man tries to cover a vast distance as he has been promised as much land as he can walk around in one day. If he doesn't arrive at his starting point before sunset, however, he will end up with nothing. Out of greed, the protagonist keeps on walking to cover as much distance as possible, making the return to his point of departure in time a real challenge. As the sun begins to set, he starts running, and reaches his goal only to collapse from exhaustion and die. Subsequently, the villagers who made him this proposition dig a six-foot grave and bury him-- exactly the amount of land a man in his situation needs.

Tolstoy's story exposes the relative worthlessness of money and possessions. Again, it brings up the question whether we can afford to live in a world where our only aspiration is to accumulate wealth, irrespective of how it's accumulated, while ignoring the flourishing of the human spirit in its artistic, idealistic and intellectual dimensions. Wouldn't it be better for our mental health to embrace moderation and sustainability rather than greed and endless consumption, to learn to be satisfied rather than desiring more and more?

The question we should ask ourselves is how can we change a society that is founded upon excess and greed? If we are not content with what we have, it will be difficult to be content with what we like to have. As Schopenhauer once said,

“Wealth is like sea-water; the more we drink, the thirstier we become.” Only if we overcome greed can we lead a simpler, happier, and more meaningful life.

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