

Happiness

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Man is in search of happiness. He feels inadequate, incomplete, not satisfied with himself as he is, and hence needs something or someone to make him feel satisfied or pleased with himself. He seeks sense gratification through pleasurable objects or people, or seeks ego gratification through achievement of success, power, recognition etc. All these pursuits are guided by his likes and dislikes. He feels comfortable, secure, and happy in presence of what he likes and feels the opposite in presence of what he dislikes. Man is helplessly driven to pursue what he likes and avoid what he dislikes. This is his life.

Unfortunately, there are some difficulties in pursuing happiness through appeasing likes and dislikes. There is no certainty about likes and dislikes. They are subject to change with reference to time, place and condition. One may not like tomorrow, what one likes today; may not like in another place or another condition, a thing that he likes in one place or condition. As a result, there is no certainty that a given thing or a person will necessarily give him happiness. This brings about a lot of disappointment and frustration. Furthermore, appeasing likes and dislikes makes them stronger, and drives man to search for new and more varied things. He becomes more dependent and helpless. This is the way of bondage.

There is another way of seeking happiness also, and that is to search for happiness within. This will become clear when we analyze an experience of happiness. In a moment of happiness, I experience a harmony within, a satisfaction with myself. I feel good about myself. There is self acceptance at that time. What causes happiness keeps changing but what happens to me when I feel happy is the same, viz., being pleased with myself. It looks as though I am happy because I am pleased with something or someone out there, but really speaking, that something or someone is only incidental. What is invariable in the experience of happiness is the pleased self.

When do I become pleased with myself? The pleased self becomes manifest when the cloud of likes and dislikes clears away, as a result of a happening that I consider pleasing. A mind free from likes and dislikes is like clear, transparent water in a lake. It reveals what is at the bottom viz., the pleased self. Pleased self or happiness is my nature. My perception about myself – “I am inadequate; I am incomplete” -- is wrong. It is this wrong perception that creates fear, insecurity and self-centeredness within me. These in turn create likes and dislikes which in turn create impulses such as jealousy, anger, greed etc. These impulses veil the happiness which is my true nature, create a sense of self-dissatisfaction, and drive me to search for happiness in the things and beings of the world, where it is not. This is the cause of all frustrations and disappointments in life. When I think I am enjoying something, it is my own self that I am really enjoying. What generally happens is that the veil of likes and dislikes comes back; I again feel dissatisfied and search for some other desirable thing.

The process of seeking happiness should therefore be the removal of likes and dislikes which are intruders, rather than appeasing them. This is done by replacing them with opposite feelings. When my mind is controlled by likes and dislikes, I find myself wanting, demanding, self-centered, often aggressive and insensitive to the feelings and needs of others. Then I find myself violating the basic values such as non-violence, truthfulness, moderation etc. In order to free myself from the hold of likes and dislikes, I commit myself to the values of nonviolence, truthfulness, fairness, kindness etc. To counter the tendency of self-centeredness, I deliberately perform actions that are other-centered. I look for opportunities to reach out, to help. I try to make my actions, a means of offering what I have rather than a means of acquiring and aggrandizing what I do not have. This is *karma yoga*.

Following the values require me to overcome temptation and control my impulses of lust, anger, greed etc. Doing good to others requires that I subdue the habitual tendency to seek personal benefits and glorification from whatever I do. This process progressively removes the negative tendencies, and brings to manifestation my true nature of happiness, contentment. It becomes a process of discovering satisfaction with myself, discovering my self-worth. The craving for acquiring, possessing and enjoying things goes on reducing and there is peace and harmony within. I need less and less

effort to be happy and am able to enjoy things and beings as they are, where they are, without the need to possess or control them. This process culminates into discovering total freedom, the boundless happiness that is my true nature.