Three Ways To Achieve Enduring Happiness
Category : English
Published by Anonymous on Sep. 01, 2003

Three Ways To Achieve Enduring Happiness

Become secure in your innate, inner joy through meditation, devotion and service to others

By Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami

Published in:
Hinduism Today
October/November/December 2003

The nonmystical approach to happiness is that if you attain what you desire, you are happy; and if you don't, you are unhappy. Win the lottery, get a great job, and you are happy. Miss the lottery, don't get a great job, and you are miserable. Webster tells us that happiness is "the emotion evoked by success or by the prospect of possessing what one desires." A reflective person knows that this kind of happiness is fleeting. When we finally possess what we have been desiring, somehow the happiness soon fades, and before we know it we are back to our dissatisfied self again, desiring something new to give us that elusive happiness.

Desire-fulfillment-pleasure-loss-pain-suffering—that is the cycle of seeking happiness in outer things, be they possessions or people. What is the solution?

Some say, "Give up desire!" Desire is what is causing the whole problem. It drives us to get what we want, and when the happiness of that getting eventually wears off we start all over again with a new desire. So, if you can get rid of desire, you solve the whole problem. Right?

Our Gurudeva, Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, looked at it differently. He said, "Desire is life, and the reason we desire things is because we are alive. Desire is energy expressing itself." The only way you could get rid of desire would be to get rid of life. Even if the physical body has passed on, even if we don't have a physical body, we are still "alive," still active, creative and motivated by what? Desire. So, trying to get rid of desire is not really a solution to the cycle of desire and fulfillment.

Instead, Gurudeva suggested uplifting our consciousness and changing what we desire. That is how we solve the problem, by channeling or transmuting our energy, desiring things that are more refined. Instead of desiring just to make ourselves happy, we desire to make our family and friends happy, too. That is a higher desire. Going to school is a way of channeling energy. As a child, first we memorize, bringing the energies up out of the chakras below the muladhara into the muladhara chakra. Then, in the svadishthana chakra, we reason. We learn how to think. Then we learn how to push things through and accomplish them, through the force of will in the manipura chakra. We are pulling the energy up into memory, reason and willpower in the normal process of schooling. Schooling is important, for it trains us to lift our consciousness, refine our character and harness the baser desires.

Cultural practices such as singing, dancing and playing a musical instrument are also effective ways of refining desire. They help raise the energies even further than the basic studying in school. In doing so, we raise our consciousness and learn to avoid the grosser states of mind—doubt, depression, discouragement—and circumvent the base problem of desire's leading ultimately to sorrow.

The goal is to claim the spiritual happiness that is inside of us. Happiness is already part of our inner self, but we need to learn how to experience that part of us that is always happy. Our religion gives us inner ways and outer ways to accomplish this. The monistic or meditative way is to turn within in meditation, go deep into the lotus of the heart and experience our inner self, our inner light, our spiritual energy. That makes us truly happy. That's a wonderful way.

There is also the theistic way. We can come to the temple and open ourself to the blessings of the Deities. We come in an unhappy state, receive the blessings and go away uplifted and happy. Why? Because we have connected with our inner self through external worship. We have connected with the same blissful state that can be achieved through meditation. These are two ways to internalize our awareness, to move our awareness into our spiritual being.

Gurudeva gave us a third way: "If you want to attain happiness, make others happy." That is a wonderful statement. Quite often we are unhappy because we are self-centered. We are in a selfish state of mind, concerned only about our life, our problems, our challenges. "Life is not treating us fairly," we think, so we are unhappy. What's the antidote? Do something for other people. Try to make them happy.

A woman suffering from severe depression was told by her psychiatrist, "I have a remedy that is a sure cure for your depression if you follow it. Go out and help other people. Make other people happy." Of course, she would not do that. We might say she actually wanted to be depressed. Or we could say she was stuck in that state of mind, unable to change.

Recently a devotee wrote to me for advice. "The doctor has put Dad on an even stronger pain medication. He spends his days in bed. He is so very depressed. I pray daily that I can brighten his day in some small way. I offer to massage him. Sometimes he is open; sometimes he just wants to be left alone. My husband and I try very hard to care for him in the best way we know how. Most times, I feel it is never good enough, because Dad is so closed down, so critical and angry. I continually look for ways to give and to serve each day. Please offer advice and encouragement."

Sound familiar? An aging parent is in a negative state of mind, to one degree or another, and refuses to budge from that state of mind, no matter what the children do. Here was my advice. "In caring for your father-in-law, it is enough to do the kindly act. Whether it is appreciated or not does not matter from a karmic point of view. You are creating good karma by fulfilling dharma."

Don't be disappointed when you you can't change a lifetime of mental habits of a person just by smiling, being nice and helping out. He is who he is. All you can do is your duty. Do it to the best of your ability. If he is uplifted and smiles because of it or remains grumpy and depressed, don't let that be the measure of your success. The measure of success is doing your duty, doing it with love. It is okay for you to be happy even if your parent isn't happy, even though you live in the same house. You should not let your father's or mother's negativity, depression and criticalness be contagious.

This same principle applies to everything we do for others in life. Sometimes parents get discouraged because they do the best they can with their children and the children don't respond in a way that seems reasonable. "Look, our daughter didn't follow my good advice, despite all my love and attention. She is still doing the same old, stupid things." The parents feel sad. But why should they? They have done their duty and earned good karma by doing the right things in a loving way.

Being surrounded by family and friends is important. It is a natural and positive state to live in. It helps us live a fulfilling, dharmic life. However, the problem comes if we rely on family and friends to make us happy. This is a false concept. We want our happiness coming from ourselves. Then we can share that happiness with our family and friends.

We should never fall into thinking, "I am unhappy by myself. Somehow, if I get married, if I have children or if I have lots of friends, I will be happy." It does not work that way. Any temporary happiness soon wears away in the old cycle of fulfillment of desire. We get married. If we are an unhappy person, we may be happy for a while. But eventually we will fall back into the state of unhappiness, because that is our mental habit, the mode our mind operates in. That habit does not go away just because we associate with new people. It also does not go away by our getting new possessions. The happiness derived from acquiring things lasts for an even shorter time. New computer, new car, redecorate the home—that is fulfilling for a few months, maybe a year for the home, but eventually the charm wears off. The state of unhappiness only goes away permanently by our remolding our consciousness and the way we look at life, by refining our character to the point where we naturally live in a state of fulfilled contentment all of the time, regardless of external circumstances. We can summarize the above observations in seven practical principles:

Seven Tools for Conquering Unhappiness

1.Refine your consciousness and build self-control through education and cultured activities.

2.Clear the subconscious of negative memories, reactions and grudges through affirmation, self-reflection and sadhana.

3.Fill yourself with gratitude for life and for all that you have.

4.Know that happiness and unhappiness are states of mind. They are not the real you. You are the pure awareness that experiences a state of mind; you are not the state of mind itself.

5.Learn to change your state of mind in meditation, turning awareness within to your spiritual nature, the radiance within you. Direct awareness through controlled breathing.

6.Tune into your innate happiness through religious devotion.

7.Become fulfilled and uplifted by doing things for others.

By cultivating these tools you can experience true bliss, true happiness, a contentment that does not cycle or fade.