

[What Is True Success?](#)

Category : [October/November/December 2004](#)

Published by Anonymous on Oct. 01, 2004

PUBLISHER'S DESK

What Is True Success?

Hinduism favors and furthers the pursuit of wealth, pleasure and happiness - all guided by dharma

satguru bodhinatha veylanswami

In today's material world, success in life is popularly measured by looking solely at people's professional and family life. Do they have a good, well-paying job and a large home with a highly educated spouse and intelligent children? If the answer is yes, then they are considered to be successful. We will take that as our initial definition of success and throughout this article deepen and broaden it in important ways.

Parents are naturally focused on making sure their children are as successful in life as possible, which is good. However, unfortunately, some Hindu parents feel that their children's participation in Hindu religious activities and studies is a complete waste of time, meaning that it contributes nothing at all to their becoming successful. This attitude is based on incorrect concepts, such as the following: 1) Hinduism encourages us to look at the world as unreal and thus take no interest in material success; 2) Hinduism values world-renunciation and thus stands against the acquiring of wealth and the enjoyment of life; 3) Hinduism's devotional practices and attending the Hindu temple are only for field and factory workers and not for educated professionals. These three concepts are, of course, incorrect, because Hinduism, when properly taught and practiced, helps us be more successful in all dimensions of life.

Four legitimate goals: Let's begin deepening our understanding of the Hindu view of success by looking at the concept of the purusharthas, which literally means

"human wealths or goals." These are four pursuits in which humans may legitimately engage. Also called chaturvarga, "four-fold good," they form a cornerstone of Hindu ethics. They are piety, wealth, pleasure and liberation. The achievement of the second and third of these goals, wealth and pleasure, is clearly identical to our initial definition of success, and thus we can see that Hinduism--contrary to what many people believe--is vitally concerned with an individual's being successful in worldly life. Said another way, wealth and pleasure, artha and kama, are natural goals of all humans, including Hindus.

Artha is material welfare and abundance, money, property, possessions. It includes the necessities of life--food, money, clothing and shelter--and extends to the wealth required to maintain a comfortable home, raise a family, fulfill a career and perform religious duties. My Gurudeva adds a broader meaning to artha when he describes it as embracing financial independence, freedom from debt, worthy children, good friends, leisure time, faithful servants, trustworthy employees, the joys of giving, feeding the poor, supporting religious mendicants, worshiping devoutly, protecting all creatures, and offering hospitality to guests. In other words, artha measures not only riches but also the quality of life, providing the security needed to pursue kama, dharma and moksha.

Kama is earthly love, aesthetic and cultural fulfillment, pleasures of the world (including sexual), joys of family and friends, intellectual satisfaction, happiness, security, physicality, creativity, usefulness and inspiration.

Moksha, or mukti, is freedom from samsara, the rounds of birth and death. It occurs after karma has been resolved and realization of the Self God has been attained. The desire for moksha only comes after a soul has pursued and been successful in fulfilling dharma, artha and kama for numerous lives, so that it is no longer attached to worldly joys or sorrows. Said another way, those who renounce the world in this life in one-pointed pursuit of moksha do so having achieved worldly success and fulfillment in past lives.

While dharma is a goal in its own right, it is also the guiding principle of the other three, as it defines the proper way to pursue wealth, pleasure and moksha. Do we acquire wealth in a virtuous and honest way? Are spouses faithful to one another, or not? These are concerns of all the world's religions, including Hinduism. Dharma, piety, now enters the picture. Dharma is the fulfillment of virtue, good works, duties and responsibilities, restraints and observances, performing one's part in the

service and upliftment of society. It includes religious disciplines and the pursuit of truth under a guru of a particular lineage (parampara) and tradition (sampradaya). It is the steady guide for artha and kama, and ultimately it leads the soul to moksha.

Building good character: Parents, of course, want their children to bring honor to the family name, to be pillars of their community and to be of unblemished character. They know that without good character true success is not possible. Good conduct and good character are not taught in most secular schools. Therefore, the natural place to learn them is in a children's class on Hinduism. Academic studies teach us how to read and write. But religious studies teach us what to read and write, which is equally important. Good conduct is the foundation of all other practices in Hinduism.

Happiness: From the Hindu point of view, happiness is the natural outcome of the fulfillment of the purusharthas. Many adults have told me that they are surprised that even though they have, after many years, achieved the professional and family goals they thought would make them happy, they find they are not happy. This can be discouraging, disillusioning and depressing, even leading some to commit suicide. In looking back, many realize they neglected their religious life, dharma, at the expense of seeking wealth and worldly enjoyments. They see now that they are not content, not fulfilled, because they failed to devote equal energy to spiritual practice, attending the temple, meditation, hearing the words of enlightened teachers and studying the scriptures. Many resolve at this point to teach their children what they learned the hard way, that dharma is the center pole of success, and happiness is its flag of victory. Dharma includes holding firm to a religious view of life and the universe--embracing the wisdom of Sanatana Dharma on all levels of our being--a view which my guru said is simply the best description of the way things actually are. This means seeing the world as the arena of our evolution as divine beings on a spiritual journey extending many lifetimes, knowing that we come from God, live in God and ultimately will merge in God. Abiding by this spiritual, mountaintop perspective, facing each challenge as our own self-created karma, gives us the inner stability, poise and contentment that we call enduring happiness, known in Sanskrit as ananda, the natural bliss of the soul. It enables us to achieve success after success in all areas of effort, and it strengthens us to withstand the ups and downs, joys and sorrows, gains and losses that are natural to life on Earth. Striving for and achieving one's goals exercises the nerve system not only of the physical body, but of the inner bodies as well, strengthening the soul body and furthering its evolution. That prowess can then be applied to all future endeavors, including spiritual pursuits. It can be carried from alife to life. Through this process we learn that while real fulfillment is not to be found in the outer world, the world trains us how to find the peace and happiness we already have

within ourselves.

Hindu parents in temple societies across the US and Canada are realizing the importance of teaching these values to their youth, and they are seeking out programs and systems to do so. They are realizing that academic studies and Hindu practices we pursue in our youth have the effect of refining our desires to the point where we can, as adults, be religious enough to experience enduring happiness through connecting with our inner, spiritual self in three traditional ways: meditation, devotion and service. Through meditation, we go deep into the lotus of the heart and experience our inner self, our inner light, our spiritual energy. Through worship in the temple, we open ourselves to the blessings of the Deities. We can come to the temple in an unhappy state, receive the blessings of God and the Gods and go away uplifted and happy. Why? Because the blessings have cleared our mind and aura of congested thought forms and emotions, allowing us to connect with the same blissful state that can be achieved through meditation. And through helping and serving others, trying to make them happy, we naturally forget about ourselves and our problems. When we see the smile on the faces of those we are helping, it brings a smile to our face, opening access to our inner happiness.

In summary, the popular, materialistic view of success focuses narrowly on wealth and pleasure. To achieve lasting happiness, the hallmark of real success, the devout Hindu broadens the scope of success by pursuing dharma with the same vigor and enthusiasm. Hindus who fulfill this complete and high-minded paradigm will naturally be looked up to not only by their family, but by their community and nation, as embodying what it truly means to be a successful person. Hindus should be proud that their religion provides the tools they need to be truly successful in life. So, let us banish the three illusions that discourage parents from imparting the knowledge and use of those tools to their children. Let's fulfill our duty to the next generation, knowing that: 1)~our faith furthers personal success in the highest sense; 2)~that it is fully supportive of acquiring wealth and enjoying life; and 3) that meditation, temple worship and helping others are sophisticated, success-building tools appropriate for Hindus of all walks of life. Knowing that it will contribute pragmatically to their success in life, let's confidently teach Hinduism to the youth!