

HOW TO BE HAPPY – SOME RUMINATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Happiness is everyone's birth right. But it is difficult to find anyone who has not faced unhappiness in life. Then, why this unhappiness and what is the cause of this unhappiness? One explanation is that we only bear the fruits our own actions – nothing more nothing less. God, in his infinite love for us, gives such bad experiences either to turn our attention towards him or to reduce the balance of negative karmas that we carry forward from our previous lives. Generally, people tend to equate material possessions with happiness, but in reality there is no correlation between the two. Happiness is a state of mind, and comes with contentment with minimum requirement to lead a comfortable life and does not come from craving for luxuries. One must conquer the six enemies viz. lust, anger, greed, attachment, pride, and jealousy, and cultivate the good qualities like pure thoughts, forgiveness, charity, non-discrimination, humility, magnanimity, love and total surrender to God. Fear, anxiety and stress are three happiness spoilers. Problems in life are inevitable. One should keep physically and mentally fit to face the problems in life. Everyone should enjoy their lives to the maximum, but with two conditions- that in the process (i) one should not harm or hurt others, and (ii) one should not spoil one's own health.

Keywords: Happiness, Karma, Material Possessions, Contentment, Enjoy Life

How to Be Happy – Some Ruminations

“How to be Happy?” This was the question that plagued me for nearly six decades. My thoughts used to run like this - How nice it would be, if there was no unhappiness at all in this world, and everybody is filled with happiness all the time. Is Happiness not every body's birth right? Then why is it that unhappiness is so prevalent? It is difficult find anyone who had not faced unhappiness in life. At least, is it possible to reduce the quantum of unhappiness from our lives and increase the quantum of happiness, and if so, how to go about achieving that?

I read several religious books, met several learned people and also enlightened spiritual persons to get an answer. Hinduism says that a soul takes several births, before reaching salvation or moksha (the Buddha had said that he had taken 8.4 million births). In each birth, the soul(through the bearer of the soul) does several good and bad karmas (deeds/actions) .

Some of the results of these karmas are either undergone in that life itself and the balance is carried forward to subsequent births. This is akin to the Newton's third law – every action has an equal and opposite reaction. Everyone has to undergo the consequences of one's action both good and bad, either in this life itself or in subsequent births. There is no escape. The scriptures also tell us that one cannot rob Peter and pay Paul, and expect to neutralize the net effect of good karmas and bad karmas. That is not possible. If one has borrowed from Peter, he has to pay back to Peter only; and if he paid to Paul, he had to receive from Paul that amount, either in this life or in subsequent lives. I.e. the fruits of each action have to be born separately. Of course, there is no clarity in the scriptures whether interest is to be paid for karmas carried forward to subsequent births and if so, at what rate. Thus the scriptures say that we face good and bad days depending on our past balance of karmas. A learned man once told me that an average man carries with him a backlog of a mound of good karmas, and a mountain of bad karmas. So one way to reduce our future suffering is to (i) stop accumulating further bad karmas by not harming anybody, (ii) and start doing good karmas, so that the benefits can be reaped later. Once I was sitting in meditation and asked God, "Oh God, why don't you please finish with all my negative karmas in one go, so that, I can live happily thereafter." Pat came the reply "My dear, you will not be able to withstand them all at one go." Only then did I realize that God, in his infinite wisdom, gives us only that quantum of the fruits of our negative karmas, which we can withstand, interspersed with the fruits of our good karmas to make our lives livable.

How do people respond when they face difficult situation in life? Normally we notice three kinds of responses. One group of people tends to suddenly remember God (in good times very few people think of God, instead they attribute the success to their own abilities). Another group tends to offer 'gifts to God if He takes away/solve their problems', as if God is amenable to bribes. The third group of people tends to blame the God for all their troubles, without realizing that God is embodiment of love and compassion and he bears no ill will against any person. I used to wonder, why the God, who is so noble, allows us to have troubles at all. I find two possible reasons for this. One, as mentioned earlier, only when we come across troubles, we tend to turn to God, either positively, praying to him, or negatively blaming him for all the troubles – either way thinking about God (which otherwise we would not have done). The second is that unless we face unhappiness, how will be reduce our negative karmas? Unless a person clears all his karmas, he will not be able to reach God. So, in his infinite love for people, God gives us difficulties or problems or unhappiness to us so that we reach God as early as possible. So, according to the learned person 'we should, in fact, be thankful to God, whenever we face difficulties or unpleasant experiences, as our negative karmas are getting reduced in the process'.

It was Gouthama, the Buddha, who had done a lot of research on 'Dukha' (sorrow or unhappiness in life). He suggested a four fold path to reduce the quantum of unhappiness from our lives and increase the quantum of happiness – step 1. Identify the actual unpleasantness, step 2: Identify the reason for unhappiness, step 3: Take necessary steps to reduce the quantum of unpleasantness, step 4: take steps to completely eliminate the causes that are causing the unpleasantness. To lead a peaceful life, he recommended Vipassana, a method of concentrating on one's breath, and observing the thoughts that arise, without reacting to the thoughts. Based on the kind of emotions connected with the thoughts, the breathing pace changes. As one continuously observes these changes, one gains a better

understanding of one's emotions, and this would enable one to lead a better life. The modern name for the same concept is "Emotional Intelligence".

What are the causes of our unhappiness? Learned people tell us that one of the main issues / causes is that we tend to equate happiness with material possessions, although there is no linkage between them. We think 'If I have a well paid job, I will be happy; or if I have a large bank balance ,I will be happy; If I have a large bungalow, I will be happy; or if I have a big car, I will be happy; or if I have a beautiful wife, I will be happy' etc. Many a times we miss that once we have a well paid job, another can have a better paying job; if you have a five bedroom house, another can have a much bigger farm house etc. So, happiness does not lie in material possessions, though it is also true that without material possessions life will be difficult. Hence the need is to have minimum possessions that are needed and not aspiring for luxuries. Learned men tell us that contentment with what we have, can alleviate many of our problems in life. Contentment with what we have, does not mean one should not strive for livelihood, and lead a lazy life. We should ensure that we are able to earn sufficient money so that we and our families can lead comfortable lives. Thus a secure source of income is a must for a happy life.

If we need a secure job, we need to have good educational qualifications, (though such qualifications do not help us in any way for spiritual advancement or happiness). Thus students should not waste their time and concentrate on their studies and excel in the examinations. They should take up such courses where they have interest and talent - without blindly following others.

Following others or imitating others is one of the foremost causes of unhappiness. Not everyone can become a Sachin Tendulkar, or a Narayana Murthy, or a Vikram Sarabhai or a Madhuri Diixit. But one can persue their own interests and strive to do their best in their chosen field of work. Bernard Shaw has said " Happy is the man whose hobby is his profession, and whose profession is his hobby". I have seen several who at the instance of their parents or friends became engineers and doctors, against their own wishes, and are leading dissatisfied lives because they do not have heart in what they are doing.

Scriptures have listed six enemies to an individual – Kama, Krodha, Lobha, Moha, Mada and Matsarya(lust, anger, greed, attachment, pride, and jealousy in that order). They also tell us that unless we conquers these six enemies, we cannot progress towards enlightenment. My father advised me early in my life " it is difficult to overcome the first two, and hence you would be struggling against them all your life. So, start with the last one and progress in the reverse order. You will make good progress." I had followed his advice and am sure progressed handsomely. Once our mind is clear and calm , devoid of these six enemies , we will lead a simple life and that leads to contentment in life which, as we discussed earlier, leads us ultimately to Moksha.

We should simultaneously cultivate the good qualities like pure thoughts, forgiveness, charity, non-discrimination, humility, magnanimity, love and total surrender to God. Developing pure thoughts include avoiding bad thoughts about others. Learned people tell us a story to illustrate the matter. Once upon a time there was a king who used to travel around his kingdom daily to know the welfare of his citizens. Once on his daily trips he saw a stranger in the market place and inexplicably felt like killing him. He wondered why he was getting such feelings. He narrated this incident to his wise minister after returning to his

palace. The minister thought for a moment and advised him not to go towards the market place for the next couple of days. The king obeyed him and stayed away for two days and visited the market place on the third day. He saw the stranger again, but this time did not feel any negative feelings, but in fact felt very friendly towards him. He was surprised and went back to palace. He narrated the incident to his minister and expressed his surprise. The minister explained that the stranger was a trader from another place and had brought a cart load of sandal wood for sale. When he saw the king the first time he thought that if only king died he would have a ready market for his goods which would be used for his funeral. The thoughts reached the King and hence he felt like killing the stranger. The minister explained further that the next day, he had arranged for the purchase of the cartload for the use in the palace. Thus, when the king saw the trader the next time, the trader was in a happy mood, having sold all his sandalwood for a good price, and was blessing the king for the good trade he made. The minister explained that that was reason why the king felt friendly towards the trader in the second encounter. The story reveals to us that our thoughts about others are inadvertently get transmitted to the other person(unknown to us) and he/she will respond accordingly. Many of us would have experienced this when we are in love. Our thoughts are easily understood by the loved ones.

Forgiveness is another quality that purifies us and gives us strength as forgiveness comes from a position of strength only. A person who is weak usually develops feelings of fear or inadequacy and harbours ill will for others although he may be afraid to express it openly. In fact, in Pranic Healing, one of the important steps that is taught is to forgive all those who has sinned against the practitioner (in this life as well as in earlier lives), and simultaneously seeking forgiveness from all those against whom the practitioner had sinned(both in this life as well as earlier lives). This practice gives the practitioner great peace of mind. I can vouch for it, from my own experience.

Charity is giving to needy from within whatever we have, to alleviate their problems. Every religion talks about charity. Charity does not result in depletion or poverty but instead results in prosperity to the giver. This looks paradoxical but true. I searched several religious books to find the ideal quantum to be given away by way of charity, for several years. In Hinduism I did not find any mention of the quantum, but Islam talks of giving away in charity 10% of one's income. It is said that Saudi Arabia is the richest among all the Arab countries because of this quality of charity among its citizens. Later, I heard one swamiji telling that one should give away in charity at least 2% of one's income.

Discrimination in name of caste, creed, or religion is one of the most common ill society of India. Though equality is the avowed principle enshrined in the constitution, in reality, discrimination is prevalent in one name or the other. There is at least one school which does not ask for details like caste or religion in their admission form – Sushil Hari International Residential School, Kelambakkam, Tamilnadu.

Humility is personified by the legendary character from Ramayana, the Hanuman, minister of monkey king Sugreeva, later turned disciple of Rama. Hanuman has learnt his lessons from Sun God directly and is considered a very learned person. He played a crucial role in Ramayana. He brought Sugreeva and Rama together. He jumps across the gulf of Mannar, outwits Surasa who blocks his way, and overcome Simhika before entering Srilanka, in search of Sita. Deftly convinces Sita that he is messenger of Rama (to be seen in view of

Ravana's tactics to win over Sita) and reassures her, tests the strength of the army of Ravana, safely returns to his friends and informs Rama about Sita's welfare, brings Sanjeevani(a life saving herb) from Himalayas, carries Rama and Lakshmana on his shoulders during the war, informs Bharat about the arrival of Rama etc. In spite of his critical role, when Rama asked him for any boon, he chooses to be with Rama declining any honours. Such was his humility, and no wonder that he has been selected as the next Brahma.

Every religion in this world preaches love. But if we look at history, more wars had been fought in the name of religion and more lives lost than all the other wars put together. Simple definition of 'Love' is caring and sharing. Love is selflessness. It is the total acceptance of others with all their faults and limitations. God is said to be embodiment of love. He wants do good to all. It is we that do not accept his helping hand and fritter away the opportunity. He is benevolent and he cares for all of us. Even at the time of crucifixion, Jesus said "Lord forgive them, they know not what they are doing". Such was the love and forgiveness he had for everyone, even for people who were going to kill him.

Total surrender to God – is what is prescribed by Hinduism, as a way of life. To give an example, a child in the knowledge that its mother is in the house, ventures out, explores the world around. It is confident that in case of any problem, all he has to do is to cry and mother will come to its rescue, leaving aside all her work. The same child would feel insecure in her absence, even though it is safe within the closed doors of the house. When we trust God fully, he will take care of our lives, better than we can imagine. It is not that we will not face problems in life. Life is full of problems, but he steers us through the problems like a seasoned navigator takes a boat through troubled waters.

I had been living in the Ashram of Sri Siva Sankar Baba, of Ramarajya, Kelambakkam, Tamilnadu for the last eight years and am greatly influenced by his thoughts. I will cover in a separate article about how I came to know of him. His prescriptions for a Happy living are simple and are given below.

- Everyone should enjoy their lives to the maximum, but with two conditions- that in the process (i) one should not harm or hurt others, and (ii) one should not spoil one's own health. This is one of the simplest and best prescription, I had come across on how to live one's life.
- Fear, anxiety and stress are three happiness spoilers. The first two come from worry about the future, and are caused by lack of faith in oneself which again comes from lack of faith in God. Stress comes from ruminating over the past emotional hurt. Learning to let go is the key to overcome stress.
- Keep physically and mentally fit to face the problems in life. Let go of attachments and expectations and learn to accept what fate has bequeathed to you.

CONCLUSION

There is an song from an old movie " Devdas", which says, ' if you can accept,(in life) pain as pleasure, then , there is only pleasure, rather supreme bliss in life.' It indeed is a hard prescription to follow. In the famous song, released in September 1988 which became a great hit, musician Bobby McFerrin gives an easier prescription. He says

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Don't worry, be happy
In every life, we have some trouble
When you worry, you make it double
Don't worry, be happy
Don't worry, be happy now

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