

Vision of life

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At a *satsang* in one place, someone asked me:

“How to have fun in life?”

“Be serious”, I said, and I said it rather seriously because really speaking the pursuit of happiness is a serious matter.

A superficial approach to anything lands one in trouble. So, “Eat, drink and make merry” is a very shallow view of life. Deeper enquiry takes us to deeper truths. Let us see how Vedanta views the issue of happiness.

To put it in a simple way, life is constituted of perception and response. Whether we like it or not, we cannot help responding to people, to situations, to events, in general to the world around. Now, response depends on individual perception. Everybody see the same object but how each sees it makes all the difference. Perception therefore can be called as a vision of life and response as an action or reaction that depends on this vision.

Superficially whatever we see or experience with our gross sense organs is alone considered as real. No wonder, one finds the world very enchanting with its infinite variety and matchless beauty. But when we try to understand the same world a little deeply, it becomes very mind-boggling. Normally what happens is we get enchanted by the world of names and forms. But again we feel horrified or dejected by what happiness sometimes in this very world.

All this proves that what is visible is immaterial, what is invisible is much more significant. What is visible is only an appearance and we all know that appearances are deceptive. The one truth that is not visible is subtle and it is this Truth that will solve all the problems. To see this Truth, we need a pure mind and subtle intellect.

This is where *Bhagavad Gītā* talks of a *sāttvika* vision. A *sāttvika* vision is one that helps us perceive the one Truth that pervades the multiple and diverse world of names and forms. Such a vision can make all the difference. It can help us see oneness in the midst of variety; it can protect us in the face of temptation, frustration and fear. The Lord explains such a vision in the *Gītā*:

*sarvabhūteshu yenaikam bhāvamavyayamīkshate
avibhaktam vibhakteshu tajjnānam viddhi sāttvikam*

All the Upanishads exhort one to develop this indivisible, immutable, immaculate vision. The very first verse of *Ishavasya Upanishad* asks us to develop such a vision. “Pervade the world with the vision of the one Truth that is the Lord.”

*Om ishāvasyamidgam sarvam yat kinca jagatyām jagat
tena tyaktena bhunjithā mā grdhah kasyasvid dhanam*

Great souls who have attained this vision will work for unity, integration and happiness of all.

Therefore, this answers the question of what fun or happiness is. It is not in merely gratifying our senses. The happiness experienced as a result of such a noble vision alone can be called as true and lasting happiness.

But sadly, many of us do not have this kind of a vision. We are stuck either with *rājasika* vision (extroverted outlook) or a *tāmasika* vision (dull approach). Lord Krishna in the *Gītā* explains the pitfalls inherent in these approaches. For example, a person with *rājasika* vision sees differences while perceiving the work and he considers those differences alone as real. He forms mental division such as "I - my", "you - yours", "good - bad" and so on. The actions performed by him therefore are born of either attachment or aversion. He is happy only as long as everything runs according to his tastes and preferences. The moment something goes awry, he becomes agitated and troublesome.

A person with a *tāmasika* vision is even worse. He is deeply, fanatically and exclusively attached to a particular object, ideology or cause, with the result that even the happiness he experiences reflects his conflict. His happiness is got by unhealthy means as fights, addiction, sleep and indolence.

Therefore, it becomes clear that the *sāttvika* kind of happiness alone deserves to be pursued. All other ways to attain happiness are illusory, both at individual and the collective level.

In life, we get mixed results because our vision is *sāttvika*, in that all of us desire happiness, peace and harmony. But, our conviction is not ripe and so we are not very clear when it comes to actions and results. For example, if we are informed of a crime immediately cry for justice but the moment we are further made aware that our own family member is the culprit, then we change our response saying: "No one is perfect". We can see the same happening at the international level too.

The Upanishads praise a person with a *sāttvika* vision as someone with a balanced view of life as he has eliminated sorrow, delusion and hatred once and for all (*tatra ko mohah, kah shokah*). All of us are seeking this kind of happiness. But we end up with something else because there is a wide gap between what we seek, what we do and what we get. That is why I said that the pursuit of happiness is a serious matter. How wonderful it would be if we all looked at the vast world as having human beings rather than dividing them on the basis of nations, regions, religions, races and sects.

Remember, a narrow vision is divisive. A broad vision is expansive. But the Supreme vision is all-inclusive. It alone helps us to transform and transcend. Lets us hope to get it by studying the *Gītā* and the Upanishads.