

Celebration of Life in An Enlightened Way

LALITA AGRAWAL

Since happiness is our birthright, we can take consciously a decision to stay happy under all circumstances without any specific reason. Let not reason imprison us. Go beyond the manipulations of your mind that says, 'If things happen this way, I will be happy, otherwise I won't.' Over time, our mind will learn to endow every experience with an exhilarating touch of beauty, joy and well-being. Then the mind will develop its taste buds to relish happiness without the manipulation of reason. Our intrinsic nature is always blissful. However, we have lost this state of blissful life while pursuing a life that is full of selfish desires. For this reason our Upanishads advise us to remain always watchful about our thoughts and desires, and pursue only those desires, which will not affect the tenor of our blissful life.

Various Zen schools have adopted methods of remaining in a state of watchfulness about their mental activities. When we remain watchful, our mental activities subside and eventually, thought streams become thinner. Once we overcome the intensity of thought streams, we are able to experience a state of emptiness and become open to bliss and joy, which is our intrinsic nature. The constant practice of remaining in a state of watchfulness helps a seeker to be perpetually blissful. Pure existence and awareness together form the consciousness. Pure existence always is, but when there is no awareness, existence cannot be known. In simple terms, if our consciousness is perfect, our life is perfect,

and where there are imperfections in our consciousness, there we suffer.

Our well-being can certainly be enhanced by creative events and pleasurable activities. This should not be equated with the 'happiness syndrome' that continues to be publicized. One needs to accept reality sans ideology. The more we talk about happiness, the more we prevent it and evidence the lack of it. The absolute, unconditional acceptance of reality may liberate us from our sufferings, but no search for happiness can do so. Seeking or searching for happiness creates a gap between being and becoming, and this may give rise to a paradox. The moment we think about happiness or how to become happy, we cannot, because we are choosing a wrong vehicle to travel. There is an urgent need to educate the youths in schools, colleges and universities to help them understand that one achieves happiness only when one selflessly helps those in distress. According to L. R. Knost, 'Our job is not to toughen our children up to face a cruel and heartless world. Our job is to raise children who will make the world a little less cruel and heartless'.

Spirituality

Spirituality is never an escape or an abandonment of responsibility. It is the ability to live with peace and contentment in every situation by understanding oneself as well as the nature of the mind and the world. This can be achieved only by sustained practice. According to Robin Sharma, the renowned motivational speaker, 'The real problem lies

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in the fact that in this age of global anxiety we do not get enough relief from stress. So to revitalize yourself and nourish the deepest part of you, plan for a weekly period of peace—a weekly sabbatical—to get back to the simpler pleasures of life, pleasures that you may have given up as your days grew busier and your life more complex. Bringing this simple ritual into your week will help you reduce stress, connect with your more creative side and feel far happier in every role of your life.’ All we need are a few hours alone, with ourselves, perhaps on a quiet Sunday morning, when we can spend some time doing things we love to do the most. It may include spending time in reading a book, watching a film we have been waiting since long but could not make out, going to our favourite restaurant, reading the Sunday supplementary, sipping the coffee in our window or balcony and enjoying every bit of it, taking a long walk, or any such thing we love to do or have been longing for. Organising our life so that we get to do more of the things we love to do is one of the first steps to improve our life. Why should we care if others don’t understand what we are trying to accomplish by making the weekly sabbatical an essential part of our life? We should do it for ourselves. We must have faith in ourselves even if no one has in us. According to Blaise Pascal, ‘In faith there is enough light for those who want to believe and enough shadows to blind those who don’t’.

Spirituality is the true knowledge of oneself and the world. When we have that knowledge, we will never become slaves to dejection. All objects and relationships of the world undergo constant change. The impermanent can never give us permanent happiness. So we should learn to accept both honour and dishonour, success and failure, joy and sorrow with equanimity. Only then

we can have contentment. The principle of acceptance entails a very positive and active approach to life. In fact, embracing the principle wholeheartedly does much more than alleviate stress. By emotionally accepting what we experience in our lives, we necessarily align ourselves with spirit when we align with reality. It empowers us by clearing our mind so that we can devise better methods to bring forth the requisite change. Not only that, we should not take anything seriously, not even ourselves. And when we accept the fact that things do not happen the way we want them to happen, then we will see that anger has simply disappeared. There is no possibility of anger and anger is certainly one of the great leakages of our spiritual energy.

We can just start thinking about ourselves that we are nothing special, that we are not always meant to be victorious, that we have to succeed always in every situation. Once this settles in our being, then everything becomes acceptable. Anger disappears and the disappearance of it will bring us a new surprise, because when anger disappears, it leaves behind a tremendous energy of compassion, of love, of friendship. We have been conditioned by society, as it were, to be in a state of unhappiness and are taught to live in a state of fear which are self-damaging. Therefore, children from the very beginning should be trained to believe that life is full of happiness which again is the result of good value system which involves getting rid of conditioning, being grateful and getting a good set of values. Yusuf Merchant, honorary member, United Nations Economic and Social Council, says that an attitude of gratitude ensures happiness, it ensures that we see the positives only. He further says, ‘I believe that frequencies return to their point of origin. If we can feel gratitude, the universe

has no choice but to create events in our reality that synchronise to the frequency of gratitude. It does so by making things happen in our reality that justify our feelings of gratitude’.

Spirituality and mysticism

Spirituality is the path of positive mysticism. We come into this world with certain responsibilities. We may have to support our family, we may have to play a certain role, or do a job in this lifetime, and we have a collective responsibility to our society. As householders we cannot shirk these duties and sit at the top of a mountain meditating all day and hoping God will provide for us. Thus when God sees that we have put in our best efforts, and after all else fails, we turn to Him, God then takes notice. But if we merely sit back and relax and expect God to do everything for us nothing will happen. In this age, good work purifies us and is the best spiritual practice. Khalil Gibran, the author of *Prophet*, says: ‘You work that you may keep pace with the earth and the soul of the earth. For, to be idle is to become a stranger unto the seasons, and to step out of life’s procession, that marches in majesty and proud submission towards the infinite. When you work you are a flute through whose heart the whispering of the hours turns to music.’ He further says, ‘Always you have been told that work is a curse and labour a misfortune. But I say to you that when you work you fulfill a part of earth’s furthest dream assigned to you when that dream was born, and in keeping yourself with labour you are [in] truth loving life, and to love life through labour is to be intimate with life’s inmost secret. Your daily life is your temple and your religion. Whenever you enter into it take with you your all.’

It is a myth that with spiritual progress one becomes redundant to his family, society

and country because we can easily follow the path of *karma-yoga* while performing our worldly duties selflessly. Our spiritual learning, practice and attitude help us a lot in developing inner goodness. We must replace our negative feelings with enthusiasm, optimism and contentment. Negativity is never the correct way of dealing with any situation. Anything that is done with negative energy becomes contaminated by it and in time gives rise to more pain and unhappiness. Enthusiasm, on the other hand, gives us faith that there are possibilities. An enthusiast looks at an obstacle as a challenge and converts it into opportunity. He is an optimist who thinks that there is always a way of any hopeless or difficult situation. If we are not able to make things happen as we like, then let them happen in their own way realizing that it is just a matter of time.

Difficulties and problems will always be there in life as it is a process that runs its course through various states. When we think suffering should disappear just because we have turned to spiritualism, we commit the biggest mistake of our life. Spiritualism in fact lessens the effects of suffering. On how to live in this world, J. Krishnamurti says, ‘To live in this world, we must deny the world. By that we mean: deny the ideal, the war, the fragmentation, the competition, the envy and so on. We don’t deny the world as a schoolboy revolts against his parents. We ... deny it because we understand it. This understanding is negation.’

Life is full of surprises

Life is full of surprises and miracles. We can’t experience a surprise as a gift if our minds are filled with preconceived notions of what we should receive and what we should not; for then, the wonderful experience of surprise is lost. Boredom occurs when we take life for granted and are

indifferent to the mystery of life. The soul of enlightened living is not to be indifferent to the message of life, but to flow with life. The moment wonderment is dead, we are dead. If we embrace each moment with wonder, we can then celebrate both success and failure with equanimity.'

We can live an enlightened life if we see opportunity in difficulty; not difficulty in opportunity; rather we should see every experience and circumstance as messages from the Divine. According to Shammi Paranjape, 'We associate divine munificence with the big things, but what impacts us most is the guidance we get in small and trivial matters.' Robin Sharma says, 'Life's greatest setbacks reveal life's biggest opportunities. If you have suffered more than your fair share of difficulties in life, perhaps you are being prepared to serve some greater purpose that will require you to be equipped with the wisdom you have acquired through your trials. As the ancient thinker Euripides noted, 'There is in the worst of fortune the best chances for a happy change.' We should know that happy people have often experienced as much adversity as those who are unhappy. What sets them apart is that they have the good sense to manage their memories in a way that enriches their lives. We ought to understand that if we have failed more than others, there is a very good chance that we are living more completely than others.

We also need to raise our vibrations. The whole world is made up of vibrations. According to psychotherapist B. K. Girish Patel, 'Everything in the universe vibrates at different frequencies, just like us. Even a nonliving thing is a form of pure energy and movement.' In truth, we live in a sea of vibrations. Everything is vibration; even our thoughts are part of this vibrating universe. We attract what we send out. Therefore, if we

think positive, we attract the same and vice versa. According to Patel, 'Each thought creates a vibration and produces chemicals. Our brain produces chemicals that make us feel happy and fulfilled when we think positive. Whenever we have a negative thought, chemicals generate an adverse effect on our physical body and well-being. Our body feels the way we think.'

We identify ourselves with our mind, which is projecting itself into an imaginary future situation and creating fear which does not exist. It is a mental phantom. We can stop this health and life-corroding insanity by acknowledging the present moment. There is nothing wrong with setting goals and striving to achieve things. The mistake only lies in using it as a substitute for the feeling of life, for Being. The only point of access for that is the *Now*. For example, people keep waiting for the prosperity which does not exist in the future. When we honour, acknowledge, and fully accept our present reality, where we are, who we are, what we are doing right now—when we fully accept what we have got, we are grateful for what we have got, grateful for what is, grateful for Being. Gratitude for the moment and the fullness of life now is true prosperity.

True happiness

True happiness is the spontaneous feeling of joy that comes from knowing we are doing the right thing and leading a divine life. When we are really happy, we are making real progress. When we become a happy heart, we move forward, we dive deep within, we fly. Progress is in movement, and this movement comes only when we have joy and we become joy. Real joy, in my view, comes from acceptance of the world and not from renunciation of the world. Our present conditions are the best possible ones

for our advancement. A simple life is the life of happiness. We need to be simple at every moment. Complicated mind obstructs the path of happiness and peace. If we can lead a simple life, we shall feel how happy and how fortunate we are. To live in joy and happiness is to live the inner life which leads us to self-realization. The fact for us to know is that the outer world, unfortunately, does not right now embody these qualities, whereas the inner world has them in boundless measure. So it is better for us to try to establish a free access to the inner world by virtue of our inner cry and our soulful meditation.

Education is not bringing peace and silence and blissfulness to people. There is something missing in it. It is only education

in subjects which do not touch our interior being at all. They may make us doctors and engineers, but they do not give us the insight that can create a Gautama Buddha in us. The true meaning of the word 'education' is to draw out. But all that our so-called education does is to force in. That is to say, borrowed education is being forced into the minds of innocent children and students from outside. The real education is the inner education. Unless we become acquainted with ourselves, all our knowledge is useless. 'Know thyself' must be the most precious education and then you can become acquainted with everything else. A man who knows himself will never misuse his education. Otherwise we are going to use our education to exploit people. ■

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