

# Peace, Happiness and Fulfilment–I

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## The eternal quest

Let us consider the notions of happiness, peace and fulfilment from the perspective of Vedanta as well as the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. We are passing through a time when we all feel the need to understand what is peace or how we can attain it and what is happiness, for that matter. What does fulfilment in life denote? Human beings are perpetually in search of these. In the *Bhagavad-Gītā* Sri Krishna says,

*Nāsti buddhirayuktasya na  
chāyuktasya bhāvanā / Na  
chābhāvayatah shantirashāntasya  
kutah sukham // (2.66)*

An undisciplined person, who has not controlled the mind and senses, can neither have a resolute intellect nor steady contemplation on God. For one who never unites the mind with God there is no peace; and how can one who lacks peace be happy?

Peace and happiness are interconnected. If one is not peaceful, how can one have happiness? One thing without exception is applicable to all, and that is man's quest for happiness. One writer says, had we not been seeking happiness, then we would be putting our hands in fire. What is happiness is a question the answer to which keeps eluding us, because, every experience of earthly happiness is invariably followed by an experience of unhappiness. A man wants

fame. He works at it. He attains it. He experiences happiness. But soon the euphoria evaporates. Why? He takes on a new endeavour to ensure that the fame attained remains permanent. He attains fame, he feels happy, and yet after a while he feels unfulfilled. Had it not been so, then people who have achieved extraordinary feats in life would all have experienced utmost happiness and fulfilment. But in reality what happens is just the opposite. We hear cases of suicide or we find that they are constantly fearful. Along with happiness, there is another thing which we are seeking in life. When we get something, we try to get something else. Having obtained that, we look for some other thing to possess. And we want to get more and more. This in Sanskrit is called *abhyudaya*—the meaning is—rising from one state to another state of accomplishment, or progress. So we want to improve things. How long should we improve things or how much should we improve things is a question. But we all want to have improvement. We all want to have more and more betterness or things better than earlier. This is the journey we are all following.

## The distractions

In the *Kathopanishad* we find a wonderful verse which says that the mind is somehow going out. This going out of the mind is described in the following verse:

*Parānci khāni vyatrinatsvayambhu-  
stasmātparān pashyati nāntarātman /  
Kashciddhirah pratyagātmānamaiksha-  
dāvrittacakshuramritatvamicchān // (2.1.1)*

The Self-existent Lord created the senses outgoing: therefore, one sees outside and not the *Ātman* within. Some intelligent man, with his senses turned away, (from their object), desirous of immortality, sees the *Ātman* within.

The Upanishad says that most of us are looking for this happiness, this fulfilment and this improvement outside—*parānci khāni*. *Khāni* refers to the senses. After all, our life consists of our senses and their uses. So it is spent in search of something. It is like a curse. The word is *vyatrinat*, which means it is a kind of punishment given to man. Why should it be punishment? Because what is available inside and so near us is being ignored and we are looking outside. As Sri Ramakrishna says it is like a man getting up late at night and, wanting to have a smoke, going out with a lantern in hand, to a place where a small fire is burning. He tells the neighbour, ‘Can you give me some fire to light my cigar?’ Surprised, the man says: ‘My Goodness! You come all the way seeking fire, and you are carrying a fire in your own hand!’ This is how, although we have something so close to us, we are looking for it through the senses outside. Who has made our senses outgoing? Who has made our mind go outward seeking for happiness or fulfilment in things of the world? The Upanishad says, ‘*svayambhu*’, as if God has created the world in this way so that the mind goes out and does not turn within. As a result, *parān pashyati*—we see the external world that our senses can perceive. What do the senses perceive? The great Indian rishis were, in fact, people who greatly believed in generalizations. If asked what we see outside, we reply buildings, roads, people, objects or whatever falls within the vision

of the eye. The rishis won’t say that. They say, everything that we see is form, is a *rupa*. So the *vishaya* or every object before our eyes is a *rupa*, a form, a particular shape. To that shape we can give any name. It could be a mountain, a river, or anything. Same with all the senses and their perceptions, all have been generalized. Sound is what our ears receive. It is not the sound of this talk, or the sound of a song, or of a passing train. No particularization, but only generalization—it’s a sound. Our senses are all generalized, like smell, touch or taste.

I would also draw your attention to one more fact. Look at the new devices created through our scientific progress or technological advancement. If you look at them patiently you will find that they are all extensions of our senses. For instance, a camera is an extension of our eyes. Look at CCTV. I cannot see everything through our eyes which have a limited vision but through CCTV I can observe the entire building. That means my own eyes have been extended in the form of these devices. Similarly, I could extend my other senses. Say, a telescope, or a microscope—these are all extensions of our senses. Scientific discoveries are made by proper observation that enables us to go deeper and discover things beyond what we see on the surface. We see a drop of water. But when we take it under the microscope we see some bacteria perhaps, and if I go further I say it is nothing but H<sub>2</sub>O, some chemicals put together. So my senses are in search of something and I first analyse the external world—*parān pashyati*. All our scientific things, all our modern day equipment have been searching outside for means to make the world better, make our living better.

Everything has a place in the large scheme of spirituality. We never say science has no place in spiritual life. For instance, I am sitting in Kanpur, recording a talk which is put up in YouTube and it reaches all those who are listening to it. So this is the discovery we have made, with our senses going out into the objects and forces of nature. Layers and layers of research have gone into the creation of technologies. Somebody has worked on camera, some on how to telecast what has been recorded and some on digital world. Things have been progressing up and up. We have made improvements in the outside world. We have made changes in our lives to make life much better and much more secure at one level. But we also know, despite our scientific progress, we are also having, side by side, a state of peacelessness. Look at what has happened today in spite of all these scientific cameras, look at how much of insecurity, how much crime is there around. That is why people have to install all kinds of gadgets at the entrance of their apartments to see who is coming, whether he is an outsider or not. There are threats of insecurity. But why is it so?

### Another dimension of life

This takes us to another dimension of life and it is of that another dimension of life that the *Kathopanishad* is here speaking: *kashciddhirah pratyagātmānamaikshad*.

Behind what is being observed there is the observer, behind what is being seen is the seer, behind what is being perceived is the perceiver. So we are all perceiving, we are all observing, we are experiencing. Who are we? We are experiencing the scientific benefits, but, who are we? So the hard question of life is the question of Self. Who am I? From where is this sense of 'I'

coming, the sense of energy coming that makes me perceive things in the world? Who is the observer, experiencer and who is seeking something? Who is He?

The *Kathopanishad* says, *pratyagātmānamaikshad*. One who is interested in *aiksat*, who is wanting—*pratyagātmān*—his own divine being has as if closed down his senses. *Āvrittacaksuh* actually means a person who has closed his eyes. So the first step for a person who is trying to meditate is to close his eyes. Look at the Buddha meditating—eyes closed. Look at the picture of Sri Ramakrishna. They have all closed their eyes. So they are looking inside. Once we close our eyes, we begin to see darkness. That's good to begin with. There is nothing except that there are a number of thoughts coming from different sides, memories, ideas, expressions, feelings—all coming up to the surface of our minds; but we have closed our eyes. So that's the first step. Then we begin to question ourselves. As our minds calm down, we begin to see things clearly. As the mind begins to come down, it also becomes purer. Then we begin to see the deeper truth about ourselves, *pratyagātmānamaikshad*, then we begin to see the True Self within, and *amritatvamicchan*—we become the seekers after immortality.

We are dwelling upon the subject of how we can seek lasting happiness, lasting peace and lasting fulfilment in life. The word lasting is very important because, we all experience peace, happiness and fulfilment in life. But they are not lasting. Let us take the instance of eating. We enjoy a particular sweet. First we experience a sense of restlessness to attain that, a desire to eat a *rasgulla*, the Indian sweet, for

instance. The desire becomes very intense and I can't hold myself any longer and somehow I go and get it and it gives me peace and happiness. But that happiness lasts only under certain conditions. What are they? First of all—I must have the *rasgulla* or any sweet, for that matter, in limited number. I might like to have more, but I can't after a certain limit and cannot go on eating and eating. I have to give a stop to it. Secondly, there should be an occasion for it. I can't be celebrating my loss of job by taking a *rasgulla*. I can't be taking something which is very favourite of mine when I have suffered a defeat. So I can take it only within certain circumstances and certain limits. All right. Even if, keeping within certain limits, certain circumstances, I repeat this sensory experience, we all know that after some time it is boring. We want something fresh, something still more exciting, something more sensational. We are seeking happiness in this way and we know, it is not lasting. Similarly with peace. We all say we want peace of mind. What's that? Sometimes you come across students who are working very hard to crack a competitive exam. They must also acquire a particular percentage of marks. Once they attain that percentage and that success, they say—Ah! I have got peace now. But that peace or happiness is again short-lived. Something else comes in. They have to face everyday situations in life. So all sensory experiences are like that. Somebody has to file a tax-return or the GST. The last date is coming. So he rushes to do it. He does it and then he says, now I am going to have peace of mind. Thus we have experiences throughout which give us temporary peace, happiness and fulfilment, but not lasting ones. This is the problem. This is

the issue before us. How to have lasting peace, lasting happiness and lasting fulfilment?

### The way out

This was the question which the rishis in the Upanishads took up. This again is the question which has been solved for us, at least through their remarkable lives, by Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda and Sri Sarada Devi. They were people who had attained such a state where there is tremendous peace, peace that passeth understanding. What have they attained that makes them so peaceful? This is the kind of peace that goes beyond our comprehension. Similarly, happiness. Look at Sri Ramakrishna. Look at his face. There is so much of joy and happiness there. Three or four pictures of Sri Ramakrishna were taken. Look at his face. The face is full of such joy! What has he attained? What is that inner something that he has attained? It is definitely not something outside. It's not that he has gone to Singapore and he is feeling happy there. It's not that he has acquired a costly car and that feeling is making him happy. It's not some upcoming something that he is so happy about. What made people whom in our terminology are called 'rishis' or spiritually illumined souls feel happy? What is that joy?

I remember, years ago, Swami Bodhanandaji, who was the Secretary of the Ramakrishna Mission, New Delhi, gave a talk on 'The Joy of Illumination'. In his introduction he said, we are always talking about difficulties and challenges in life, the struggles, the pain and misery. But why can't we speak of the joy that accompanies illumination? Why can't we seek and think about the joy which a sage experiences because he has got illumination? What is that illumination? This is what this verse speaks

of: *pratyagātmānamaikshadāvrittacakshur-amritatvamicchān*. He is a seeker after the *amritatva*. You may call it immortality or eternal sense of joy, for the word *amrita* means both. In our day-to-day life one experience that comes to all of us is that of dealing with other human beings. When we are dealing with others, it causes us a state of happiness or a state of unhappiness, a state of peace or a state of peacelessness. There are some people by being with whom we feel joy. As one of our monks used to say, some people bring happiness wherever they go and some people bring unhappiness wherever they go.

According to the Upanishads, in all human beings there are different elements. These elements have been studied and are being studied and will be studied further by human beings themselves. We have the modern psychology which studies human minds. We have our rishis who also studied human beings. And in so doing, they arrived at certain conclusions. Let us put it in a very broad way. In each human being, let's say, there are three things that the *Bhagavad-Gītā* describes as the *trigunas*—three basic elements or qualities or constituent elements which make the nature of all creation. What are they? First is *sattva*, second *rajas*, third is *tamas*. *Sattva* stands for serenity, *rajas*, activity, *tamas*, inertia. Based on these three *gunas*, there are three types of living beings. Those who are based on pure *sattva* are the 'devatās' or deities and those who are full of *tamas* are the *rākshasas* or demons, and those who are full of *rajas* or in whom there is a mixture of these two are the human beings. This is the general understanding. Then if we go further, we shall find all the three *gunas* existing in each one of us in different proportions. We have human qualities in us; we all are humans. There is also the *devatā*-like quality in many human

beings. In fact it is there in all of us but in some it is more manifest than in others. Similarly, there is the *rākshasa* or the demon-like quality in us. In his *Lectures from Colombo to Almora*, Swami Vivekananda said, ninety-nine per cent of us are still in the brutish stage. We have not grown. We are still in the uncivilized state. We have the animal in us, the man in us, or the God in us. Having said this, now let us turn to a story which is given in one of the Upanishads.

### *Dāmyata datta dayadhvam*

Once men, gods and demons went to their creator, the *Prajāpati*, and asked for their father's advice as to how to live their lives. The father was like a typical examiner. He would not give away things so easily. He said, 'If you want to know the truth about how to live life, you must first practise a life of self-control and discipline for thirty years.' It was a long period but they complied. The *devatās*, the gods, the *manushyas* or humans and the *dānavas* and *asuras* i.e. the demons went and spent thirty years in perfect self-control. Afterwards, they came back to their father, who is God Himself. God gave all the three of them one little word and that word in Sanskrit was *da*, not the English D but the Sanskrit *da*, and kept quiet. Each one of them had a message through that word *da*.

Let's begin with the *tāmasik*, the *asuras*. The *asuras* take it to mean *dayadhvam* which means to be compassionate. *Da* refers to *dayā* because, by nature, the demons or the demon-like beings are cruel. They can go to any extent to enjoy things and, if anything comes in the way, they have no mercy. They just tear it apart. For them the advice given by *Prajāpati* is—learn to have *dayā*. Try to cultivate *dayā* or compassion and you will be happy. What

was the purpose of the thirty years' span of control and austerity? That was to prepare the mind for receiving the teaching and having meaningful interpretation.

Then the *devatās* or the gods go and for them the word *da* stands for *dāmayata* which means *damanam* or control. The *devatās* are the embodiments of *sattva*. A *devatā* is one who is in a state where there is no *duhkha* and which is a state of enjoyment. And, as far as the story goes, just to enjoy they do wrong things. So in order to enjoy your life properly, you must learn to have control, *dāmayā*. The word *dāmayā* means self-control.

Then comes the *manushyas* or the humans. A *manushya* is a mixer of both *sattva* and *tamas*. So when they approached *Prajāpati*, it was for them to learn to have *datta* which means *dānam*. The main problem with human beings is greediness. This greediness is the cause of man's downfall. So the advice of *Prajāpati* for him is that he must learn to give and be charitable.

Āchārya Shankara in his comments on this story says, these three tendencies are present in all of us. So we should try to practise all these in our lives. We should have *dayā*, we should have *damanam* and we should have *dānam*. This is the message given to us by the Upanishad, if we are, indeed, in search of a meaningful life.

*Dayā* or compassion comes in so many ways. Compassion is not just for somebody in trouble. Of course, you should have that. But it is something more. Being kind to others means being aware of whether you are causing some inconvenience to somebody. That also is part of compassion. Piero Ferrucci, in his book *The Power of Kindness: The Unexpected Benefits of*

*Leading a Compassionate Life*, speaks of the power of compassion. It is the power of gentleness, that comes in so many ways.

Then comes *dāmayā* which means you must learn to be self-controlled. One of the reasons we suffer is that we take up something and then we are not able to give it up. We do not know where to draw a line, how much we should go in for and how much we should *not* go in for. The *Bhagavad-Gītā* says, if you want to benefit from the practice of yoga you must practise moderation. *Yuktāhāra-vihārasya* which means you must be self-controlled.

And the third is *dānam*. We must learn to give, we must learn to offer whatever we don't require, or whatever we can afford to give to others. This *dānam* need not be always in terms of giving money. Let us be very clear about it. It is not an appeal for funds. It is something more than that. In the *Bhagavad-Gītā* we find *dānam* is spoken of as of three types—in a *sāttvik* way, or in a *rājasik* way, or in a *tāmasik* way. When *dānam* is given in a *sāttvik* way, it is given to the right person at the right time in the right quantity and for the right occasion. The *Gītā* uses the phrase *deshe kāle cha pātre cha*. You should not give *dānam* to somebody who may misuse it. So you must choose the right person, the right place, the right situation, while giving your *dānam*. Then there is the *rājasik dānam* which seeks applause from the society. Even that also is acceptable, for, at least out of these tendencies, a person will be doing some kind of charity. And the third case is when a person does not have any of these considerations and gives things to the wrong person and in a wrong situation and this is known as the *tāmasik dānam*. ■

(To be continued)

\* This lecture by Swami Atmashradhananda, the Secretary of Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Kanpur, was arranged by Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata on 15 November 2020.