

The Concept of Success

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The concept of success on the part of the human being is a very old topic, an ancient topic. From culture to culture the concept of success can be different. Thanks to the speed in communication and a certain global traffic of ideas, the concept of success seems to be now almost universal. The cultural differences don't seem to exist, save perhaps in some remote tribal society which has no contact with people at large. The concept is almost reduced to one or two things—success in the field of one's profession or in terms of accomplishment. Success is largely gauged in terms of the pursuit of knowledge, and in terms of economic pursuit. There is a drive for success in terms of gaining more money and more recognition in society. This seems to be the universal concept of success these days. I don't think one has to change these pursuits. I think this concept will rule the hearts of people for ages to come. But then, is there a sense of success on the part of the human being as a human being? That is very important.

Self-Judgment

When I strive for success, I am going to judge myself as a success or a failure, or as one who is struggling to become successful. I don't mind struggling for success for a certain number years in my life. Up to middle age one will strive for success, for there is always a hope that next year will be different, or that the next two years will make a great difference in one's life. There is hope and there is striving for that expected person that I would be. But when I reach middle age, though I find that I have perhaps achieved what I wanted to achieve, still, I am going to look at myself as a person. The judgment is not going to be from the standpoint of what I have achieved, even though I thought my professional accomplishments were what I wanted. Even though I have done all that, still, I am going to look at myself not only from that one standpoint; I am going to look at myself as a person. And this is going to be the basis for my judgment about myself. Thus, in middle age, as they say, there is a big crisis—as though there was no crisis before. In middle age the person begins to realize there is no hope. That is the crisis. Till then he was hopeful that things would be different. Now he realizes, "I am already 45. What difference will another 45 years make? And it is a declining 45 years, so it is not going to be the same." The drive, the energy, the enthusiasm all slowly wane. This indicates that he seems to realize the situation. And he is bound to make a judgment—that he has not made it. Money is okay. But

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that itself is not enough. Somebody has to approve of the fact that I have made money, and think that I am wonderful.

A person who has gained financial and professional success from a poor start, may not only think that he has made it, but may also have to make sure that everybody else knows that he has made it. To be the son or daughter of that person is a tragedy. Every day in the morning he will say, “You know how I studied? I studied under street lights.” Although he has made it, he has not assimilated it. Therefore, he has to boast about it and get the approval of everybody that he has made it. That means that inside, he doesn’t think that he has made it.

Self-criticism doesn’t seem to go away. It is a chronic problem which becomes acute in middle age. Therefore, you would like to bring about some changes in your life. But change in one’s personal life doesn’t make any difference. It is always the same because the person is the same, and it is this person who is going to make the self-judgment. That self-judgment is the problem of a human being. It is easy to say, “Don’t be judgmental.” What people don’t understand is that this very statement reflects a judgment. There is no way of not being judgmental; as a self-conscious human being you are going to judge yourself. When you are judgmental about yourself, you are not going to be compassionate towards others, understanding of others. You are going to be judgmental. It is natural, because if I am harsh on myself, how I am going to be sympathetic and understanding of others? I am judgmental, and you are also judgmental, so both of us pass as normal. To be normal all we need is enough company.

But then, how I fare in my own intimate understanding of myself is the only thing that counts in determining whether or not I have made it. This is very important. The whole world may say that you are beautiful, but you have to assimilate that. Otherwise you will think that the world doesn’t know you, it only knows the person with makeup. Inside, what I think about myself is what really counts. In that very place where I have this sense of me, of I, in that very place I see a freedom from the judgment that I am not successful, that I have yet to be successful, or, in other words, all is not well with me. If a person is at home being oneself whatever one is I would say that person alone is successful.

Self-consciousness and Freedom

We can look at this concept of success in a different way. As a self-conscious person I am to a great extent free—free in the ways of my thinking, free enough to have certain desires, free enough to act upon them, or not. People can even have desires to go to heaven. This is

amazing to me, because nobody has seen heaven. Yet after death they plan to go there. That means the sky is the limit for desires. That kind of freedom in terms of desires is the prerogative of a human being; he is endowed with the power to desire, the power to know and the power to do. This power comes from the person whom you are conscious of, a self-conscious person. And in that very self seems to be the freedom that you draw from. What makes me different from an animal like a cow? The cow also has a capacity to desire, to know. It not only gathers perceptual knowledge, it can also make inferences. But from the behavior of the cow it looks like it has a certain programming. A cow is a vegetarian not by choice; by nature it is a herbivorous animal. It has certain desires, but it doesn't plan for retirement. And it seems to be happy being a cow. Whether it is an Indian cow or a Jersey cow, the cow doesn't seem to have any complex about it like the human being has. The black cow doesn't think that it is black, and the white cow doesn't think it is white. It is happy wherever it is. The animals seem to be better off than us, because they have no complexes. How is an animal different from us? What makes the difference? It has a body, it has biological urges, physiological urges; we have them also. There is no difference whatsoever. But the capacity to know, to desire, and to act is programmed in an animal. What makes you free from that kind of totally programmed life? It is only self-consciousness.

Being conscious of myself I become free—free in terms of desiring, exploring, knowing. It is self-consciousness that endows me with this freedom. Every human being has a great capacity (*śakti*) in terms of desires. That is a driving force, and it is a very big thing. We have multinational corporations because of this great capacity to desire. Everything human beings have made is the manifestation of the force of desire. Even the destruction wrought by human beings is again due to desire. You make because of desiring, and unmake because of desiring. This power to desire is a tremendous force that the human being is endowed with. And it manifests even as child. The story of desires is very interesting. If you closely track the story of predominant desires in a given person's life, you can get the biography of that person. All you have to do is observe the whole process of the fulfillment of desires and attempts to fulfill desires.

As a child I had desires. I can't say I fulfilled all of them. As a young boy or girl one has desires. All are not fulfilled. Which child did not want to score 100 percent in every subject? He had to settle for something less, something less and something less. The parents also had a lot of desires for their children, and they too had to settle for something less. As a young person I had a lot of fantasies. At that time I thought they were all legitimate desires—later they proved to be fantasies. Some were met with, and others did not meet with any measure of success. In fact,

some were failures. Though desires are the driving force of my life, no doubt, they are not always met with. The idea of success in terms of a desire is to get exactly what is desired. Behind every desire there is something aimed at, and that has to be gained by the person. But it does not always happen that way. In fact, after a certain number of years of striving, even as the desires arise you know you are not going to fulfill them. Therefore you find yourself having trouble even starting something new. When you look back into your life it is a disconcerting fact to realize that in a day of twelve waking hours you have never cleared, even once, the deck of desires.

As child I had unfulfilled desires. As I grew up the list lengthened. Every passing year brought in a few more unfulfilled desires in my life. By the time I reached 40 there was no hope of fulfilling them anymore. That is a disconcerting fact, for I cannot look at myself as a successful person when I have so many pending desires unfulfilled. These desires are not fun for me. It isn't that I am so happy that I am free to have desires that I therefore entertain some more. And if I fulfill them, I am okay, and if don't fulfill them I am still okay. No. These desires are not separate from the desiring me, the striving me, the me who wants to get ahead. The competitive me and the desires are identical; they are not two different things. The type of desires one has may be a little different from the desires of others. But that everybody is subject to desires is a fact, and that they are incapable of fulfilling all of them is another fact.

These desires include the desire to change others. Desire here is not merely the desire for money, for a break-through in your research, for a better place of work or whatever else you may want. The desire to change others is a very predominant desire in one's life, especially when you are married. You want to change your partner. Twenty-five years of marriage are over—you are still striving to change the other person. A human being doesn't give up. And the truth of the story is, the other person is also trying to change you.

I cannot change the economic climate of the society, or of the country. I cannot change the behavior of people. I cannot change the wild beliefs that people have, even though some of them are ill founded. Beliefs that are absolutely unverifiable become absolute truths, especially religious beliefs. There is no possibility of verifying whether I will survive death or not. It is a belief. And it is a non-verifiable belief. How am I going to verify whether you and I are going to survive death, unless both of us meet each other after death.? Assuming I survive death, that I will go to heaven is also non-verifiable. That I am going to like it is also non-verifiable. That following this person will take me there is another non-verifiable belief. It is all tourism

promotion. Most of the religions are tourism promotions. I would like to give them the freedom to believe what they believe and do what they do. But they do not give me the freedom not to believe. That is what we call fanaticism. On what basis can one prove that I am more right than the other? Perhaps both are wrong. Perhaps both are right. We want people to think a little bit and change, but we find we cannot change them.

I have umpteen desires in my life. I want political leaders to behave properly. I want religious leaders to be more responsible. I want people in general to be more understanding, if not giving. And of course I want my parents to understand me. I want myself to be more understanding, especially when I have to relate to my in-laws. I seem to be very intolerant. Therefore, desires are not merely for success in my profession, or in terms of money. There are many areas of desire, and few of them are fulfilled. When can I say I am successful? What will be the fraction of my happiness, when the unfulfilled desires are more numerous than the desires fulfilled? Not only are there many current desires unfulfilled, but there are unfulfilled desires with reference to my past also. And there are also desires buried in the unconscious which I am not now aware of. I have to look at myself as a person with all these desires, because they all constitute me. My sense of success about myself is in terms of how many desires I have fulfilled. If this is true, everyone has to conclude “I am a failure.” Before accepting that conclusion, we have to look into the nature of desires.

A desire is not always to acquire something you don't have, like money, home, friendship, name, power, skills, and knowledge. The desire for any or all of these is a positive desire to acquire what is desirable. Then there is the equally powerful desire to avoid what is undesirable, according to you. You don't want to lose your job; you don't want to lose the value of your money, and therefore you have to fight inflation. That means you have to invest, and that means you have to take a risk. You want to avoid a lot of things. Both desires that are positive and desires that are negative are valid. Included are desires to retain what you have, as well as to get rid of what you have. These are the sets of desires that constitute a human being. Their expression is the very life of the person, the story of the person. One's attitudes, judgments about oneself and others, are also based upon the fulfillment and non-fulfillment of desires. The bitterness that one may have about one's life, or about oneself, is again in terms of these desires. Even if I have fulfilled at least fifty percent of these desires, perhaps I can say that I am successful. But that is not the case. Even one unfulfilled desire is one too many. Therefore, I don't see any way of looking at myself as a successful person.

Desire as a Privilege

Now here comes along a person like me to talk about this. Is there anything that will help me to look at these desires more as a privilege than things to be fulfilled? Is there a basis for my self-judgment? Can there be an expression of the free soul that I am? These desires can constitute my personality, my simple likes and dislikes, giving an individuality, a uniqueness to me. Thereby, I can look upon them as a privilege. For that, I must be someone who is acceptable to myself. That means I have to see myself as a little different from the privilege that I have, because the one who is privileged is a person who enjoys some privileges already. Privileges are luxuries. If I look at my desires in this way, then I can say I am a successful person.

Our way of looking at life is a little different. When I say our way of life, I mean a tradition of teaching, spiritual teaching. In the light of the vision of the teachers in this tradition, success is always a *siddhi*. This is entirely different. In this concept of success, desires do not form the basis for my self-judgment; they are purely privileges. And in this vision the self is to be understood as it is. To convert these desires into privileges, to understand them for what they are, the self should be adequate even before the fulfillment of desires. They should be looked upon as privileges added to a free soul—a person who is already free, an adequate person, a person who is at home with himself. That person plus desires is entirely different. That is a successful person. In fact, all his faculties are unfettered, because the pressure to fulfill desires is not there; the pressure to prove himself to others is not there.

We have a clean plan, a method in the *Bhagavadgītā*. If I can manage my desires, I am not going to be affected by a sense of failure. Managing one's desires we call *yoga*. My capacity to manage my desires makes me a *yogi*, a person who has a degree of success. But you cannot manage anything unless you know what it is that you are supposed to manage. Desires become the basis for my self-judgment only when these desires cause me distress. In other words, when I do not know how to take the results of the course of action that I have undertaken to fulfill any given desire. On this basis, there is an analysis of the whole concept of failure and success in the *Gītā*.

That you desire is not a problem. It is a prerogative. That you need to fulfill a desire is inherent in the desire itself. You cannot have a desire and say, "I don't need to fulfill it." A desire is what needs to be fulfilled. In order to fulfill a desire, a wish, a longing, you undertake a course of action. That is not unexpected. Just look at the whole process. That I desire is natural. That the desire has to be fulfilled is proper. It is inherent in the desire itself. And that I undertake

an activity to fulfill that desire is also natural. None of these bother you. What bothers you is this. After the course of action is undertaken, you draw a line somewhere and see whether what is expected is achieved or not. And that expected result of your activity is always in keeping with what you originally wanted. So you have a plan. Desires are there. Your cognitive faculty helps you to plan out how you are going to fulfill the desire. The skills and resources that you have are brought together to execute the course of action that is planned so that you can get what you wanted. But when the outcome is seen, you find, more often than not, that you are not successful. This is otherwise called failure. From this we understand that in the course of my planning and acting, there are many hidden variables.

Acknowledging Hidden Variables

Hidden variables being what they are, are not under your control. You have no say over them. There is a truth in this—I don't call all the shots. I try to surface these hidden variables—as many as I can, and as well as I can. But all the way there are hidden variables. The whole thing is a percentage game. I need to change cognitively. This will bring about a necessary change in myself. I am not talking about healthy, positive thinking. I am talking about proper thinking. If you understand what you don't have and want to have, is it negative thinking? It is thinking. If you don't lament about it, that is born of a certain attitude, an attitude consequent to my cognitive change. What I am attempting to do here is to see whether we are able to see certain facts about this issue.

Living a life of achievement is a percentage game. When I plan and act to accomplish a given result, I may be surprised to find a result which is even more than I set out to accomplish. Or I may accomplish exactly what I wanted, or I may accomplish less than what I wanted, or I may accomplish something opposite. Let us take the simple action of catching the bus. I am on one side of the road. The bus stop is on the other side. I have to cross the road and catch the bus. My desire is to catch the bus. I cross the road and catch the bus. This is success. Or, I cross the road and a friend stops his car and gives me a lift—more than I wanted. I am successful. These two things I don't need to manage at all. If things happen like this throughout my life, there is no problem. But when I get less than I wanted, I have a problem of management. I cross the road. I miss the bus. That result I have to take into account. I do not work for nothing. Some people say that you should perform action without expecting results. Nobody performs action without expecting results. The very action is meant only to produce results. If it is less than you expected, it is a fact. You are a cognitive person and you will see it. You have to manage that situation.

Then there is the opposite of what is expected. I *was* crossing the road. Two days later I find myself waking up in the hospital asking some basic questions like ‘Where am I? Who am I?’ and so on. These four types of results are inherent in this action because there are hidden variables. If the result is more than you expected, the hidden variables are in your favor. Or you got exactly what you wanted. Again, the hidden variables are in your favor. If the result is less than you wanted or the opposite of what you wanted hidden, the hidden variables are not in your favor. The only satisfaction is, it could have been worse.

In the *Gītā* we have a statement that says, “Always having the same mind on obtaining the desirable and the undesirable,” *iṣṭa-aniṣṭa-upapattiṣu nityam samacittatvam*. The first two results we saw are desirable, *iṣṭa*. The other two are not, *aniṣṭa*. In the wake of both, if you can command a mind, an attitude in which you are the same (*samacittatvam*), neither highly elated because you got more, nor depressed because you did not get what you wanted, then you are successful in terms of managing your desires. Otherwise, you have to fulfill all of them to be successful. Management of desires is not controlling desires, because desires are a privilege. You only have to be pragmatic in terms of whether a desire is worth pursuing, or whether it is possible to fulfill it with the resources and limitations you have. A cognitive person will be able to decide that. An individual has this freedom to desire. Once you decide to fulfill a desire, in the process there is your self-expression, which is very satisfying. Desires are a privilege and your working to fulfill them is another privilege. If you don’t have the enthusiasm to fulfill a desire due to inertia that is a tragedy. You don’t need anything else to feel badly inside. When you are up and doing something, it is self-satisfying because it comes from freedom. That freedom is manifest in your activity. The cognitive person is manifest in planning. In fact, you are expressing yourself all the way. The problem starts only when you begin to respond to the results. When I respond to the results, I find either I am elated or depressed. This is a pendulum.

The *Gītā* tells me a little more about the situation. You have choice, freedom with reference to the course of action to fulfill a desire. But you don’t have complete control over the result, inasmuch as there are too many laws which you have to take into account. There are too many variables to control so I am told, *karmaṇi eva adhikāraḥ te*, “You have a choice only over your action.” The result is taken care of by the laws over which you have no control at all. We don’t have knowledge of all of them. Our understanding of the laws is very limited. It is something like budgeting for your future. You have some data on the basis of which you budget for the year. On the basis of what you plan to accomplish this year, your expenses, income etc., you arrive at an amount. Then you add something for any hidden variables—maybe ten percent.

But then, the hidden variables may not be only ten percent. It is very clear that with limited knowledge and power I cannot think of what is going to happen in the future. It is impossible to figure out what is going to come. I cannot know everything that is going to happen, and even if I could know, I cannot stop it. I am limited in powers and skills and knowledge. This is a fact you have to recognize. The more you recognize that fact, the more you will be equipped to deal with it. That recognition, in its wake, brings about a change in your attitude towards yourself and also towards what you are facing. Because results are expected, and because I am pragmatic and equipped enough cognitively, I am able to take them as they come. Because I understand that I do not call all the shots, and because the results are inherent in every action, I can only be prayerful, and take them as they come. The pragmatism comes from the understanding that the other two, less and opposite, are also expected. They are in the game.

So you hear from the *Gītā* that you have a choice over your actions. You can act, you need not act, or you can act differently. You have a desire; you chose to fulfill it, and chose a course of action. It is freedom all the way. There is no let or hindrance to your freedom. But when the result comes, you find your freedom is gone, because the result comes according to its own laws, which we don't understand. The *Gītā* says that you have choice over your action. You are the author of your action (*karma-hetu*), but not of the result (*karmaphala-hetu*). You are not the source of the result of action, because there are too many laws involved.

If I understand that, I can go one step further and appreciate that all these laws are given. The laws may even include the law of *karma*; your own past actions may be working for you, or against you. In human experience we find that one is lucky, and one is not lucky. As long as good luck and bad luck are there, you have to accept that there is some other force, because there is nothing accidental in this world. Every accident is explainable. 'Accident' is a word for an incident in time and place the causes of which are not known. The understanding that I have no choice over the results of my actions gives me the capacity to be objective and to take the results as they come. I can be wiser in the light of what I did or did not get. Nobody is a loser. Just a change in attitude makes me feel free with reference to my desiring and fulfilling desires. If my whole life becomes a *yoga*. I become wiser, never the loser.

This is *yoga*. The laws that are there are given, but they are not given or created by me. My body itself is given. My mind is given. My senses are given. My parentage, the earth, the galaxies, the universe, the quantum object world are all given. If everything is given, that means nobody creates anything. Everything is available on the surface, or as a potential. Every piece of

software and every machine that has been discovered were potential. We never achieved the impossible. We see a possibility and work towards it. Man went to the moon and came back because it was a possibility. Certain things are lying in a potential form to be tapped through action. Between the action and the possible result, the connection is already provided.

Everything is given. The body, mind, and senses are intelligently put together and given. You cannot think of anything intelligently put together, to serve a purpose, that doesn't imply prior knowledge. And knowledge necessarily implies a conscious being. If all that is here is given, it implies knowledge, which in turn implies a conscious being. That conscious being has to be accepted and if he is, you say he is God. That intelligent being that has put all this together is necessarily all-knowledge. Since everything is given, that intelligent being, that knowledge, has to manifest in the form of all that is here. Nothing can be outside that reality. God cannot be sitting somewhere in time and space and create time and space. Time and space are not absolutes; they are part of the whole. Further, God cannot be outside of time and space, because our concept of outside is within space. The only alternative is that the very space is not separate from God. Time itself is not separate from God. Every law, every force, strong and weak, is not separate from God. All that is here is God. If I can have that awareness it is easier for me to accept things. My knowledge and powers are limited. I can only plan so much, but I can learn in the process. Therefore, life is not a matter for judgment on the basis of any one day. If I enjoy this process I am successful. I become wiser. This is born of understanding; it is freedom expressed. My desire is an expression of freedom. It doesn't bind me; it is a privilege. If I look at it this way, my life is called a life of *yoga*. I grow as a person. It is that person who can become compassionate, who can be understanding, who can be non-judgmental about himself and others also. That person is successful.