

Satsang with Swami Vidadatmananda Saraswati
Arsha Vidya Gurukulam
More on Happiness

Question

What is the definition of happiness?

Answer

Happiness is subjective. When I am happy, I know that I am happy. I do not need verification from some one else that I am happy. I am happy when I am pleased with myself. Unhappiness is when I am not pleased with myself. When am I pleased with myself? When I find myself to be acceptable to me. When I find myself not acceptable to myself, then I am not pleased with myself, and I am unhappy.

When do I find myself unacceptable? I do not like myself when I am the greedy self, the angry self, the hating self, the reacting self or the helpless self. I do not like myself whenever reactions such as *kāma* (desire), *krodha* (anger), and *lobha* (greed), arise in me and my *rāga-dveṣas* or likes and dislikes appear. Whenever any of these arise in me, I do not like myself. I do not like the angry I, or the greedy I, or the desiring I. Whenever any of these feelings arises, I do not like myself.

When do I like myself? It is when I find myself to be loving, giving, charitable, compassionate and free. Therefore, whenever there is the feeling of freedom or love in my mind, I find myself likeable and acceptable. So by definition, happiness is in ‘being pleased with myself’. I am pleased with myself when I am a good person; when I am a kind person; when I am reaching out; when I am charitable; when I am loving. Thus what is equated to happiness ultimately is kindness, charity, compassion or love. I feel good when I go out of my way to help somebody, even though it may involve some inconvenience or some exertion or pain.

Whenever we do something good, we feel good about ourselves. Something in me may tell me, “It does not matter. Tell him a lie. You will benefit by the untruth and also get away with it”. But I resist that temptation and tell the truth, which means that I may lose an advantage that I might have had, but I feel good about myself. I feel good that I could overcome my own temptation and greed and assert honesty or truthfulness.

Whenever we act in an honest or truthful manner, whenever we are able to follow the values, we respect ourselves. We respect the truthful self, the honest self, the self that follows the values. Happiness comes when I follow the values. When I do that, I am able to live up to my expectations. Everybody expects himself or herself to be an honest person, a loving person and a kind person. Therefore when I find myself acting in accordance with these values, I am happy and pleased with myself. Thus happiness lies in being pleased with oneself.

Question

How do we achieve happiness?

Answer

Happiness is being happy with your self. The way you get to it is by living a life, which is conducive to accepting yourself. There are some ways of living, which can hurt you. There are other ways of living which can help you -- ways that are conducive to improve your self-esteem, self-worth, and self-respect. The way to become happy is to 'be good and do good'. A happy person cannot hurt anyone. Only an unhappy person can hurt others.

Question

How can I not be attached to happiness?

Answer

We are attached to happiness. Happiness is our very nature. Therefore to desire happiness is not willful. When we say, 'do not get attached to happiness', we mean 'do not get attached to the means of happiness coming from some other source than within you'. When happiness comes from something or somebody, then that can also make you unhappy. Somebody can make me happy by becoming agreeable to me, thus creating a condition that I am acceptable. By accepting me, that person creates happiness in me. Then it is quite possible that the person may not accept me. If this happens, the same person also becomes the source of unhappiness. This is what is meant by attachment.

Be as objective to happiness that comes from outside as you are to unhappiness that comes from outside. If something can make me happy, that can also make me unhappy. Therefore I have to discover the happiness from myself. That does not mean I have to become indifferent to the world. Detachment does not mean I become indifferent to the world. It means not making demands on the world. That is what becoming free from attachment means. I have to slowly become a non-demanding person. That will help me to own up what I have. When I make demands, I disown what I already have. When I make a demand for happiness from someone, I have already concluded that I am not that happiness. But that is not a right conclusion. Try to give up demands as much as you can. That will set the ground for discovering what it is that you are seeking from elsewhere.

Question

Vedānta teaches us how to become happy and enlightened. How come so few people in the world have achieved this?

Answer

One needs certain amount of *punya karma* in order to be exposed to it and take this on. As *Vivekacūdāmaṇi* points out, a human birth is rare. Then a desire to evolve is even rarer. Even if the desire is there, implementation of the desire is very infrequent. Having lived a life of *dharma*, a desire to study the scriptures is even rarer. Having studied the scriptures, the separation of self from non-self is even rarer. To gain abidance in this knowledge is even rarer. All of these are the result of progressive *punya karma*.¹

¹ Transcribed and edited by Anjali Bhat, Aparna Modi, Jayshree Ramakrishnan and KK Davey.