

Satsang with Sri Swami Veditatmananda Saraswati
Arsha Vidya Gurukulam
More on Vision of Vedanta

Question

Sometimes it seems that Vedanta takes away a person's motivation and makes him passive. It is said that a Vedāntin sees inaction in action and every event as a cosmic event, and is neither happy nor sad. Will such a perception not take away one's initiative and enthusiasm for life?

Answer

Happiness and unhappiness are both reactions to external events. When an event is judged to be favorable it is called happiness, and when it is judged unfavorable it is called unhappiness. Therefore, both happiness and unhappiness are responses to our judgment of a situation, rather than to the situation itself. That a situation is assessed to be favorable or unfavorable is a subjective judgment. What is favorable to one may be unfavorable to another, and what is unfavorable to someone can be seen as being favorable by another. Thus, my response is not to the event itself, but to my own projection of the event.

When I am successful, I am happy. Now, what is success? Success is a subjective or personal point of view. For instance, to get a job paying \$8.00 an hour may be a wonderful thing for someone, while for someone else, it is nothing. Similarly, to get two raises may be a great thing for someone, while for someone else, it is nothing. Therefore, a given event can make one person feel successful and happy, while it disappoints someone else. Happiness and unhappiness are thus reactions to an event or experience rather than an understanding or result of a given situation. A reaction indicates that I am controlled by something. When my mind perceives an event favorably, I react with happiness and vice versa. If, for some reason, the event changes my reaction would also change. Sometimes, while taking a walk, I see a friend approaching and I am happy; however, on closer scrutiny, I see that it is a stranger and I am disappointed. Thus, it is my own perception that makes me either happy or unhappy. Both happiness and unhappiness are reactions; they are not a reality.

A Vedāntin sees things as they are; neither as favorable nor as unfavorable. To him, everything is in order as it is. He does not project or superimpose his own perceptions upon anything. He does not see any more value or less value in it than there is. There is no reaction; rather, there is a graceful response that everything is

fine as it is. The lack of happiness or unhappiness does not mean he is not happy. Happiness is his very nature and in not being a reactive person, he is cheerful and joyful. He sees order, beauty, and harmony everywhere.

Vedanta does not make him passive; rather, it makes him cheerful, joyful, and free to do what needs to be done. When I perform an action out of my free will, it is called an action. On the other hand when I act out of anger, greed, elation, or depression, it is a reaction. Usually, people react impulsively. A Vedāntin does not react to a situation; he acts. Moreover, he sees inaction in action. He recognizes that all action is performed in his presence. It is action performed at the level of the organs of action. He recognizes that these actions are performed in the presence of the Self. It is similar to the rotation of a fan in the presence of electricity. It is not that the electricity turns the fan; the fan rotates in the presence of the electricity. It is like iron filings being attracted to a magnet by its very presence. Similarly, action takes place in the presence of the Self. This is what is meant by seeing inaction in action. It is seeing, not doing. The Self does not act.

When we look at an event as being created by us, there is guilt or arrogance. We take upon ourselves the authorship of that which we have not created. When we say that every event is a cosmic event, we mean that all the cosmic forces have worked to create the event and I am also one of the factors. However, I cannot take authorship of the event because so many factors have contributed to make it happen. Indeed, every event is a cosmic event. Thus, a Vedāntin looks upon himself as playing a role or as an instrument in the hands of *īśvara*, the Totality, through which an event is performed, rather than as its author. Vedanta provides a true perception; it does not prescriptively say do this or do not do this. The idea is that when we have a true perception we will do what is right while a false perception can lead us to do something that is not right. Merely doing or being active is not the criterion; it is doing what is right and doing it with the right attitude. Vedanta helps us to cultivate right perceptions and attitudes. Action by itself is not the issue. It is more important that our actions be meaningful. Vedanta helps us to do things meaningfully, and to the extent that our understanding is clear our actions become more meaningful. When our attitude is clear, our response is bound to be meaningful¹.

¹ Transcribed and edited by Malini, Krishnakumar (KK) S. Davey, and Jayshree Ramakrishnan.