

Happiness

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THE whole world desires happiness. So we think. But it is not so. The world has no such desire or happiness would become general. Unity of desire in a multitude of people is a force that could scarcely fail of effect, and the world is sunk in misery.

What the world does desire is nothing so simple as happiness, nothing so easy of attainment. For after all, happiness is not hard to find if it is sought in the right way, nor is it far from anyone of us. But the desire of most people, of mankind in general, is not this, either for themselves or for others; indeed, were true happiness presented to them they would probably reject it with scorn. Their desire, far from being thus simple, is both double and contradictory; pleasure, and the absence of pain; something very like a desire for shadow without light.

This world we live in, if we once begin to look closely at it, will be found to be made double all through, with a right side and a wrong side. It is not merely the human race or the animal world that is male and female; the pairing does not stop short even with the vegetable world; the dual exists in one form or another in all the conditions surrounding us: it invades even our minds, and our very desires drag after them a grim lining in the negative: pleasure I want, but no pain. Thus double vision is not merely physical, it is mental also. Our two physical eyes do not, however, except under abnormal conditions, double the objects of vision. Is the mental vision, then, that sees double really out of order? If so it is probably a disorder arising rather from surroundings than from organic defect, as when to our bodily eyes objects are distorted by fog or heat or a blaze of light. The effect of the glamour through which we look mentally is to make that which is merely double appear to be two distinct objects, as if one should see the heads and tails of a coin like two distinct coins of different pattern.

It is thus with pleasure and pain; they are but reverse sides of the same coin, though they appear to us as two separate coins of different patterns which we can gain or spend at will. They arise from currents which have a kind of ebb and flow and may produce pleasure in one person and pain in another, by the same means, or first one and then the other in the same person, or even both together in the same person at the same moment. Thus music is considered a pleasure, yet how intensely do some people abhor it. Does not love, too, cause a smile at meeting and a sigh at parting? And if cruelty is, as it [Page 18] seems to be, a pleasure, it must surely be because of the weird pain it brings to the torturer.

This then is the character of surrounding conditions, ebb and flow, right side and wrong side, pleasure and pain. Watching the world as it goes, could it be said which it was aiming at, to start or to stop this ebb and flow? It would seem nearer the truth to say that it aims at neither — aims not at all — but is, instead, a victim under the sway of the dual.

The whole world is subject to this ebb and flow. Man alone does not submit with patience and resignation. Man has within him an intuitive perception that the dual is his enemy, he is as it were perpetually striving to find out its secret; yet he is at the same time so deluded by the dual in his own nature that the attempt he makes in order to solve the problem is to seize one half and avoid the other, whereas his course should be to lay hold of both and put them under his feet, thereby raising himself high enough to breathe the air in the world of the ONE, the world where all is still and quiet, where nothing is double, and where there is neither pleasure or pain, but only peace.

There are those who preach moderation in the pursuit of pleasure, and so far as it leads to self-control this is good. There are those, too, who preach asceticism — that is to say, the choice of pain instead of pleasure — and there are those also who practise it. To these last no doubt pleasure follows in the track of pain, but it is the same disastrous system of choice. Besides, there is no inherent virtue in pain; nor is it in itself the path to happiness any more than pleasure is. Still to prefer pain is often to "step out from sunshine into shade to make more room for others", and in that way it is a departing from self which goes very near the road to happiness. Again to accept pain and refuse pleasure, though it is necessarily a less pleasant process, is really more possible than to accept pleasure and refuse pain, for the one difficult part of the whole system is to refuse pain, or in other words to adopt such an attitude towards pain that it retreats vanquished.

The real remedy is to see the two — pleasure and pain — as one, and to accept or refuse both the one and the other. It matters little whether they are accepted or refused, for it comes to the same thing in the end if the same is applied to both.

Perhaps the initial step on the road to happiness, the first stage of the opposite system — the system which instead of making war upon the dual agrees to live at peace with it, and overcome it not by warfare but by government — this first step is perhaps acceptance; the more advanced stage being refusal, that is to say, the becoming invincible against pleasure and pain.

The attitude of mind then, which is supposed to be that of the whole [Page 19] world, is in reality the ideal attitude reflected merely, not carried out, by the material. This, as we have seen, is to desire happiness — or the perfect state — and to pursue it at all costs. The cost or price is first of all to hand over pleasure to anyone who cares for it. Let who will have such flimsy goods, they are worthless to the wise man, and along with this to accept pain; not merely to bear it patiently, without seeking to be rid of it unless for some useful purpose; not merely to abstain from inflicting it either upon oneself or others, except under the same conditions; but besides all this, to seek it out in others, to remove it from them, to bear it for them, or to lighten its load by sympathy; this is to accept pain. This, well carried out, will bring in that indifference to sensation of all kinds which is equivalent to the acceptance of pleasure and pain alike. Indeed, at this stage, except under great excess, it is difficult to distinguish the two in the world of mind, and the body also may begin to show a dullness of sensation. There should be after this another stage in which the producing vibrations cease, and the spirit of man, whether in the body or out of the body, should live in unchanging peace. But this would be fruition, the ideal become the actual — the attainment of the real — happiness.

And if the goal were reached, if happiness were found, what would it be? First of all it would be found to belong to a world above the sphere of language, and it could therefore be explained only by such general

terms as are used to express states of which we are made conscious only by flashes and passing inspirations, and of which we have no lasting experience. But even a string of such epithets as peace, rest, quiet, stillness, is not without its effect upon the mind; a picture is formed which fills the emptiness within.

There would be another way of describing happiness which might be useful because it is startling — by negatives. Happiness is not pleasure, nor sensation, nor change, nor activity, nor gain, nor play, nor work, for all these are fleeting, and happiness, to be happiness, must be lasting. Does the difficulty of understanding it make it less attractive? Not to those really in search of it. But what of the world at large? Will it accept this definition of happiness? Will it undertake the difficult search? No, the world at large does not even desire happiness. They have preferred darkness rather than light.

MORAL SAYINGS FROM THE MAHABHARATA

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He obtains happiness who renounces desire, that fatal disease, hard to be forsaken by the evil-mind, unconsumed when even life decays.

Adiparva lxxxv.14

Those who are free from anger are superior to those who are angry, so are also the patient to be impatient. The humane are superior to the inhuman, the wise to the unwise.

Being reviled one should not revile; provoked, one should be patient. Good Karma comes to him who is wrathful, wrath burns away the good Karma of him who is wrathful. A foe should not be subdued by the infliction of cruel pain, nor by cruel speech, nor by evil thought. One should never use wicked, cutting speeches that wound. He who uses sharp, cruel, wounding speech, tormenting men as with thorns, is unprosperous, carrying destruction in his mouth.

One should always be patient under the evil speech of the wicked.

Stricken by the arrows of speech a man grieves day and night, they strike the vital parts of the adversary, a wise man never hurls them at a foe.

Nothing in the three worlds is a more effectual mode of worship than forgiveness, friendliness, liberality and sweet speech among all.

Therefore always utter gentle words and never harsh ones. Reverencing what is worthy of reverence,

give but never beg.

Adiparva lxxxvii., 6-13

The wise say that heaven has seven great gates for men; ascetic meditation, charity, patience, self-restraint, simplicity, sincerity, sympathy with all creatures. The wise say these are all destroyed by vanity.

He who, having studied, thinks himself a learned man, and by his learning injures the reputation of others, attains but perishable regions, that learning does not yield Brahma as its fruit.

Four actions are the source of fearlessness, they cause fear if improperly performed (in a boasting spirit); sacrifice to fire, the vow of silence, study, sacrifice.

One should neither exult in good report nor be cast down by evil report.

I have given away so much, I have offered such sacrifices, I have studied so much, I have performed such vows — such boastings are called causes of fear and are everywhere to be shunned.

Those are blessed who, determined on self restraint, know their sole refuge to be the everlasting that can only be approached by the road of the mind; united with it they obtain perfect peace here and hereafter.

Adiparva, xc. 22-27