

The Art and The Science of Happiness- from Vedic to Modern Philosophy

- Om P. Sharma, Toledo, Ohio

Life in itself is a unique gift to every living creature. Happiness is the aspiration and the ultimate goal for everyday living. Overall well-being and happiness are used as the measures of social progress in a nation. The pursuit of happiness is the inalienable right of each and every one of us. The philosophical question of the meaning of life is to explore the very basics of our existence. This question has intrigued the minds of philosophers, theologians, psychiatrists, psychologists and scientists in various fields since the beginning of time.

One needs to explore the relationship of life to right and wrong and good and evil as well as its relationship to ethics and morality and ideology. It explores the very concept of The Creator as well as the human mind, the body and the soul and its relationship to happiness, pain and pleasure. Earliest documentation of happiness and human mind is depicted in Vedas. 'Rishis', the original recipients of Vedic knowledge transmitted Vedas by word of mouth ('shruti') successively through generations before the writing tools were invented.

'Gyatri Mantra' has been accepted as the one of oldest divine hymns to pray for His blessings. We pray to God to illuminate and guide our thought-flow in our mind and intellect in the right direction. This mantra is one of the oldest scholarly connections of our mind to intellect and thoughts.

Three mantras that give the essence of Hinduism and to highlight real spiritual happiness in life are: Gyatri mantra Yajur Veda 36-3, Rig Veda 3-62, Shanti Path Yajur Veda 36-17 and the very first mantra of 'Isha Upanishad' derived from Yajur Veda 40-1: 'Isha vasyam idam sarvam, yatkimcha jagatyam jagat Ten tyakten bhunjitha, ma gridhah kasya swid dhanam.' God pervades everything in this ever-changing dynamic world and nothing lasts forever. Shanti Path is a mantra for universal peace, harmony and happiness.

Manas (Mind) is the most powerful possession of a man. It is the key to mysteries of our existence as it unfolds the real mentality. It is the seat of our thoughts, desires, emotions, will, attention, interest and imagination that are essential for functioning of life. Life without a mind is metaphorically a candle without any light. The ambiguities of mind have continued to elude us forever. Mind is never static and like a boat is roaming freely in the 'ocean of life'. It is the 'receiving station' that is always adapting to the stimuli from 'Panch Jnanendriyas' (5 organs of perception: ears, eyes, nose, tongue and skin). Budhi (intellect) is the faculty that discriminates by past experiences, knowledge, character and wisdom to determine the suitable response. Mind-intellect complex responds through 'Panch Karmendriyas' (5 organs of action: hands, feet, mouth, rectum and genital organs). Mind easily gravitates to endless cravings-vasanas (desires) that gives short-lasting pleasures on its gratifications and can sometimes lead to addiction. Unfulfilled vasanas or cravings through 'Brain reward circuitry' trigger agitation of mind with anger frustration and unhappiness when vasanas remain unfulfilled. Only control of a determined mind and wisdom of the intellect can bring peace of mind with lasting happiness. Mind and intellect are guided in the right direction of peace and tranquility by spiritual connection.

You can never meditate and contemplate without self-control. Like a bird you are tied by a rope, you have to cut this rope to be free from desires (kam), anger (krodh), greed (lobh), attachment (moh), and most of all pride (ahankara) and hatred (grinah).

The neurologic changes that govern our emotions and behaviors are complex and to a great extent unknown. The newer concepts of their neurophysiology are constantly evolving (Pet-scans, fMRI etcetera).Hormones like adrenaline and cortisol regulate the basic ‘fight-and-flight response’.

Brain reward system regulates, controls and enforces behavior with pleasurable effects. Dopamine and Serotonin are feel-good neurotransmitters. ‘Novelty-seeking genes’like DRD4 are involved in behavior genetics that transpires the spirit of adventure. Population with repeated migration continues to possess genes favoring exploratory behavior. People with this forward-looking behavior with optimism seek fulfillment and happiness. It varies from 2R (East Asia) to 4R (Africa) and 7R is in the New World. Children that are carriers of DRD4-7R profit most from positive feedback and remain at lower level of literacy skills in absence of it (Orchid children)

Hypocretin-1 is a neuropeptide that has been recently known as the ‘peptide of happiness’.

‘Individuals whose happiness comes primarily from ‘doing good to others’ show much better gene profile than those feel god hedonistic individuals who are always self- centered. Altruistic people have less inflammation and better antibody and antiviral activity.

Behavior disorders are to a large extent have genetic predisposition but to an extent can be influenced by environmental factors and knowledge. That is where our ancient Vedic philosophy is helpful for transformation of mind.

The purpose in life is liberation from bondage leading to God realization and everlasting ananda (bliss). Four objectives necessary in life (Purushartha) are Dharma (religious and other duties), Artha (material prosperity), Kama (satisfaction of desires), and Moksha (salvation). We need to do Yajna in self-dedicated work in any activity, Tapa to by self-denial and self-control of our ahamkara (ego), Dhayana (meditation) and attainment of lasting ananda of pure consciousness and connectedness of jeevatman to ultimate Divine Parmatman.

Mind should have a harmonious control over organs of perception and action. Detachment through self-restrains brings happiness. Penance is to keep your mind calm, cool, collected and controlled, and devoid of jealousy, anger and apathy. Let there be no harsh words in your speech, no vanity in your mind, no conscious sinful acts by your deeds and thoughts and no backbiting echoes in your heart. Control your mind to reach your destination; don’t let your mind be a slave to your desires. Continence of mind opens the gates for inner peace by curbing ego and illumination of the Self for an everlasting bliss.

There is a beautiful analogy of mind and body in Katha Upanishad: ‘Where self is the rider of the body, which is the chariot, intellect is the charioteer and mind is the reins for the horses that are the senses that travel on the road filled with web of desires.’ Charioteer (Budhi) controls the mind (manas) like the reins of the well-trained horses that obey the commands by faculty of discrimination. An uncontrolled mind, on the other hand runs wild towards the temptations. In a wise man, senses obey mind, mind obeys intellect, the intellect obeys his ego and the ego obeys the Self. (Katha Upanishad)

Desires are insatiable. They keep growing as we try to satisfy them just as the fire becomes more inflamed when oil is poured into it.’ -Manusmriti 2-94