
Recent Articles

Table of Contents

Happiness

Fame and Greatness

Knowledge and Imagination

Nonviolence in the Age of Violence

Many Splendors of Love

Happiness

To seek satisfaction of desires is intrinsic to human nature. The satisfaction is supposed to lead to happiness but that rarely happens. Desires are endless, one gets satisfied and is promptly replaced by others. Satisfaction is simply musing over the past while wishes, desires, and ambitions are things in the future. The future is just a dream and the past is but a memory. It is only the present that one is in real contact with and has any control over; what one does in the present shapes the future. Understanding this simple fact can go a long way in finding happiness and success.

Happiness is an attitude of mind and it can only come from within. There is no 'how to' help for being happy. Success does not necessarily bring happiness unless it is measured in terms of achievement and self-satisfaction. But that happiness is always transient. Success and achievement both imply an end - the end of an effort. Happiness is not some destination you arrive at; it is always from moment to moment and therefore, in the present.

There are any number of books and newsletters that promise to give you recipes for happiness. But happiness is not a commodity to be sold. Self-improvement and self-development has become a big business. There are experts who can tell you how to improve any and every aspect of your life. Self-development, in whatever form, is still a fulfillment of desire. True happiness can come only with contentment, which is being aware of and accepting 'what is' instead of pursuing 'what should be'.

The main problem lies in understanding what happiness is. Understanding is not a matter of knowledge; it is always intuitive and comes like a flash. Happiness that results from any thought or action is different from the one that comes spontaneously, for example, from watching the beauty of a serene sunset or some other phenomena in nature. In that enchanting moment the person becomes one with nature without any thought in the mind. The same happens when there is no desire. Desire always brings thinking and the mind can never be calm while thinking.

It may be argued that watching nature or listening to music is also a kind of action that is always prompted by some motive. Life itself is action. What we are talking about is action without any desire for the result associated with it. It is extremely difficult to put this into practice but in a way we do it all the time. We do not breathe thinking that it is a matter of life and death. There are other functions of the body of which we are not conscious. In nature it happens all the time. A flower blooms without any expectation that it will be appreciated and will be useful to others. A bird sings with no thought of whether or not anyone will listen to its song. Everything in nature represents self-expression. If we take the clue from nature, we should also be able to consider every action as self-expression.

Another negative aspect of action prompted by desire is that one wastes precious time in waiting anxiously for the result. The irony of the life for most of us is that we are all waiting for something. The object of waiting may be as mundane and commonplace as

waiting for the result of a lottery or it may be as lofty as waiting for nirvana. In almost all cases the result is uncertain and beyond our control. Once we realize this fact it may be easier to perform action without any concern about the result.

The action resulting from desire may not be always related to the expectation of fruit. Still it has a negative aspect; if the person is conscious of the action. It is no longer self-expression. Virtues in people are admired. However, if a virtue is practiced deliberately, it is no longer a virtue. Take humility for example. If I am being humble fully aware of my humility, it ceases to be humility; it becomes a part of my ego. In an abstract way the same is true of happiness. As soon as I become conscious of my happiness I cease to be happy; the mind gets involved in a thought process and drifts away from the state of happiness.

Happiness is always related to an individual. It is clear from the above discussion that we have been talking about two different types of happiness. One relates to the body and the other to the soul, which represent the duality inherent to an individual's existence. Both types of happiness are desirable, and even essential in life. No happiness lasts forever. The happiness that comes from the fulfillment of desires is transient because it benefits only the body and the ego. That which comes from the calm state of mind and is self-expression benefits the soul and in that sense it is not transient. The body is perishable, the soul is not.

Fame and Greatness

In this age of instant publicity celebrities abound. Celebrities are people famous in some way or other. They may be famous for some skill they have acquired or some feature of outward appearance like exceptional beauty. Just as leaders have their followers, celebrities have their admirers. Fame is always a product of ambition.

From a purely human perspective it may be argued that lives of famous people provide inspiration to others. But fame comes with an intrinsic problem. A famous person has a serious disadvantage and the irony is that most of the time he* is himself unaware of this fact. Take for example the case of an artist – a painter. When he starts out he has a passion for the art. His work is a true expression of himself, his passion. Then he becomes famous, critics rave about his work, and interpret it in a way even he had not thought of. Now he has an image to live up to. Of course it is his choice to be himself or conform to the image, but almost invariably he chooses the latter. His work ceases to be art for art's sake; in fact he is not his former self any more.

It is the same way with a politician. He may start with a sincere desire to serve his people, his community, and his country. As he gains popularity his actions are constrained by factors other than his own wishes. As he climbs the ladder and approaches the top, his life itself is controlled by extraneous factors. He also ceases to be himself.

Another glaring example involves the so-called spiritual teachers or gurus. They claim to be enlightened souls. As individuals they might have started on the path of spirituality with a sincere desire for self-realization. With persistence and long practice they might have even seen light in their own way. But to proclaim that they are enlightened shows their ego and desire for attracting followers; enlightenment and the presence of ego are mutually exclusive. As they become popular and their mini-empire grows, their sense of values also suffers degeneration. They redefine values to rationalize their acts and fall into disgrace, as we have seen in the case of many gurus. The fall is always quicker than the climb.

To a varying degree this is true for all celebrities. Fame always comes at a price and sometimes the price is so great that fame may become shame, at least for the conscience.

On the other hand greatness is inborn. It also develops gradually but the seed is already there. It is not influenced or caused by external factors. A great person may also become famous but that fame comes from his personality in which there is no

duality. When he looks into the mirror, it does not present to him the image of a stranger. True greatness does not come to the person, it emanates from him. It is an intrinsic quality that does not depend on perception by others.

'Fame is variable, greatness is constant.'

*The pronoun 'he' is used purely in a generic sense to avoid using he/she or his/her every time. Fame and greatness do not show gender discrimination.

Knowledge and Imagination

“Knowledge is limited, imagination is not.”

I read this statement somewhere in some book but cannot quite remember where. But Einstein had made almost the same statement although with different wording. Knowledge is so vast that it is impossible for any one person or even a group of persons to acquire it in entirety. In this era of specialization it is impossible to know everything, even in a narrow field of specialization. One may devote one's entire life in that quest and still not be in a position to claim that one knows everything.

Knowledge is a ceaseless quest. No matter at what point one is, there is always more to know. In that sense knowledge itself is unlimited. The statement quoted above, therefore, refers not to knowledge per say but to knowledge that one can acquire.

The word knowledge has two connotations; one is about what is known and the other is about what can be known. One is limited the other is not. This distinction is sometimes expressed by the two descriptive terms rational and intuitive, although the correspondence is vague. Here again we run into the limitations of language and words in expressing thoughts exactly.

The situation is a little different with imagination. It is generally believed that one can imagine anything one wants and therefore imagination has no bounds and is unlimited. But imagination is created by the mind and the creativity of mind is limited by many factors. The most significant is its conditioning, which itself is governed by several factors like religion, social conditions, upbringing, and knowledge itself.

Mind is always in the realm of the known. It can create things only based on what is accumulated there. A person who has spent the entire life in a remote forest cannot imagine things happening in metropolitan areas. We have all heard the story of blind men trying to describe an elephant by touching different parts of its body.

The most common example of the limitation of mind is the idea of God. No one has ever seen or known God in the literal sense. But almost everyone thinks of God sometime or other and imagines what He would be like. That imagination depends entirely on the conditioning of the mind, especially the part brought about by religion and upbringing. Knowledge itself becomes a limiting factor for imagination.

We live in a three-dimensional world and mind has no exposure to higher dimensions. It is almost impossible to visualize the four-dimensional space-time of relativity, let alone

the higher-dimensional space of abstract mathematics. Our imagination is always limited by what is already in the mind.

At the beginning of the article I made a reference to Albert Einstein. His statement goes like this:

“----- Knowledge is limited, imagination encircles the world.”

It is important to note that he did not say that imagination is unlimited. He had also mentioned that knowledge came from accumulated experience; in that sense he was referring to the knowledge that can be acquired and not the knowledge in general.

Nonviolence in the Age of Violence

We are witnessing the emergence of the world into an age of violence that may be a precursor of worse things to come. Violence is so rampant now that fear has become a dominant factor in our lives. We are afraid for ourselves, for our children and loved ones, and for everything that we cherish. The places that were once sacrosanct have become as susceptible to violence as battlegrounds. Only a few years back in the past one could have never thought of schools as scenes of carnage. Even places of worship that are supposed to be abode of God or gods, are no longer safe. Is it the human destiny to finally succumb to violence and perish as a species? Or is there a way to reverse this trend in human behavior to avoid the bleak end? There are no easy answers to these questions. But man has been endowed with the capacity to think and act. And this is the crucial moment in human history requiring the use of that gift both individually and collectively.

The acts of violence appear in different forms but the worst is killing of man by man. All these acts are symptoms and getting rid of the symptom is not the cure. One has to look for the root causes and only by eliminating those it is possible to solve the problem. In this particular instance there is a multiplicity of causes of diverse nature; some are social, others are political, but they all relate to human nature. Unless there is a fundamental change in the behavior of individuals there can be no solution to the problem of violence. It is not possible here to go into all the facets of this problem and we will consider only the violence related to children. There are two sides to this problem; one is violence perpetrated by children and the other is violence on children by grown-ups. But how children grow up determines the adult behavior and the real and effective change of behavior has to occur at an early age.

The antidote to violence is, of course, nonviolence. It may be a very unpleasant fact in retrospective, but the parents are largely responsible for how children grow up. The children learn more from actions than words. If the idea of nonviolence is inculcated in them right from the beginning, they would be less prone to acts of violence (and putting up with the acts). Violence does not mean only physical harm but also harming anyone in any other way. In a broad sense nonviolence means love for all – not only for mankind but for all things having life. It is also important that the idea becomes a part of daily life instead of being a philosophical concept imposed externally.

The school system also has an important part to play here. If the idea of nonviolence is made a part of teaching from the very beginning, it would go a long way in assisting parents in their responsibility. This requires a drastic change in the framework of the current school systems, but is essential for checking the upsurge of violence in young ones. There are other factors involved in dealing with this problem, which get embroiled

in politics and religious beliefs. But a change in the attitude of a growing generation towards violence will be a major factor in coping with it. It is not a quick and easy solution, but it is the only way towards a lasting solution. The important thing is for the social, political, and religious leaders in all communities to realize the gravity of the situation and act promptly and decisively.

We are also in an age when the interest in spirituality has been on the increase as evidenced by the increasing number of spiritual teachers. Apparently the number of 'enlightened' men or women has been growing steadily. It is strange that this has not made any difference to the violence perpetrated by man on man. Spirituality is, of course, considered to be exclusively in the domain of adults and all the so-called gurus put emphasis on self-improvement leading eventually to self-realization. But spirituality that governs human nature has to be inculcated from the very beginning. Without going deeper into philosophy we can see that the concept of nonviolence has a lot to do with spirituality. If a person grows up with a full understanding of this concept, it affects not only his behavior but also of others around him.

In recent years considerable attention has been devoted to human energy fields both by scientists and psychologists. The concept of field has long been there in physics but relating it to human body is new. There is now some experimental evidence of the existence of such fields for individuals as well as groups. Ancient philosophies had, of course, postulated this existence already. In reference to nonviolence in particular the yoga philosophy states that a yogi steeped in nonviolence has the effect that even animals forget their violent nature in his presence (Patanjali's Yoga Sutra, 2-35). If the energy field of an individual contains a strong abhorrence for violence, it can deter another person from committing crime in his presence. This can be true also for collective energy fields. Extending this idea to a group of people it would seem that the collective field of the group as a whole could also be a deterrent to any violence.

Many Splendors of Love

'Love Is A Many Splendored Thing' is one of the most poignant movies I have ever seen. At the time (which was several decades ago) the real significance of the title did not register with me. Now after all these years it has dawned on me that it was not just a movie title but also the statement of a universal truth. Love is such a common word. Everyone uses it in some context or other; but do we really understand what love is? To put it more bluntly, can we ever understand love? Understanding is always of the mind and in its true sense love transcends mind.

The graphic representation of this transcendence is seen in the practice of using the heart symbol in the context of love. But the significance of this symbolism is lost in its commercialization. The marketing of products related to the observance of Valentine's Day is a perfect example of exploitation of this symbol. It is an unfortunate fact that in the modern world anything, however sublime, is exploited for material gain. Love is essentially spiritual; when brought to the material level it ceases to be love.

In the normal usage of the word 'love' there is an inherent tendency to associate it with an object. But love is a sublime feeling that is not directed to anything or anyone. Leaving that aspect aside for the moment let us consider love only from the common human perspective. In this limited usage also it has many, almost infinite hues and colors. There is mother's love for the child, sister's love for brother, husband's love for wife, friend's love for friend, and so on. The list is as long as that of relationships. Then there is the love for abstract things – love for nature, love for music, love for books, love for work, love for country, and so on.

In all these categories of love there is a relationship involved. Whenever love has an object it involves a sense of gratification consciously or subconsciously. Even if it is a selfless love in a worldly sense, the self is involved through the desire for gratification. True love does not have a motive of any kind.

Love is often described as a (or the most) sublime emotion. However, emotion by its very nature involves feelings for someone or something and thus it is related to some object. But love can be devoid of any emotion even in this context. Love for mankind or for life in general need not have any emotion involved. Emotions come into play only if there is some form of attachment. When there is no motive and no desire love is not an emotion but the innate human nature in action. In that sense love is divine.

When love is considered only in terms of physical relationships it gets to its lowest denominator. It then becomes lust and loses all its purity. Unfortunately in this material

world that has become the most frequent degeneration of the concept of love. The modern epidemic of broken marriages is a sad reminder of the difference between lust and love. To be an enduring relationship a marriage needs some substantial values to rest on when lust and passion die, as they inevitably do.

In this so-called civilized world the societies are based on relationships, which are reciprocal. So love is also considered a reciprocal relationship; but true love does not require reciprocation. It is like sunshine, it is not directed toward anything in particular and does not expect any return.