

Pursuit Of Happiness

Dear Friends,

A discussion on Pursuit Of Happiness has been initiated by Viney Qazi under the newly instituted Ask Maharaj forum.

Happiness is the most important experience of life and without it life is not worth living. Yet it is the most neglected subject. The reasons for this are that for thousands of years humankind followed the advice of religions but religions were seeking higher levels of mind, unison with God, immortality, a life of high purpose and ethicality. Happiness was considered to be a superficial and a day to day affair, more like excitement and mirth. But humankind has come a long way and has realized that it needs happiness to live a life filled with hard work and high stress. (Never has humankind worked harder and lived under more stress in its entire history than it is doing now)

It is my fervent hope that all the members join this ongoing discussion. I assure you it will be stimulating, challenging, and rewarding. I am sure that everyone will get something out of it.

To start with the subject of the pursuit of happiness one has to define what it is. Unfortunately, our religious books do not help us. (Books of all religions). Though the word happiness is ancient but it is only in modern times an effort is being made to define it. The reason for this is that from the ancient times man was supposed to be strongly religious to be elevated to the state of tranquility. Let us call this mental state higher level of consciousness. Different religions had different concepts for it and different approaches to acquire it. The state of higher consciousness was different from what we think these days of happiness. To realize the state of higher consciousness in Hinduism one had to go through a lot of religious learning followed by a lot of meditation. Some special people would acquire a state of higher consciousness where there would be almost an absolute mental tranquility. But modern man does not have the time to go through that

regimen to acquire happiness and besides he is challenged to think that it should be realizable rather less strenuously. So even though the word happiness has been in almost all literatures of the world but it has been associated with superficial and temporary state of excitement and elation. Therefore, the discussion of happiness, quite different from the higher consciousness of religions, is new. We are on a clean slate. We are talking about non-religious happiness. Bertrand Russell, a brilliant British philosopher, wrote a book on happiness. So many others have also written about the subject. But there is no consensus about what is happiness and how to acquire it. That is why when you put this question to different educated and intelligent people different answers and some no-answers come.

I have spent an awful lot of time on this subject and have come to believe that it is possible to have non-religious happiness. But since we are talking about something which touches the deepest recesses of human heart and mind an experience of the subject matter has to take place in the other person before I can truly make him understand what I think. So, unfortunately that will take time. In my next letter I will expound on my views on human happiness.

Part II

4.10.07

In the first part I made the following important points:

- Religions do not talk about happiness, they are striving for something higher.
- Happiness has been considered in the past as something superficial.
- We are going to address non-religious happiness and not the higher consciousness religions have been pursuing for thousands of years.

When in the evolution of species man appeared on the scene his consciousness was primitive. As time went by it grew incrementally. The primitive consciousness was concerned with basic survival. Later on man's consciousness expanded to

issues beyond physical survival. A man is concerned with possibilities, with the search of God, of life beyond his death, etc. These concerns are without parallel in the animal kingdom.

As man's life developed beyond the hunter gatherer stage to the one when he had more control on food and shelter, his consciousness expanded to areas beyond his immediate environment. He started wondering what is beyond the sky and earth, day and night, winter and summer. At times he was very scared of his surroundings. He also at times felt very lonely. His existence was wrapped in mystery.

He started to believe in demons, witchcraft, and mythology took root. Thousands of years passed in this state. Then miraculously the power of reasoning started to grow. Initially he used reason as another survival tool. Later on he started using it to learn more about his environment. Over another hundreds of years his understanding of his environment improved and he developed cause and effect method of understanding. That is how science was born. But as to who he was and why he was on earth he did not know anything about. Religion had the sway over his mind in these areas.

With the invention of agriculture 40,000 years ago man became less dependent on animals for his food. He could now live in a planned way and had more time for leisure. This was the period when man had a rural existence. With the advent of industrial revolution in 18th century, man's confidence in himself grew exponentially. Man's intellect (reasoning power) started to grow fast.

Man started to make his physical existence easier. He created manufacturing plants. He created cities. His lifestyle changed. He broke loose from the herd and started becoming an individual. But his factory life made him into merely a badge number. Living alone in big cities he started becoming lonely. His belief in God was not as strong as before. His family and community life changed. Was all

this technological progress worthwhile? This is a big question whose answer he has not yet had.

Part III

4.11.07

In the last discussion I made the following significant points:

- Man, using the method of cause and effect, expanded his knowledge of the environment he was in exponentially, but he was still in the throes of mystery as to who he is and what is he doing here. These questions became the responsibility of the religion to answer.
- With the birth of the industrial revolution in England in 18th century man moved from a agrarian culture to an industrial one. In the process he lost community life and close proximity to nature to a life of isolation, loneliness, and alienation.
- Religion's power was diminished.

While man worked and produced goods and services much more than before, he was enjoying his life less than before. For sometime he was not sure what the cause of his unhappiness was. Was it a lack on his part? It took a long time for thinkers to realize that the nature of man required:

- A psychological security, which in the past used to be provided by religion, but now had to be provided by something else, as religion's appeal was diminishing.
- An identity.
- Peace of mind.
- Social connections.
- Something to appeal to his heart.

The mechanization of the technological age even made man a kind of

technological entity. This was the greatest blow of all, as man is essentially an emotional entity. Try removing the emotions from man's armor you will have a dehumanized being. In the modern industrialized age you have some such humans. Go to Manhattan in New York and see people at 4:00 AM walking the streets aimlessly, as they have no family to go to, no one to love, no hope for tomorrow. The welfare they get is for the survival of their bodies but there is nothing they have for their soul. They are soul dead people. Can you imagine the torment of such people? Some of these people become insane, some become savage criminals. Human beings are a sensitive system, if you rock it too much it falls apart.

While man could not go to the earlier simpler life, closer to the fellow man, closer to nature, he has to find a new way to keep him together. US is the richest country in the world but it is also the heaviest consumer of sleep medication, tranquilizers, and pain killers. US is a living experiment in which you see man does not live by bread alone. He needs an identity, love, and happiness. This happiness is not what religions have been talking about for centuries. It is a common man's peace of mind, something to hope for, something to love, something to work on. It needs new thinking, a new strategy.

One has to examine the nature of man to find out what he needs to be happy about. And also to define what happiness should be like. One can not go on living mechanically day after day, dependent on chemically induced temporary euphoria. One can not live on illusions. What is the way out of the highly demanding, highly stressful , and highly lonely modern life?

Part IV

4.12.07

In the last discussion I emphasized the following:

- Man in today's technological culture finds himself isolated, lonely, and stressed.
- He can not turn to religion because first it does not hold the sway over him as it

did over his ancestors. The scientific advancement has something to do with it.

- Man does not know whether all the progress he has made in his physical universe is worth the price he is paying in being very unhappy.

Where should man turn to find peace of mind and meaningfulness in life. Sheer intelligence can not make man happy, there has to be something else. The rub is that on one hand he has to continue more or less living in the same lifestyle as before but he has to make his life somewhat fulfilling.

Religion, community, and family used to be the ultimate relief for man when he was uneasy, lonely, unhappy. But now all of them have lost that power - in fact, they have changed. What should man do under these difficult circumstances?

One thing that has not changed is man's heart. That is, man still has emotions, although many of them are right now not satisfied. If man could pick up the most significant emotions in his life and then see what way he could fulfill them, then he may be on the right track.

Every educated, matured person knows that we can not change the nature of life, nor can we change the present technological culture, which has riven a big hole in man's emotional universe. Family setups and women's independence can not be changed as they are in the state of the progressive movements. Man's social rug has been pulled under him.

What he has to do is something radically different. He has to find out where is his bliss. That is, he has to find what satisfies his soul, what pleases his mind, what gratifies his heart. All these things combined are called a bliss. He has to make efforts, if he already does not know, where does his bliss lie. Let us imagine there is a man, who following general social thinking goes through technical college and lands up a good job but he is not happy. Obviously, the choice of technical

profession was a mistake. He has to now find what at this stage of life turns his heart on. It may turn out that he finds out that indulgence in music will give him happiness. This man has to find every day, or whatever is the right frequency for a man of his intensity and in his circumstances, the right frequency of playing or listening to the music of his choice. By this process he is creating an island in his life of unhappiness. Like unhappiness, happiness has an inclination to diffuse and fill the space of life. The man has to make sacrifices to get his daily two hours of music. He may have to spend some money on his hobby or cut some social activity to find time for it. For your bliss you have to be willing to make sacrifices and work. It is not going to fall from the skies. Happiness, in the modern circumstances of man, is a creative enterprise. You have to expend effort for it, make room for it in your life, even fight for it, if that is what it takes to acquire it. We are no longer talking about a religiously acquired higher state of consciousness, we are talking about a simple and simply understandable state of bliss. What you are doing is getting your heart involved and you can not fool your heart for long. Happiness has to be real, you should be able to feel it in your heart; if you do not then it is not happiness but just an illusion or merely an excitement. Happiness is real and durable; it does not effervesce like a good drink or a dinner. To put it in other words, if you do not have a heart which has strong feelings for anything, then you can never be happy – you are as good as dead. A man who has lived in a state of unhappiness for long may have to invest a long time to arouse his heart. Only after the full arousal of heart can one find what pleases it under the circumstance the person owning it living in. We can not cover our eyes to get rid of reality but we can do is be creative with it. Intelligence is not dispensable in human life. But one of the greatest problems with intelligence is that many people who possess it become egoistical. And that is the end of the possibility of finding happiness or for that matter anything more than ordinary. Intelligent people have to continuously check on the disease of ego taking hold of them. An egoless intelligent man is the best raw material one can have for making him happy and many other things.

Part V

7.25.07

In the previous part we discussed:

1. The various difficulties that besets a modern man to acquire happiness.

2. How a man has to look into his heart to find out what would please it.
3. A man pursuing happiness may have to sacrifice some things or make changes to his lifestyle to make room for his bliss.

The above indicated vision of happiness is not the only way to acquire it. If a man is of artistic bent of mind or is religiously inclined he can also find happiness. An artist might see beauty in life that ordinary men may not. He may feel rapture in nature. Albert Einstein was a brilliant scientist but for him nature was the ultimate thing. He considered himself to be an element of nature. He also believed in the uniqueness of the individual and the brotherhood of mankind. We know that not everyman can feel that way. A poet may see a special meaning in life. Religious people, generally, believe God is controlling the universe and therefore man. They believe if they follow the dictums of their religion "happiness" will come to them. As Einstein said, "Science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind." The first part of his saying means that at the very fundamental levels of universe, its operation at the subatomic level, and at its level of the totality, and also at many other levels, some of our scientific laws are based on assumptions. We only accept them because they are corroborated by the experiments and also they fit in a theory about them. But there is no absolute proof that nature fundamentally works like as indicated. With the limited power of faculties that mankind possesses we can not be sure if we have reached the rock bottom of nature. The natural laws we have are at the most good approximations of natural phenomena. That is why a faith is needed to believe in the assumptions, the scientific faith. The second part of the statement says that a religion has to take into consideration the scientific knowledge. If it does not do it then it is being blind. Belief in religion, Einstein said, does not mean lack of intelligence. The teachings of morality could not be deduced from science. Human beings have been on this planet for a long time and have learnt certain good ways to live. Universe is so colossal in size, so complex in its operations, works on such a gigantic timescale, and we interpret it through our brains, that we may never be able to find the "reality." We can easily call the universe the God.

So happiness can be achieved in more than one way. But first of all a person has to be motivated to do so. For the common man culture around him should answer the questions on happiness: what it is and how to achieve it. Human cultures have dwelt long on the subject of happiness and therefore what they prescribe has to have some wisdom in it.