

23 HAPPINESS

1. Man thinks foolishly that he can make himself happy, and after years of struggle finds out at last that true happiness consists in Idling selfishness and that no one can make him happy except himself.

2. Nobody is really happy here. If a man be wealthy and have plenty to eat, his digestion is out of order, and he cannot eat. If a man's digestion be good, and he have the digestion of a cormorant, he has nothing to put into his mouth. If he be rich, he has no children. If he be hungry and poor, he has a whole regiment of children, and does not know what to do with them. Why is it so? Because happiness and misery are the obverse and reverse of the same coin; he who takes happiness, must take misery also. We all have this foolish idea that we can have happiness \without misery, and it has taken such possession of us that we have no control over the senses.

3. In some oil mills in India, bullocks are used that go round and round to grind the oil seed. There is a yoke on the bullock's neck. They have a piece of wood protruding from the yoke, and on that is fastened a wisp of straw. The bullock is blindfolded in such a way that it can only look forward, and so it stretches its neck to get at the straw; and in doing so, it pushes the piece of wood out a little further; and it makes another attempt with the same result, and yet another, and so on. It never catches the straw, but goes round and round in the hope of getting it, and in so doing grinds out the oil, In the same way you and I who are born slaves of nature, money and wealth, wives and children, are always chasing a wisp of straw, a mere chimera, and going through an innumerable round of lives without obtaining what we seek. The great dream is love, we are all going to love and be loved, we are all going to be happy and never meet with misery, but the more we go towards happiness, the more it goes away from us.

4. We have seen how happiness is either in the body or in the mind, or in the Atman. With animals, and in the lowest of human beings, who are very much like animals, happiness is all in the body. No man can eat with the same pleasure as a famished dog, or a wolf; so, in the dog and the wolf the happiness is entirely in the body. In men we find a higher plane of happiness, that of thought, and in the Jnani there is the highest plane of happiness in the Self, the Atman. So to the philosopher this knowledge of the Self is of the highest utility, because it gives him the highest happiness possible. Sense gratification or physical things cannot be of the highest utility to him, because he does not find in them the same pleasure that he finds in knowledge itself; and after all, knowledge is the one goal, and is really the highest happiness we know.

5. "Dependence is misery. Independence is happiness." The Advaita is the only system which gives unto man complete possession of himself, takes off all dependence and its associated superstitions, thus making us brave to suffer, brave to do, and in the long run attain to Absolute Freedom.

6. Can any permanent happiness be given to the world ? In the ocean we cannot raise a wave without causing a hollow somewhere else. The sum total of the good things in the

world has been the same throughout in its relation to man's need and greed. It cannot be increased or decreased. Take the history of the human race as we know today. Do we not find the same miseries and the same happiness, the same pleasures and pains, the same differences in position? Are not some rich, some poor, some high, some low, some healthy, some unhealthy? All this was the same with the Egyptians, the Creeks and the Romans in ancient times as it is with the Americans today. So far as the history is known, it has always been the same.

7. We cannot add happiness to this world; similarly, we cannot add pain to it either. The sum total of the energies of pleasure and pain displayed here on earth will be the same throughout. We just push it from this side to the other side, and from that side to this, but it will remain the same, because to remain so is its very nature. This ebb and flow, this rising and falling, is in the world's very nature; it would be as logical to hold otherwise as to say that we may have life without death.

8. Philosophy insists that there is a joy which is absolute, which never changes. That joy cannot be the joys and pleasures we have in this life, and yet Vedanta shows that everything that is joyful in this life is but a particle of that real joy, because that is the only joy there is. Every moment we are enjoying the absolute bliss, though covered up, misunderstood and caricatured. Wherever there is any blessing, blissfulness, or joy, even the joy of the thief in stealing, it is that Absolute Bliss coming out, only it has become obscured, muddled up, as it were, with all sorts of extraneous conditions, and misunderstood.

9. After every happiness comes misery; they may be far apart or near. The more advanced the soul, the more quickly does one follow the other. What we want is neither happiness nor misery. Both make us forget our true nature; both are chains, one iron, one gold, behind both is the Atman, who knows neither happiness nor misery.

10. Happiness presents itself before man, wearing the crown of sorrow on its head. He who welcomes it must also welcome sorrow.

11. Then alone can death cease when I am one with life, then alone can misery cease when I am one with happiness itself, then alone can error cease when I am one with knowledge itself.

12. The miseries of the world cannot be cured by physical help only. Until man's nature changes, these physical needs will arise, and miseries will always be felt, and no amount of physical help will cure them completely. The only solution of this problem is to make mankind pure. Ignorance is the mother of all the evil and all the misery we see. Let men have light, let them be pure and spiritually strong and educated, then alone will misery cease in the world, not before.

13. So long as there is desire no real happiness can come. It is only the contemplative, witnesslike study of objects that brings to us real enjoyment and happiness.

14. The animal has its happiness in the senses, the man in his intellect, and the god in spiritual contemplation. It is only to the soul that has attained to this contemplative state that the world really becomes beautiful. To him who desires nothing, and does not mix himself up with them, the manifold changes of nature are one panorama of beauty and sublimity.