



Svaroopā® Vidya Ashram

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Big Questions #5

Where Can I Find Happiness?

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You find happiness where it is located. It's not located at the end of a rainbow, though I've chased a few rainbows looking for it. It's not consistently found in family relationships, as important as they are. Nor will you find happiness in external things. However, any of these can prompt an experience of happiness in you. That's precisely the point, happiness happens inside. It's an inner experience.

Recently I carried my breakfast into our dining room, headed over to sit in a chair by the sun-drenched window. The chair was already taken by one of our cats, all stretched out in the sun. So I sat in a different chair. Why? I could see that the cat was happy. Happiness matters so much that we even want the cat to be happy.

I love sitting with a group of yogis, something I get to do more of these days, with people again coming to retreats and trainings at the Ashram. Yet they often want to talk about the things that make them unhappy. Talking about unhappy things makes them happy. Strange, isn't it?

My Guru said you will never find a truly happy person. I saw how true that was as I grew up. As I was trained, I applied my efforts to what others were doing. Unfortunately, none of it made me happy. I thought there must be something wrong with me, so I asked questions. They ultimately confessed that those things didn't make them happy either. They talked about being comfortable, satisfied and contented, but they never said they were happy.

I knew that I wanted more than they offered. I hadn't yet realized that what I sought was bliss, not mere happiness. Happiness is a state of mind; bliss is a state of being. When you are based in your Divine Essence, you are filled with the bliss of Consciousness. And your mind still functions in the relational world.

This confused me when I first went to live with Baba. Sometimes he yelled at people. Sometimes he yelled at me! He certainly looked and sounded angry! I wondered, "What happened to his bliss?" The answer is that he was still in bliss. But the situation called for anger and he used his mind to handle the situation perfectly. Anger is like a wave on the surface of the ocean, while the bliss of Consciousness is the whole ocean. The ocean can handle the waves.

Similarly, happiness is another wave on the surface of the ocean. That's why it's so short-lived. When you are happy because of something that happened, you can know that something else will happen in a minute or two. The new thing might contribute to your happiness or squelch it completely. When your happiness depends on outer circumstances, it will be unpredictable and temporary.

There is a way to be happy all the time: simply accept all external circumstances as they occur. You say, "Oh, there's a pandemic and I have to stay home for a year? OK. I always wanted to simplify my life." Later you say, "With getting vaccinated, we can start going out again. OK. It will be fun to get out there." This is called adaptability. It is called renunciation.

The key to happiness is renunciation, the exact opposite of what everyone thinks they need. In their quest for happiness, most people focus on self-indulgence, money and possessions, along with getting others to do what they want. They urge you to live the same way. Maybe it's time to ask, "Do these things make you happy, truly happy?" I predict that they'll talk about pleasure, security, winning friends and influencing people. They may even say that they're happy sometimes, but not all the time.

Everyone wants to be happy. The yogic sages say you have a right to happiness, just like you have a right to breathe. How great! But you may find that the things that make you happy are different than last year. They are certainly different than when you were playing in the sandbox

or with marbles or jacks. Yet happiness continues to be the same experience it was when you were small. Happiness is happiness. It is inherent to your being. When you're happy, you never wonder what's wrong with you. You accept happiness without question, as though it's part of your being. It is.

Hidden within you is bliss, the bliss of Consciousness that I saw modeled so perfectly in my Guru. He lived in the fullness of his being, bliss personified, yet he was engaged and involved in everything going on around him. The mystical secret is that his happiness didn't depend on what happened around him. If it rained, he was in bliss. If the sun shone, he was in bliss. If there were 3,000 people there, he was in bliss. If there were 5 people there, his bliss was the same. This is called renunciation.

You already understand renunciation so well. So many times, you couldn't get what you wanted. I remember some disappointing Christmas mornings from my childhood. And I got over it. That's called renunciation. Similarly, you may have lost something that meant everything to you. It can take a while but you find a way to keep going, even a way to be happy again. You outgrow the old situations like a child outgrows last year's school clothes.

Happiness surprised me the first time I was grieving the loss of a loved one. In the midst of my grief, someone said something that made me laugh. I was shocked at my own laugh. How could I laugh at such a time? But there it was. The laugh just bubbled up from somewhere inside. Yes! Happiness lies inside you. It's always there. The problem is that you're usually looking elsewhere.

Tantric renunciation is turning your attention inward, to find the source of happiness within. Instead of pursuing things that don't work, you look inward to find the happiness that is already there. It doesn't mean you have to go without things. Instead you pursue the one thing that really matters, happiness itself. Once you are living in the ever-arising inner flow, worldly activities will not diminish it. You bring the inner fullness with you into every situation, every moment, even every breath. This is bliss, not happiness.

Yoga warns you not to settle for mere happiness. Happiness is only a superficial taste of the bliss that is your innermost feeling. Happiness and other emotions are like waves on the surface of the ocean, but bliss is deeper. Bliss is the feeling of Self, your Divine Essence. Meditation is the way you get there. When you're experiencing your own Self, the deep inner bliss bubbles up and fills your mind, which makes you happy. Happiness is a state of mind; bliss is a state of being.

What most people call "fine," I see as a bliss-deficit. When someone asks you how you are, I'd love to see you respond, "Great!" Why? Because you are great. Your inherent is-ness is Divine. Your essence is Consciousness. Experiencing this within, you recognize your own Self, which fills you with independent, ever-arising inner bliss. Shaktipat gives you access to all that you already are.

Then you go back to normal. Unfortunately, you go back to looking for happiness in external things. You say you're fine, but it means you've lost your bliss. Yet you've already found the source within. You know the way home again, simply turn within. Once you've gotten Shaktipat, you can settle into yourself again. It takes only minutes. That's why I keep saying, "Do more yoga."

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