
LIFE LESSONS

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Be happy always, no matter what!

Over the course of time, there are some lessons that I've learnt and I try to follow in life. We all come across these lessons in various forms in our daily lives and through discourses in various traditions. The key is to apply these in our own lives. I call these my 7 commandments. In this first column today, I'd like to share my first commandment – "Be happy always, no matter what! Don't let events (good or bad) disturb your state of bliss."

Basing your happiness on the external environment: We spend most of our lifetimes basing our happiness on the external environment – what other people say of us, the events that happen in our lives or the outcomes of our pursuits. We say we'd be happy if we do well in those exams, win that competition, get that dream job, buy the next car, the next house, the next iPad, get the raise, get the next contract, etc. When things happen the way we want them to and we get what we're pursuing, we are happy. If things don't go the way we want them to, we get sad and disheartened.

Blown around like a fig leaf: If we think about it, we spend our time allowing ourselves to be blown around like a fig leaf – one whiff of air and we're blown in one direction. Another whiff and we're blown in the other. One person says something nice about us and we become elated. Another person says something nasty or insensitive and we lose all our composure. We are, in a sense, remote-controlled by the events happening around us and the words spoken to us or about us.

Life, by its very definition, is difficult. The Buddha, as the young Siddhartha realized, "*The world is full of sorrow*".

Life is difficult for you or me, for the celebrity out there, for your boss, your subordinate, your peer, the leader out there or the person next door. Death, disease, failure, hardship lurk just around the corner. When none of these are there, we invent ways to make our lives miserable. Good and bad things happen all the time to each person – just the degree is different at different points in time. Neither can any person escape words of praise or words of criticism. They are waiting for us all the time. We can think of life like a glass half full – where the full portion represents the desirable

things and the empty portion the undesirable ones. Both coexist in a package. At any point, it is a choice we make whether to concentrate on the happy portions or to concentrate on the unhappy ones. Put on the happy pair of spectacles and you'll see the happy things. Choose the unhappy pair and you'll see the unhappy things. This is a conscious choice we make at any point in time.

Drawing happiness from within - deciding to be happy right now: While we may not have control over the events that happen in our lives,

we do have control over how we react to them. The key to happiness is deciding to be happy right here, right now – to be happy with things that we have in life, and with things that we don't; to be grateful for all the little things and all the people in our lives – yes, including those we think we don't like. Does this mean that we become content and complacent and give up pursuing our dreams? No, on the contrary, we ought to pursue our dreams with double the vigor – just that we stop tying our happiness to the outcomes of our pursuits. I read somewhere that happiness is an art that ought to be



practiced and perfected like playing the violin. I couldn't agree more. Each time we see ourselves being affected by good or bad words for us, it requires awareness on our part to recognize that we're beginning to be blown away like the fig leaf. Remind yourself and you'll come back to your stable happy state. "From wherever the mind wanders due to its flickering and unsteady nature, one must certainly withdraw it and bring it back under the control of the self." (*Bhagavad Gita 6.26*)

The only thing we need to guard is our state of bliss. Let not any event disturb it, let not any word from anyone disturb it, let not any outcome of your pursuit disturb it. The idea is to reach a stable state of bliss – neither too affected by the desirable things happening in our lives, nor by the undesirable ones. The lotus flower is an apt metaphor to adopt – grows in water, sometimes murky, yet unaffected and blossoming beautifully. The only thing we need to do is to see ourselves as this lotus – happy, cheerful and smiling always, unaffected by the good and the bad happening around us. The Bhagavad Gita talks about this as a state of equanimity, 'samta' or sameness. In verse 2.48, Lord Krishna says to Arjuna, "Perform your duty equipoised, O Arjuna, abandoning all attachment to success or failure. Such equanimity is called yoga."

"In the state of perfection called samadhi, one's mind is completely restrained from material mental activities by practice of yoga. This perfection is characterized by one's ability to see the self through the pure mind and to relish and rejoice in the self. In that joyous state, one is situated in boundless transcendental happiness, realized through transcendental senses. Established thus, one never departs from the truth, and upon gaining this he thinks there is no greater gain. In such a position, one is never shaken, even in the midst of greatest difficulty. This indeed is actual freedom from all miseries arising from material contact." (*Bhagavad Gita 6.20-6.23*).

A word of caution: this and any of the other commandments is meant to be practiced and applied in one's own life – not to be preached to the other. If someone is going through a rough patch, help solve the issue bothering the person. If someone has had a loss in one's life, give the person a hug. Don't just advise the person to be happy with the circumstance.

I wish you all happiness always!

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