

THE SPIRITUAL SCIENTIST

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SMILING FACES, CRYING HEARTS



Meet Mr Befooled. He has a broad smile on his face. He is thinking, "Just see how clever I am! I have outwitted my doctor." Sometime ago, he was afflicted by a severe cardiac pain. His doctor prescribed an expensive medicine and a cheap painkiller. After he started the treatment, his pain subsided. A few days ago, he accidentally discovered that taking just the painkiller was enough to keep the pain away. The discovery delighted him, "I don't have to spend so much money on the antibiotic after all." Poor Mr Befooled. Little does he know what's in store for him. The painkiller has just created an illusion of health by deadening him to the sensation of pain. Unknown to him, the disease is worsening within. And soon it will become so aggravated that the painkiller will no longer work. By then it may be too late for even the medicine to act.

THE EMPTY HEART

Our present existence can be likened to a heart disease; we find ourselves in a situation where our innate longing for happiness is inevitably frustrated. Our heart longs for love and the happiness that it brings. Loving relationships give meaning and joy to life; indeed they make life, filled as it is with hardships, worth living. Ironically enough, intimate relationships, which have the potential of bringing the highest happiness, often become the source of the greatest anxiety and agony. Being an extremely intense emotion, love builds for the object of love such a lofty tower of expectations, hopes and dreams that it is practically impossible for any human being to ascend and stay in that tower. Love is almost always blind and marriage is almost always an eye-opener. Even if somehow a somewhat satisfying relationship is formed, it is invariably severed by the inexorable sword of time. And the stronger the relationship, the more agonizing is its summary termination.

Fearing disappointment, betrayal or ultimate devastation, most people do not dare to love. But a heart that does not love is profoundly empty. And an empty heart makes for a dry life, bereft of purpose and thrill. Without the satisfaction of loving reciprocation, life becomes at best boring and at worst agonizing. If there is nothing worth dying for in one's life, there is nothing worth living for either. Thus most people live with a heart dis-ease; their heart's longing finds no lasting fulfillment.

ADVANCING IN EMPTINESS

In the modern times, advancement in science and technology has led to a considerable increase in physical comforts and luxuries. Hi-tech gadgets now relieve us of many of the routine daily chores, which were thought to be making life repetitious, boring and

burdensome. Also for most people, the worldview created by science makes religion appear outdated, sentimental and unscientific. They thus feel themselves free to enjoy fully the sensual pleasures that were earlier restricted or prohibited by religion. Therefore being pampered by technology and freed from religion, most modern people consider themselves far superior to the people of the past.

However scientific advancement provides no help whatsoever in filling the empty hearts of people; on the contrary, it tends to increase the void in the heart. The mechanistic approach of modern science reduces sentient human beings to machinelike humanoids. It further reduces human behavior and personality to an interaction of lifeless particles governed by impersonal laws. Cherished human emotions like love become nothing more than electrochemical signals coursing through nerves and neurons. Such a conception appears shocking when stated so bluntly, but it is precisely what the scientific worldview implies and what most people unconsciously accept by embracing a technology-centered lifestyle. Of course love is a much-banded word in the modern times, especially in the media, but what is portrayed as love is basically lust.



LUST IS NOT LOVE

About so-called love, Montaigne remarks, "Love is nothing save an insatiable thirst to enjoy a greedily desired object." Love and lust are as different as gold and iron. Just as iron can be easily made to look like gold by an external coating, similarly lust can be made to look like love by an external show. But lust is an animalistic drive resulting from the craving of the flesh, whereas love is a sublime outward flow of oneself meant exclusively for the pleasure of the beloved. Lust is primarily selfish, whereas love is essentially selfless. And selfishness ruins relationships, whereas selflessness nourishes them. That is why relationships formed on the basis of lust - the so-called 'love' marriages - tend to be highly volatile, as is evident from the spiraling divorce rates in cultures encouraging sexual permissiveness. Statistics show that in the USA every third marriage ends in rupture within three years. About pre-marital sexuality, 'The New Harvard Guide to Psychiatry' notes:

Students caught up in this new sexual freedom found it "unsatisfying and meaningless".....A more recent study of normal college students (those not under the care of a psychiatrist) found that, although their sexual behavior by and large appeared to be a desperate attempt to overcome a profound sense of loneliness, they described their sexual relationships as less than satisfactory and as providing little of the emotional closeness they desired

Thus modern culture degrades love to a frantic search for carnal gratification, a search that soon becomes an exercise in meaninglessness; it therefore aggravates and perpetuates the void in the heart.

THE BOREDOM INDUSTRY

Modern society has devised ingenious ways of attempting to somehow forget this emptiness of the heart. Typical is the multi-billion dollar entertainment industry. Dubbed as the boredom industry, it provides people an escape-way from the frustrating grind of daily life to a celluloid



world. There, they vicariously become a dream character, who speaks smartly, behaves flawlessly, fights heroically, wins invariably and enjoys erotic fantasies unlimitedly. But all that the entertainment provides is a temporary feeling of well being, which cannot and does not last. Worse the grandiose and fantastic settings for bodily enjoyment that it depicts, fuel lust, greed and anger. These irrational and irresistible passions can never be satisfied in actual life. This further cripples the ability of people to experience and exchange love in their real lives and thus the emptiness of the heart deepens. And the vicious cycle - emptiness of heart leading to artificial enjoyment and the vicarious enjoyment resulting in further emptiness of the heart - perpetuates itself. The consequent desperation results in the maniac frenzy that surrounds sports, movies and similar forms of entertainment.

SOPHISTICATED PAINKILLERS

Thus for the disease of the empty heart, artificial pleasures are nothing more than a sophisticated painkiller. Just as a painkiller creates an illusion of health that only worsens the actual disease, artificial enjoyment creates an illusory state of stimulation and excitement that just cannot be maintained in actual life. Even when the body is young and healthy, no one can actually enjoy as much as the media portrays. The resulting unfulfilled passions lead to enormous frustration even in youth. And as the body ages and dwindles, nature forcibly strips away all abilities to enjoy. By then the sense of loneliness and emptiness, which was somehow numbed through extravagant sensual indulgence in youth, becomes so pervasive that life becomes an hellish, unlivable ordeal. Thus artificial enjoyment in youth sentences one to a condemned existence in middle age and senility.

At this point a question may arise: accepting that artificial enjoyment is just a painkiller, what is the harm if it provides some much-needed relief in a stressful life? Returning to the starting analogy, Mr Befooled's blunder is not that he takes the painkiller, but that he rejects the actual medicine, thinking that he is more intelligent in taking just the painkiller. He thus cheats himself of the chance to be cured. Similarly modern society, being infatuated with the analgesic of artificial enjoyment, has rejected the cure of genuine spirituality, which can lead to an eternal life of real enjoyment. So the foregoing critique of artificial enjoyment is meant to serve as a necessary prelude to an introduction to the Vedic paradigm of real enjoyment.

ENDLESS LOVE

The Vedic texts assert that our loving propensity is not meant to be forgotten or frustrated, rather it is meant to be completely and eternally fulfilled. Our longing for love is integral to our being and it remains strong even after our body dwindles. This indicates that our longing for love belongs to a setting that is different from and independent of our present bodily situation. The Vedic texts therefore posit that our actual existence is spiritual, that is, beyond the constricting confines of space (our material body) and time (our present lifespan). We are eternal spiritual beings, known in Sanskrit as *atman* (soul), and our real life is in a deathless spiritual realm.

There we relish and rejoice in an everlasting loving relationship with the supreme spiritual being, God.



When a person is beautiful, wealthy, intelligent, strong, famous or renounced, that person attracts our love towards him. Being supreme by definition, God possesses all these cherished attributes in full eternally; He is thus supremely beautiful, wealthy, intelligent, strong, famous and renounced. He is therefore universally attractive and is hence best described by the name Krishna, which in Sanskrit means all-attractive. *sarva akarshati it krishna* "The Supreme Being who attracts everyone is known as Krishna." Over and above these six attractive qualities, Krishna also has an especially endearing seventh opulence - a most loving nature. In the spiritual realm, He personally and individually reciprocates with the love of each soul. In one of his songs, renowned Beatle, the late George Harrison, has described Krishna as "the Lord who loves those who love Him." Krishna is thus the perfect object of love and the soul's longing for love, when reposed in Krishna, finds everlasting fulfillment.

In the spiritual realm each soul is endowed with a free will to enable him to choose to love Krishna and thus experience the ecstasy of endless love. By causeless misuse of his free will, when a soul refuses to love Krishna, he is sent from the spiritual realm to the material world. Here he tries to find a substitute object of love, but the temporal nature of all material objects frustrates him inevitably and repeatedly. Krishna being a most magnanimous lover does not forsake those souls who turn away from Him. He arranges to provide for their essential material needs - light, heat, air, water and food - through nature. He further provides a systematic program of spirituality to enable them to return to the spiritual realm.

RECOGNIZING GENUINE SPIRITUALITY

In the modern times, due to lack of spiritual education, almost any practice meant for any purpose passes as 'spiritual'. Actual spirituality however is a divinely delineated path meant specifically to re-unite us with the lost love of our heart. Love necessitates regulated behavior. For example, when a boy wants to develop a loving relationship with a girl, he very carefully does the things that will please her and he scrupulously avoids doing the things that will displease her. The same principle holds true in spiritual life, wherein an aspiring transcendentalist desires to develop a loving relationship with Krishna. Hence so-called spirituality that does not demand regulated behavior can be safely rejected as bogus. Of course the regulations expected in spiritual life are not meant to stifle our enjoyment in life, rather they are a necessary requisite to awaken our dormant love for Krishna, by which we can experience in full our original joyful nature.

DIVINE SOUND

The positive program for spiritual rediscovery given by Krishna is centered on divine sound. Spiritual sound vibration is fundamentally different from material sound vibration; it is much more than a mere carrier of information. Divine sound contains within itself the potency to free the hearer from vicious material desires and to enable him to experience higher realms of reality. Therefore the Vedanta-sutra, the condensed essence of all Vedic wisdom, concludes with the aphorism: *anavrttiḥ śabdāt* "The uncovering of pure consciousness takes place through divine sound."

Divine sound is most effective when received from those living according to spiritual principles. Therefore it is vital for an aspirant on the spiritual path to associate regularly and submissively with advanced spiritualists. In such holy association, he can have his consciousness purified by receiving spiritual knowledge and by molding his life accordingly.

Divine sound is also easily and universally accessible through the medium of the Holy Name, especially the maha mantra Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Krishna Krishna Hare Hare Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare. Krishna and His name are non-different. Therefore chanting of the Holy Names brings us immediately in contact with Krishna. This sublime contact provides us a glimpse of our spiritual joyful nature and thus stimulates the awakening of our original love for Krishna. Hence another essential principle for progressive spiritual advancement is regular mantra meditation.

A serious spiritualist also eschews activities that impede the swift awakening of his love for Krishna. The most detrimental of such activities are meat eating, gambling, intoxication and illicit sex. All living beings – whether human or subhuman – are the children of God. So if a so-called spiritualist satisfies his palate by gorging on the flesh of his own brothers in the family of God, his spirituality is just a charade. Gambling agitates and preoccupies the mind with false hopes of future prosperity and thus takes away the impetus for striving to attain the platform of real happiness. Intoxication creates a further illusion within the illusion of material life and thus propels one in a direction opposite to that desirable for spiritual realization. Illicit sex perverts the soul's divine longing for love into an animalistic hunt for sensual titillation. It dulls the spirit, quickens the senses and rivets one's consciousness to flesh. The Bhagavad-gita (3.41) therefore warns that lust is "the destroyer of knowledge and self-realization."

Abstaining from these four self-destructive behavioral patterns – meat eating, gambling, intoxication and illicit sex – is not however a necessary pre-requisite for embarking on the spiritual path. From any position in life, one can adopt the positive principles of spirituality. Contact with divine sound provides spiritual happiness, purifies the heart and elevates one to a higher level of consciousness, at which following the negative injunctions becomes easier.

THE CURE FOR THE HEART

Those who adopt this process of reawakening their dormant love for Krishna can very soon experience Krishna and His love in their lives. Countless people throughout history have had these spiritual experiences. And even today ISKCON (The International Society for Krishna Consciousness) is freely distributing this cure for the soul to anyone and everyone all over the world. Thousands are experiencing the joy of Krishna consciousness in their lives. Seeing the medicine of Krishna consciousness working in their lives, they no longer need the analgesic of artificial enjoyment. For them, self-restraint is not a source of mental and physical torture, but a gateway to higher happiness.

It is unfortunate, nay tragic, that most of modern society has placed itself in the position of Mr Befeled. Most people have rejected the cure of spirituality and embraced the analgesic of artificial enjoyment. And they think of themselves as very advanced and intelligent in doing this. But the passage of time is showing that neither is a life of artificial enjoyment satisfying, nor is a society espousing artificial lifestyles sustainable. Despite the best facilities for bodily enjoyment, Western and Westernized societies are witnessing an alarming rise in divorces, criminality, addictions and suicides. Stress, a disease unheard of in earlier times, is now synonymous with the modern lifestyle. All these are symptomatic of hearts that are profoundly and desperately empty. The disease of the empty heart has worsened so much that in many cases even the painkiller of artificial enjoyment is no longer working.

But still it is not too late. The cure of genuine spirituality is easily available. It is safe, simple and sublime. And it works for those who give it a sincere try. The process of filling what theologian Micheal Novak has called "the empty shrine" at the heart of modern existence is the most exciting and glorious of intellectual, and human, adventures. The onus is on the bold and the intelligent to take up the challenge.

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Dedicated to

**His Divine Grace A C Bhaktivedanta Swami Srila Prabhupada,
the Greatest Spiritual Scientist of the Modern Times**

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