

“What are we looking for?”

When we examine all our needs and wants, we arrive at a very simple conclusion. Through all our activity and busyness of life, what we are really looking for is peace and happiness. We want it here and now, we want it to be always present and without limits, whatever the circumstances, situations, events or experiences. Every human being without exception, regardless of age, gender, race, culture, religion or nationality, wants peace and happiness, a satisfied life. To put it another way, we all want freedom from suffering. Even those who perform negative and harmful actions towards themselves or towards others, do so because they think that they will find peace and happiness that way! They don't realise that such actions are counter-productive.

Not only do we want peace and happiness for ourselves, we want it for others too: those near and dear and for all others and all creatures. However, we need to attend to ourselves first because of a very simple and obvious principle: we cannot give or share what we do not have. So the enquiry is reduced to the individual, from a 'we' to an 'I': “What am I looking for?” In this article, the first person singular “I” will be used.

The fact that I want peace and happiness means that I do not have it at this moment. If I did, I would not be looking for it. How do I currently seek for it? By getting objects. I think that by getting objects, I will become peaceful and happy. This is what I have done from childhood and I continue with the same approach right throughout life. The objects I seek change as I change, but the seeking for objects persists. I seek objects to find security, pleasure or to become a better person, thus hoping to find peace and happiness in my life.

What are 'objects'? They are 'things' or 'phenomena' or 'aggregates' or 'structures', elements put together and held together. Objects can be tangible and gross or intangible and subtle. Tangible ones are like my physical body, money, property, investments, jewellery, personal items, bullion, etc. Intangible ones are like my mind, thoughts and emotions, pleasure, sensations, success, fame, family and relationships, subjective experiences and daily encounters, security, situations, amazing experiences, transcendental experiences, the unconscious, etc. They are all objects.

Seeking and dealing with objects to find peace and happiness has a particular problem: objects are temporary and keep changing. In other words, they are unreliable and can even be disappointing and counterproductive. Despite my best efforts, I cannot control them. What pleases me today may not please me tomorrow. What was pleasurable once can become painful later.... think romance and divorce! I have to guard what I get and keep them safe because they can be lost and they do get lost! Like everything else in life, they are subject to entropy! Sometimes after working so hard to get them, I find they are not exactly what I wanted or I find them hollow. Something is missing. What pleases one person may not please another. Besides, I may not get the object I want and so I go into frustration, anger or depression. The reason I get depressed is very simple: I am not getting what I want. Don't our life experiences confirm these facts?

In other words, objects in themselves cannot give peace and happiness because it is not in them to do so. Yet, even though I know this from hard and painful experience, I still keep pursuing objects because I do not know what else to do! This is how I have been conditioned, how I think and act, and society and advertising only reinforce this conditioning: “Buy this, and you will be happy!” “Use this

and you will get what you want!” “You are missing out if you don’t have this!” Advertisements can be so bewitching and enticing and so cleverly pull at the heart strings. End result, I pursue objects.

What I do not understand is the mental mechanism or dynamics pertaining to desire, getting objects and what happens after:

- First, I must have the thought of the object, ie. I must know it. Through perception and experience, I get to know an object, ie. the thought of it, an imprint of the object arises in my mind. This is how we gain knowledge of any object. When not directly needed, that thought is archived in my memory and can be retrieved as needed. Then I can act on it. Conversely, when I do not know an object, I will not have the thought of it in my mind.
- I cannot desire what I do not know; I can desire only what I do know, ie have a thought of.
- From whatever cause, when the thought of an object arises in my mind, it must please me for me to desire the object. If it displeases me, I will drop the thought and not pursue the object.
- When I am pleased with the thought and desire the object, my mind gets agitated. The degree of agitation depends on the intensity of the desire. Something I do not really care much about, raises very little agitation. But if I really desire something very strongly, then the agitation will be equally strong.
- This agitation drives me to seek the object and I cannot rest until I get it. (The popular phrase is: “I go nuts!”) This is how cravings arise.
- When I get the object, the agitation ceases and the thought of the object drops away from my mind because I now have the object with me; there is no more need for the thought.
- With the agitation gone, my mind becomes quiet and restful.
- I feel peaceful and happy and I conclude ...and it appears to be true... that the peace and happiness came because I got the object. WRONG CONCLUSION! (Sorry!!)

What really happens is that when the agitation ceases and the mind is quiet and rested, peace and happiness flood my mind. Where did it come from? This peace and happiness comes from me. It is my nature. When my mind is quiet, my nature of peace and happiness is easily recognised and experienced. But because I am ignorant of my true nature, I think the object gave it to me. Not at all! Peace and happiness arises from me because it is my nature.

What is the proof for this surprising claim even though it seems contrary to everything we have so far known?

- Everyone has had experiences, even if episodic and brief, where they felt some peace and happiness even without objects... just simply peaceful and happy for no obvious reason.
- Also, the fact that I seek peace and happiness means that I must have experienced and must have known it. I cannot desire what I do not know. As stated above, for me to desire something, I must have the thought of it and the thought of it occurs in my mind because I

have experienced and known it. So since every human being without exception (that includes me) desires peace and happiness, we must have known it.

- Just that I did not realise that the peace and happiness I experienced is my own nature. Ignorance is the factor that prevents me from recognising this reality and so I seek it in objects. Because of ignorance, I overlook my own nature, I project peace and happiness on to objects, associate it with objects and therefore pursue objects. All the time I am unaware of where peace and happiness really arises from – myself, my nature. What an unfortunate and painful mistake and how ironic! What I am really looking for is here present all the time!
- More proof..... I cannot accept pain, unpleasantness and suffering. I seek freedom from these. Either I quickly withdraw myself from these experiences or I try to actively eliminate them and their source. This is normal and usual human behaviour. However, when I experience peace and happiness, I do not seek to withdraw from it nor seek to eliminate it. I want it to remain all the time. That is because peace and happiness is my nature, what I am and not something I have to get. Whereas pain and suffering are not part of my nature. They are foreign to me and unpleasant and so I do not want them. So even my desire to avoid suffering, proves that my nature is peace and happiness.
- To summarise, I always want peace and happiness whether I move towards desirable objects or shun away from undesirable ones. Peace and happiness is my nature.

When I know this reality about myself, I can be happy and peaceful under any circumstance. Life is constantly changing and always in flux. We experience duality constantly: pleasure alternating with pain, success and failure, gain and loss, pleasant and unpleasant, beginnings and endings, birth and death, etc. These experiences are inevitable in life. To hope for and want only the good things in life, is a sure recipe for disappointment, suffering and misery. When I am ignorant of my nature, I suffer; the roller coaster ride up and down is highly unpleasant in the long run. When experienced to extremes, it becomes a psychological problem called Bipolar Disorder.

But when I ground myself on the foundation of the peace and happiness that I am, ie. on my nature, then I can handle these swings without being overcome by them, not getting high with the pleasant nor low with the unpleasant. My mind will be balanced and equanimous with either... not because of the objects and experiences, circumstances and situations, all of which keep changing... but because I know I am the source of my peace and happiness.

In addition, I will be able to handle all objects, both tangible and intangible, freely and wisely without developing any dependence on them. Objects have their place. I realise objects are needed for survival, sustenance, comfort or pleasure but not for happiness and peace. This latter is my nature. With such an attitude, I am free, unbound, liberated and peaceful.

When I am at peace with myself, I will be at peace with others. When I know this truth about myself, I can help others find the peace and happiness they are. I can share insights and experiences and ways of living which are conducive to a peaceful, happy and satisfying life. Individuals grouped together make a society, the 'we'. When individuals in society are peaceful and happy, society will be peaceful and happy. But when ignorance of the reality of ourselves predominates, there is

trouble. Look at the world today. So it all begins with the individual, each individual, who knows what he / she is looking for and knows where to find it.

This knowledge or realisation about myself leads to peace and happiness and a satisfying life, here and now. Isn't this what I am / we are looking for?