

Feeling Hopeless about Finding Happiness

Ted Schmidt

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Intellect speaking...

This part of my journey is kind of bleak. I know in theory that absolutely nothing can bring me happiness!! But it's not absolute enough to make my mind able to reflect me/ awareness. Therefore I feel a lot of hopelessness inside of me.

Ted: I'm not sure what you mean by the statement, "But it's not absolute enough to make my mind able to reflect me/awareness." It is not the knowledge that no object can bring you permanent fulfillment that "makes" the mind able to reflect you/awareness. Rather, it is in a mind that is sufficiently still (i.e., no longer agitated by binding *vasanas* that extrovert one's attention and compel one to seek happiness through the obtainment of objects) that a clear reflection of the limitless, attributeless nature of pure awareness is most clearly "seen" and recognized as one's own true nature.

Your sense of hopelessness suggests that you are still interpreting "happiness" to mean the experiential emotion of joy that is ordinarily associated with the obtainment of desired objects or the achievement of desired ends. In other words, you are still seeking the subtle object of a particular emotional state. You believe that being happy will bring you permanent fulfillment. But it won't. The emotion of happiness is an object like any other object. It arises, abides for a time, and then inevitably subsides. And you, the apparent person, are not in control of the thoughts and emotions that arise within your mind. They come unbidden, as it were, based on your *vasanas* and the constant natural fluctuation of the *gunas*.

The most ironic aspect of the notion that experiential happiness is the goal is that the pursuit of it only causes continual frustration and consequent unhappiness.

The "happiness" that Vedanta says is your true nature is not experiential bliss, but rather the sense of wholeness or fullness that results from having fully assimilated the knowledge of one's inherently limitless nature; the unshakeable confidence that no circumstance or experience in life can enhance, diminish, or change your essential nature in any way or to any degree; the settled conviction that no matter what happens, you are always okay.

Right now, it seems apparent that you are equating the goal of *moksha*, ultimate inner freedom, with experiential happiness. Moreover, rather than appreciating the freedom that the knowledge of the incapacity of objects to provide permanent fulfillment affords (for now you no longer have to spend all your time and energy in their pursuit), you are lamenting the fact. More to the point, as you say, it doesn't seem that you have fully assimilated the fact that objects are not the source of joy. It seems there is yet a part of you that believes there is joy in objects, but you have simply given up hope of ever finding it.

Helena: This is new to me because before I was so busy chasing the happiness carrot that I was full of false hope.

Ted: So self-inquiry is bearing fruit after all. At least you recognize that your previous efforts to

find happiness through objects were misguided. As I mentioned, it doesn't seem like you are ready to surrender to this fact yet. But at least you are moving in the right direction. It takes time to remove the ignorance that has been so deeply ingrained in us.

Helena: I keep plugging away at my constant self-enquiry. Knowing I'm on the Vedanta bus and the only stop is moshe.

Ted: This is all you can do. Keep contemplating the teachings and analyze your every experience in light of them. Every time you do this, you chip away a little more of the ignorance that is covering your limitless nature. Eventually you will "see" that you are the awareness in which all objects, subtle and gross, appear, and that, therefore, you are free of all objects. Then, no matter what emotion is coloring Helena's experience, you will know that you are A-OK.

By the way, the term for the ultimate inner freedom to which you are referring is *moksha*, which is spelled "m-o-k-s-h-a" and not "m-o-s-h-e," as you have been spelling it throughout our dialogues to this point.

Helena: But it seems like I'm riding in the back of the bus. I've tried to not to get my hopes up too much knowing I could be here for a long time. God forbid maybe even the rest of this incarnation. Which could be another 20 years or more. Guess I'm just looking for encouragement/suggestions.

Ted: Since *moksha* is our true nature, we will not rest until it has been re-discovered and fully assimilated. So at this point there is no other option than to continue self-inquiry under the guidance of a qualified teacher, which you have. What are you going to do? Quit on yourself? I would suggest that you worry less about attaining some pre-conceived notion you have concerning the nature of *moksha* and focus more on making a careful analysis of your own experience in light of the teachings.

In conjunction with continued inquiry, it might also be worthwhile to seek some counseling or psychotherapy. In light of some of the personal information you've shared with me regarding eating issues and your sister's concern that you might harm yourself and the ongoing theme that you find little happiness in your daily affairs, I get the feeling that you might be suffering from depression. I am not a doctor, so I cannot say with any authority whether or not this is the case. But the issue may be worth your consideration. If you are interested in improving Helena's experience, in cultivating a greater degree of experiential happiness (which is certainly understandable), then psychoanalysis might be either a good alternative or a nice compliment to the process of self-inquiry.

Vedanta is not a method of self-improvement or psychotherapy. It is not concerned with improving the individual, but rather with revealing one's true nature as pure awareness and negating one's identification with the apparent person one seems to be. In this regard, Vedanta is meant for those who are spiritually mature and mentally healthy, which is the reason the scriptures speak of the mental qualifications necessary for successful self-inquiry. It does not offer a means of transforming *samsara*, worldly life, into *nirvana*, an everlasting state of experiential bliss. Rather, it is a means of understanding the true nature of reality, which once assimilated allows one to live free of the suffering that results from identifying oneself as a person, to abide in one's "already established" limitlessness even while navigating through the apparent reality in the guise of a seemingly limited individual.