

Going Beyond the Good and the Pleasant

Modern psychologists simply confirm what the ancients have always taught and that is that the primary thing that motivates a human being is the search for happiness and the avoidance of pain. In the beginning we feel that happiness is getting what is pleasant to the senses, what is flattering to the ego. The avoidance of pain is to accomplish this with the minimum amount of effort.

If we are somewhat attentive, to a large extent, we can accomplish this. The problem is that what we want and our pleasures very often interfere with what others want. And so when we are seeking only our own happiness with the minimum amount of effort, we find ourselves in continuous conflict with our fellow human beings who are wanting the same thing. They're self-centered, we're self-centered, both unable to see the other's point of view, and so we are in continuous conflict.

Fortunately the human being has a higher sense than this pure animalistic part of his nature. He also has the capacity to be a moral being. And, indeed, until he becomes a moral being he is little different than the animals. The moral being recognizes that there are other human beings out there that feel the same way as I do. Therefore, if I am wise and want to be in harmony—not continuously in conflict—I should treat them the way I would like to be treated.

When Lord Yama was speaking to Naciketas he put this in a nutshell. He said that man is continuously choosing between the good and the pleasant; the good leads to his highest welfare, the pleasant to his destruction. The good, in fact, is what brings us in harmony with other human beings and the world; the pleasant is just seeking our own welfare. Therefore, the first step up from being an animal is to be a true human being who seeks the good, the welfare of others, equally with his or her own welfare.

But still, man is not only animal and human, he is divine. And so even if we're leading a good life, considering other people, working for the whole, there is something higher yet. We all yearn for heaven or harmony. As long as we're trying to choose between the good and the pleasant, if we choose the good, we avoid outer conflict, but there is still an inner conflict

between what is good which may involve sacrifice and what is pleasant which is what the senses want to do.

Therefore, within us is a feeling that there must be something higher, a better way still. That is to come in harmony with the universe itself. It is to rise above this conflict between the pleasant and good by placing our decision-making in the hands of a higher power. That higher power is no other than our true Self, ever available to us. We get access to this higher power through surrender, by letting go of the conflict between the pleasant and good, admitting it is too much for us—resting in God, trusting God, taking refuge in God.

Then we find a new way of making decisions—beyond the mind, beyond the three *guṇa*-s and the pairs of opposites. They say that a saint acts spontaneously. It's just another way of saying that he spontaneously makes the right decisions, spontaneously does the good, without effort, without conflict. This is true happiness, the happiness that all of us are seeking.

Ultimately, happiness is never in seeking the pleasure of the senses. Nor is it even in the struggle to be good. It is, in reality, going beyond both the good and the pleasant and becoming an instrument of the Lord. Lord Kṛṣṇa has told us that we must lift ourselves up. The first step is to choose the good over the pleasant and ultimately it is to be an instrument of the Lord, to let the Lord make all the decisions for us.