

The Joy of the Self.

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There is a spring of Joy perennial in the heart of every living being and the *Vedānta* gives it the name of *Ātma*. Clothed as it is in a physical encasement, it ever seeks to find expression even through it and the seeking will cease to be only when the expression is full and perfect, unhampered and unlimited by any encasement. It is idle and fruitless to embark upon an enquiry as to when and how this limitation came into existence or came to be related to the essentially limitless. It is, on the other hand, very much worth our while to help in its seeking to find expression even through the encasement and much more worth our while to help to find its fullest expression untrammelled by the encasement. Joy therefore that seeks expression is said to be twofold. More accurately speaking, the expression of joy is said to be twofold, limited by encasement and transcending encasement. The expression of joy limited by encasement is given the name of *Abhyudaya*, the Good; and the expression of joy transcending encasement is given the name of *Niḥśreyasa*, the Highest Good. The expression of joy transcending encasement is, necessarily, of only one sort, for differentiation belongs only to the encasement. The expression of joy through encasement is of two sorts, according as that encasement happens to be the particular encase-

ment we are now in or happens to be another encasement which we have to occupy after this encasement has ceased to be. The former is called *Āhika* or the "Here" and the latter *Āmuṣmika* or the "Hereafter". The Vedic Religion, aiming as it does at our good, has therefore to tell us the means for the expression of Joy in all these ways.

It will be well if we begin with a consideration of our encasement. To the ordinary thinker, it would seem that our physical body of flesh and blood constitutes all our encasement. But a little more consideration will tell him that, even without that physical body there is a capacity in him to experience in dreams and that he has a personality therefore even when the physical body is forgotten. A still more deep consideration will tell him that sensuous experience is not a necessary attribute of his as it is absent in deep sleep and that all the same the personality does subsist even there as is shown by his remembering about the bliss of sleep which *he* enjoyed at that time. He finds therefore that his personality, though really one throughout all these three regions of experience, can yet be conceived of as threefold, first as conditioned by the physical body wherein the senses are awake, second as conditioned by the mind with its store of impressions

and third as conditioned by individuality alone which is remembered after waking. These three conditionings of the personality are spoken of as three bodies, *Sthūla* (gross), *Sūkṣma* (subtle) and *Kāraṇa* (causal).

It is interesting to consider the same from another standpoint. It is well-known that the life period of an individual can be conveniently divided into several stages each with a distinct characteristic of its own. For the first few years of a person's existence after birth, his only instinct is hunger and his only activity is to satisfy that instinct. If you give a child a ball or a knife, it will instinctively place it in its mouth; the rate of growth of the physical body is also very high during those years. After those years are passed and the child enters on its boyhood, there is increased activity perceived and the boy runs here and there with no apparent purpose except to give vent to the excessive vitality that make its appearance then. When the boy becomes a youth, he is not merely concerned with food and exercise but cultivates likes and dislikes and wants to give expression to them in his relationship to the persons and things in the outside world so that he may have all that he likes and get rid of all that he dislikes. After a series of experiences, especially disappointments, he realizes somewhat that his own like or dislike is no criterion of the goodness or badness of things and desires to know about things as they are, unaffected by his own subjective colourings. The middle age

is therefore an age of enquiry actuated by a desire to know truth. When old age sets in, even knowledge does not seem worth striving after, for the call of the body and the mind is towards rest and peace. Thus the life period of a man may be divided into five stages:—

- (1) Childhood, where physical growth and food stand out prominent.
- (2) Boyhood, where physical activity and exercise stand out prominent.
- (3) Youth, where mind and its likes and dislikes stand out prominent.
- (4) Middle age, where intellect and the desire to learn the truth stand out prominent.
- (5) Old age, where the entire body, mind and intellect seek rest and peace.

By pointing out that these are the characteristics of those stages, I mean only that they are predominant there. Even a child has its own movements, its own likes or dislikes, its own curiosities and its own sleep. Thus all these do exist in all the five stages though each one finds accentuated expression in a particular stage. Our personality therefore may be conceived of as being clothed in five coatings which are all ever present with us but get prominence under certain circumstances or in particular periods of life. These coatings are known as *Koṣas* and are given the names of:—

1. *Annamaya Koṣa*, the food-made coating.
2. *Prāṇamaya Koṣa*, the vital coating.
3. *Manomaya Koṣa*, the mental coating.
4. *Vijñānamaya Koṣa*, the intellectual coating.
5. *Ānandamaya Koṣa*, the blissful coating.

Taking our everyday experience, we may say that all the coatings 1 to 5 are in full play when we are awake, that the coatings 2 to 5 are active in dreams and that the 5th coating is alone present in sound sleep. This classification therefore is really more comprehensive than the classification into bodies as mentioned before. The encasement in which we happen to be at present may therefore be considered as made up of these five coatings.

The joy that takes its rise from beyond the entire encasement but seeks to find expression through it has necessarily to share its imperfections and to be coloured by its characteristics. It takes upon itself the imperfections and the characteristics also of the particular coating of the encasement through which it sheds its lustre. The joy as experienced in the physical coating is known as health, in the vital coating as strength, in the mental coating as comfort, in the intellectual coating as knowledge and in the blissful coating as peace. Just as the same water gets the name of a spring, a stream, a cascade, a river, a lake

or a sea by reason of the limiting boundaries which define it for the time being, so does the same joy get these various names. The *Vedānta* does not at all concede that there is in essence any difference between sensuous happiness and the Bliss of the Self; it is only the latter that finds expression in the former but under very limited and polluted surroundings. The *Vedānta* sees therefore no contradiction between sense experience and the realization of the Self as some systems of thought do. It, no doubt, lays emphasis upon the importance of renunciation as a pathway to a knowledge of the Self but at the same time grants such knowledge to King Janaka and others who were quite in the world. To realize that a chair is but all wood, it is quite unnecessary to smash it into pieces; but it may be necessary in the case of a person who is unable to ignore the chairship. Similarly to the person who is sense-bound and is unable to realize that he is really enjoying the Joy of the Self when it comes to him through the senses, it is quite necessary to segregate him, as it were, from sense-born joys but such a process is not necessary to the person who sees only the Joy of the Self everywhere. But such a realization is not at all an easy matter and is had but rarely even after heavy ordeals and strenuous courses of training.

It is quite common in these days to affect such a realization to ensure licence in sense pleasures. Those who indulge in such tactics may pass for great men and hoodwink some innocent

persons but, unfortunately for them, they cannot hoodwink God. He has prescribed for all time in His Vedas the methods by which one can secure limited enjoyments, limited by time or by the particular encasement or by the particular coating in that encasement or by any other circumstance, realizable here in this life or in the lives hereafter, in this world or in the innumerable other worlds and the methods by which one can secure, or rather regain, the Joy Supernal which has always been his. It is impossible to ignore or violate those methods and yet claim to have attained the same results.

God has no doubt given us full liberty of action and it is quite open to us to disobey His commands but it is well to remember that He has reserved in His own hands the power of reward and punishment. May we therefore always have the faith and the strength to be guided by His words in our quest of Joy, be it *Abhyudaya* (Good) or *Nihsreyasa* (Highest Good). As this quest is with us every moment of our lives, we cannot afford to neglect His guidance even for an instant. Even in the very act of reposing in Him and submitting to His guidance, there is Joy unspeakable.
