

The Gift of Happiness

One aspect of Christmas is the tradition of exchanging gifts as a symbol of expressing appreciation. Because my Guru embodied a state of unconditional freedom and love, those who came to sit with him often wanted to offer a gift to show their gratitude. But what to bring someone with such modest needs? So, when they would ask, "Swamiji, what can I bring you?" he would answer, "Just be happy. This is the greatest gift."

It seems so simple, even naive. Why is it more difficult to be happy than to buy a gift? Why, when everyone's true wish is to be happy and to spread happiness to all, why do we not see evidence of that happiness – not just at celebrations, but at every moment?

After considering this question for many years, I would like to share my research findings as my Christmas gift to you, the reader.

To unwrap the gift, you must become aware of the nature of the mind, not as 'your' mind, but as 'the' mind. Meditation and Self enquiry (*satsang*) strengthen a power of observation that is not bewitched by, and thereby entangled in your personal story dancing centre stage. This power of observation reveals that the mind's patterns that make up the collective human experience do not imprint that pattern on You, the Witness Self, whose nature is freedom.

This enquiry leads us to examine how these mind patterns evolved – from an innocent, little girl or boy, who, being the nature of pure awareness, observed all that was around. We observed, we absorbed, we started to explore things, their names and their purposes, and we made meaning from sounds we heard repeated again and again.

We felt all kinds of feelings and learnt so many things as elders steered us through this complex maze called education, imprinting on the mind what is right and what is wrong. Even with the best intentions to nourish and support a child's self-esteem, the elders must 'correct' the child in order for them to learn how to master this marvel of engineering – the body and mind.

Being told we are right felt great, and being told we are wrong felt the opposite. And so, as instinct dictates, we learnt to seek the 'good' and erect barriers to shield us from 'wrong', all the while perpetuating and cementing a personal identity that struggles to be seen as right and suffers from feeling the underlying sense of wrong.

Understanding how the conditioning process impacted and shaped our sense of self, does not give us license to indulge in regret and blame. But rather, when freed from a charged emotional response to our personal drama, the power of our true nature rises out of the helplessness that etched an imaginary identity of personal hurts that we are not recognised or supported by those in whom we invested our self worth.

We are the indwellers of this body, governed by a very fine intelligence that projects through a personal lens to interact with this formed existence. We were taught a liturgy of rules on how to manoeuvre the body/mind to be 'proper' in this ever-

shifting world, but not taught how to be happy, joyful, creative, and free of pride, hatred and envy.

These rules did not secure us in love, nor relieve us from selfishness, worry and fear. We were not taught how to be at ease with ourselves and with others. We were not given the knowledge of how to work with vigour and yet not exhaust ourselves nor squander our resources. The rules did not set a wise course of action when faced with doubt and confusion. Where is the manual to show us the way to be in touch with our true nature – happiness?

Meditation is to give value to the manual of Self Knowledge. To read and assimilate its wisdom opens a vision that sees the changing physical nature – body, mind, senses, world, relations, experiences – AND, ‘sees’ with inner awareness, the subtle, unchanging, formless power, the basis upon which the physical nature exists.

Due to our training, the mind divided these powers, manifest and unmanifest, but in truth they are one and the same, just as earth and earthen jug are one and the same. When we realise we are whole, our consciousness unites the otherwise fragmented sense of Self, and personal hurts, worries, and frustrations are healed.

In the light of Oneness, it is clear that your true nature was not born with the body, nor will it die with the body. This clarity reveals that you are not a victim of the conditioned human drama, existing in between birth and death. You are forever free, but ... only you can give this most precious gift to yourself.

Having received your own gift, you will not keep identifying yourself with the needs of the body. You will manage this body, nourishing it with love and respect.

Having received this gift, you will not overindulge the demands of the senses that seek fulfilment in fleeting things.

Having received this gift, you will not entertain the gripping dramas of ego projections and defences, carrying a sense of wrongness, of lack, of worry, and in need of validation.

Having received this gift, you will not be upset by words and their meanings to feel small under the burden of how you appear to others.

Having received this gift of your own Self, you will not retaliate from not feeling appreciated and lick your wounds of self pity, sustaining the vicious illusion that you are not lovable and beautiful just as you are.

Having received the most precious gift of Self Awareness, you will return to innocence, pure Being, pure awareness, pure love, but with the manual in hand that steers you to see where happiness lies. In You.

Happy Christmas