

Joys, Sorrows and Serenity 80-04-13

Om. A-sa-to ma sad gam-ma-ya. Ta-ma-so-ma jyo-tir gam-ma-ya. Mri-tyor ma a-mri-tam ga-ma-ya. Avir avir ma e-dhi. Rudra yat te dak-shi-nam mu-kham. Tena mam pahi nityam. Tena mam pahi nityam. Tena mam pahi nityam.

Lead us from the unreal to the Real. Lead us from darkness unto Light. Lead us from death to Immortality. Reveal to us Thy Resplendent Truth and evermore protect us, Oh Lord, by Thy Sweet and Compassionate Face, by Thy Sweet and Compassionate Face, by Thy Sweet and Compassionate Face.

The subject of my talk this morning is: Joys, Sorrows, and Serenity.

Just as in the sky, on the sky sometimes we have sunlight and sometimes clouds. So also, in our life, there is sometimes joy and sometimes suffering. That is the rule of life. We cannot escape it. Nobody can say that, "I have nothing to do with suffering. I always want to enjoy. I always want happiness." In the nature of things, that is an impossibility. Life is a mixture of opposites – not merely on this level of joys and sufferings, but on every level of life we have the interplay, the admixture of two opposites.

Think of life itself. There cannot be a continued life. Life has to be followed by death. Health has to be disturbed by sickness. Beauty and ugliness walk side by side, just as day and night. Knowledge and ignorance also function side by side. Nobody can say, "I know everything." You may know many things, but you also do not know many other things. This is the rule of life. This is the plan of nature, and if God is the ultimate source of things, He has planned His creation in this way. We can put a question to God, "Why is this? Why not just a continued experience of joy? Why not a continued experience of life – a continued experience of health? Why [do] You bring the opposites here?"

What will be God's answer? A diplomatic smile! [Audience laughs]. He would say, "This is not the whole story. If you really are interested in continued happiness, in continued life, then you have to shift your level of experience. You have to come to spiritual experience. You have to come closer to Me, because you see, Me, Myself, I am free from these opposites, though I have created these opposites, but I, Myself am above these opposites. Neither life nor death touches Me. Neither happiness nor suffering touches Me. There is a state, there is a level of existence where you can rise above these opposites. In other words, it is possible for you to share My life. If you have My experience, if you have God-experience, then you will be able to rise above these opposites. Then you won't suffer, but neither you will also enjoy."

Then we say, "What is this?" If there is no enjoyment, mere getting rid of suffering is not enough, we want to enjoy. Then God will say, "Yes. There is something, which is above joy and suffering. That is serenity. Serenity is infinitely more glorious than even your joy or happiness. Your joy and happiness suffers under many conditions, but not serenity. Serenity is My quality, My attribute. I am always serene. All this vast movement of this universe is going

on and I am the witness. Nothing is touching Me, neither life nor death, neither health nor sickness, neither beauty nor ugliness. I am above these pairs of opposites and you can also do that. You can also develop your wisdom in such a way that you can be the witness of these two, namely joy and suffering -- joy and sorrow.

So as we are standing in this life, we have to face these two things: joys and sufferings. But if we are drawn to spiritual life, if we can find God in our life, if we can discover our own spiritual nature, then we attain serenity, calmness -- tranquility. And, standing on that serenity and tranquility, we can see the play of life, just as God is doing. God is the eternal witness of all happenings, of all flux of life, of all events of life. In His true majesty, infinite majesty He is always residing. And we human beings, when we can discover God in our life, if we can understand our true spiritual nature, then we can also share this life of God. We begin to live a divine life. From a biological and psychological life, we ascend to what is called the divine life. The body does not go. The mind also remains, but we then are stationed in something, which is neither the body nor the mind; in spiritual literature, it is called our soul.

Lord Jesus Christ said, "What shall a man profiteth if he can gain the whole world and lose his own soul? What can a man give in exchange for his soul?"¹ [Matthew 16:26] Soul of a man is not a myth, is not a fancy, is not a poetical imagination. It is true. It is very true! We may forget our soul. We may forget our own spiritual nature, but [in] our soul all the time, [the] flame of light is within us. So joys and sufferings, the play of joys and sufferings, joys or sorrows, will go on. There is no guarantee-- no matter how hard we may try, we cannot escape suffering. Just as today there is sunlight, tomorrow suddenly a patch of cloud comes. A storm comes. Rain comes. In that way, in the firmament of our life, there will be the sunshine; there will be moonlight but we must be prepared also for storm, for clouds. But that need not make us depressed, because in the depths of our consciousness there is the higher truth: the more sublime truth than matter or energy or life or mind! Our spirit. Our soul. Our God. Our divine nature.

So a spiritual person, a seeker of spiritual truth has to come to that experience. Slowly, steadily he must try to discover his spiritual nature. He must try to feel the presence of God. God is not in some distant heaven. As the Upanishads tell us, God – the word for God in the Upanishads as you'll remember is Brahman. Brahman means the Greatest, the All-Comprehensive, the All-Including Reality. So the Upanishads say, God after creating this universe entered into every fiber of this universe. There is not a point, there is not a spot in this universe where there is no God.² Only He is a very master player. He can hide Himself so cleverly that we cannot easily find Him. But if we are earnest He responds to our desire, to our prayer. He then becomes a matter of experience. Just as we are experiencing the sunlight, just as we are experiencing our body, our mind, our thoughts, our emotions, in the same way we can experience God. Great spiritual teachers tell us it is possible. It is possible to... to lift our mind to this spiritual level. And when the mind goes to that level, the mind discovers God, the spirit.

So, we need not and should not waste our energy in grief and depression... the “Why suffering? Why I am suffering?” Wisdom is... is to face life, face joys and suffering, but to know that really speaking we are above joys and sufferings. This life... as we see, this play of life, the vast universe, great spiritual teachers, sages and saints tell us is not our ultimate goal. It is something on the way. Man is a pilgrim. Man’s goal is God. And he passes through the experiences of life in order to be mature, in order to rise above nature. So a person who is seeking God, who is seeking freedom from these opposites, he has to know this first of all: what is his objective of life.

Normally, [for] millions of us, our objective is progress, is pleasure, is happiness, is prosperity, is education – knowledge through books, and so on. That is all right, but there is a higher goal for man. A person who examines life thoroughly and deeply, he finds this life cannot be our ultimate goal. What we are seeking here, even a fraction of that we cannot attain. Our search for life, our search for knowledge, our search for happiness always remains unsatisfied. When we depart from this life and look into the account book of our life we see we had hoped so much. We wanted to attain so much, but how much I have attained? In knowledge, in acquisition, in happiness, all that I wanted to attain has not been attained. And most people die with that unsatisfied desire.

That desire does not go. There is always an insatiable desire in man for more, more... more life, more happiness, more abundance. There is a constant craving. The wise man examines this. Why is this craving? I know that this cannot be satisfied. My urge for love is always insatiable. I love certain people. I love certain things, but still from the depth of my heart there is a cry: “I want to love more. I want to love more. I want to love more.”

So when we come to spiritual life, when we examine this life a little more deeply we ask this question. “Why is this thirst for more? Why is there this dissatisfaction, this frustration?” Great seers and sages have given us the answer. The answer is, “This is bound to be. Man’s hunger is coming from a deeper source, because in the depth of the human personality there is that Soul of Man. There is this God, and that God is infinite. That Soul of Man, is infinite love, infinite knowledge, infinite existence – immortal.” So man is living with that whole. So man all the time is living with that totality. But due to his ignorance, due to his distractions, due to his foolishness, he has suppressed that infinite within him.

And so, when we are seeking more love, when we are seeking more life, more knowledge, more happiness, really speaking we are seeking that Infinite within us. So the satisfaction cannot come from outside. If we run after pleasures, we cannot attain that totality of all pleasures. If we run after knowledge by reading this book, this book, this book, we cannot attain the satisfaction of total knowledge. So all these cravings can really be satisfied when we discover our spiritual nature. When we discover God, then we feel, “everything is with me,” because in God, everything is in God.

So when I have experienced God, that hunger subsides. Then we feel really everything – the vast universe -- is with me. My soul, my pure infinite soul is the totality of things, is the totality of knowledge, is the totality of joy. So, in

order to counteract this impact of these opposites, in this case the joys and sufferings, we have to come to spiritual life. We have to slowly prepare ourselves for spiritual experience.

So a spiritual seeker is not baffled or frustrated or intrigued or depressed by seeing this play of life and suffering. He faces that calmly. That calmness is called serenity. Think of Abraham Lincoln. He was a very sad man. He was also a very happy man. But at the back of his sadness, at the back of his happiness, there was serenity. I read one book about Lincoln, written by one of his contemporaries. There, he makes this remark: that we have seen him in moments of great calamity and also in moments of great joy. He retains the balance... equanimity -- which is unusual. When joys come and victory comes, he is not mad. He does not lose himself. On the other hand when suffering comes, trouble comes he does not remain depressed. He has found really the **key** to life.

The key to life is to remain serene – equanimity, to know that these are unavoidable things. Sorrows and sufferings will come and sometimes joy and elation will come, but I have to be the witness of these two. If one can develop this attitude of serenity, he has conquered life. This attitude of serenity is really a spiritual experience. A person...he may not be outwardly religious but if he has been able to retain his equanimity in the face of these opposites, he is really truly a spiritual man, because that serenity, as mentioned earlier, is God, is man's spiritual nature. Just as when we, we can stand outside in our... We have a two-story, a three-story building, we come outside and stand on the balcony, stand on the terrace and look down. The streets, the cars are going, people are going – so many things happening. But those things are not affecting me. I am the witness. Things are going; things are moving. I am the witness.

Now this attitude, this feeling of witness can be practiced, because it is really not something imaginary. A spiritual seeker finds that very soon. By the practice of contemplation, he tries to separate himself. He begins from examining his own body. He thinks of his own body. He thinks of his head. He thinks of his ears. He thinks of his eyes. He thinks of his breathing. He thinks of his heartbeat. He is watching, watching all the things that are happening in this body of his. If he can practice this, he will get a glimpse of the experience of witness. Then he watches his mind. All kinds of thoughts are coming, emotions are coming: some pleasant, some unpleasant – some welcome, some other unwelcome. [It] doesn't matter. "I am watching my mind."

If a person spends a few minutes every day just watching the mind, then also he is on his way to this experience of serenity. In this way we have to develop this experience of witness, knowing that in the depths of my personality the real me, real center of my being is my soul. I am that soul! I am that spirit! The vedantic scriptures tell us that the soul of man is birthless, is deathless, is timeless. So, beginning from this work in this body, this mind, and man, through the practice of contemplation and analysis can more and more have glimpses of his spiritual nature. Then more and more he feels that really I am [not] my body. I am separate from this body. I am separate from this mind. I am even separate

from my ego. I am separate from this vast world. I am the experiencer. I am the witness. That is one way of attaining, experiencing this serenity.

There is another way, which is the way of devotion and love, because man's mental pattern is not the same for everyone. Some persons are more rational. Reason applies more to them. And some persons are emotional. So a person who tries to think of God with love, "God is my beloved; God is my master. God is the creator of this universe. He is real! He is way up..." Thinking will be like this. And if he develops faith in God and love for God, then he brings this attitude, which Jesus Christ taught in the Lord's Prayer. The formula for him will be "Thy will be done." These joys are coming. Sufferings are coming. Crises of life are coming. Honor is coming. Dishonor is coming. All these things are happening. But, "Thou art eternal. Thou art the polestar of my life. Let me pass through this. Let me not be overwhelmed by this."

If he can develop faith and love for God, he feels that it is God who is working this. Through this, He is making me pass through this school. This work, this world is a school where we have to learn our lessons. Through these sufferings, through this enjoyment, through the impacts of these dualities, we have to develop our spiritual nature. So with this faith and knowing that God is my eternal companion, if he can develop this faith and love for God, he is not overwhelmed. Sufferings come. Bereavements come. Crises in life come. But he can face that with tranquility, with self-surrender, repeating all the time, "Thy will be done" because he knows in his heart that his goal is God. These experiences of life are necessary for my development. Let them come. I shall face them boldly. I shall not complain.

There is one thing in the Indian spiritual tradition, which is called the "Law of Karma." The law of karma means the law of causation on the moral sphere. It says that every action has a reaction, just as we see even in this material world. Any action is followed by a reaction. So in the moral sphere, whatever we do does not end there. It leaves a result. If we do something pious, something charitable, [do] something good, honorable, it does not stop there. It leaves a resultant and that resultant, this law of karma says, brings us happiness. Our happiness and sufferings are not arbitrary. I was happy yesterday. Everything was clean. Everything was in order. But today something happens; I fall to pieces. Something terrible happened. Now the law of karma says, this is not sudden. It has a cause, and the cause is your own past action. Man is the creator of his own destiny. There are some eternal moral principles: like truth, like justice, like kindness, like charity. These moral laws in the Old Testament of the Bible about [which] we read about ... the Ten Commandments. The idea of the Ten Commandments is this moral law.

When you are born as a human being you are under this moral obligation. You cannot say, "Why?" You cannot, because you are not an animal. You are on the human level with reason. Your mind is not the mind of an animal. An animal is not bound by moral laws. An animal can commit adultery, can steal. We do not blame that animal. It is just an animal. We pat him on the other hand. [He chuckles.] But human beings, on the level of evolution, is... carry as soon as he is born and as he grows, he is bound by these, some basic obligations of

life – these moral laws. The Ten Commandments dictate those moral laws. You should not steal. You should be kind to your parents. And so on. Now each religion speaks of these moral laws. In Christianity, we learn about, we read about the Christian virtues. So this is an obligation, which has come upon us because we are human beings. And if you transgress these moral laws, you'll have to suffer. There will be punishment, you see. Ten Commandments, in the Old Testament of the Bible, we see Jehovah is saying to Moses: If you transgress these commandments, you have to suffer. You will be punished.

On the other hand, if a person is true to the moral laws, then he is entitled to happiness – in different forms: maybe through wealth, maybe through love, maybe through knowledge. There are different channels of happiness, as we know. Now, all this happiness that we enjoy -- according to this law of karma, is earned by you. You have earned this because you have respected these moral laws. You have practiced these virtues and so you are entitled to happiness. So happiness and suffering, according to the law of karma, come by our own past deeds, good or bad. So if one remembers... believes in this law of karma, there is another source of tranquility. He does not look upon suffering as something unjust and arbitrary, imposed, or thrown upon me by God. He does not complain. He remains calm. "I deserved it. I deserved it." And when happiness he also feels, "I deserved it." He then learns to develop a balanced attitude to these joys and sufferings. That is called serenity. So in that way also we can practice serenity.

We can practice serenity by love of God, by faith in God. We can experience serenity by trying to understand our own spiritual nature, our true self. So, in spiritual life there are these different ways to come to this level of serenity. Now if we really want a solution of this problem of joy and suffering, we have to experience this serenity – by any means we like. We should remember... fortunately for us, there are great examples. There have lived men and women: how much serenity they developed! Trying circumstances have come, but they could not... these circumstances could not overwhelm them. They might have been religious men, even otherwise there are some persons, even without a religious background, somehow they have developed this attitude of serenity. Really speaking, they are spiritual, even if they do not practice religious devotions. But really, in their character pattern, there is that spiritual power.

Man cannot be serene if he is too much passionate, if he is too much body conscious, if he is too much selfish, if he is too much aggressive and covetous. In other words, if a man is through and through materialistic, he cannot develop this serenity. This... this serenity is a spiritual quality. But, through whatever means we like, we have to experience this serenity. Then life will not capture us. We shall live our life, but we shall not be slaves of life. We shall live here with freedom, with detachment. Serenity is bound to bring us a spirit of detachment. So this detachment also is a spiritual quality.

The teacher of the Gita, Sri Krishna, gives a wonderful advice to his listener, his student, Arjuna. [Gita 2:38] "Sukha-duhkhe same krtva labhalabahau jayajayau tato yuddhaya yujyasva naivam papam avapsyasi."³ "Try to remain, maintain your balance, equanimity in the face of suka means happiness and

dhuka means suffering, lava means gain and alava means loss. Jaya means victory and ajaya means defeat.” So these are the situations of life. Sometimes victory comes and sometimes defeat comes. Sometimes gain comes. Sometimes loss comes. Sometimes joy comes. Sometimes suffering comes. So [to] Arjuna [he] says, “You have to remain. You have to maintain your balance. You have to remain calm in the face of these opposites. If you can do that, by slow and steady practice, then what will happen to you? Then, you will not be captured by this world-process. You will be free! You will be slowly able to realize your spiritual nature. You will eventually reach your spiritual destiny, namely God, namely Self-Knowledge.

So this is a practical advice. It does not happen in one day, but we can practice this. An occasion of great suffering comes, train our mind. Why should I be overwhelmed? This... it is not happening only to me. Just as this moment there may be thousands of men and women who are suffering in the same way. See? We suffer because we give too much importance to our own little world, this body, this little family. If we extend our vision, if we try to feel that I am just a unit in the vast universe... Millions of human beings – I am one among them! If we can think of the world outside us, then also this experience of equanimity comes.

When we, our attention is restricted to just a little sphere, myself, my body, my wife, my children, my grandchildren-- even I do not care for neighbors, then I am perturbed, easily perturbed. But if I become a cosmic man, a citizen of the world, mentally I can always be [unperturbed]...mentally, more and more... There have been people who were really citizens of this world. They felt that I am an inhabitant of not merely a place, or a county or a state, or a country, but I am... I am a unit in this vast world. I am one among the millions of human beings. These thoughts of expansion, they bring miracles to our mind.

Our mind has infinite capacity for expansion. It is our waywardness, our ignorance, our foolishness, that has crippled our own mind. So we should allow our mind to expand. If the mind expands in this way, more and the mind feels unity, with the neighbors, with other peoples, with the plants, with inanimate objects, with the rivers. There have been persons who had this cosmic experience. They look at the clouds. They feel an affinity with the clouds. They look the ocean. They feel an affinity with the ocean; look at flowers; they feel a kind of unity with the flowers. They feel a kind of unity with all humanity.

The same mind, the same mind can expand and have these visions of unity. The little man grows and grows. The little man becomes great. More and more, he discovers this unity. The real Source of Unity means his True Self, because his True Self, that means the divine in him, is the totality. In that divine, the whole universe is there. So it is really self-experience. It is really Self-Knowledge. Self-Knowledge comes bit by bit. It does not come all at once. So this practice of identification, this practice [of] allowing the mind to expand, if you are a lover of nature, if you are a lover of nature, sit before nature, before a landscape, before the ocean, in a forest, and not just allow your mind [to wander]... Give your mind some exercises, some spiritual exercises, not merely enjoying the forest and flowers, but going into the deeper and deeper level of the

mind and feel that unity. Unity with the forests, with the trees, with the flowers, with the water, with the snows! This can be done. Many people have done that. Really speaking this is, we are proceeding towards Self-Knowledge.

When we are able, when we shall be able to touch our true Self, this feeling of unity will be spontaneous. Wherever we are we shall feel unity with the vast universe, because our body is limited. Our body is functioning in a little space, but the spirit in us is timeless. The spirit is present here. The spirit is also present millions of miles away, because the spirit is not spatial. Spirit is above space. So when that spirit experience comes, man becomes cosmic. He is happy and tranquil and serene all the time, in all situations of his life. He feels, it's true: that infinite immortal nature, that timeless truth, which is the spirit, which is the God in him.

So, we are not helpless, [facing] the impact of joys and sufferings, pleasure and pain-- and many other forms of duality will come. That is the nature of life. But if we are spiritual seekers we should not be caught up with this world. We should know this world is just a stage. Our goal is to reach that truth, that truth which does not change.

Joys and sufferings change. Everything in life changes: my body changes; my mind changes. But my true self, the divine in me can never change. It is eternal. It is immortal. So a person who experiences this more and more, it comes by stages, not all at once, he becomes more and more serene. It is he who has been able to conquer life.

This life is a challenge to us. It is a battle, and we should not be defeated. It is by spiritual knowledge, it is by spiritual wisdom that we can rise above life. This life is... and then there will be a stage, our scriptures tell us there will be a stage when we shall be able to not merely defeat this life, this interplay of opposites, but we shall be able to convert them. These pairs of opposites, pleasures and pain will be spiritualized. We shall then know that anything that is functioning here, is appearing here – see, health and sickness, life and death, pleasure and pain, gain and loss -- everything is really emanation, manifestation of that infinite truth, which is my Self, which is that eternal consciousness. That eternal consciousness is projecting all the time these multifarious experiences, beginning from space/time. It is the Self, it is that infinite spirit which is projecting space, time, matter, energy, mind, life. Everything!

So when we, [when] our Self-knowledge attains that level, comes to that level, then there is a final solution. [The] final solution is to spiritualize everything. There will be no more [difference] in the opposites. Suffering and happiness will be the same. Suffering and joy will both be two faces of the spirit. There will be nothing material. Everything will be the spirit. Such possibility is also mentioned in the Upanishads, in the Vedantic scriptures -- and there have been men and women in the history of spiritual life who have attained this state. By that kind of integrated spiritual experience, they have spiritualized all experience! For them everything is a mass of light, the light of consciousness. Space, time, living beings, non-living beings, everything is, in the language of the Upanishads "Atmavsyayidam sarvam." "All this is the Self."⁴ The true Self within us, that true Self is so vast, is so inclusive that it includes everything. There is

nothing else here, but the Self. It is the Self that has become the atom, tiny, tiny, tiny atomic particle. And it is the same Self, which has become the vast star system, the galaxies, the vast space. That knowledge may also come to us.

So we are not helpless. Suffering and joy may come but we can rise above joy and suffering by developing spiritual knowledge, self-knowledge, God-consciousness.

Om saha na va vatu; saha nau bhunaktu; saha viryam kara vavahai.
Teja svi nav adhi tamastu ma vidvi shava hai. Om. Shanti, shanti, shanti. ⁵

May Brahman, the Truth Eternal, protect and nourish us, both the speaker and the listener. May we have the requisite strength and vigor for the pursuit of self-knowledge. May our study of the Vedanta be fruitful in the realization of Truth, and may we cherish no ill feeling toward anyone. Om. Peace. Peace. Peace be unto us all.

1. Matthew 16:26. King James Bible. Bible Gateway. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+16%3A26&version=KJV> accessed on October 22, 2017.
2. Svetasvatara Upanisad 6:1-11, in: The Principal Upanisads, ed. by S. Radhakrishnan. New York: Harper & Brothers, c. 1953. p. 743-6 (and other similar verses).
3. Bhagavad Gita Trust. Bhagavad Gita 2:38. <http://www.bhagavad-gita.org/Gita/verse-02-38.html> accessed on December 17, 2017.
4. ?? According to this site- "Bhagavata Purana VIII.1.10 says (*Atmavasyamidam sarvam*)" <http://dvaita.org/sources/shruti/translation.html> though it appears differently elsewhere. Similar quote in Bhagavad Gita 9:4 – <http://www.bhagavad-gita.org/Gita/verse-09-04.html> accessed on December 18, 2017. Similarly - "Isavasyam idam sarvam" in Isa Upanisad 1:1 in: The Principal Upanisads, ed. by S. Radhakrishnan. New York: Harper & Brothers, c. 1953. p. 567.
5. Shanti Mantras. Wikipedia – [Appears in several Upanishads -- Taittiriya Upanishad, Katha Upanishad, Mandukya Upanishad and Shvetashvatara Upanishad. Their transliteration varies slightly.] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shanti_Mantras accessed December 18, 2017.