

Direct the quest for happiness inwards

A TWO-INCH tongue can kill a six-foot man. Modern obesity statistics confirm this traditional saying. The prosperity of the Indian middle class is showing up — in a not-so-pleasant way in the burgeoning waistline of over 25% of urban Indians. Obesity is the cause of diabetes, hypertension, heart attacks and a variety of other diseases.

The same trend is seen globally. For example, in the US, obesity, if left unabated, is set to overtake smoking as the number one cause of preventable death.

Some experts state that unhealthy eating habits, caused largely by aggressive advertising of fast foods, are behind the obesity epidemic. So they suggest increased nutritional awareness and change of food habits to tackle obesity. These will help as symptomatic treatment, but will they uproot obesity? People overeat because the food tastes good and they don't want to lose the enjoyment. Here we encounter a familiar and frustrating human dilemma: why does most enjoyment turn out to be unhealthy, even hazardous? Smoking makes us prone to lung ailments, drinking to liver problems and promiscuity to AIDS and other STDs.

Moreover, WHO statistics show that over 1 billion people are overweight globally as compared to the 800 million starving. Thus the

have-nots suffer due to lack of food and the haves suffer due to lack of self-control. The crowning irony of the struggle for enjoyment is that losers suffer and so do winners!

Obesity and all other indulgence-induced problems originate from the misconception that material enjoyment is the only enjoyment available to us — and so we must have it, whatever the cost.

But as spiritual beings, our deepest fulfilment comes from having a satisfying relationship with God. Therefore, *Shrimad Bhagavatam* (1.2.10) asserts that harmonious living requires that we seek food for nourishment — and enlightenment for fulfilment. We can experience spiritual fulfilment



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through prayer, meditation and chanting the holy names of God. When we get the first taste of devotional joy, then self-restraint will cease to be an exercise in self-denial; it will become a welcome catapult for our further spiritual enrichment.

The obesity problem is a timely reminder to direct our quest for happiness inwards, not only for our spiritual fulfilment, but also for our physical health — and the survival of our starving fellow humans. Lest we hesitate, Albert Einstein prods us, "Problems cannot be solved by the same level of thinking that created them."

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