

THE SPIRITUAL SCIENTIST

A Cyber Magazine for Those Who Think

Vol 1 Issue 16

The Tragedy of Self-Destruction

The trout is caught by the fisherman's lure, the mouse by cheese. A tragic irony of the struggle for existence is that living beings are often destroyed by what they desire. But at least the fish and the mouse have excuses: the bait and the cheese look like sustenance. Also the fish and the mouse do not know in advance that they will be trapped. Humans seldom have either of these excuses. The temptations that wreck their lives are quite often pure indulgences that are known to be dangerous. For example, no one has to smoke for survival and almost all smokers are aware that smoking is dangerous.

TRAGICALLY TRAPPED

Consider the following World Health Organization statistics:

- Tobacco kills nearly 10,000 people worldwide every day.
- By 2020 it is predicted that tobacco use will cause over 12% of all deaths globally. This is more deaths worldwide than HIV, tuberculosis, maternal mortality, motor vehicle accidents, suicide and homicide combined.
- Half of those who start smoking in adolescence will die in middle age, losing around 22 years of normal life expectancy.

Add the facts that an average cigarette contains 401 poisons and 43 cancer-causing chemicals and that there are around 1.1 billion smokers in the world (about one-third of the global population aged 15 and over) and we have quite a sobering picture of the world around us. The statistics about other self-destructive behavioral patterns - alcoholism, substance abuse and suicide - are equally, if not more, alarming. And even among so-called normal people, practically everyone is victimized by some form of self-destructive behavioral pattern - unwarranted expression of anger that turn out to be disastrous, unintentional use of caustic words that break hearts and ruin lives and so on.

A question naturally arises: how does an intelligent human being embark on such a destructive course? Most people know that when they start, say, smoking, they are treading into a danger zone. But the media, the friends circle, the peddlers persuade them to experiment just once. Seeking a break from the humdrum daily life with its inane pleasures,

they acquiesce. The impression of instant pleasure gets embedded in their mind and in future whenever they face a reversal, they tend to seek immediate relief through smoking. Every successive experience of smoking reinforces the earlier impressions, strengthens the tendency to seek momentary relief and weakens the voice of intelligence and conscience. Till smoking becomes an irresistible demand, a compulsive need, an addictive habit. They are by then helpless victims, driven again and again towards smoking like a moth attracted towards fire.

CURRENT SOLUTIONS

Let us now analyze some of the methods currently used for de-addiction:

1. **Knowledge:** It would seem that if people knew about the dangers involved, that would deter them from indulgence. Sometimes. But not generally. Sometimes knowledge has the opposite effect. For example, after governmental regulations made it mandatory to display, "Cigarette smoking is injurious to health" on every cigarette ad and pack, cigarette sales increased; the warning tended to evoke a dare-devilish spirit in smokers.

1. **Emotional Support:** Often people turn to addictions when they are emotionally let down or betrayed by their loved ones. Also adolescents who have not been emotionally cared for tend to be more susceptible to addictions. So providing emotional support through personal counseling is thought of as a solution. But this often leads to the addicts becoming chronically dependent on their counselor. In the fast-paced modern lifestyle few people can invest the time and energy to provide intensive emotional support consistently. Seeking professional guidance entails prohibitive costs. Moreover psychologists and psychiatrists often become so harassed by calls for help from distressed patients at unearthly hours that they themselves sometimes end up in need of counseling.

1. **Sublimation:** Sublimation involves replacing a gross physical drive with a more refined substitute. For example, an alcoholic might try to seek refuge in music instead of alcohol. But this can work only if he has a strong liking for music and if his addiction to alcohol is not overpowering. Another problem is that, due to recent mental impressions of indulgence in alcohol, that urge generally appears far more attractive than its substitute.

1. **Willpower:** Seeing the physical and emotional pain that he is inflicting upon himself and his loved ones, an addict may sometimes by sheer determination decide to give up his perverted habit. Unfortunately few people are able to muster the necessary willpower. Even if successful, they face the grim prospect of an entire lifetime of constant inner struggle with the fear of succumbing at any moment. And failure often brings with it intolerable feelings of guilt, making living itself an agony.

1. **Religion:** Statistical surveys have shown that the religiously committed are less likely to succumb to seeking perverted pleasures. Adopting religious principles rigorously also sometimes helps addicts to free themselves. Dr Patrick Glynn writes in his book *God: The Evidence*, "It is difficult to find a more consistent correlative of mental health, or a better insurance against self-destructive behaviors, than a strong religious faith."

While each of these methods has had some small success, humanity at large is mostly in darkness as regards a clear understanding about the factors that impel self-destructive behavior and the means to permanently rectify such behavior. Let us now consider the Vedic perspective about self-destruction.

THE VEDIC PARADIGM

In the Bhagavad-gita (3.36), Arjuna asks Lord Krishna, "By what is one impelled to sinful acts, even unwillingly, as if engaged by force?" Lord Krishna replies, "It is lust only, Arjuna, which is born of contact with the mode of passion and later transformed into wrath, and which is the all-devouring sinful enemy of this world."

The background of this dialogue is as follows. The fundamental teaching of the Bhagavad-gita is that the source of life in the material body, the actual self, is a non-material particle of spirit, known as the *atman* or the soul. The essential need of the soul is to love and be loved and to experience unbounded happiness through loving exchange. Being spiritual by constitution, the soul belongs to a higher dimensional milieu, the spiritual world. There the loving propensity of the soul finds complete fulfillment in the supremely lovable all-attractive person, who personally reciprocates with his love. In fact, the Vedic texts state: *eko bahusyam*. The Supreme has expanded into infinite subordinates for the purpose of loving reciprocation. The Vedanta Sutra explains: *raso vai sah*. The Supreme is the reservoir of all divine loving emotions. The Srimad Bhagavatam confirms that this Supreme Person is all-attractive and is therefore best known by the name Krishna, which means all-attractive in Sanskrit. In the spiritual world Krishna is the pivot of all relationships and the soul continually relishes ever-intensifying and ever-expanding ecstasies of love in relationship with Him there.

Love necessitates freedom; only when the object of love freely chooses to reciprocate one's love does the experience of love become truly satisfying and fulfilling. The soul is therefore endowed with a minute free will to enable him to experience the joy of loving the Supreme Person Krishna. But when the soul misuses his free will and becomes causelessly unwilling to love Krishna, he has to find a substitute in whom to repose his loving propensity. Of course by definition there can be no substitute for the Supreme and by constitution the soul cannot find happiness in loving anyone other than the Supreme. But for those souls who insist on making that attempt, the world of matter (where all of us currently reside) provides the necessary arrangement for experimentation and rectification.

THE ENEMY WITHIN

As soon as the soul comes to the material world, his love for Krishna becomes perverted into lust. Lust is a formidable illusory force that offers the soul various surrogate objects of love to experiment with. Lust creates and perpetuates the misidentification of the soul with the material body that he is given. Lust causes within all living beings the overpowering drive for gross sexual enjoyment in specific, and all forms of material enjoyment in general.

Modern civilization with its media, social environment, culture and overall values aggravates lust disproportionately. Especially the celluloid promises of unending sexual bliss provoke wild erotic fantasies. But the actual experience of sexual enjoyment is heartbreakingly brief; dreams cherished for years vanish within moments. Though what people experience is so pathetically little as compared to the hype, the media blitz goads them on. Sexual enjoyment, especially illicit, is a complicated affair; it involves money, time, intense emotions, interpersonal relationship dynamics, risk for prestige and so on. And the attempt for such enjoyment, even if somehow successful, leaves one feeling disappointed and cheated - and craving for more. And if unsuccessful it creates great anger. Either way the victims are soon so enslaved by lust that the more they try, the more they get frustrated, and yet the more they become impelled to keep trying. Eventually the accumulated enormous frustration makes instant relief a desperate necessity. Such people easily fall prey to the lure of quick pleasure offered by addictions.

Lust is thus the internal enemy, which causes all self-destructive behavioral patterns. The Gita (18.39) describes vividly the nature of all perverted pleasures: they appear to be like nectar at first but poison at the end. Srila Prabhupada comments, "While one enjoys sense gratification, it may be that there is some feeling of happiness, but actually that so-called feeling of happiness is the ultimate enemy of the sense enjoyer."

Lust is present in everyone in varying degrees. That is why everyone, no matter how materially successful he may be, has some tendencies towards self-destructive behavior. People generally become concerned about such tendencies only when it exceeds socially acceptable limits. But actually lust throttles the ability of everyone to make meaningful contributions toward society and even towards their own future; the difference is only in degree. From the spiritual point of view, lust is inherently self-destructive; it strips the soul of the unlimited spiritual happiness that is his birthright and forces him to labor for paltry material sensations of pleasure that can never satisfy his immortal longing.

THE SUPREME CONQUEST

Lust being a perversion of our original, essential nature, cannot possibly be annihilated, suppressed, repressed or even sublimated. But it can be reverted to its original nature by redirecting our loving propensity back to Krishna through the scientific process of devotional service. Action on the spiritual platform is what Lord Krishna recommends to Arjuna as the key to overcoming lust, "Therefore knowing oneself to be transcendental to the material senses, mind and intelligence, O mighty-armed Arjuna, one should steady the mind by deliberate spiritual intelligence (Krishna consciousness) and thus - by spiritual strength - conquer this insatiable enemy known as lust." (Bhagavad-gita 3.43) The channeling of consciousness from matter back to Krishna is most easily and effectively executed through the medium of divine sound. The Supreme Person Krishna being omnipotent is fully present in His Holy Names. Chanting of the Holy Names therefore connects one immediately with Krishna, who is the supreme pleasure principle. Regular meditation on the Holy Names enables one to experience happiness streaming down from the spiritual dimension. This spiritual pleasure is so satisfying that it soon frees one from the craving for perverted mundane pleasure like drugs, alcohol etc.

Millions of people all over the world have experienced the purifying potency of the Holy Names of God. During the period of the counterculture in the US in 1960s and 1970s, Srila Prabhupada propagated the congregational chanting of the Holy Names and saved thousands of young people from a condemned life of drug addiction. All over the globe ISKCON devotees who practice mantra meditation - chanting of the maha mantra Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Krishna Krishna Hare Hare Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare - everyday for two hours are easily able to eschew intoxication (of all forms), gambling, meat-eating and illicit sex, which are the primary self-destructive activities impelled by lust. Ability to follow these four regulative principles is not necessary to begin chanting, but as these four activities greatly obscure the original consciousness of the soul, abstaining from them helps to accelerate the process of purification. While many people in the modern times are so captivated and enslaved by lust that they consider life without these activities an impossibility, devotees lead lives that are natural, peaceful, satisfying, meaningful and constructive, protected as they are by their mantra meditation.

But the benefits of chanting do not stop with freedom from addiction, nor is chanting meant only for those victimized by self-destructive behavioral patterns. Chanting the Holy Names of God is a universal, time-tested, non-sectarian method of bringing about the blossoming of consciousness to its highest bloom of pure love for God and all living beings. Chanting frees one from all selfish desires, which throttle the flow of the fullness of life. It enables one to experience within oneself continuous happiness, which is absolutely independent of the state of the body and the external world. Chanting thus heralds the advent of a life of selfless spiritual service to God and all His children. This selflessness within individuals alone can form the basis of lasting world peace and harmony. Srila Prabhupada succinctly

summarizes, "Without the awakening of divine consciousness within the individual, there is no use of crying for world peace."

The world-famous Beatle, late George Harrison, a diligent lifelong practitioner of mantra meditation, sings:

If you open up your heart,

You will know what I mean

We've been polluted so long

But here's a way for you to get clean

By chanting the name of the Lord and

You'll be free

The Lord is awaiting on you all to awaken

And see.

- 'Awaiting On You All'

from the album 'All Things Must Pass'

Join us next month for another session of thought-provoking discussion.

The Spiritual Scientist

Investigating Reality from the Higher Dimensional Perspective of Vedic Wisdom

Published by ISKCON Youth Forum (IYF), Pune

Dedicated to

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Founder-Acharya: International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON)

Magazine Committee:

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