

Is Life a Joy or a Test?

*Transcription of Q&A session in a workshop with
Pujya Guruji Swami Tejomayananda, CM Ottawa, June 2013*

Before commencing the session, Pujya Guruji said, “I will try my best to answer your questions—to my satisfaction, because the question is yours, and the answer is mine. So, I hereby give a disclaimer: Satisfaction not guaranteed. But if you are satisfied, that is very good.”

Needless to say, Guruji’s impromptu answers, packed with wisdom and practicality, and spiced with humor, brought the audience not only more than 100% satisfaction, but also complete admiration for the master.

Is life [meant to be] a joy or a test?

Life is how you look at it and how you label it. If life is viewed as a problem, you have to keep solving it. If life is taken as a challenge, then meet it. If you see life as a dream, then realize it. If you take life as a sport, then play it. If you see life as a joy, then enjoy it. And if you think life is a test, then prepare yourself and pass the test. It is all in your hands. Whichever way you look at life, you will have to face it accordingly.

Happiness in a household is possible only if the members have a common vision. If the family members have conflicting views, how can we have happiness and peace at home?

Ideally speaking, it is true that if all have the same vision, it will be easier. But how can we expect everyone to be of the same nature and views? That is not the nature of things. Please remember, even your own views and visions do not remain the same. Haven’t you noticed that your views do change over time? So, how is it possible that everybody will have the same vision? It is rather difficult. Thus, do not even expect that.

But see, vision, attitude, and spiritual practice are such that there is nothing physical about them. Suppose you want to do a puja in your house, but the other person does not want it and perhaps even creates some obstacle. When no one is there, you can do the sadhana part; no one even needs to know your attitude and vision. Others may differ in their views, but you have to face life as it is. If you read the lives of saints and devotees, such as Mirabai, not everyone’s family life was smooth. It is said that Socrates’s wife one day scolded him and then poured water on him. His student asked him what was going on and Socrates calmly said, “After thunder, there is shower.” You can’t change others. And don’t wait for others to change.

How do we build our patience to deal with adult children who have grown up in the West?

Adult children! Firstly, children grown in the East are not mahatmas. Children are children. Different combinations, different temperaments—there are all types of children, whether East or West.

People tend to have patience with other people’s children, but become impatient when it comes to their own. The reasons can be many, but the main thing is that children do not conform to your expectations and what you want. The child wants to be who he is—what to do?

The most important thing is to build a good rapport between yourself and your child. If the tuning is there, it is wonderful. Understand their nature and tune your mind. It will be wonderful. It will be fun. We forget that we were also a child or youth once, causing annoyance and problems. Don’t start with, “In our time, we never used to question our parents.” Then they will ask, “Why did you not question?” You change with the times. Where there is love and tuning, there will be patience. So, develop that love and tuning.

How do you develop love for God?

Just think of how you develop love for any thing or being. There are two aspects: What relationship you have with that thing or being, and how much time you spend with it. If you spend time gardening, you will

have love for flowers. A child develops love for the maid more than the mother if the maid is his main caretaker. Having a relationship is important to develop love. You must establish some relationship with God, too: "God, you are my father and I am your child." Or, "You are my master and I am your servant." Spend some time with God. Read the *Ramayana* and the lives of saints.

How to achieve your dreams without the fear of somebody trying to stop you?

Really speaking, nobody can stop you. If you see a problem, you have stopped seeing the goal. If your mind remains glued to a goal, then come what may, who can pull you down? Actually, if someone is there to pull you down, there will be ten people there to lift you also. Why only see one side? See, what we lack is our own conviction, our own determination. We also expect the whole world to come and help us. It is not necessary.

I remember an incident in Gautama Buddha's life. He taught his disciple and then he wanted to check if the disciple was ready to teach Dharma to others. The dialogue went like this:

Buddha: When you go out to teach Dharma, and nobody pays attention to you, how do you take it?

Disciple: I will think: Even though they are not listening to me, they are not opposing me.

Buddha: Suppose they oppose you?

Disciple: They are only opposing me. At least they are not fighting with me.

Buddha: What if they beat you?

Disciple: They are only beating me, not killing me.

Buddha: What if somebody kills you?

Disciple: Anyway we are born to die. Death will come to all of us one day.

Buddha: You are ready to teach Dharma.

So, some people will applaud and some will criticize. Cheers and jeers will always be there. If there are opponents, there will be many supporters also. You be determined and convinced. You march toward your goal.

What was Pujya Gurudev's guiding principle in life?

That is very difficult for me to tell, because that is something only he can tell. But from whatever I have understood, being a spiritual master, Gurudev's guiding principle was only love and compassion for all. Because such masters realize their Oneness with all, what remains is only love and compassion. The realization of Oneness with all only evokes love and compassion.

I remember that when Swamiji inaugurated the Chinmaya International Foundation, the interviewer asked him why he was doing all this—establishing CIF, etc. Swamiji said that he felt for others' well-being and he felt that all should be happy.

He gave Chinmaya Mission's motto as, "To give maximum happiness to maximum people for maximum time." And we should add, "In maximum ways." How to give this joy and make all happy? He used to say that total perfection is possible only through individual perfection. He used to tell us you are not here to change the world; you change. So his guiding principle was all-inclusive love and the motivating thought, "May all be happy."

Can you please talk about your own guiding principle.

You have put me on the spot. There are two points I keep in mind. In meditation, I say, "*Soham*." In the field of action, I say "*Dāsoham*." I am pure Consciousness; that is my truth. In the field of activities, the one thing that guides me is that I am a servant of the Lord and my Guru. I have to serve. When we keep the attitude of being a servant, there is no worry.

From spiritual standpoint, remember your own true nature. In the field, remain the servant. That is all. The whole world is according to God's will; it moves according to His will. What role you have to play, you just play.

