

# AN ANALYSIS OF WORLDLY PLEASURE AND PAIN

*Swami Akhandananda Saraswatiiji Maharaj*

1. Is pleasure a mere absence of pain ? If so, the question arises : What is pain then ? Is pain a mere absence of pleasure ? By "a mere absence" we mean non-existence (Abhava). If both pleasure and pain are non-existences, how shall one non-existence be recognised as pleasure and the other as pain ? Without separately characterising pleasure and pain, their negations cannot be distinguished. Therefore, it is necessary to analyse separately the concepts of pleasure and pain.

If at all pleasure and pain were non-existences, the universal experience of an individual, viz., 'I am happy; I am miserable' would be contradicted, and the natural desire in man for pleasure and a natural aversion for pain would also remain unexplained. Therefore, pleasure and pains are existent entities, and their analysis is both necessary and useful.

2. Not Only every human being but an ordinary creature like an insect or a worm also feels pleasure and pain in his or her heart. Pleasure and pain are immediate experiences. 'I am happy' and 'I am miserable'—these are experiences pertaining to the witness only, i. e., these experiences are cognised directly by the witness ( Sakshi ) without any external means of knowledge. Pleasure and pain are not experienced by direct



perception like a jar or a piece of cloth; and for this reason they are not subject to inference which is based on perception. The other means of knowledge e. g. comparison, presumption etc. also are of little avail in getting pleasure and pain known. This is the reason why these selfevident entities, namely pleasure and pain are not refuted by these means of knowledge and at the same time they retain their existence beyond any pale of suspicion.

3. Pleasure and pain are not akin to external objects. External objects usually fall under three categories :—

- (1) Agreeable objects like flowers, sandal-paste etc.
- (2) Disagreeable objects like, snake, scorpion, thorns etc.
- (3) Indifferent objects like the nipple hanging down from the neck of a she-goat.

The lovability, unlovability or indifference in these objects is due to the differentiations of VASANA ( the innate desire to enjoy or hate ). By practice and perseverance, some people convert the lovable into the unlovable and vice-versa, and transform the cause of pain into the cause of pleasure and vice-versa. A particular person or a thing which is lovable for one is hateful for the other. It follows that pleasure and pain cannot be regulated in man and matter. The fate of events and actions is no better. For example the devotees of god wish to be born again and again and undergo misery, only to have a direct perception of Him and serve Him.

All these objects are extraneous to the body, whereas pleasure and pain are inside. Therefore it is a folly to regard material objects, their existences or non-existences, persons, events and actions as pleasure and pain. Although pleasure



and pain do find expression through these agencies, yet they are altogether different from and independent of them. For, even though, at night or in a secluded place, the external objects may be absent, yet pleasure and pain may arise through remembrance of imaginary objects. Another dissimilarity is that whereas the external objects continue to exist even when they cease to be objects of an individual's consciousness, pleasure and pain no longer exist from the moment they are lost from consciousness.

4. Internal objects like desire, aversion and hatred etc. are such that they exist only if known in consciousness and become non-existent if unknown in consciousness. But pleasure and pain are beyond them also. This much is common to them that they exist in consciousness and do not exist outside it, in other words they don't have an unknown existence (Ajnat-asatta). But the difference is that the objects of desire and aversion are separate. "To desire" and "To hate" are transitive verbs requiring 'objects' to complete their senses. But 'to be happy' and 'to be miserable' are phrases complete in their sense and require no 'objects'.

Truly speaking, desire and aversion are not the resultant modifications of mind although they are the results of past impressions. Desire seeks pleasure and aversion tries to avert pain. Thus the objects of desire and aversion are pleasure and pain which therefore, are the resultant modifications of mind.

These objects which are seemingly the causes of pleasure and pain are through ignorance; identified with pleasure and pain and become objects of desire and aversion. This superimposition leads to the formation of impressions which in turn



produce desire and aversion again. This cycle goes on unbroken until the ignorance is completely annihilated.

5. Pleasure and pain, although dissimilar to the internal objects like desire and aversion, are nevertheless not consciousness or knowledge ( Jnana ). In fact, they are objects of consciousness; they are known. But consciousness itself is never the object of itself. Just as a burning lamp does not require another lamp to reveal it, in the same way one consciousness does not need another consciousness to know it. Consciousness is self-luminous and selfknowledge requiring no other testimony. On the other hand, what other means of knowledge would testify to the existence or otherwise of consciousness when it is only in the presence of consciousness that all the valid instruments of knowledge proceed to testify the other? It is for this reason that the great philosophies like Vedanta and Purvamimansa have not accepted the principle of the knowledge of consciousness. However, philosophies like Nyaya do hold that the Principle of knowledge of knowledge ( consciousness ) must be upheld, for otherwise, they argue, how will the difference between true knowledge and false knowledge be established? This argument is weak, because the difference between true and false lies in the object of knowledge and never in the consciousness ( knowledge ) itself. The illuminated object may be true or false but the light that illuminates cannot be false.

Therefore in a situation like this when the knowledge of consciousness is not possible, it is admitted on all hands that pleasure and pain are known, their rise and dissolution are known and their differentiability is also known. Nay, the means of getting pleasure and removing pain are also known



through past experience or scriptural authority. From this we conclude that pleasure and pain are different from knowledge or consciousness.

6. A close examination would reveal that all bodies of all species in this world differ from one-another in one respect or the other, be it in their figure or nature, in powers of the physique, senses or the mind, in their inclination or the food they consume and so on. Why this difference after all? Every creature whose mind entertains pleasure-value or pain-value with regard to an object is endowed with the necessary power also in its body to enjoy or keep off that object. This is the reason for the difference in the formation of horns, teeth, hands, legs etc. When we view things in this perspective we find that Vasana ( the desire to enjoy or repulse ) is the root of all diversities in the entire universe. Besides; it is also observed that the entire behaviour of every creature is directed towards acquiring pleasure and warding off pain. If pleasure and pain were not the rootal motivations of human behaviour, the entire activity in the world would disappear.

What is this world? Only the enjoyment of pleasure or pain.

Who is worldly? The enjoyer of pleasure and pain.

Who is God ( The Ishwara )? The bestower of pleasure and pain.

Who is the enemy? One who impedes pleasure and is a source of pain.

Who is the friend? One who helps eliminate pain and is a source of pleasure.

It follows that the entire world is only an extension of pleasure and pain.



7. It has already been said that pleasure and pain are mutually contradictory existent entities. They are not negations of each other and that their positive existence is immediately cognised in the minds of all creatures. There is unambiguous contradiction like light and darkness between the two experiences : 'I am happy' and 'I am miserable'. In addition to this, whereas pleasure is the object of unconditioned and uncaused desires, pain is the object of unconditioned and uncaused hatred ( To explain : ) The question as to why we want pleasure and not pain simply does not arise. No-where does a person first decide why he wants pleasure or does not want pain and then proceed to acquire pleasure or avert pain ! It is also well known that absence of pain also, like pleasure, is an object of desire. Similarly, absence of pleasure, like pain, is an object of aversion. For this very reason the desire for painlessness and an aversion for pleasurelessness is unconditioned. Whether pleasure is obtained from the acquisition of money, enjoyment and religious merit or from the renunciation thereof, does not matter. We do not want to condition our pleasure with these adjuncts. What is of importance is that we must have pleasure by any means. We WANT pleasure whether we get it from projecting our senses or from their withdrawal, whether from a struggle or from peace, whether in the crowd or in seclusion. Exactly in the same way, we wish to be saved from pain and pleasurelessness whether we succeed in it by acquisition of wealth or its denial, by enjoyment or its denial, by religion or its denial, by activity of senses or their withdrawal, by peace or by strife. We are prepared to accept any situation but we must be saved from pain. Ironi-



cally enough, this natural impulse for pleasure and pain sometimes pushes ignorant and unwary persons into such paths where they go to seek pleasure but get pain and where they seek painlessness but get all the more pain. Instinctive desires and aversions are blind and their sole motivation is past impressions. They have to be trained and streamlined, and for this, wise guidance and counselling is necessary.

8. That when, where and on whom will these instinctive pleasure and pain flowing with the beginningless current of impressions, be superimposed and make one happy or miserable is difficult to predict, for the current of impressions is rotted in ignorance, difficult to be categorised and eternally flowing as a flux. So the system of education and training has been prescribed in the practical world.

It would have been futile to learn from and get training under mature minds and erudite well-wishers, had it not been intentioned to tell the blessed path of pleasure and to save from the cursed path of pain, In that case, wherever, whenever and in whatsoever object a person conceived the pleasure he would have started hearing, describing, collecting and enjoying that object. He would have acted similarly in order to remove misery. Then would abound in life unrestricted collection of material objects, unrestricted enjoyment, unrestricted actions leading to injustice, unrestricted hearing and unrestricted descriptions.

However, for the attainment of pleasure and elimination of pain, there is required a regulated system which meets the approbation of mature minds and their behaviour, involves sound physical health in the interest of the welfare of the individual and the society, is pleasing to the mind and



safeguards the interests of life here and hereafter. Can we leave our worldly conduct to the sole charge of indisciplined reign of desires and aversions? In all periods of History, no order has been able to survive without proper controls and prescribed norms. The controller of order is called Dharma ( the Law ) and the shatterer of order is called Adharma ( the violation of the Law ). Dharma is the cause of pleasure and Adharma is the cause of pain.

9. The analysis brought out so far enables us to conclude that pleasure and pain are existent entities and that the desire for pleasure and aversion for pain are natural. If pleasure and pain were not existent objects and were non-existent like sky-flowers, the desire for the acquisition of pleasure and aversion of pain would not have been there; nor the corresponding action would have been present. At the same time, if these existing pleasure and pain were self-truths like the Atma ( Self ) and were not attainable through effort, there should not have been any necessity of prescribing any do's and dont's in this connection. Moreover, if the frame-work of action aimed at securing pleasure and shearing pain were not definite, even then there was no need to prescribe the do's and dont's. The fact however is that pleasure is sweet and desired whereas pain is bitter and hated. Therefore both the attainment of living pleasure and the reducing of pain to nought require efforts. And just as pleasure and pain are perennial in the world current, in the same way their means of acquisition and elimination are perennial. It follows that the characteristics of Dharma and Adharma and their valid means of knowledge are also perennial.

10. If the difference between pleasure and pain had not



existed if the desires of achieving or averting them were not perennial and if the world-current had not flown perpetually like hunger and thirst, then the do's and don't's also, in relation to Dharma and Adharma, would not have been perennial like food and drink. The four Vedas, their six Ancillaries ( Angas ) Puranas, Itihas ( History ), Nyaya, Mimamsa, Dharma-Shastra ( the scriptures of conduct ), right conduct and self-satisfaction etc. etc—have been the basis of deciding the true form of Dharma in this world; and this tradition has been coming down to us from the times immemorial. Had the pleasure and pain and their means been not well-defined, all these scriptures and worldly conduct would have been reduced to nullity. In fact, pleasure and pain are the only such realities of life as compel us to obtain the true knowledge of Dharma and Adharma and having saved us from the path of decline good us to the path of progress and perfection.

11 No intelligent man can go on speaking out or go on doing, enjoying or collecting whatever crosses his mind. If he does so, he would be regarded insane. The mind is stuffed with innumerable, unconscious and beginningless Vasanas. Which of them and where, when and how, would surface up, is not definitely known. The question of regulation of Vasanas arises only after they have risen up. Before their coming up to the surface they are not even known and so how can the question of their regulation arise ?

After Vasanas have arisen, two points must be borne in mind. Firstly, this must be ascertained through the intellect whether the Vasana that has arisen is proper or improper, according to the Dharma or not and conducive to our well-being or not. Secondly it must be decided ( employing the



will-power through the intellect ) if that particular Vasana is worth translation into action or it must be destroyed through the paths of opposition, sublimation or tranquillisation.

Some Vasanas have little potency; they appear like a dream in the Vista of imagination and die out by mere indifference. However, some are quite strong. They should be dealt with discrimination in order to turn them to advantage. Pleasure and pain are the fruits of Dharma and Adharma respectively. Therefore, Dharma must be practised consciously and willfully to reap the fruits of pleasure, and the conduct which is not according to Dhama and which is born of indiscretion and impulses of Vasana must be avoided to keep off pain. This is the key to pleasure and pain.

12. There are three main paths in order to gain control over Vasanas :

( i ) The path of opposition : Let not improper Vasanas be translated into action. This means that forbidden acts must not be performed, but this is not enough. The Vasanas do not obey order, particularly the negative orders. They need some positive discipline also together with a negative one. That discipline consists of morning-evening prayers, sacrifices ( yajnas ) alms ( Daan ), Vows ( Vrat ) etc etc. in conformity with the Scriptures. This is the external form of Dharma.

( ii ) The path of sublimation : Here the Vasanas are directed to move along some path of internal Sadhana ( discipline ) where they are chemicalised and transformed. This is not merely a positive path of opposition but a mixed course of lovability and obedience. Visualise the objects of your Vasanas, namely the sound, the touch, the beauty, the taste, the smell, the virtues, the importance, the respect, the fame



and so on, in your Beloved Lord of Lords who is seated in your heart. Think of Him with the relevant attributes and take delight in Him alone. You would get within you what you would have sought outside! When your Vasana is fulfilled within your heart, why go out? The worships of God with form and attributes set at rest all Vasanas through the path of sublimation.

The path of Dharma is the path of opposition, but the opposition is accordingly to the Law (the Dharma) and not according to the Vasanas. The path of worship is the path of sublimation. Here the worships do not oppose the Vasanas; they make them sublime by first isolating them from external objects and external currents and thereafter purifying them.

(iii) The path of Tranquillisation : The vasanas make their impulses felt only in the activated state of mind. If the activity of the mind itself is suspended through the path of yoga, the Vasanas won't arise and the problem itself whether or not to translate a particular Vasana into action will be extinct. The Yoga does not disturb the Vasanas at all, it tranquillises the very seat of vasanas that is the mind.

Dharma eliminates Adharma through action, upasanas (Worships) do it by transformation of Vasanas and the Yoga does it by the placidity of mind. The elimination of adharma leads to the elimination of pain, and the performance of Dharma produces pleasure. The Sadhana of Dharma is outer, that of Upasana is inner and that of the Yoga is innermost. But all the three types of pleasure produced by these Sadhanas—namely the worldly and other worldly pleasure produced



by Dharma, the divine pleasure produced by worship and the pleasure of Samadhi produced by the Yoga—are creations of effort.

13. The pleasure and pain that are experienced in this world or hereafter are born of Dharma and Adharma, and being creations they are ephemeral—notwithstanding their sources which may be enjoyment, imagination of the mind, pride or habit. The Nyaya-Vaisheshikas hold that Dharma-Adharma and pleasure-pain are attributes of the Atma ( the self ). The Upasakas ( Worshippers ) hold that when in the course of worship the modifications of mind are emptied of all objects except the Deity with whom the mind becomes one, the pleasure of the Deity is reflected in that mind. The primary source of pleasure is the Deity and the Secondary source of pleasure is the soul, the Jivatma. The Bliss has found complete expression in the Deity and the same is experienced as pleasure in the state of unification of mind with the Deity. In the Yoga pleasure is experienced upto the stage of Tripartition ( Triputi ) only, where the consciousness of the 'Seer', 'Seen' and 'seing' remains intact. Anandangat Samadhi : i. e. the Samadhi of the mind as a result of meditation on I—ness, there is no tripartition of the enjoyer and the enjoyed and so there is no pleasure. In the Asamprajnat Samadhi i. e. the Samadhi in which the division of the enjoyer and enjoyed ceases to exist, any talk of pleasure is meaningless. After one has discriminated Parush and Prakriti according to Samkhya Philosophy, the knower alone exists as consciousness only. In the Kaivalya state (the state of being of the Purusha ) there is no experience of anything at all including the world the God and other "seers." Even pleasure is not there but at the



same time there is no pain either. The seer is saddled in its own pristine glory.

In this way, pleasure and pain are creations in all the three systems and so are ephemeral. So long as the cause lasts, the effect also remains. So long as Dharma remains, its effect, the worldly pleasure also remains. So long as the unifying modification of the mind remains, the pleasure due to Deity remains. So long as Samprajnat Samadhi lasts the pleasure due to habit also lasts. So much so that even the Lord (Ishwara), the bestower of pleasure and pain, can be the cause of pleasure and pain only to the extent of and relatively to the individual's Dharma and Adharma, Vasana and Worship, and Sweet and Bitter modifications of the mind, God cannot be the unrelated cause of pleasure and pain—So says the Vedanta.

14. From the stand-point of Vedanta, worldly pleasure is the fruit of action. But the real pleasure is Bliss which is the nature of Sachhidanandaghan Atma (the self which is undifferentiated existence--knowledge--Bliss). This Bliss is never attained by any effort or discipline; it is self-attained. Whatever is acquired through effort is short-lived. The self-luminous Blissful nature of the Self (Atma) appears to be unacquired due to ignorance. Whatever is unacquired through ignorance is actually not unacquired and whatever is acquired through knowledge is also not unacquired; it is acquired already and for all times. Vedanta only annihilates ignorance. The self characterised by the annihilation of ignorance is verily the indestructible perfect non-dual Brahma which is the Bliss. The thought of ignorance itself is in the state of ignorance, in reality there is no ignorance.



The practice of Dharma, worship or Yoga in a spirit of detachment and dedication without recourse to fruits of actions or as a service to the Lord purifies the heart. This leads the acquisition of merit by the Seeker of Truth who is thereafter bestowed with a sincere desire to know. Consequently Brahma-Vidya ( the science of the knowledge of Brahma ) comes to him and with possession of this Vidya nothing remains for him which he must do by way of duty or which he must acquire, know or renounce. Verily, this is the Brahmisthiti ( the state of Brahmanhood); this is the Jeevan Mukti ( Liberation even while living ), the highest state of being for which the seeker after truth must aspire. This state of Brahmanhood, as viewed from the standpoint of the aspirants for their highest upliftment, finds expression in the body of the Great Liberated Souls. This Brahmisthiti is the pleasure par-excellence and Bliss Absolute.

( Translated by —“VISHNU” )