

Interdisciplinary Journal of the Dedicated Semester

Volume 1 *Happiness: Traditions and Tensions*

Article 11

1-1-2010

Hinduism, Happiness, and the Good Life

Swami Nishpapananda
Vedanta Society of St. Louis

Follow this and additional works at: <https://griffinshare.fontbonne.edu/ijds>

Recommended Citation

Nishpapananda, Swami (2010) "Hinduism, Happiness, and the Good Life," *Interdisciplinary Journal of the Dedicated Semester*. Vol. 1 , Article 11.

Available at: <https://griffinshare.fontbonne.edu/ijds/vol1/iss1/11>

Hinduism, Happiness, and the Good Life

SWAMI NISHPAPANANDA
VEDANTA SOCIETY OF ST. LOUIS

There are two types of happiness in Hinduism. The first is happiness that comes from achievement and pleasure, from the Good Life. The second is happiness that comes directly from God.

Hinduism has four answers to the question “What do people want?” They are the four aims of life: *dharma*, *artha*, *kama*, and *moksha*. *Artha* and *kama* taken together correspond to the Good Life. *Artha* literally means “thing, object, substance” and is usually translated as wealth but has the larger connotation of achievement, worldly success, fame and power. *Kama* means pleasure but is not limited to physical pleasure. It also includes intellectual and aesthetic pleasure. The type of happiness that comes from success and pleasure alternates with unhappiness.

Moksha refers to the immediate, mystical experience of the Divine, the peace that passeth understanding. The happiness that comes from *moksha* doesn't wax or wane. It is the final goal of human life, and each person, according to Hinduism, has the potential to achieve it.

The key to attaining both types of happiness is *dharma*. According to Hinduism, the one universal duty of all human beings is the practice of *dharma*. All people, past, present and future, regardless of race, creed, education, social status, or any other characteristic should follow *dharma*. What does it mean?

The most meaningful English rendition I have heard is this: **The one universal duty of all human beings is the practice of virtue.** By virtue is meant the cultivation of fellow feeling for our fellow beings and overcoming anti-feeling.

What does following *dharma*, practicing virtue, do for us as we pursue the Good Life? The practice of virtue purifies and calms the mind, calms the senses, and brings clarity to the intellect. And an abiding sense of cheerfulness comes to the mind.

The clarity that comes to the intellect through the practice of *dharma* is essential to right understanding. It is through a clear, calm mind that we can make decisions in our best interest. A seeker of the Good Life in any form, who does not deviate from the path of virtue,

gets the greatest benefit out of every situation that comes to him. From one's own experience of the blessings of life one develops insight by which one becomes convinced of the inherent inadequacy of even the greatest success.

The human mind seeks life without death, happiness without misery, youth without old age. Through *dharmā* one realizes that polarities go together and that seeking one without the other is a wild goose chase for the unmixed blessings of life. It is then that one approaches the Divine Ground with unfaltering steps.

This is how *dharmā* leads from the Good Life to the fourth aim of life, *moksha*. *Moksha* is freedom, liberation from all bondages and sufferings. We eventually find, after seeking everywhere else, that happiness lies in the nature of the reality that lies hidden in the depths of the heart.