

Freedom From Sadness

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The senses may be called external instruments of perception because they are exposed to the external world. They allow you to see, hear, taste, touch or smells, thereby helping you gather knowledge of the external world. To perceive an object, the mind is also necessary; perception is not possible if the mind is not present behind the senses. That is, a relevant modification in the form of a thought is necessary for perception to take place. In fact it is not the object standing before you that you are seeing; you see what occurs in your mind. If what occurs in your mind and what is before you are identical, then your knowledge will be valid. Thus the mind is an internal instrument which is an important factor in understanding the world. You also make inferences with the mind based on the data of perception. When you infer, you use the mind. Again it is an internal instrument in the hands of someone, and that someone is you, the person referred to by the word "I". But more often the mind does not seem to be just an instrument; it seems to be the very person. The ways of the mind are so uncleradar to us that the mind and the "I" seem to be identical. If that were not so, you would never be sad in your life. Before seeing how this is true, let us first analyze what it means to be sad.

Sadness is a word that I shall use to represent not only sadness but all conditions related to sadness. Sadness includes your frustration, your despair, your anger and resentment. In fact all the feelings that you don't want to have are covered by the word 'sadness'. If it is there,

you want to eliminate it. Sooner, the better. Usually you can divert your attention to something else for some time, but generally you come back to the original condition – sadness. This is how we continue to be sad with occasional moments of happiness in between. But sadness is unlike them in that it is a disposition of the mind caused by a certain pattern of thinking. If the thinking mind is resolved for some time, sadness is not there. In deep sleep you are never sad. Under sedation you are incapable of thinking, and so your sadness also goes away. A single thought never causes sadness. In fact you have to think a great deal in order to get into disposition of sadness. That is why a sad depressed person is given a drug to either curtail the frequency or alter the pattern of his thinking.

If thinking were always in your hands, i.e. if the process of thinking were always wielded by you, the subject "I", and given that sadness is a process of thinking, then how do you gain a disposition of sadness which you don't want to have? Do you consciously become sad, willingly yourself into sadness? Suppose I say, "Let us all become sad for five minutes." It is impossible for us to do so. You should understand, therefore, that confusion exists between the ways of your thinking and yourself. In fact you use your mind as an instrument only occasionally, and the mind uses you most of the time, which is like the tail wagging the dog, a definite indication that there is something fundamentally wrong with the dog. When you use your mind as an instrument, you see yourself as someone who is distinct from the mind.

But if you become sad, which you don't want to be and for which thinking is necessary, or if you become angry or frustrated through a process of thinking which you don't want to have, then it is clear that you are no longer using the mind, for the mind has become your very self.

To keep from getting into a state of sadness or despair – to keep the mind from using you – you may try to control the mind by various techniques. This invariably proves to be a temporary measure. To get rid of sadness permanently requires that you discern the problem of sadness or sorrow more fundamentally. One needs to understand that sorrow arises because of confusion between the mind and yourself. If you come to know clearly what exactly constitutes the mind, what exactly is “I” and what is the peculiar relationship between the two, then you find that it is actually impossible to become a sad, depressed person.

To understand the peculiar relationship that exists between the mind and “I” consider an actor A, who is on stage playing the role of a beggar B. According to the story, B undergoes the severe privations of a beggarly life. Therefore A has to beg very convincingly in the play. In fact A becomes the greatest beggar you could ever hope to see; nevertheless, A seems to be free, inside. According to the script he is supposed to shed tears, and he is able to bring real tears to his eyes. Even while shedding the tears, A is congratulating himself for being able to do so. When the scene is over, a friend goes backstage and also congratulates him. A is then even more pleased and happy that he cried so well.

Look at this situation. In the play B has problems leading to sadness and tears. In

spite of B's problems, A remains unaffected, free of the problems of the beggar. Why? Is there a physical distance between B and A such that B's problems cannot contact and affect A? Not at all. B's physical body depends entirely on A's physical body, where B stands. A also stands. Therefore B is definitely A. If that is so, then B's problems should also be A's problems, but we find that is not the case. Even though B is A, A is not B. There is a difference between B and A, but not a physical one. A is not B in the sense of A's knowledge. A knows that he is not B but that he has assumed the role of B. A remembers himself as A and plays the role of B according to the script, regardless of whether the script calls for pleasant or unpleasant situations to arise. A does not lose himself.

Suppose that A does forget himself while playing the role. When the villain slaps B in the play, B is supposed to invite another slap. But A forgets the script and gets so angry that he strikes back. The director pulls the curtain down and asks A what is the matter. A answers, “He slapped me. Do you think I am going to let him get away with that?” And A hits him again right there. A's problem is that there is a confusion between himself (A) and the role (B). There is no longer action on A's part, there is only reaction. When A remembers the script and acts, it is an action. If he forgets the script, forgets himself in the process and performs an action, that action is really a reaction. A is no more an actor but a reactor because he has no self-awareness; there is no role playing on his part.

That A is not B must be as clear as the light of day, a fact about which there is no trace of ignorance or misunderstanding. Then alone one can afford to play roles. Once A loses his self identity on the stage, he may be advised to avoid playing roles. But

in real life you cannot live without playing roles; you have countless roles to play. If the role is taken as you, there is no problem. But if you take yourself as the role, then definitely there is a self confusion leading to sadness and despair.

In life, playing roles means relating to the world. Whether you perceive something or perform an action, there is always a subject-object relationship. Only in a state of coma or continuous sleep can you not relate at all. You may be alive alright, but you are not living a life. Life is lived only when you relate. Your tragedies and comedies are made only in relationship to the world. And one thing is certain: the object to which you relate keep on changing but the "I" is always present. The "I" remains the same, being the invariable in every relationship. Is the "I" always the same in all situations? "I" also seems to change. Suppose I like an object, I become a liker. If I dislike the object, I turn into a dislike. If the object is father, I become son; but if the object is son, I become father. Along with a change in the object, there seems to be a relevant change in "I". Still, when you say; I am father, I am son, I am a seer, I am a hearer, etc., 'I am' is involved in each. 'I am' is always there as the invariable while the variable is father, son, seer, hearer etc. If father were invariable, I should be the father of the whole creation, but I am father only with reference to my child. Therefore father is me, but the 'I' is not father. Son is me, but the 'I' is not son. In the father there is 'I', in the son there is 'I', but 'I' is free from both. Because the role is 'I', however, there is every possibility of my taking myself as the role, if the invariable 'I' is not clear to me.

If you have a problem as father, son, husband or wife, you must know that there is confusion between yourself and the role. You wanted your son to become a doctor

so that through him you could live a doctor's life. But, instead, he joined the Hare Krishnas. Now your mind reacts, and your blood pressure goes up whenever you think of your son. Here the 'I' totally identifies with the role of father along with the reacting mind. The 'I' then suffers the reaction of the mind, and you say, "I am sad and upset". However, though the role is no doubt the "I", I am definitely not the role. If the role's problems become your problems, then not only B is A, but A becomes B as well. If you have a problem as a father or husband, then you are not playing the role. You have become the role – and you will have to roll in sorrow.

Any role is full of challenges. Just as without rules there are no games, so too without changing events, without challenges and drama, there are no roles.. The role playing becomes a problem only when you lose yourself to the role, not knowing the "I" to be invariable, free from all thoughts and roles. In any situation you say, "I am frustrated, I am worthless, I am a failure", you take yourself to be all these. That is, the identification of "I" with the situation and its resulting thoughts is the real problem. When the "I" is thus confused about itself, then the mind is holding you hostage, keeping you in sadness and sorrow. In truth, however, the situation and the reacting mind are merely facts you must attend to. That is what playing roles involve. You must know that the "I" is free from all situations and roles, free from the mind itself. Only with this understanding of the ways of the mind will you become the master of your mind, using it as an instrument and taking advantage of it to learn, to appreciate, to love. This is purely what the mind is meant to do. The knowledge of the invariable "I", which resolves the universal confusion about yourself, constitutes the subject matter of Vedanta.