

SUCCESS

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27th Anniversary of Arsha Vidya Argentina, main talk Buenos Aires, Argentina Sunday April 30th 2017

Every human being wants success. We are born with a desire to be successful. This is not the case with living beings other than human beings, which have no notion of success and failure. Our Pujya Swamiji used to give the example of a dog show where a number of dogs are displayed. One dog will be judged the best. The dog owner takes his dog for a walk, showing the dog to everybody. Who feels the sense of success? Does the dog feel successful? He doesn't know what is happening; it is the owner of the dog who feels successful.

Many years ago, in New York City, I was taken to the Belmont Horse Track. Some friends invited me there and people bet. I was told by somebody that horse number seven in the third race is the favorite horse. "You should bet on that horse," he said. I did not know anything about races and I never gambled before, but my friends worked upon my greed. I had one hundred dollars in my pocket. They said if you bet one hundred dollars, you'll win one thousand dollars if the horse wins. My greed overcame me and I bet my hundred dollars.

Now came the horse race number three and everyone got up from their seats watching with binoculars. I was hoping that the horse number seven would be number one. When the shot was fired, all horses started running, but the horse number seven, on which I bet, did not even start! It finally finished last. That night I could not sleep! I could not enjoy my dinner because I failed, I lost! Do you think that horse number seven did not eat its dinner? Do you think it did not sleep? There was no effect on the horse!

The notion of success and failure is the unique problem of the human being. You have to be successful and you cannot accept failure. Therefore, from childhood until the death our constant effort is to be successful.

What is success? The world says that those who are wealthy, famous and powerful are successful! Therefore, everyone wants to be equally wealthy, famous and powerful. We equate success with these material accomplishments. Everybody has a picture of a successful self. I will be successful if I am wealthy! I will be successful if I am famous! I will be successful if I am powerful! And therefore, I strive constantly to acquire wealth, fame, power!

But is that really success? Vedanta asks this question: What is success?

You may say that success is when my desire is fulfilled. I desire something and if my desire is fulfilled, I feel successful. Someone desired to gain first rank in the university, but that person got fifth rank and thought he was a failure. On the other hand, somebody did not even expect to pass the exam and he got passing marks. He felt successful. So somebody who gets 99% marks feels that he is a failure because he wanted 100%. And somebody who just wanted 35% marks feels successful because he got 40%. So what is success? Is 99% success? Or is 40% success?

What is success? Success is when you feel you are successful.

Unfortunately, all along we try to get approval from others. We want others to declare us successful. Therefore, we are always trying to please others, so that they will respect us, so that they will honor us, because we do not respect ourselves. The human being does not respect himself or herself. We have a low self-esteem, we have a very low opinion of ourselves, and that is what makes us unhappy.

In order to be happy, I should have a good opinion about myself. But I think I am good if you say that I am good. Since I do not think I am good, I hope that you will tell me that I am good. Therefore, all the time I struggle to please you, so that you will say that I am good. Then, I feel I am good! Therefore success is a subjective feeling. We equate success based on external situations, but really success is an inner feeling of the mind. As a child I felt successful when I spelled "C as in cat". I felt that I was great with a simple spelling. Now that I am grown up, I feel nothing about the spelling.

Therefore, what is success is when I feel I am successful. When will I feel that I am successful? When I am happy with myself! When am I happy with myself? When I live up to my own expectations of myself.

Each one of us has expectations from our own self, that I should be such and such! When I am able to fulfill that expectation, I feel happy with myself, then I feel I am successful. On the other hand, when I am not able to fulfill my own expectation of myself, I feel unhappy with myself. I do not accept myself. Sometimes I reject myself. I even condemn myself! The self-non-acceptance, self-rejection, self-condemnation, is only a problem of the human being because I am a self-conscious being. I am always conscious of myself.

Not only that, but I am a judgmental being. I constantly judge myself. If I judge myself as good, then I am happy. If I judge myself as not acceptable, I am unhappy. Therefore, I am the cause of my happiness and I am the cause of my unhappiness. Nobody else makes me happy, nor does anybody else make me unhappy. It is I who makes myself happy and it is I who makes myself unhappy.

When I make myself happy I am successful. When I make myself unhappy, I am a failure. Success is most important to us. And therefore my approval of myself is most important to me. My acceptance of myself is most important to me.

This is very important to understand: That we are the cause of our happiness and we are the cause of our unhappiness. You may find it difficult to accept this. You may think that it is your mother-in law who makes you unhappy, that your spouse makes you unhappy, that your boss makes you unhappy. We think that the cause of our unhappiness lies out there. Therefore, the whole life we try to change things outside. We try to create a situation where we think the situation will make us happy. Therefore, all the time we are trying to please others, but this is a wrong understanding.

Nobody can make me unhappy if I do not allow them to make me unhappy. You can make me unhappy only if I cooperate with you. If I do not cooperate, you cannot make me unhappy. Suppose somebody tells me. "Swamiji, he insulted me! I am very unhappy!" I ask him, "What do you mean by insult?" "He said such and such thing to me!" I said, that is his opinion. What happens is, we make his opinion as our opinion. "He said to me yesterday that I am stupid and I felt hurt." That is because he had a very low self-esteem.

Our Swamiji used to make a joke. Four persons are going somewhere. They are Alfredo, Peter, Tom and Roberto. I say "Roberto!" and Roberto looks back at me. I say "Alfredo!" Alfredo looks back at me. I say "stupid!" and all four look back, because that is how people feel about themselves. Because we have a very low opinion about ourselves.

Therefore, the way to become successful is to have a good opinion about myself, is to accept myself, is to be satisfied with myself. You may say, "Swamiji, I'm satisfied with myself." But that doesn't work. By saying that I am happy, I do not become happy. By saying that I am satisfied with myself, I do not become satisfied. Happiness has to happen. Satisfaction has to happen. It's like love. Someone says, "Please love this person!" You can't love. Love has to happen. Otherwise, everybody would love everybody else. But we do not see that. Sometimes even spouses cannot love each other.

If you could will to love, it would be so nice, you could also will to be happy with no effort at all. Sometimes people say, "Be happy!" But that does not work. If one could will to be happy, who will be unhappy?

Unhappiness comes, whether I want it or not. Therefore, happiness has to happen. Success has to happen. When will it happen? When I create in myself a disposition of mind, which is a happy disposition. I have to work very hard to make myself acceptable to myself.

How do we do that? By fulfilling my expectation of myself. What do I expect of myself? I expect that I should be a kind person. I expect of myself that I should be a loving person. I expect of myself that I should be a good person. I like a kind self, not an unkind self. I like a loving self, not a hating self. When they tell me, "Swamiji, please pose for a photograph." How do I pose? Do I pose with a fierce look? No, with a smile, because I like the smiling self, not a hating self. I don't like myself to be cruel. I don't like myself when I am hating. I don't like myself when I am dishonest. I like myself when I am honest. I don't like myself when I am not truthful. I like myself when I am truthful.

You may ask a question, "If you like yourself to be truthful, then why do you tell lies?" Every human being wants to be honest and truthful. And still we find people telling lies. Everybody wants to be a kind and loving person, and still we find people are cruel, hateful. Why? Because I am helpless when I am hateful. It is my helplessness that makes me a hateful person, a cruel person, an untruthful person. It is not by my choice that I tell a lie. It is not by my choice that I hate somebody. It is not by my choice that I hurt somebody. Something makes me do all that.

Some of you may have known about "*Mahābhārata*". There was a character whose name was Duryodhana. He was a very powerful king, but he always violated dharma, righteousness. Somebody asked him, "Hey, you are a learned person. You know what *adharma*, unrighteousness, is. You know what righteousness is. You know what truthfulness is. Then why do you act opposite to that? Why do you violate the *dharma*?"

Duryodhana replied, "I know what dharma or righteousness is, but I cannot practice it. I know what *adharma* or unrighteousness is, but I cannot give it up. There is somebody within me that forces me to behave in this manner." Which means, within all of us, there is some devil or evil, which forces us to act against our values. Even though I want to be a loving person, I am compelled to be a hateful person. That is how I dislike myself.

So, how do I start liking myself? By deliberately being a kind person, a loving person. "But Swamiji, I am not kind, I am not loving. How can I act as a kind person?" Then Swamiji says, "Fake it, until you make it!" Pretend as though you are a loving person, and ask yourself, "How would I conduct myself if I were a loving person?" And make yourself do that. That fellow inside says, "Hate him!" I assert myself, "No, I am going to love him." How do you love a person? By helping him. By serving him. By being kind to that person. So, even though the kindness is not natural, I deliberately make myself act as a good person, deliberately I try to become a good person.

There is one simple rule. Everyone knows that rule. Do not do unto others what you do not want them to do unto you. Reach out to others as you want them to treat you. We are all in agreement on how we want to be treated by others. We want others to be kind to us. We want others to be honest to us. We want others to be generous to us. We are all in agreement. I do not want to be hurt. I do not want to be insulted. I do not want someone to steal something that belongs to me. Is there anybody who doesn't agree?

Our Pujya Swamiji would say to the audience, "Nobody wants to be hurt. Is there somebody who wants to be hurt?" Nobody would say yes to that. But once, our Swamiji was surprised. One fellow got up in the audience and said, "Yes!" Now Swamiji was confused because the rule is that nobody wants to be hurt. Here is an exception. An exception breaks the rule. Swamiji did not know what to do. Fortunately the audience came to his rescue. They said, "Swamiji!" and made a gesture meaning the fellow is mentally not right. This means that no normal person would want to be hurt.

So there is a simple rule that says: "I should not do to others what I do not want them to do to me." I should not hurt others. I should not insult others. I should not tell them lies. I should be kind to them. I should be helpful to them. How would I do that? Fake it until you make it! In every situation, we can apply the simple rule. I place myself in the situation of the other person. And I ask myself, how would I like to be treated if I were in that situation? Then I will know how to treat that person. I know that even when I have done something wrong, I don't want to be punished. I want to be pardoned. If somebody has done something wrong, should I punish that person? Or pardon that person?

What I would expect, is what I should try to do. It is not easy, because we have strong impulses of hurting, of retaliating, of punishing. We have to control those impulses by keeping them under check. Then only we can act as we want to act.

This is the first step in gaining success in life. It is to follow the basic values of life. Nonviolence is a value. Truthfulness is a value. Compassion is a value. Kindness is a value. These are natural values, meaning we are born with a love for them. These values should become valuable to us.

We all know these values and still we compromise them. Because in life, other things are also valuable to us. Money is also valuable. Power is valuable. Fame is valuable. My job is valuable. My family is valuable. So these worldly things are also valuable. These are called acquired values. There are natural values and acquired values.

This non-violence, kindness are natural values. We are born with them. But as we grow up in the society, we find that people value money, power and material achievements. We find that people are respected who gain the front page of the newspaper, the wealthy, the famous, the powerful. Therefore, we cultivate a value for these worldly achievements also.

So there are two sets of values. One set are the natural or universal values. The other set are the acquired values. There is a clash between the two. In order to speak truth, I may have to sacrifice money. For example, many years ago, I was returning from the United States to India and was passing through customs at Bombay Airport with two huge suitcases. I knew that lots of electronic appliances were in those suitcases, because you could not get them in India those days and so I brought them from the United States. But they would charge a lot of customs duty. When I passed by the customs officer he would ask me, "Swamiji, do you have something to declare?" He said "Swamiji" instead of "Swami" because in India the people still value the Swamis. If I had said, "No, I have nothing to declare", he would let me go. I would save 100,000 rupees with one small untruth. The moment the customs officer asks me, "Do you have something to declare?" there are two voices within myself. One voice tells me, "You are a Swami giving classes on honesty, you are supposed to be honest." The other voice, the greedy self tells me, "Hey, a hundred thousand rupees is a lot of money. You tell a small lie, how does it matter?" There is a conflict within myself. Who wins?

Often the money wins and the truth loses. So this is where will power is required. This is where the value of a value is required. Only when the value of honesty is more than the value of money, I can be honest. If the money is more important, my honesty is likely to be compromised. That's why in the world, we find violation of values. Greed makes people dishonest. Anger makes people cruel. Lust makes people use others as objects of sensuous pleasure.

Kāma, krodha, lobha. *Kāma* means lust. *Krodha* means anger. *Lobha* means greed. These three are our inner enemies. We have to conquer them to be successful in life. I will share with you a simple story of how to deal with these three. There is a story in the Upaniṣad where the teacher says to the disciples, one letter in Sanskrit, da. In English the equivalent is c. The c has three meanings: "control over oneself", "compassion" and "charity".

When *kāma* comes, when a strong desire comes, when one wants to indulge, as for example when there is ice cream in front of me, I cannot control myself. Even though my doctor has told me there is too much sugar inside, "no more sugar for you!", still the ice cream tempts. I cannot control. There is a tendency to indulge. This is *kāma*, so first 'c' for "control": this much and no more!

When I am seated for dinner, very delicious food is served. If I have no control at all, later I repent because I have acidity, stomach ache, vomiting. Because while eating I have no control. Therefore, before I start eating, I put boundaries: only one empanada, only one corn cake and no more! But they keep bringing more and more. Very delicious! One, two, again boundaries! One and no more! So, draw boundaries everywhere. That is how we control the tendency to indulge. *Kāma* can be controlled by putting boundaries: boundary in talking, boundary in watching TV, boundary in WhatsApp, boundary in cell phone. Everywhere, boundaries, boundaries, boundaries. That is the first 'c'.

The second 'c' is compassion. When anger arises, when somebody has hurt me, I am angry at that person, I want to punish that person, I want to retaliate! I remind myself, 'c', compassion. Be compassionate to that person, be large hearted. That person has done something wrong. Accommodate that person. Be kind to that person. So, 'c' is compassion. Remember 'c', 'c', 'c'! The anger slowly subsides.

The third is greed. Greed means not being satisfied with what I have, and not parting with what I have. Even if I have plenty, I cannot part with it. This is greed. So third 'c' stands for charity: be charitable, be large hearted, share what you have, part with what you have. Our Pujya Swamiji used to say, "Give until it pinches you!" If you have one thousand pesos, giving five pesos is nothing. Out of one thousand pesos, give five hundred pesos. That is called "giving". This is charity.

You have to overcome this greed by charity. Overcome anger by compassion. Overcome indulgence by control. Thus, we move in the direction of victory over ourselves. As inner enemies become weaker and weaker, our goodness becomes more and more manifest. Because basically we are a good, kind, loving person. Each one of us is a good, kind, loving person.

As these enemies become weaker, the real person becomes manifest. You begin to like yourself, to be content with yourself. You are successful.

Success is not some day in future. Every time you win over the impulse of anger, you are successful. Every time you win over the impulse of *kāma*, you are successful. At every step, you are successful. So success is a process. It is not only the end, it is also the process. It leads you to total success. That is called "*mokṣa*".

Vedanta says that the cessation of sorrow once and for all, is the same as attainment of unsurpassable happiness, because that is our nature. It is the sorrow that is denying us the experience of happiness that is our nature. The extent to which the sorrow goes away, to that extent our nature becomes evident. We become happy with ourselves. We become successful. That success leads us to *mokṣa*.

All the best to all of you!



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