

## Vedanta – Happiness, Science, Religion & Philosophy

### Recap - Last discussions conclusions:

- We **all** seek happiness (directly/indirectly) – whether people realise this or not!
- All our actions, thoughts & feelings are fundamentally motivated by this desire → we act every min of everyday of our lives is **for the sake of happiness** alone
- After logically analysing our own life experience; it seems happiness comes from external ‘things/thoughts/activities’. E.g. *I listen to good music, I feel happy – is the happiness ‘in’ the music, or in me?*
- **Is this correct? If so, shouldn’t that music bring happiness to all who hear it?**
- Therefore, we can conclude that happiness **cannot** be coming from external ‘things’(objects)
- Therefore, if happiness is not external, it **must** be coming from me somehow!?
- In fact, Vedanta claims that happiness **is** you. It is your very nature. – sounds strange?
- **But, why does it seem to come from a desired external object?**
- External ‘objects’ (anything I can objectify through perception) act as a trigger for a ‘switch’ in my mind to temporarily drop that desire & experience the happiness **within** me

### What types of desire does everyone have? (AKA ‘objects’ of desire)

- **Body?** e.g. I want to be: fit, healthy, beautiful. I don’t want to get old.
- **Material?** e.g. I want a Porsche, a big house in the country and a swimming pool
- **Emotional?** e.g. I want ppl to like me, find my soul-mate, I want to be famous
- **Spiritual?** e.g. I want to go to heaven, be a good person, see God, achieve enlightenment

What is the underlying desire in all of the above? “I want to be Happy.”

### So What? - What is the problem with gaining happiness from the above desires?

Well, to a lot people – there is no problem. End of story. However, a minority of people come to realise that the resulting ‘happiness’ gained from fulfilling such desires, is short lived. It is always temporary. No doubt, it may feel good for a while, but you realise it never lasts. This very dissatisfaction implies we desire a longer lasting, more permanent happiness.

You then begin to realise, that actually, it is the big questions of life that really matter – Why am I here? Who am I & what should I be doing? What happens to me when I die? Why can’t I be happy all the time?

It is to this type of person, that the teachings method of Vedanta is addressed – someone who has realised the temporary nature of happiness gained from fulfilling desires, someone seeking a more permanent happiness and understanding of why things are the way they.

### So what is ‘Vedanta’?

The principles presented in Vedanta are very similar to the basis underlying many religions including: Hinduism, Christianity, Sufism, Buddhism, Taoism, Greek philosophy (e.g. Paramendis). Veda-anta literally means the ‘end of knowledge’ and the end of the Vedas.

It is a teaching which enables you to directly & personally understand that your own nature is happiness/bliss/limitlessness.

### Vedanta claims:

- Permanent happiness **is** possible – in fact, it is actually with you all the time
- This happiness is unaffected by **anything** – i.e. regardless of your thoughts, feelings, perceptions, it is **always** present - e.g. Sun + Clouds example
- This truth, is directly ‘testable’ & ‘experience-able’ by **you**

**OK – so I can test this – So, how do you test if something is true? Think back to your science classes – how did you test a theory? E.g. Theory of Gravity?**

Do some background research under a working hypothesis/assumption; conduct some experiments; experience the results for yourself, draw valid conclusions. → Same process Vedanta advocates with its own teachings. In this rigorous, logical, methodical sense; Vedanta is a science of your-‘Self’.

So it’s good & healthy to be sceptical in the beginning:

Swami Vivekananda, the great Vedanta teacher used to say... “*Don’t believe what other say unless you yourselves know it to be true*”. Vedanta actively encourages an open minded, intelligent, questioning attitude towards everything – including Vedanta’s own teachings!

**Why should I listen to Vedanta? There are plenty of other sources of so called ‘Truth & Wisdom’ - i.e. religions, philosophies, belief systems...etc.**

Vedanta is **not** a philosophy or a school of thought because it is not the subjective opinion of an individual or a group of individuals. Its subject matter is the very person (the subject) who holds the opinion. So, how can the very subject who holds an opinion about an object (e.g. a philosophy/religion), be the object of opinion? In this sense, the subject matter of Vedanta, can never be a school of thought/philosophy/religion. – A bit confusing?! This becomes clearer at a later stage

Philosophies are subject to negation and correction because they are usually speculations, imaginations, beliefs and opinions of an individual ...which means they are always subject to error or irrelevancy because they do not serve a fundamental human need, in this case the need be free of limitation. Vedanta has thrived for several thousand years precisely because it is not a personal philosophy.

**What about Modern Science – does that contradict Vedanta?**

Modern Science does **not** and should **never** contradict Vedanta. In fact, they complement each other. Both Science and Vedanta seek the truth. The difference being – Science excepts the material world as truth – completing ignoring the *perceiver* (You) of this material world. Whereas Vedanta explains that the truth of any object (inc: matter, thoughts, feelings, emotions, perceptions) is in the *Subject* that perceives an object (i.e. You!).

Schrödinger, the creator of the mathematics of Quantum Mechanics, calls the teachings of Vedanta “*the quintessence of deepest insight into the happenings of the world*”. The German philosopher Schopenhauer exclaims that “*in the whole world there is no religion or philosophy so sublime and elevating as Vedanta... this Vedanta has been the solace of my life, and it will be the solace of my death.*”

Even as Quantum Mechanics reveals the subtleties of the world of matter, so does Vedanta reveal logically the nature of the self, its relation to the world of happenings, and beyond that, to the ultimate Reality that underlies both. Today, as ever, Vedanta shines as a stunning testimony to the ability of the human mind to ponder and penetrate the abstract.

**Vedanta - Some final inspiring thoughts....**

Mahatma Gandhi: “Vedanta is the relentless pursuit of Truth...Its freedom from dogma appeals to me since it allows the largest scope for self-expression.” The teachings of Vedanta are profound, yet simple; coldly logical, yet warming the heart with love; completely personal, yet universal; and above all very relevant in today’s world.

References: Dennis Waite, *The Book of One*  
Swami Dayananda, *The teaching tradition of Advaita Vedanta*