



Introduction

The stress and strain of day-to-day living, especially modern living in urban areas, has to be considered and dealt with at two levels. One is at the surface of living from moment to moment, and the other, perhaps even much more important and at a much deeper level, is being anchored in peace and harmony while facing life from moment to moment.

Many years ago, I was taken to a place in Los Angeles which specifically dealt with the first variety of stress. The place offered a number of devices and gadgets specially designed to substantially reduce the stress of daily living on executives functioning at a higher level in various aspects of life, such as finance, business, and politics. The membership was expensive and, therefore, exclusive.

The executive club was equipped with diverse items ranging from a massage table and a saltwater tank that could keep people afloat without any effort at all,

to physical and mental games for the specific purpose of reducing physical and mental stress and strain. Good music would fall in this category as a great reliever of mental stress. The idea was for the members to visit on weekends, if they could not do so on working days, to reduce the stress accumulated during the week – and, one supposes, to be ready to take on the stress of the following week.

At this superficial or surface level of life, various activities could be of help: yoga, meditation, light massage, belly laughter, and various other physical and psychological treatments. But these cannot reach the deepest level to enable you to feel anchored in peace and harmony, a state in which you never feel uncomfortable with yourself or with others, while you face life from moment to moment. This is a state in which anger may arise in the moment, but would never make you feel enmity or hatred towards the person (body-mind organism) that was the cause of the anger arising as an immediate natural or biological reaction.

The only way you could have this lasting feeling of hating neither yourself nor anyone else – always being comfortable with yourself and with others – is when you are totally convinced, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that no one, neither you yourself nor anyone else, could ever be the doer of any action; that all action can never be anything done by anyone, but a happening that simply could not have not happened according to the universal cosmic law.

This understanding means, in effect, being anchored in peace and harmony while facing life from moment to moment. Facing life from moment to moment means accepting life as it happens, whatever the moment brings – pain or pleasure – without getting involved in it by resisting it. What it means, in effect, is to witness whatever happens, doing whatever needs to be done (knowing that that it is a happening according to the cosmic law) and, most importantly, being still. Being still means not thinking, not conceptualising in the past or future – being still in the present moment.

The state of being anchored in peace and tranquillity, while facing life from moment to moment, is indeed the result of the realisation that all action is a divine happening and not anyone's action. Such a realisation of non-doership immediately means the total absence of shame and guilt for one's own supposed actions, and also the total absence of any hatred and malice, jealousy and envy, towards any 'other'. This state of being anchored in tranquillity and repose, by its very nature, includes the acceptance of whatever happens from moment to moment in daily living, and thus, the question of stress and strain in daily living simply cannot arise.

It is a fact of life that the sting of life's slings and arrows is astonishingly short; so also, the mellow glow from a week or two of holidays will fade just as surely. Happiness, many psychologists are concluding, seems to be largely determined by the genes and not by outside

reality. However tragic or comic life's ups and downs, people appear to return inexorably to whatever happiness level is pre-set in their constitution.

The idea is similar to the set-point concept in weight-control, a theory that says the brain seems to be wired to turn the body's metabolism up or down to maintain a pre-set weight. There is also, scientists contend, a set point for happiness – a genetically determined mood level that the vagaries of life may nudge upward or downward, but only for a while. With time, the grouchy tend to become as cranky as before and the light-hearted, cheery again.

Interviews with a range of psychologists show that the idea of a biological set-point for a sense of well-being (quite apart from being anchored in peace and harmony while facing life from moment to moment) has wide support in the field. Says Dr. Jerome Kagan, a developmental psychologist at Harvard University: "It's clear that T. S. Eliot was by nature dour and Jay Leno is congenitally upbeat. But we are far from filling in the biological blanks."

The set-point idea seems to make sense of long-standing data on happiness that has puzzled researchers. Studies of happiness in several countries have found that money makes little difference in perceptions of happiness, except among the very poor. Nor does education, or marriage and a family, or any of the other variables that researchers have sought to correlate with contentment.

Each factor may make a person a little happier, but it has a minor impact, compared with the individual's characteristic sense of well-being.

Says Dr. Edward Diener, a psychologist at the University of Illinois: "We find that for events like being promoted or losing a lover, most of the effect on people's mood is gone by three months, and there's not a trace by six months." He cites data showing that lottery winners are no happier a year after their good fortune than they were before. And several studies show that even people with spinal-cord injuries tend to rebound in spirits.

All this, of course, can relate only to the superficial level of daily living. To be anchored in a deep sense of peace and harmony, while facing the various vicissitudes of life from day to day, is an altogether different matter. Such anchorage depends almost entirely on the conditioning of the individual concerned, a conditioning that reflects the total acceptance of the fact that the free will of the individual human being is, in fact, illusory. All human action is entirely a happening that simply could not have not happened, strictly according to a cosmic law, according to which everything in the universe moves – from a small object to the stars and planets in the sky.

It is a proven fact that the thought and the relevant action cannot really be separated. The thought and the act are one integral whole, and the human being has no control over the arising of the thought.