

Observations & Views:

Contentment Is Bliss

Non-possessiveness (APARIGRAH) is one of the five vows. It leads to contentment. Affectionate regard constitutes possessiveness (MOORCHCHHA PARIGRAHAH, TATTVAARTH SUTRA 7-17). This refers to material possessions such as clothes, jewelry, cars and houses. In TATTVAARTH SUTRA, Acharya Umasvati includes men and women servants (DAASI DAAS) as well in possessions (SUTRA 7-29). Limiting material possessions brings about contentment and bliss.

Evidently, we have instinctive affectionate regard for our family (including our spouse) relatives and friends. Our lives depend on their support. Moreover, we depend on plants and trees for food, on cows for nourishing milk and milk products, and so on and so forth. This conforms to the edict: the function of living beings is mutual assistance (PARASPAROPAGRAHO JEEVAANAAM, TATTVAARTH SUTRA 5-21). This implies that possessiveness encompasses living entities as well.

How can these two concepts, affectionate regard and mutual assistance, be reconciled? Well, the fact is that possessiveness (just like violence) cannot be avoided completely. We can only minimize it so as to reduce the impact of our activities on our animate and inanimate environment. Instead of inordinate pursuit of materialism, we should limit our desires and be content with what we need, and enjoy the bliss of contentment. We should also realize that others may see things differently and are free to make their choices.

Laura Munson, describing certain difficult times in her marriage in the book 'This Is Not the Story You Think It Is' has presented similar concepts.¹ She believes that Buddha to Jesus to the Sufis to the Christian mystics to Dr. Seuss and beyond, "all hint at, or even proclaim, this simple truth: the end of suffering happens with the end of wanting." Laura Munson writes. "*Go home and base your happiness on one thing and one thing only: freedom. Choose freedom, not suffering. Create a life of freedom, not wanting.*"

Laura Munson had married a man she adored since her senior year in

¹ <http://abcnews.go.com/GMA/Books/laura-munsons-book-marriage-love-happiness/story?id=10269295>

college. One day, her husband walked out of her life. Her psychiatrist remarked, "So let me get this straight. You base your personal happiness on things entirely outside of your control." These words opened her eyes and she made a determination that she will not let her husband's action control her life. When she lived with her husband, she had affectionate regard for him. When he left her, she attained peace of mind and bliss by being content with her lot.

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From July 1998 Issue:

Voices Of Reason In Contemporary Society

Andy Rooney, on the TV program '60 Minutes' on Sunday, April 26, 1998, presented a feature on the so-called 'tobacco settlement.' He said, among other things, that cigarettes 'kill' considerably more people in the world than illegal drugs. Mr. Rooney retorted that it is the cigarette manufacturers who are addicted - addicted to money and they do not seem to get enough of it. They are trying to promote the sale of cigarettes in other countries to make up for any reduction in sales here. He also mentioned that the President wants to get tough on people who sell cigarettes to minors in this country. However, Mr. Rooney added that it should be illegal to export cigarettes to any country because selling them to young people at any other place in the world is as immoral as selling them to 16-year olds in this country. Jainism impels us to consider the overall impact of our actions on humanity and the environment. This is real compassion (JEEV DAYA). May be the Jains all over the world will learn from Mr. Rooney's remarks.

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From July 1998 Issue:

Hidden Faces of Hunger Despite Economic Boom²

'Profile of hungry Americans includes more working people' is the title of an article, which appeared on March 10, 1998 on the Internet on CNN. Among other things, the article states the facts:

"The cost of living has increased but wages haven't kept pace with their needs."

² In spite of a large number of charades in the name of charity, things are going from bad to worse. Further, considerable waste of natural resources is involved in such events, which is detrimental to the environment.

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"The majority of those seeking help to get enough to eat live outside big cities, are mostly white, overwhelmingly female, and either very old or very young." "And increasingly they have jobs."

"The data runs counter to almost every stereotype we have of who needs help." "It's mainly families that are playing by the rules -working or trying to work."

"These are people who aren't surfing the wave of prosperity we keep hearing about." "It increasingly features working people, whose low-wage jobs don't pay enough to put food on the table."

Similar facts have been presented by Cokie and Steven Roberts in the article, 'Hunger: A Startling Crisis,' published in the USA Weekend of March 27-28, 1998. Further, the article states, "Prosperity has not produced generosity. Often the opposite."

Both articles list the names of various charitable groups helping to deal with the problem. Some of them are nationwide organizations. Their approach is to treat the symptoms and not the root causes of the problem. Treating the symptoms through making appeals for donations of various kinds is commendable. However, is it not necessary to pay attention to the root causes of the problem - widening gap between the rich and poor fueled by rampant greed which, in the name of prosperity, totally disregards the impact of some normal business practices on individuals and families?

Some people, who do not even think about the overall impact of their personal and business activities on other people and on the environment, seem to clear their conscience by indulging in charity by donating money and material themselves, and/or by raising funds for various organizations. According to the Jain theory of karma, we are responsible for our own thoughts, feelings and actions. If we are negligent, and consequently, if our actions result in the suffering of other people who may or may not be directly involved in our endeavors, we accumulate painful karmas. Enterprises like exporting cigarettes to other countries is a fair example of such practices. It is unlikely that karmas that we accumulate through such activities will be wiped out through charity. Moreover, when we indulge in charity for satisfying our ego, and with a desire of name and fame, we accumulate more bad karmas.