

The moment is all

CAN WE TAKE
PLEASURE IN
THE FLEETING
JOYS OF LIFE
WITHOUT
RESISTING
THEIR PASSING
AWAY?

by Suma Varughese



Suma Varughese is
Editor-in-Chief of *Life Positive*.
Write to her at
suma@lifepositive.net

How often do we find ourselves rejecting something simply because we fear it may not last? Can we instead simply be happy with it for as long as it lasts? I found myself asking this question when after a very long time, I began to feel healthy. I was sleeping better, feeling joyous and energetic and looking better. But instead of enjoying this much-longed-for state, I kept distrusting its longevity. I finally decided that no matter how little it lasted, I would enjoy it, and be grateful for it.

This attitude is probably one of the keystones to a happy and contented life – the willingness to simply enjoy the moment, and not pine for it to last for keeps. William Blake was probably referring to it when he talked about ‘kissing joy as it flies’ as a solution to living ‘in eternity’s sunrise’.

If we can see life as moments strung one after another in eternity’s chain, we will have no problem in accepting the ephemeral joys of life. Children do that all the time. So immersed are they in the immediate joy of playing cricket, watching a movie, or eating an ice-cream that they rarely fast forward to a time when it will not be there. When the time does come, they simply absorb themselves in whatever else confronts them. We, however, victims of the thinking mind, can never be so simple or essential. Fear, worry, doubt and distrust poison whatever innocent sources of pleasure may come our way. A friend of mine who leads a blessed life wondered aloud to me that surely her happiness was too good to last?

Maybe so, but so what? All the more reason to enjoy it, I should think. What a simple logic, really, but how difficult to attain. The reason is, we are too afraid of pain. *The supreme irony is that we poison our present happiness by our fear of future pain.* Isn’t it amazing? How right the sages were, especially the Buddha, when they pinpointed our oscillation between craving for pleasure and aversion to pain as our fundamental spiritual dilemma. The more we crave the pleasure, the more we resist its inevitable dissolution and the onset of less pleasant situations and sensations. Every moment is poisoned because running through each is our anxiety about what awaits us next.

We fall in love but how fraught each moment is with fear lest our love is not returned, lest it be fleeting, lest our parents not accept the situation, lest our neighbours gossip, and so on. We are happily ensconced in a wonderful job, but the financial anxiety that has spread over the land digs its tentacles deep into our contentment, and sends us biting our fingernails under our bed covers at night.

What is the solution to this problem? Equanimity. The willingness to accept pain. How on earth can we get there? A long tutorial in practising awareness and acceptance of one’s state of mind will definitely help. An immersion in the Buddha’s truth, “This too will pass” is also mandatory. Everything that arises will pass away. The truth can plunge a dagger into our heart. What, our love for parents, children, to pass away? Our health and wealth to pass away? If, however, we can survive the revelation and accept its reality gracefully, we will achieve this wonderful gift of staying stable in the present moment and accepting and experiencing its delights and pains. Another insight that will help us achieve this balance is to recognise that pain is one of the most effective of teachers and is rich with rewards if we grasp it firmly and without flinching.

Surrender too is a wonderful tool for achieving equanimity. The recognition that it is God who runs our lives and that our puny worry, fear and resistance will not change the wheels of fate one whit, but in fact will hasten its onset, can help us to stay in the moment. If we can only pass on our worries to the Higher Power and rest tranquilly in whatever is sent our way, we will find ourselves more easy in the ever slippery present moment.

As our culture disintegrates into ever greater chaos and uncertainty, we will need this ability to live in the present moment and to readily let it slip into the next with equipoise. Then, even though disasters and catastrophes swirl and twirl around us, we can stay still, like a very Buddha, smiling and breathing deeply.

Bliss is never in the circumstance, it is in the moment. ☺