

# *The Spiritual Scientist*

An ezine for those who think!

## *Is Vedic Philosophy Pessimistic ?*

**Question:** Why is the Vedic philosophy pessimistic about life? Why does it harp on the miseries of life? Why not see the bright side of life?

**Answer:** Pessimism in Vedic philosophy is only initial, never final. In its conclusion, Vedic philosophy is supremely optimistic. Let's see how.



Consider a person diagnosed as having cancer that is serious but curable through a rigorous chemotherapy. The patient may initially flinch at the prospect of the severe treatment, but when he is made aware of the prognosis: excruciatingly painful, gradual, inevitable death, he will become ready for the treatment. That's why it is wisely said that, when faced with a grave problem, if there be a way to the best, it begins by having a hard look at the worst.



The Vedic texts apply this same principle to our current material existence. They explain that presently all of us are diseased; we are eternal souls afflicted with amnesia. Having forgotten our spiritual identities, we are misidentifying with temporary material bodies. Due to this misidentification, we have to unnecessarily suffer the miseries of old age, disease, death and rebirth – again and again. The so-called bright side of life – the worldly pleasures – blind us to these harsh facts of life and fills us with the hopeless hope that some temporary adjustments within our material existence will free us from suffering. Thus the so-called bright side of life perpetuates our dark, diseased existence.

Unfortunately, in our daily lives, we get so caught up with pursuing the so-called bright side of life that we forget or neglect these miseries and so lose the opportunity to cure ourselves of them. Curing ourselves requires a spiritual therapy wherein we expose ourselves to spiritual God-centered stimuli like his holy names, his sacred scriptures, his beautiful deity, his sanctified remnants (*prasad*), his saintly representatives. Although this spiritual therapy is nowhere as rigorous as chemotherapy – it is, in fact, remarkably peaceful and joyful, still most of us are highly reluctant to start this therapy. Therefore the Vedic texts offer us an unsentimental, uncompromising look at the facts of life: miseries throughout our life's journey that only worsen as we near the end. When forced to face this prognosis of our current life, our reluctance to spiritual therapy evaporates and thus the doorway to eternal life opens.



This profoundly wise Vedic strategy is evident in the *Bhagavad-gita* which initially declares this world as an irreformably miserable place (8.15) and eventually shows us the way by which each of us can relish thrilling ecstasy at every moment (18.76-77). Thus, the initial pessimism of Vedic philosophy is the essential beginning that leads to its ultimate optimism.

