

A Prisoner of Success

“Success nowadays means to drive in a loaned car on a toll-charged expressway using credit card fuel.” This poignant statement shows the deceptive nature of the definition of success that is imposed on us by society. Indeed, most people today are “prisoners of success.” How? Generally, a prisoner is one whose freedom is restricted by immovable physical bars. The modern definition of success restricts people in their freedom by inflexible mental conceptions.

For example, a person, to be considered a social success, has to have a posh row-house, a sleek car, a trendy cell-phone.... And for this, many people have to take a variety of loans, which indenture them to blood-sucking labor for years. Not only that, these loans create an agonizing mental burden due to the anxiety of repayment. This anxiety doesn't allow them to peacefully enjoy the very comforts for which they accepted those anxieties.

Even those who don't have to take loans to maintain a “successful” image in society are not spared by the ghost of anxiety. They are haunted by the anxiety to protect what they have from rivals, thieves and even relatives. Thus they too are prisoners of success.

If “success” does not make us happy, but instead makes us miserable, stress-filled, anxiety-ridden, then is that the kind of success we want in life? Unfortunately, most people run like programmed machines to try to achieve “success,” no matter how troublesome it is to achieve or maintain.

Srila Prabhupada reveals the spiritual secret for a successful lifestyle, “Life is never made comfortable by artificial needs, but by plain living and high thinking.” Plain living will appear unattractive and impractical as long as we don't find the spiritually satisfying object for high thinking – God, Krishna. When our thoughts are high and enlightened, we understand that we are spiritual beings thirsting for the nectar of love of God. We can have real peace by harmonizing with the benevolent will of God, by learning from the sacred scriptures like the Bhagavad-gita to accept gracefully and gratefully whatever He provides. And we can have real happiness by awakening our dormant love for God by chanting His holy names. ❧

