

Your Cosmic Specialness

The impenetrable shell of the tortoise, the breathtaking swiftness of the leopard, the incredible color-changing ability of the chameleon: the variety in nature is amazing. Every species of life has a special gift from nature, an ability that is vital for its survival and success in the struggle for existence.

The Strange Irony

Compared to these animals, humans have no extraordinary external ability; their bodies are soft and vulnerable, they are not particularly fleet-footed and they can do little to camouflage themselves when in danger. And yet humans stand far above all other species. A puny human can tame a massive elephant and engage a ferocious lion. How? What is the special gift of nature to humans, the unique ability that makes them superior to all other species? Undoubtedly it is the advanced human intelligence. Empowered by their intelligence, humans have subjugated all the lower species. Not only that, humans have also built civilizations, developed cultures, devised languages, written literatures, come up with fine arts, inquired into metaphysics and advanced in science and technology.

Strangely enough, in the modern times, by that same intelligence, humans have created weapons of mass destruction, which threaten to wipe out all life on the planet. Furthermore, by that same intelligence, humans have developed perverted ideologies, by which they foster animosity and hatred for others of their own species. This then is the strange irony of the present condition of humanity. Intelligence has been the key to the success of humans and yet intelligence is what threatens to destroy them today. For no other species of life does its source of protection threaten to become its cause of destruction.

Advancing In Anxiety

Let's look at this situation from another perspective. All living beings are driven by a craving for pleasure. All subhuman species search for pleasure through the bodily activities of eating, sleeping, mating and defending. Humans do the same, but in more refined ways. For example, a bird lives in the same nest year after year, generation after generation, but humans try to improve their residences – from huts, to apartments, to bungalows, to villas. A cow eats the same grass lifelong, but humans choose their food from a large variety of cuisines. Modern scientific advancement has been essentially utilized for improving these four bodily pleasures. For example, humans have explored the mysteries of electrons to come up with electronics and telecommunication, which helps them enjoy erotic pleasures through television, movies and the internet. Similarly, advancement in biotechnology has been used to develop better foodstuffs. Also, worldwide, most of the funds for scientific research come from the military (which is a hi-tech arrangement for defending) and the consumer industry (which offers sophisticated methods for eating, sleeping and mating).

Humans have made these sophisticated arrangements for eating, sleeping, mating and defending, and yet they undergo far more anxiety than animals in these very activities. Animals rarely die of starvation due to artificial shortages created by others of their own species; animals rarely suffer from insomnia; animals rarely undergo the trauma of heartbreaks due to betrayed love and animals rarely live in mortal fear from others of their own species. Furthermore, animals rarely feel stressed, animals rarely struggle with depression, animals rarely fall prey to addictions and animals rarely, if ever, commit suicide. Thus we are confronted again with the strange irony that modern humans, despite their advanced intelligence and organized attempts for better enjoyment, are suffering more than their less intelligent subhuman counterparts, the animals.

The Vedic Perspective

The Vedic texts offer some interesting insights into this state of affairs. They agree that humans are endowed with a higher intelligence that makes them unique among all forms of life. They further state that this higher human intelligence is meant for a purpose far loftier than searching for better ways of obtaining bodily pleasures. Equipped with their special intelligence, humans are meant to probe into the deepest mysteries of life. The Vedic texts thus urge all humans to explore the spiritual frontier of life.

For such enterprising spiritual scientists, the Vedic texts present a comprehensive, consistent and cogent body of knowledge that answers all the fundamental questions of life. In essence, they explain that a nonmaterial self, known as the atman or the soul, animates the body and a similar non-material Supreme Being, known as the Paramatama or the Supersoul, animates the cosmos. When the soul and the Supersoul are in harmony, every moment of life becomes filled with ever-increasing joy. Sub-human species have no opportunity to achieve this fullness of life as their under-developed intelligence allows them no access to the spiritual dimension. Only when the soul gets a human body is he endowed with the intelligence to penetrate the superficial world of matter and perceive the spiritual energy within the cosmos. Humans alone can harmonize themselves with the totality of the cosmic energies - material and spiritual. When a human being achieves this harmony, he gains access to a whole new world of profound knowledge, thrilling experience and unlimited happiness. The Vedic texts also delineate a systematic program centered on meditation on divine sound, by which a spiritual scientist can experience these higher realities of life.

The Massive Blunder

In the modern times, humans have exercised their intellects tirelessly to understand the world of matter. This has resulted in significant advances in science and technology. But modern science has been dogmatically reluctant to investigate the spiritual dimension of life. A thinking person can easily perceive that life has an aspect

higher than the material. Can electrons think? Can atoms have emotions? Can molecules desire? Can chemicals experience love? Obviously not. Within the framework of material science, there is no explanation whatsoever for the phenomenon of consciousness. Although the reality of consciousness is undeniable, modern science has done precious little to understand it; indeed, modern science has religiously restricted itself to the study of matter.

The Vedic texts assert that to keep the human intellect locked within the realm of matter is gross underutilization of the tremendous potential of human life. Worse still, when deprived of access to the spiritual realm, a human being cannot experience the fullness that he intrinsically longs for. He frantically searches for that fullness by manipulating matter in newer and newer ways, but to no avail. The resulting frustration causes such a human being to become stunted, throttled and distorted. Overindulgence in matter and negligence of spirit backfires and results in disharmony, distress and disaster.

The modern world is bearing the brunt of this colossal imbalance of material and spiritual values. Individually there is an increase in dissatisfaction, stress, depression, addiction and suicide and globally there is an increase in unrest, criminality, violence and terrorism.

Dare To Be Special

The essence of a living being is his desires; it is our desires that direct and determine our entire life. A human being may advance in science, technology, culture, art, literature and even religion, but if his driving desires are the same as those of the animals, if he is still interested only in eating, sleeping, mating and defending, he is not much superior to the animals. A person may have seemingly special externals – a fancy hairstyle, a fashionable dress, a hi-tech mobile, a flashy car, and so on, but if his internal desires are the same as those of the ordinary animals – to attract the opposite sex, to seek titillation of the tongue and so on, such a person is nothing more than a sophisticated animal. If his desires are not higher than those of the

animals, his material advancement is but an eyewash. By such a façade, a human being succeeds only in cheating himself of the highest happiness that is due to him as a human.

A human being becomes truly special only when he makes his desires higher than those of the animals. Such a human being dares to desire the highest happiness that genuine spirituality alone can provide. Being a connoisseur of pleasure, he rejects the pleasures that the animals are seeking, considering them unworthy of his developed intelligence. He wisely refuses to tread the beaten track that all other living beings are pursuing, a path that leads to old age, disease and death. The Bhagavad-gita (7.3) declares that such a human being is very special and rare; indeed he is one among millions.

Therefore, the onus is on every intelligent person to choose his desires. Will he continue to be just another face in the crowd, another ordinary creature with the same desires of eating, sleeping, mating and defending that everyone else has? Will he continue to be just another figure in the meaningless statistics of this world? Or will he be bold enough to be special - by pursuing lofty spiritual goals in life? Will he take up the challenge of pioneering an ongoing global spiritual awakening that is the only hope for the modern misdirected civilization? The world is waiting to see.