

The Idea of Happiness: A Study with the Perspective of Epicurus

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ABSTRACT

Happiness means the peace of mind, it is an apprehension, and the happy life means the pleasant life. Pleasure is the road which leads us into the happiness. One may live his life with pleasure, but may not get the happiness. For happiness the knowledge is very much required. Living with Wise, Well and Justice is the mantra to live a happy life. Furthermore we have to mould our way of thinking, our thought process, and our arguments philosophically in order to achieve happiness. Not only that we have to know our limitation and act accordingly. Our desire give us pleasure, but our desire also give us pain. So we should desire in such a way that desire cannot gives the pain. We should live simple basic life instead of luxurious life for living happy life. What is happiness, what is the way to get the happiness, what kind of life we should live to achieve the happiness in life, what is the role of pleasure in happiness are the some points which are discusses here with the perspectives of Epicurus.

Keywords: Epicurus, happiness, idea.

INTRODUCTION

Epicurus (341-270 BC) was an ancient Greek philosopher and the founder of Epicureanism, he thinks that all animal including human beings are the pleasure seekers and it is a natural instinct to the animals to pursue the pleasure. It is said that searching pleasure and avoiding pain is the fundamental instinct of human nature. The aim of human being is to attain the pleasure and man ought to seek the pleasure because men desire the pleasure. Thus every pleasure is good for man. However he said that we have to accept pain in order to attain

pleasure. Again we have to reject the pleasure which lead us into the hole of sufferings. Morality is an activity which offers the pleasure. Virtue has no value if it cannot bring the pleasure. It is the pleasure who makes valuable to the virtue. The value of the virtue derived from the pleasure. ^[1]

Philosophy is essential for happy life. Philosophy is the path which leads us in the world of happiness. So if we want to get happiness in our social life then we need to get a touch of philosophy. Epicurus said to secure the happy life we have to mould our thought philosophically. Further he told 'philosophy is a daily business of speech and thought to secure a happy life'. ^[2] To acquire a happy life we have to understand the people whom we communicate, the society needs to recognize where we live and to apprehends the nature whose part we are. If we have not the proper knowledge of nature, fear may come after seeing the physical phenomena and as a result we move away from the happiness or peace of mind. We should gather knowledge not for only knowledge but to achieve happiness in our life. We much exercise ourselves in the things which bring happiness. ^[3] The presence of happiness means presence of everything and if we have lack of happiness our action should be directed towards the attaining it.

Way to Attain the Happiness:

We know that drawback of desire is the cause of unpleasantness. Although satisfaction of desire is equal to happiness, but any kind of non-reasonable desire cannot bring happiness. The desire should be regulated by the prudence and cultivated

by the virtues. This kind of reasonable desire is indispensable means of happy life. So here we see that the role of reason is very much high.

Epicurus accepted that the necessity of friendship in happy life. He thinks that happiness arises by sharing the philosophical thought and love, and for sharing love and thoughts no one is perfect except friends. 'Friendship dances around the world, announcing to each of us that we must awaken to happiness.'^[4] But there are some obstacles of happiness.

Obstacle of Happiness:

Epicurus suggests that mental trouble is a main obstacle of happiness. It is the mental thought processes which obstruct our happiness, neither poverty nor the things of desire can prevent our happiness. Anything which breaks your serenity, anything which disturbs our mind and anything which impedes our satisfaction can obstruct the happiness of our mind. Happiness is a mental thing and happiness can be achieved only through mentally. Physical things can give us physical satisfaction, but for happiness mental satisfaction should also come through physical satisfaction.

What is Good Life?

Epicurus said happy life is a good life, and the course of action which produces happiness in our life is a good action. Virtues such as courage, friendship, wisdom are good because it produce the happiness. Good actions are those which produce happiness. Epicurus gives very important to the acquisition of friendship for ensure the happiness on our life. Of all the means which are procured by the wisdom to ensure happiness throughout the whole life, by far the most important is the acquisition of friends.^[5]

A man who does not takes trouble himself and tries to not give trouble to other beings is a real happy and good person. He does not believe in partiality, favoritism, and anger, one should be busy looking for happiness without spreading hatred towards one another. Pleasure means lack of pain,

bodily and mentally both, and happiness is always uninterrupted. Where there is happiness, there cannot be a pain or trouble.

For Epicurus, all the pleasure is good; it is the main thing or criterion to choice or avoids of any object in our life. It is the pleasure by which we judge every good things and it is the pleasure which directs our aims our all activities which we want to do. Even our wish is also depend upon pleasure. We wish those things which give us the pleasure.

The Necessity of Knowledge for Happy Life:

Epicurus believes that for happy life one should live wisely and justly. Without the knowledge of living which is come from the continuous deliberation i.e. philosophical thought one cannot live the happy life. Further he said that wise, well and just living is the truest life of happiness. Anyone of these if absent then it is impossible to live a happy life. Here Epicurus might have meant wise living as knowledge about how to get ride from trouble, well living means live according to the gathered knowledge and just means live in accordance with the accepted and approved law by the society.

Pleasure in itself a good thing and pleasure can never be an evil. But sometimes it is happened that an object that produce the pleasure can be the cause of annoyances. Pleasure never bore; it is the things which produce pleasure bored us. Pleasure should be the main reason to choose any action; it should be the starting point of every choice and an end of any action. That is the reason to call pleasure as alpha and omega of the happy life.^[6] But though pleasure is the aim, yet we have to leave those pleasures which bring pain and we have to accept those pains which bring greater pleasure in our life so that we can live a happy life.

Epicurus said that we need the knowledge which frees us from the fear of death, god and other natural phenomena. And also free from the worry about the past, present and future. What is the way to

overcome from these fear Epicurus told that the study of philosophy. By studying philosophy one can overcome from these fears. Here the philosophy means the study or to understand the natural causes of things. "It would be not possible for a person to banish all fear about those things which are called most essential, unless he knew what the nature of the universe is, or if he had any idea that the fables told about it could be true; and therefore it is that a person cannot enjoy unmixed pleasure without physiological knowledge."^[7] So the knowledge of meta-physics or physics is useful or necessary for mankind.

The Necessity of Self-knowledge:

If we run our life following others, listening to who said what then our life will not be our life, it will be the life of loan. And in this types of life the pleasure we will get, that will be a mixed pleasure. For unmixed pleasure we have to know by ourselves applying our reason and it is possible only through study of philosophy. Another thing which we have to keep in minds that in this world and by this body and soul we cannot achieve everything that we want. One must have to know his or her own capacity, possibilities and position where he is, because life has its own limitation. One should know his limitation, if a man understands his limits then he can live his life happily. Mind is a source of happiness, if we can direct the mind in the right way, there will be no lack of happiness, because the mind does not lack enjoyment of the best life.^[8]

Think about Present:

Epicurus believes in one life, there is no other life after life. We do not know what will happen tomorrow still we are not enjoying the life in thinking of tomorrow. His view is like the views of Carvaka, who appeal to the people to eat, drink and be merry tomorrow you may die. Buddha is also said that do not dwell in the past, do not dream of the future, concentrate the mind on the present moment.^[9] Epicurus said that if we afraid about future punishment or imagine that god will punishes for misdeed

then we will never enjoy our present life. And the calmness of mind will never attain, which should be the end of our life. Moreover he said that our body and the soul is the combination of atoms. After death all the atoms will be destroyed. So there is no scope for rebirth or there are no chances of survival. Life is one; there is no reason to afraid the future punishment or fear of god or death. After death nothing will be remaining, everything will be finished.^[10]

The main tenet of their teaching is live in such a way that there is no regret in life. You do not control tomorrow so why think about tomorrow, think about present. Do not postpone your joy; do not die without truly living.^[11] For Epicurus, truly living means the life of happiness, and for happy life pleasure or enjoyment is the road which leads us to the real end of our life.

The Old are Eligible:

Generally peoples speaks that the young are the happiest person because they do not have any serious things to think. But for Epicurus it is not true, he said the young are stumbles in many mind, they cannot take the proper decision due to lack of experience where as the older or the experienced are the person who are happy or who can live the happy life. Because for him the old man has settled into old age as if in a harbor, secure in his gratitude for the good things he was once unsure of.^[12] Actually here he wanted to say that the young are those who are ignorant, having less knowledge about the nature of life, which is why they are suffering to take the right decision which will give him the pleasant life. Whereas the old are the persons who know the taste of life, wisdom is their mate that always shows the path of happiness. The love and the practice of knowledge always give the delight. Furthermore, 'I will be happy' one must have this commitment and confident to be happy.

The Necessity of Self-Control:

We are unable to control other thought and behavior, but we can control ourselves. If we want to live happy life then

we must attend to healing ourselves. If one cannot help himself, no one can help him. Epicurus said, we cannot control external world because the things of world is not in our hand, but we can control ourselves by controlling our emotion and passion and can attain pleasure by staying indifferent in all worldly matters. He said that a wise man can only achieve or enjoy imperturbability or the mental peace. Who are the wise men? A man who can control his passion, emotion and desire, he is a master of own self and who can stay indifferent in every worldly matters and whose desire is few. Though there is certain thing which cannot avoid such as food, water, sleep etc. but there is some conventional, artificial and luxury things which should be avoid in order to attain apathy. Mental peace, serenity and painless will come through the apathy.^[13] There is no limitation of desire so it is better to check the desire. Pleasure is possible only by staying indifferent. In Geeta it is also mention that one can attain pleasure not by fulfilling desire but by the sacrificing the desire. We must concentrate to our own power for living happy life. And the fact is we have a power to be happy. Epicurus opine that it is foolish to pray the gods that which we can supply for ourselves. A happy man never trouble to other man, because people are robbed when there is no peace in their mind.

Why Mental Pleasure is Preferable?

Epicurus did not distinguish between the higher and lower pleasure. Though Epicurus did not say about higher and lower pleasure but he preferred pleasure of mind than the pleasure of body. Why he prefer mental pleasure because the duration of mental pleasure is last long than the bodily pleasure. Bodily pleasure is just for the moment, we get this pleasure when our desire is satisfy, and it is inferior one because this bodily pleasure is encircled by the pain.^[14] But in the case of mental pleasure or pleasure of mind we can increase the duration of pleasure by remembering the past experience and also by the imagination of future events. He also

told that without the mental pleasure bodily pleasure cannot be fully enjoyed. When our mind is not fill with hilarities we have not get proper pleasure even by taking food or drink. From this it is proved that mental pleasure is required in order to enjoy the bodily pleasure. That is why Epicurus prefers mental pleasure.^[15] A man should not depend on external things for pleasure. External things are always changing and unreliable. For pleasure man must have rely on his own self, again we know that bodily pleasure is temporary and transient. So it is our duty to search such kind of pleasure which is last long. Epicurus said that a wise man can be happy even he is in bodily stress, because in his mind he is possess the inner tranquility, serenity and calmness.^[16]

Negative Pursuit of Pleasure:

The calmness and serenity of the mind is very much necessary for attaining the pleasure. In addition to this Epicurus also think that to follow the negative principles to attain the pleasure is much easier than to follow the positive one. Because the negative way is more useful, the negative principal viz. to controlling the desire, don't desire much, don't expect high, fewer want etc. we can practice easily these things than to positive pursuit of pleasure. The ideal of life should be the live with tension-free; the Epicurean don't want pleasure which is overwrought. Since the positive pleasure is beyond the reach of mortals, so they told about the negative absence of pain. Although the ideal is pleasure, but his world view is connected with luxurious pessimism as suggested by the WT Stace.^[17] The Epicureans will say that having nothing is more desirable than having something, because if you have something then you have fear to loose of that something. Thereby we lose pleasure also, because we have tension in mind and to enjoy the pleasure, it is very necessary to have serenity of mind.

Pleasure is not a thing which we can get after the satisfaction of desire. Pleasure does not consist in the contentment of the needs. When the need increases pleasure

moves away. Without bringing the pleasure into the life, the needs, the desires, the wanting, the longing etc. are the things which complicated and intricate our life. Epicurus said that the best means to becoming a happier person is to live simple life with simplicity, moderation, cheerfulness, temperance etc. [18] the wants and the thirst are the major cause of pain. He who can control his or her desire is the eligible person to be a satiated person. That person is worthy to be a happy person who can direct his desire.

A Man can Live Happy Life:

People have the freedom of will. He can do anything which he wants to do. He is not under any fate or unseen agent. There is no matter of past karma or law of karma. But no one can achieve happiness without the prudence, justice and honor. In order to attain the pleasure we have to follow certain morality. Without the moral life to achieve happiness is something irritating imagination. According to Epicurus the only standard of morality is pleasure and this pleasure is of course the individual pleasure. That is why his pleasure is called egoistic. There is no place for social or public good. It seems that Epicurus is believed the Sophist's view that 'man is a measure of all things.' And it can be said that Epicurus ethics is a hedonistic and support only individualism. [19]

Epicurus opines that pleasure is not drinking or eating delicious food or indiscriminate sexual intercourse with men and women. Regarding sexual desire, Epicurus' view is that it is unnecessary. Moreover he did not opposed to fulfillment of sexual desire; one should enjoy the sexual pleasure in any case following the law and convention and without harming anyone and damaging one's vital resources. Sex is a kind of action which did not harm and it did not do well also. The pleasant life is the life of honor, justice and wisdom. For pleasure it is enough to have some like minded friends, meek gardens and a simple vegetarian diet. [20]

The philosophy of Epicurus is covered by the pleasure; going a little further we can say that his philosophy is a pleasure philosophy. The pleasure, for Epicurus is the beginning and the end of happy life. Pleasurable life is a happy life.

CONCLUSION

The following points are come out by the above discussion, these are:-

- ❖ Pleasant life is a happy life, which is why we should seek pleasure. Pleasure is the thing that every being seeks. Because only pleasure can gift us happiness.
- ❖ The knowledge is very much required to attain the pleasant life. We have to mould our way of thinking, our thought process, our arguments etc. philosophically in order to live a pleasant life.
- ❖ The knowledge should be purpose oriented, and the purpose is to achieve the happiness.
- ❖ Happiness is a mental thing and happiness can be achieved mentally. The physical things only encourage it.
- ❖ Our desire can obstruct our pleasure, so we should know the technique of how to control the desire, unless and until we are not equipped with this technique happy life will be remain an ideal.
- ❖ Desire should be controllable and directed by the reason. Moreover virtuous actions and having friendships are the way to attain the happy life.
- ❖ Happiness is always uninterrupted. Pain is covered by pleasure and happiness is covered by the pleasure. Where there is happiness there is no pain.
- ❖ People have to live in wise, well and just in order to live happy life.
- ❖ Pleasure is the key to open the world of happy life.
- ❖ One should know his capacity, his limitation because an individual has his own power. That is why self-knowledge necessary for living happy life.
- ❖ Negative pursuit of pleasure is much easier than the positive one. Because the

negative way is more useful, viz. to controlling the desire, don't desire much, don't expect high, fewer want etc.

- ❖ One should know what is the basic thing that required for living, unnecessary things and luxurious things always takes us in front of the problems.

Finally, we can say that happiness is an activity and it is coming from the within not from outside. It is a choice action, if we really wish to be happy, we can be happy.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am very much grateful and thankful to the authors and the publishers of the books from I am taking help while writing this paper. Special thanks go to the book Epicurus *On Happiness*. London: Arcturus Publishing Limited.

FOOT NOTES

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2. On Happiness, Epicurus, Arcturus Publishing LTD., p. 23
3. On Happiness, Epicurus, Arcturus Publishing LTD., p. 87
4. On Happiness, Epicurus, Arcturus Publishing LTD., p. 10
5. On Happiness, Epicurus, Arcturus Publishing LTD., p. 62
6. On Happiness, Epicurus, Arcturus Publishing LTD., p. 90
7. Quotation taken from Frank Thilly, A History of Philosophy, p.102
8. On Happiness, Epicurus, Arcturus Publishing LTD., p. 60
9. <https://www.facebook.com/233305020161980/post/1581418192017316/?substoryindex=0&app=fbl>, retrieved on 05-01-2020
10. Y Masih, A Critical History of Western Philosophy, p. 129
11. On Happiness, Epicurus, Arcturus Publishing LTD., p. 115
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13. Y Masih, A Critical History of Western Philosophy, p. 129
14. See Anthony Kenny, Ancient Philosophy, p. 95
15. Y Masih, A Critical History of Western Philosophy, pp. 128-29
16. W T Stace, A Critical History of Greek Philosophy, p. 359
17. W T Stace, A Critical History of Greek Philosophy, p. 359
18. W T Stace, A Critical History of Greek Philosophy, p. 360
19. Y Masih, A Critical History of Western Philosophy, p. 130
20. See Anthony Kenny, Ancient Philosophy, pp.277-79

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How to cite this article: Debbarma S. The idea of happiness: a study with the perspective of epicurus. *International Journal of Research and Review*. 2020; 7(2): 85-91.
