

Managing Stress in our Daily Life¹

B Mahadevan²

Materialistic benefits and opportunities for consuming them are far more than what it used to be 20 years back. If you are in doubt please count the number of shopping complexes and malls, the number of cars and two wheelers on the road, the number of apartments and the number of new providers of products and services in the country. Despite this, peace of mind is a big challenge that society is currently facing. Working people complain of excessive stress and frustration. The number of young children being taken to psychiatric treatment is on the rise. Youngsters contract stress induced diseases such as hypertension and diabetes despite advances in medical technology. More and more people flock to yoga camps and spiritual retreats.

This raises a fundamental question of what indeed enables an individual to lead a life which is relatively more satisfying and rewarding than what we are currently going through. Is there something that we are missing fundamentally which is responsible for this predicament that we are in? Is there a simple idea that we can follow to reclaim our sense of fulfillment in our life? In this context, it would be interesting to understand how these issues were addressed by our ancestors. If we go through the *Purāṇas*, the vedic texts and scriptures such as *Upaniṣads* and *Bhagavad Gitā* we find a number of ideas. It is time we get to know some of these and make efforts to practice some of the ideals suggested by our ancestors.

Living in a World of Dualities

In order to understand this aspect we need to step back and see how several events in our life create stress and low morale to many of us. We all live in a world of duality. Success and failure, good and bad, desirable and undesirable, friend and foe, hot and cold, happiness and sadness, up and down, higher and lower and so on. The list of dualities is endless. Ordinary people get carried away by the pulls and pushes of life like a ship in the middle of an ocean being tossed here and there by a strong wind in the absence of a captain to navigate the ship. When the children do not get first rank in the examination the parents go through considerable stress (not to mention of the stress that the child goes through). We are told by everyone that only good things can happen in life and therefore we should build expectations around this idea. This is as good as saying that a coin has only one side!

¹ Mahadevan, B. (2011). "Gita Way of Life: Managing stress in our daily life", *Sadguru's Blessings*, Vol. 9 (1), September 2011, pp 22 – 23.

² B Mahadevan is a Professor at the Indian Institute of Management Bangalore.

Trading on this path we find ourselves in a mess that, any deviation from the targets that we are aiming for will create considerable psychological stress to us. In business organizations everybody is made to believe that on a quarter-by-quarter basis the financial results of the company can only be better. Any deviations from this induce enormous stress in the minds of the executives working in the organization. Every competitive examination and event that a child participates while it grows entrenches this idea strongly in its mind. Consequently, our understanding of the reality is so artificial that even for the slightest of the disappointments and failures in life we need to seek expert help, psychological counseling, resort to use of sleeping pills etc. These are indications of our growing inability to understand and make sense of life as it unfolds every moment in front of us.

Titikā: Cardinal Principle behind life

The crucial difference according to Lord Krishna between a person, who can lead a contented (and even a successful) life and others is the ability to handle this world of dualities. Therefore, Lord Krishna advises Arjuna to develop and nurture a capability to overcome the world of dualities:

मात्रास्पर्शास्तु कौन्तेय शीतोष्णसुखदुःखदाः ।
आगमापायिनोऽनित्याः तांस्तितिक्षस्व भारत ॥ 2.14

*mātrāaparśāstu kaunteya śītoṣṇa-sukha-duḥkhaḍāḥ
āgamapāyino'nityāḥ tāmstitikṣasva bhārata*

Life according to Lord Krishna is a roller coaster ride. Every one of us will encounter ups and downs in life during various occasions. As long as we are active, our five senses are alert and they will constantly feed signals from the outside world into our mind. Our mind is always trained to process every activity, the outcomes, the benefits and the impact on us from purely a perspective of a world of dualities. For example in a war the activity is war. Winning (*jayah*) and losing (*ajayah*) are the duality of outcomes of the activity. The benefits arising out of the outcome could be gainful (*lābhah*, if the war is won) or otherwise (*alābhah*), if the war is lost). The impact of the benefit to the warrior could be happiness (*sukha*) or sadness (*duḥkha*). Lord Krishna pointed this aspect to Arjuna and emphasized him to see beyond these contrasting aspects of activities, outcomes and benefits.

सुखदुःखे समे कृत्वा लाभालाभौ जयाजयौ ।
ततो युद्धाय युज्यस्व नैवं पापमवाप्स्यसि ॥ 2.38

*sukhaduḥkhe same kṛtvā lābhālābhau jayājayau
tato yuddhāya yujyasva naivaṃ pāpam-avāpsyasi*

Everything happening around us manifest in terms of the lens of the world of dualities. However, a wise person according to Lord Krishna understands that the world of dualities has two attributes: being temporary in nature and transitory in its effect. Therefore, he advises Arjuna to develop a sense of overcoming these. This is known as *titikṣā*.

Developing a sense of *titikṣā* is a crucial principle behind discovering our own happiness in life. It will help us perceive events unfolding around us with a high degree of realism. We will begin to appreciate that there are always two sides to a coin. It will equip us with mental courage to face up to the pushes and pulls of life more evenly. More importantly it will help us develop the wisdom of leading a satisfied life. Above all it will help us develop humility to accept things as it unfolds even while engaging in the thick of action.

It is important for us to impart this life principle to the younger minds. We need to encourage them to continuously strive for doing things better and yet take results as they unfold. The current view that the world belongs to only the “successful” people needs to be challenged. We need to remind ourselves that while developing capabilities to be successful may appear very useful, developing capabilities to transcend the world of success and failure is indeed valuable. There lies the secret behind discovering the peace of mind in our life.