

WHEN WE APPROACH LIFE'S EVENING HOURS

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Coming from a humble background, he had made it in life. Few in the city were ignorant of his riches. People in his field respected his special skills and envied his professional accomplishments. With all this, however, he was a depressed man. He was to celebrate his 70th birthday that day but his heart had anything but joy.

Gnawing at his heart were the frequent quarrels with his wife, the lack of mutual love between his two sons and, at work, an increasing number of his team members working for him out of fear rather than admiration. The family had planned for an evening out at the best (and most expensive) restaurant in the city. Deep inside, he did not want to go.

Achievements 'of the world' have really got to look like that. So the Bible talks of 'being in the world, but not of the world'. "It is wonderful if you know this Truth in this life; what a great tragedy it is if you do not," says the Kenopanishad.

Wealth, health, name and fame no doubt 'cause' happiness. These forms of happiness die soon, too. Those things that have a beginning have got to have an end too, say the philosophers. Self-knowledge (*ātma-jñāna*) is marked by 'uncaused happiness'. We rise above desires here; we let go of our attachments and live in quiet, open and alert consciousness. The ways of the self (ego) are fraught with expectation and anxiety. The way of the Self (*ātmā*) is distinct; there is flexibility and innocence.

As we approach the evening hours of our life, if not before, may we take up self-inquiry in all earnestness and realize the Self, seeing the difference between the eternal underlying the ephemeral. It is of course like swimming against the current. We have to let go of our strong habits. We are not talking about coffee or tea but such habits which judge or evaluate our own existence. For example, if we tend to measure our self-worth in terms of the wealth we possess, it is an error – spiritually speaking. We must put wealth in its proper place and not give it undue importance. Correcting our ways of thinking and evaluating (others and us), we can arrive at much peace.