

Can you really have it all?

One common saying today is that “You can have it all!” Well, the harmonious combination of spiritual abundance and material abundance is not quite as simple as it sounds. Is it good to enjoy life? Yes! However, what does it really mean to enjoy life? Can you really have material abundance along with spiritual abundance? Are most materially rich people equally wealthy in love, joy, happiness, and spiritual wisdom? Why did so many saints and sages choose to live simple lives when they could have just used the secret law of attraction to live in luxury?

These questions are especially important to consider in today’s world, with so many enticing things to enjoy, and where money, relationships, and career aren’t considered so much as options, but goals and requirements in their own right. Here are two contrasting takes on this topic, both from a spiritual point of view:

- **No, you can’t have it all.** For centuries, monastics of every tradition have concluded that keeping themselves away from the temptations of worldly pleasures was necessary to keep their attention focused on their spiritual or religious efforts. I personally spent a decade in a monastic-style ashram and very much enjoyed the experience of leaving the media-laden, commercial world in favor of a spiritually focused, simple (but nevertheless exciting and challenging) life. I didn’t read newspapers, rarely watched television, and went to only one or two movies during these ten monastic years. I wasn’t interested in money, relationships, or climbs up a corporate ladder.

Yet, although I didn’t have a chance to enjoy what many would call the good things in life, inside I was receiving precious spiritual treasures. My inner being was empowered and uplifted by my focus on scriptures, prayers, devotion, and enthusiastic service.

- **Yes, you can have it all.** Some modern-day preachers attract huge masses of followers by giving the enticing message that God — yes, God Himself — wants *you* to be rich! Even some ancient scriptures suggest that you can have material and spiritual abundance at the same time. One of the philosophies Swami Muktananda introduced to the spiritual mix of the late 20th century was a spiritual philosophical tradition called Kashmir Shaivism, which I cover in more detail in Chapter 14. This ancient and fairly obscure philosophy is one of the most complete, wide, and all-encompassing views of the nature of reality that I’ve come across.

One of the main teachings of Kashmir Shaivism philosophy is that this entire world and everything in it is made of divine consciousness. According to this view, anything can be a porthole for experiencing the divine, if you have the right kind of awareness.

Many philosophical schools and spiritual teachers from India set divisions between worldly life and spiritual life; however, Muktananda traveled the world, telling everyone to “attain God” right in the midst of their lives. While giving spiritual teachings and practices such as meditation and chanting, Muktananda explained that you don’t have to leave your families, your jobs, or your homes to attain spiritual realization, because this entire universe and everything in it is a play of divine consciousness. He would tell us to enjoy and witness the play of our lives. He’d encourage us to be filled with joy and ecstasy, and through spiritual disciplines and blessings, to see the supreme consciousness that exists in and as everything. He’d tell us not to despise or run away from this world, and explained that with a shift of spiritual awareness, you can attain God right where you are. Muktananda said, “Change your understanding. Change the prescription of your glasses. Know that you are a part of God.”

Clearly, this teaching suggests that you really can have it all. However, the key is to elevate your vision and understanding to a level from which you’re free from the traps of this world while still enjoying the world.

Finding true generosity

One afternoon, a wealthy man was riding in the back of his limousine when he saw a small group of poor people who were so hungry that they were eating grass from the roadside. The wealthy man ordered his driver to stop and stepped out to find out more about their situation. He asked one of the men, “Why are you eating grass?”

“We don’t have money for food,” the poor man replied.

“Well, you can come with me to my house,” replied the wealthy man.

“But sir, I’ve got a wife and three kids here, and my brother’s family also.”

“Bring them along!” insisted the wealthy man.

They all excitedly climbed into the limousine, and while being driven to the wealthy man’s house, the poor fellow gratefully said, “Sir, you are too kind. Thank you for taking all of us with you.”

The wealthy man replied, “Glad to do it. You’ll love my place. The grass is almost two feet tall.”

This humorous analogy demonstrates the way some people behave when they think they’re giving. Just as a child may give only the Halloween candy that she doesn’t want to her little brother, so some people who seem to be giving are in fact giving what they want to get rid of, or giving with strings attached, or to make an outer show of generosity, or to create a situation that will ultimately benefit themselves. Not everyone understands the spiritual practice of true generosity, where you strive to give the right thing to the right person at the right time, and in the right way.