

8. Karma and Divine Grace

The edifice of man's life is erected on four walls: *Janma, Karma, Dharma, Brahman* (Birth, Actions, Duties and Supreme Reality). These four walls are interdependent and inextricably connected with each other. What for does birth take place? To perform actions. How are actions to be done? Actions should be filled with *Dharma* (Righteousness). Through righteous actions one should realise the Brahman.

Man has forgotten this goal. Today actions are related to physical needs and *Dharma* is concerned with getting on in the world. There is no awareness of the Supreme. Without four bare walls, even a cottage cannot be erected. The mansion of life has to be supported by the four essential walls of *Janma, Karma, Dharma* and *Brahman*. *Karma* (Action) is the cause of birth. It is the life-sustaining force. The body is the instrument of this vital force. *Karma* sustains life in the body, through the body. Every action done by man is described as *Karma*. Man performs actions for the fruits thereof. He takes birth again to experience the results of his actions. That is why, it is declared in the *Gita*: "*Karma anubandheeni manushyaloke*" (Man's life in the world is bound by his actions). It is not possible to get away from action, but it is essential to perform actions properly.

Our condition in life is determined by our actions. Our habits are governed by our actions. Habits determine conduct. And conduct determines our future. Hence it is supremely important how we act. Good and evil in life are determined by the nature of our actions. To claim that "I am the doer, I am the experiencer and I am the enjoyer," is a sign of egoism. Good and evil result from actions, whether one is aware of their consequences or not.

Krishna and Dharmaraja

After the end of the Mahabharata war, Krishna approached Dharmaraja and told him: "Dharmaraja! The battle is over. You have been victorious. You must now be crowned as king." Dharmaraja did not accept Krishna's advice. He told Krishna: "Did I kill so many of my kinsmen and friends only to assume the crown? For whose sake should I become the ruler? I killed many of my kinsmen and I was also responsible for the death of many others. Over whom should I rule? What joy can I derive from such rulership? I have no use for this paltry kingship. I do not wish to be crowned." Dharmaraja pleaded in this way with Krishna and would not agree for his coronation. Krishna realised that it was no use himself arguing with Dharmaraja.

The ways of the Lord are mysterious. In everything He does, He sets an example to the world. No action of the Lord is without a purpose, though its meaning may not be obvious. When the Lord comes in human form, proximity to the Lord may conceal the full import of His words or actions.

Bhishma asks Dharmaraja to follow Krishna

Krishna thought that Dharmaraja would be more amenable to advice if it came from a venerable elder like Bhishma. So He took Dharmaraja to the grandsire of the Pandavas, who was lying on a bed of arrows. Krishna knew that Dharmaraja would heed Bhishma's sage counsel. If Bhishma advised and encouraged Dharmaraja to go through the coronation and accept the burden of kingship, Krishna felt that Dharmaraja would not refuse. So, after leaving Dharmaraja with Bhishma, Krishna retired.

Bhishma looked at Dharmaraja with tears streaming from his eyes and said: "Dharmaraja! Will you wholeheartedly respect my words?" Dharmaraja held the hands of his grandsire and reverently promised him that he had never gone against Bhishma's injunctions in the past and would never do so in the future.

Bhishma then said: "Dharmaraja! Before the war you relied on Krishna. You regarded him as your mentor. He, whom you revered as your mentor before your ends had to be realised, is worthy of the same regard even after your purposes have been realised. It is unworthy of you to ignore Krishna's advice now. You are looking upon him only as a kinsman. Krishna is God incarnate. No doubt he is your kinsman and friend, but you have no conception of his powers. Looking at the world externally, you are wasting your time. Look within and see the Truth," advised Bhishma.

Dharmaraja replied: "Grandsire! I know full well with what love you brought us up when we were left fatherless. You fostered us with greater care than even a father could have bestowed. But we fought against you in the war and brought you down. We resorted to a deceitful stratagem to make our Guru Dronacharya, lay down his arms. We killed numerous dear kinsmen and friends in the war. After all this, what joy can I derive by ascending the throne? Please spare me from the ignominy of coronation." Dharmaraja piteously pleaded with Bhishma in these words.

The bonds of *Karma* and Time

Bhishma smiling at Dharmaraja said: "The world is bound by *Karma*. Dharmaraja! You are well versed in the scriptures. Nevertheless, you speak about killing so many people. Who are the killed? And who are the killers? You do not have the power to kill or to make others kill. Killing and getting killed are consequences of past *karmas*. *Karma* is responsible for everything that happens. Let me illustrate this by a story."

Bhishma then related the following story: "A woman who had an only son lost her husband. Taking her son with her she was going through a forest to go to another village. On the way she rested under a tree with her son sleeping on her lap. Suddenly the boy woke up with a shriek and started crying. The mother woke up and noticed that a cobra had bitten her son and was wriggling back into an anthill. Within a few moments the boy died. While the mother was wailing helplessly over the death of her son, a highway robber, who was passing by that way, heard her cries and enquired about the cause of her grief. Learning about the death of her son from a snake bite, the robber decided to dig up the anthill and kill the cobra.

At that stage, the woman took hold of the robber's hands and pleaded: "Dear man! Please do not kill the cobra. Will my son get back his life if you kill that cobra? I cannot escape my fate." The robber said: "That poisonous snake can cause the death of others who may come here. I have a duty to destroy poisonous creatures." Then the mother replied: "Son! It is by the dictates of *Kaala* (Time or Fate) that this poisonous cobra bit my son. His death is the result of his own past *karnum*."

***Karma* is responsible for everything**

"We are not aware of the consequences of our actions when we do them. We grieve over our calamities when they occur. Behind every good or bad event there is a cause, Dharmaraja! People talk about *Yama*, the God of Death. He comes in innumerable forms to take life at the

appointed time. *Yama* is called Time or Destiny, Dharmaraja! *Karma* is responsible for everything. How is it that you could not see that a simple woman realised so clearly? You are well versed in all the *Sastras* and know what is wrong. Knowing that gambling is among the five great sins, you succumbed to play the dice and as a result had to endure innumerable difficulties including living in the forest as an exile with your family. Were not all your ordeals the consequences of your action? No one can escape from the consequence of one's deed. With God's grace the results can be overcome. But if one disobeys the command of the Lord, no one can save him. By going against Krishna's command, you will not save yourself from the consequences of your actions," concluded Bhishma.

Submit to the Divine Will

Finally Bhishma exhorted Dharmaraja in these words: The Divine Will is the basis of all action. The Divine can annul the consequences of these actions or provide the means of expiation for them. Hence, your duty is to carry out faithfully the Divine command. If you act to the contrary you will be ruining your life. Bow to Krishna's command and get yourself crowned."

Dharmaraja, however, continued to be racked by doubts as to how the law of *karma* operated. Was the boy's death from the cobra bite a decree of Fate? Bhishma reassured Dharmaraja, the Lord grants the fruit of every action, according to each person's deserts, in any form, in any situation, through any agency. All results follow from the actions. The wicked Kauravas, although they knew the principles of morality and justice, subjected the noble Pandavas to such troubles and ordeals that ultimately their entire clan was destroyed. Because the Divine was on their side, the Pandavas were victorious. Bhishma, therefore advised the Pandavas not to ignore Krishna's advice in the hour of their success.

It is not easy to explain in what form and in what manner *Karma* follows a person. A cow, which feels proud about its horns and its size, finds itself controlled by a rope through its nostrils on account of its *karma*. Hence one must bear with whatever troubles that may come, treating them as the consequences of past actions. But the effects can be mitigated or removed by earning the grace of the Divine.

As you sow, so shall you reap

Men today do not view things in this manner. Considering some person as the author of his misfortunes, they tend to abuse him, without thinking about their own actions. They should realise the Truth of the saying: "As you sow, so shall you reap." Your present state is the result of your past actions. Therefore, by doing good acts in the present, you must ensure beneficial results in the future. Everyone should realise that for happiness or sorrow, profit or loss, his own actions are responsible.

Of all actions nothing is so reprehensible as the violation or ignoring of the Divine's injunctions. The *Vedas* have emphasised the important role of *Karma* and urged that due regard should be had for its operation.

Students should try to understand the inner meaning of all teachings. They should not concern themselves with the actions or words of individuals. They must concentrate on their respective duties. Intelligent persons may discuss matters of moment. The small-minded may discuss personalities. Both types of discussions are likely to be exercises in futility. What should be realised is that nothing happens without a cause and that every result is the outcome of a particular action. Once the cause is understood, one should act on that understanding, avoiding

actions which are bound to have undesirable consequences and performing actions which will yield beneficial results. Do not be concerned whether someone is watching your actions or not. God is certainly watching your actions. Therefore you must take care to act righteously at all times and in all situations.

Today people claim to be working for world peace. How can those who have not achieved peace within themselves hope to achieve world peace? Those who have not learnt to look within themselves and cultivate a broad spiritual outlook are not competent to work for peace in the world.

Education is for acquiring wisdom

Students! Your actions are responsible for your good or ill, your fame or disgrace, your joy or grief. Do not get excited over petty demands and desires. Fix your minds on permanent ideals. The discipline you observe should not be confined to your tenure in the college. When Bhishma questioned Yudhistira whether his faith in Krishna endured only as long as the war lasted, Yudhistira was bitten to the quick. He realised his mistake and felt repentant deep in his heart.

Today's students, however, seem to be immune to such appeals. Do you need Sai Baba only for obtaining a seat in the Institute? Don't you need the help of Sai after you have finished your studies? You will need Sai always. You must not forget how you completed your studies and what the Sathya Sai Institute has done for you. If you forget this, you are in for all sorts of troubles. You should not forget the pledge you have given to the Institute, whatever difficulties you may confront. Remember the example of Emperor Harischandra who went through every kind of ordeal to honour his plighted word. Treat your word as a sacred expression of the Divine. Do not speak ill of others. Do not give room for attachment and hatred in your hearts. Education is for acquiring wisdom, not for getting material wealth.

Bear in mind the message of the sages

Do not treat lightly your human birth. Show respect for words of elders, parents and teachers. The Yadava clan, in which Sri Krishna was born, was totally destroyed because of the disrespect shown to a sage. Bharath's history is full of the lives of great souls. Bear in mind their message, which will be of use to you sometime or other. Their teachings are wholesome medicine for the spirit.

Mundane existence is subject to a variety of diseases. For all of them, remembrance of the name of the Lord is the panacea. When you install the name of the Lord in your hearts, revere your parents and respect the Divine that is present in all beings, you will be able to lead ideal lives. Pursue your studies for achieving consummation. Cultivate good habits. Thanks to your good *karmas* in previous lives, you are having the good fortune of studying here. Take full advantage of this precious opportunity.

Krishna operates "Cancer" in the body politic

Dharmaraja once asked Krishna: "Krishna! Why did you bring about this disastrous war for the sake of this contemptible rulership over a kingdom? Forty lakhs of warriors died in this battle. Only the Pandavas have survived. Is there any justice in sacrificing the lives of forty lakhs of men for the sake of the five Pandavas?" Krishna replied "Dharmaraja! You are looking at the numbers involved I am looking at the principles at issue. Can any crores of insects equal a lion?"

"*Kurukshetra* is comparable to the body. *Kuru* means work. The body is the instrument of action. Because it is the field in which action takes place, it is called *Kshetra* (field). Supposing in the back of the body, there is a gangrene. If it is allowed to grow, it will spread throughout the body. If the gangrene is on the arm or the leg, you can remove it by the amputation of the limb concerned. But when it is in the back, how do you deal with it? A major operation will be necessary. Likewise, the evil qualities in the Kauravas were like cancer in the body politic. If they had been ignored, the entire nation would have got infected. Hence, acting as a surgeon, I carded out the operation of the Mahabharata war, with Arjuna as my assistant. In the process, forty lakhs of "microbes" died. For the sake of saving these microbes should we let the patients die? To save the individual you have to eliminate the cancerous microbes. Likewise, persons with evil qualities are like cancer cells. I saved the nation by destroying these bacteria. There is no sin in this," declared Krishna.

How the Divine acts

If for doing a good deed, you have to cause a little harm, even that should be regarded as a help. But, in all such cases, there should be absolutely no element of self-interest. Whatever help is rendered, with a selfish motive behind it, is no help at all. Because the Divine is totally free from self-interest, whatever He does is utterly blameless and is solely for the welfare of the world. It is foolish to question the propriety of God's actions. There is nothing beyond His powers. He is the creator, the protector and the destroyer. When He protects, no one asks why He protects. But when He does not protect, questions are asked about His inaction. When the Lord punishes, the question is asked: "Why does God inflict punishment? Is it not wrong on His part to do so?" Such questions are motivated by selfishness and self-interest. God is totally free from any taint of self-interest. To indulge in controversies over the Divine actions is supreme folly.

There is a valid reason behind every action of the Divine. Therefore, your duty is to pray to God and secure His grace. Take, for instance, the case of Sakkubai. When Sakkubai wanted to join the pilgrims going to Pandharpur, Krishna could have openly arranged for her joining the party. But He did not do so. If she would have gone against her husband's will, she would have got a bad name. To maintain her good reputation and show her as an example to the world, Krishna assumed Sakkubai's form and subjected Himself to all kinds of harassments of the mother-in-law, while the real Sakkubai was sent to Pandharpur. Why did Krishna do this? The Lord is ready to assume any form and subject Himself to any hardship to uphold *Dharma*. On the one hand, public opinion has to be respected. On the other side, the devotee should not go astray. Only the Divine knows how to reconcile these opposites.

Men in general can look at things only from their personal point of view. They cannot have an integral view of things. Students should note that on one side they have to set an example to the world by their behaviour. At the same time they have to conform to the Will of the Divine. They have to follow both these courses. They have to please their parents who have done so much for them. They have to bring credit to the Institute which has been their Alma Mater. Whether you are here or elsewhere, your conduct must be the same. It is unworthy of a human being to vary his behaviour according to place and time.

Sanctify every act

Recognising the supremacy of action, you must see that everything you do is pure and holy. Action is not limited to what you do with your hands. What you hear, what you see, what you speak and even what you think---all of them constitute action. This means that the things you

see, the words you hear, the thoughts you think and the speech you make should all be pure. All that you take in through your five senses should be wholesome and pure, and not merely your food alone. Only then can it be *Satwic*. Devotion is not confined to *bhajans* and exhibiting a yearning for Swami. Every one of your actions should be filled with devotion.

Each one is the architect of his destiny. And as Bhishma pointed out to Dharmaraja, no one can avoid the consequences of his actions. What he can do is to pray to the Lord and show him how he can atone for his wrong doings.

It is essential to suffuse all our actions with *Dharma*. That *Dharma* should be dedicated to the Divine. When this happens, life becomes sanctified. There may be no rebirth at all. Therefore, build your lives on the four pillars of *Janma, Karma, Dharma* and *Brahman*. This is my benediction for all of you.

Discourse to the students of the Sri Sathya Sai Institute, at the students hostel, 21 Feb 1988

Sacrifice is sweeter than enjoyment. Sacrifice should become the aim of life. Only through sacrifice can one attain peace. Sorrows do not flee from us as long as the mind is not at peace with itself. Agonies dwell forever within us. Without the tranquillity of the soul any amount of wealth cannot be of any use. Surrendering the fruits of action with a dispassionate mind is eligible to be termed sacrifice.

Sathya Sai Baba