

QUESTION & ANSWER SESSION: Q. 304,

ON FREE WILL AND HOW TO ESCAPE THE EFFECTS OF DESTINY

These questions are from Prof. Anil Kumar's Satyopanisad, Volume 1

Om Sai Ram

Today's question is:

Q. 304: Swami, today everyone speaks of free will. Do we really have free will?

Here is Bhagavan's answer:

Man has no free will. It is only God who has free will. Being a slave to the senses, how can you claim to have free will? From where do you get free will? God alone is free and hence He alone has free will. That is why this free will is an absolutely divine attribute. How?

Here is a small example. When a man suffers from a paralytic stroke, he is not able to lift or move the paralyzed part of his body. Come on! Let him now try in the name of free will. So there is no free will as such, and it is ridiculous to think so. There is no meaning in that claim.

Swami, in modern society much knowledge is only half-knowledge and partial understanding. We just don't have a clear picture of anything. We want to know the difference between free will and Divine will.

Bhagavan: It is ego and ignorance that prompt doubts of this kind. On account of body identification, you are not able to know reality. In fact, you are a slave to your senses. So you are not free. How can you have free will then? God is the master of all. He is above everything. He is not bound or limited by anybody or anything. He is absolutely free. Hence, it is only God who has free will or Divine will.

Today everyone thinks that he has free will, enabling him to do anything of his choice and that he can decide anything in the name of his free will. This may be one thing today and quite a different thing tomorrow; but the Divine will never change. While exercising your free will, you may succeed or fail, win or lose. If you succeed, you become proud and egoistic. If you fail, you become frustrated and disappointed. But the Divine will is a transcendental phenomenon.

What you should do is simply surrender to the Divine will. It means readiness or preparedness to receive and accept happily whatever happens in your life, good or bad, with the feeling that it is only for your ultimate good. You must accept it as God's gift to you. This is true *jnana* and *bhakti*. In fact, you do not know what is good for you. God knows the when, the why, the what, and the how of everything, of everyone. Everything happens according to God's will or the Divine will.

If you know and sincerely believe this, you will never be elated, egoistic, proud, frustrated, depressed and disappointed once you have truly surrendered to the Divine will.

The Divine will is preset in the guise of your conscience, reminding you of your responsibility. It is the *antarvani* or inner voice. But you neglect it and don't pay heed to its appeal and message, and so you suffer. With your mind turned inward, your intellect tuned to the fundamental principle and your senses kept under strict control, you can hear clearly your Inner voice, which is none other than the voice of God. The Divine Will is the master plan of God.

Swami, on a related topic, one cannot escape from the effects of fate or destiny. Things are pre-ordained, and accordingly, events happen in our life. This being inevitable, we suffer and face difficulties. Would you please tell us the way out of this?

Bhagavan:

Everything in life is nothing but a reflection of your own thoughts and deeds of your earlier life or lives. You pretend happily to think that none can notice

you. But God within you knows full well all your thoughts, feelings and deeds. God is everywhere. You cannot hide anything from Him. One day or another, you must face the consequences of your actions. This is the supreme truth.

You think and blame someone else, holding him responsible for your troubles. You are thoroughly mistaken here. Your actions are responsible for both the good and the bad you experience in this life. God is an eternal witness of all human activities. He created this world and gave it to man for his enjoyment, but on one condition that he must face the consequences of his own actions. God is like a postman. He is least bothered about the contents of the letters that he hands over to people. It is all a matter of the relationship that exists between you and the one who writes you a letter. God is not concerned in any other way about the matter.

Well, when you receive a wedding card, you don't pay compliments to the postman, do you? Or if you receive a threatening letter from someone, you don't blame the postman either. So the postman is merely an instrument in the process of delivering letters.

But prayer does help you to withstand tensions and problems with courage. Intense prayer, deep devotion, strong faith, sincere repentance, constant yearning and supreme love for God can alter the sequence of events in life. They can make even God reverse His own will.

Take for example, the life of Markandeya. Fate granted him only sixteen years of life. But his devotion to Lord Siva was so intense that He made him immortal. God had to review and revise his own master plan in response to the prayer of Markandeya.

Take another example. There is a prisoner who is punished according to the law of the penal code. During the period of imprisonment, if the character and conduct of the prisoner are found to be good and if he follows all the rules, regulations and code of discipline imposed by the jail authorities, there is scope for the reduction of his jail term.

There is another point you should note. Suppose the appeal of a person in a criminal case is lost in all the courts from the district level to the High Court or even the Supreme Court. When a punishment like the death sentence or life imprisonment becomes imminent and inevitable, the President of India can still order his release from jail on the grounds of mercy, and for special reasons.

Similarly, though you are bound to suffer and destined to face difficulties as a result of your past actions, God, in response to your sincere prayer and repentance, will change the course of your life and save you from your suffering. God confers special grace on you, being pleased with your single-minded devotion to Him.

Thank you for your time. Next week we will continue with more important questions from Prof. Anil Kumar's book *Satyopanisad, Vol 1*.

Sai Ram