

Satsang with Swami Dayananda Saraswati

Arsha Vidya Gurukulam

Good and Evil ¹

Question

Swamiji, Is there such a thing as evil in the world? If not, how does one account for the atrocities committed both at the individual and the collective levels?

Answer

Evil cannot be a force. If it were, then we would have two opposites—a divine force and an evil force, both of which would have to be resolved into another Almighty. We would therefore have to create another force in which both of these forces existed.

If we analyze evil, we find that it is, after all, within free will itself. There is no other evil. For instance, we cannot say a person is evil. Evil is only the abuse of one's free will. Abuse of free will is possible only because the will is free, meaning that there is choice in one's actions. Therefore, behind every evil action, there is an abuse of free will. This is something we have to accept.

There is, then, no such thing as an evil force opposed to *īśvara* the Lord. Some people, because they imagine an evil force as something that we come under the influence of, think that we should join *īśvara* and fight against the evil. This suggests that *īśvara* is helpless in the face of this so-called evil force.

If all that is there is *īśvara*, the Lord, where is evil? The only evil is ignorance. Free will itself is not evil. Because there is ignorance of the fact that there is only

īśvara, a second thing comes and, once a second thing comes, there is fear. When fear is there, greed is there and when greed is there, evil force will also be there.

Evil and the abuse of free will exist because there is no understanding of *dharmā*, the order that is *īśvara*. This lack of understanding can be at the individual level and at the collective level, also. If ten egos join together, they become one ego—a collective ego. Then, there is a collective use or abuse of freedom. In all large scale genocides, mass murders and colossal exterminations, there is a collective abuse of freedom.

One's *karma* can also be a consideration here. But once we say there is an abuse of free will, we cannot bring in *karma*. This would be like saying that it is someone's *karma* to be murdered and the murderer is helping the person to fulfill his or her *karma*. No one is going to commit homicide to fulfill someone else's *karma*.

There is definitely, however, such a thing as a collective use and abuse of free will because there is a collective ego, a collective entity. There is a community ego, religious ego, a group ego, a corporate ego—meaning a huge ego—and a national ego. The national ego of a particular nation can abuse its collective free will and destroy another nation. Similarly, the religious ego of a particular religion can destroy another religion. The cultural ego of a culture can destroy another culture and one community ego can destroy another community. The male ego can destroy the female and female ego can destroy the male.

Any mass movement is a collective ego. You can identify with all females and a collective female ego results. Students joining together is another example of a collective ego. A collective ego is also seen in the pursuit of the murderer of a

police man. The entire police force develops one ego, collective ego, and pursues the person who committed the murder.

The gods and demons, the Pandavas and Dhartarastras in the *bhagavadgita* also represent the collective ego. A collective ego can be for good or bad. This, then, is what we mean by good and evil.

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