

Satsang with Swami Viditatmananda Saraswati
Arsha Vidya Gurukulam
Liberation for an Atheist

Question

Can an atheist who does all the right things attain *mokṣa*?

Answer

This is a very theoretical question. Who is an atheist? An atheist is one who does not believe in the *śāstras* or God, or in *pun̄ya* or *pāpa*, or in the Law of Karma. How can he do what is right? How can he do everything that is right? He does not even know what everything is and what is right. What does it mean he does not believe in God? The Taittirīyopaniṣad says:

असन्नेव स भवति । असद्ब्रह्मेति वेद चेत् ।

asanneva sa bhavati, asadbrahmeti veda cet.

If a person takes Brahman for an unreality, truly he becomes a non-entity [Taittirīyopaniṣad, 2-6].

When one says that there is no God, he himself becomes non-existent, because God is not an entity somewhere in heaven that we have to believe in. God means that there is truth or order in this life. It also means that the life has a purpose, and if he does not believe that itself, then what guides his life? Only when you accept that there is truth or order in the life, your life will be lived in keeping with the truth. If you do not believe in an order, or in the truth, then you do not believe in *dharma*, or in the values and you do not believe in anything.

“No Swamiji, he does not believe in God, but he believes in *dharma*.” If that is so, then he believes in God automatically. He may not believe in God with four hands, but if he believes in *dharma* or righteousness, then he already has a belief in God.

We have to ask an atheist what he means by calling himself an atheist. What do you not believe in? Do you believe that there is no goal in life? Do you believe that there is no order in life? Do you believe that there is no *dharma* in life? Do you believe that there are no values in life? How can you believe that? Nobody can deny the existence of values in life. Who are you not to believe in values like truthfulness or non-violence? You are already born with those values. There is no question of not believing in them. You know very well that

you do not want to be hurt. You know that the other person also does not want to be hurt. Where is the question of belief? You know that you do not want to be cheated. Others also do not want to be cheated. So you know what is right and what is wrong. Nobody can claim ignorance to this basic fact of life and if you still claim that you do not believe in these values, then you have some emotional problem.

All 'isms' are born out of emotional problems. Nothing else. An emotionally disturbed person can not do everything right. He is a disturbed person. Therefore, he cannot do everything right. You require an alert, thinking mind to do everything right. Doing everything right is not easy at all. It is a very difficult thing to do. The more you are committed to doing things right, the more difficult and subtle it becomes to determine what is right and what is wrong. It requires a very thinking mind. So it requires a mind that is 'together,' and that togetherness can be there only when you are living a life based on proper values and understanding. If the basic understanding is wrong, how can you be together as a person? Therefore, this is a theoretical question.

I do not believe that there is a true atheist. People just say these things. That is all it is. They take pride in themselves by declaring that they are agnostic or atheistic. I do not think they truly understand what is meant by that. They have some vague notions about God and then deny that 'vague' God. That is their problem. If someone truly understands what we mean by God and rejects our vision, then we can engage him in a discussion, and find out what he does not accept¹.

¹ Transcribed and edited by Chaya Raj and KK Davey.