

**Satsang with Sri Swami Veditatmananda Saraswati**  
**Arsha Vidya Gurukulam**  
**More on Freewill versus Destiny**

*Question*

When I use my free will and perform an action, am I not still acting under the influence of destiny?

*Answer*

This is a question that is asked often. What is freewill and what is destiny? Is an action performed out of free will or does destiny make me perform the action in a particular way? We cannot really declare what the extent of free will is and what the extent of destiny is. Both are present in our lives. We have to accept the many things that we cannot control as being destiny. On the other hand, there are a few things we can control and our freewill comes into play when we do control them in a given situation. There is thus some freewill and some destiny in every action. However, it is difficult to determine the extent of destiny and freewill in our actions.

When I act out of an impulse, I don't use my free will. For example, if I act out of anger, jealousy, or any one of these reactions, it is my impulse and not my freewill that determines what I do. We have the freedom to use our freewill if we choose to, and perform an action in keeping with dharma. In fact, each one of us knows what the right thing to do in most situations is. Even when I am about to hurt someone, something within tells me that it is a wrong action, for the simple reason that I myself do not want to be hurt. There is an inner voice that tells me that my action is wrong. I have the freedom to listen to that voice and act accordingly. This is the use of freewill. I am conscious of what is right and what is wrong and I have the freedom to do what is right. Sometimes we submit to our impulses, which are the result of our past actions. We do not exercise our freewill then and, thus, do not benefit from having freewill.

*Question*

What about the statement that Duryodhana is driven to do a wrong action even when he knows it to be wrong?

*Answer*

There is no freewill there. Duryodhana loses the capacity to perform an action out of freewill. An action that is performed in accordance with dharma is an action born of freewill. An action that is prompted by adharma is an abuse of freewill or the result of an impulse. Duryodhana says that there

are impulses that control him so he does not have the freewill to do what is right and he does not have the will power to desist from what is wrong.

However, there are occasions when Duryodhana is a kind person; it is not that every action he performs is an evil action. When he acts in a kind manner, he acts out of free will<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Transcribed and edited by Malini, Jayshree Ramakrishnan, and Krishnakumar (KK) S. Davey.