

Satsang with Sri Swami Veditatmananda Saraswati
Arsha Vidya Gurukulam
On Rebirth

Question

What happens to us in the next birth?

Answer

The *Kaṭhopaniṣad* (5-7) says, 'yathākarma yathāśrutam,' our destiny is determined in accordance with the actions that we perform in this birth and in accordance with the attitudes that we entertain. If I had lived as a God, I may be reborn as a *devatā*. If I had lived as a human being, I may be reborn as a human. If I had abused my freewill, it is conceivable that I may be born as a form of lower species also.

As a human being I am in a position to help myself or hurt myself. But there is no doubt that those who have dedicated themselves to the spiritual pursuit will never go down. Lord Krishna says in the *Bhagavad Gītā* (6-40):

*pārtha naiveha nāmutra vināśastasya vidyate
na hi kalyāṇakṛt kaścid durgatiṃ tāta gacchati*

Indeed, O Son of *Prthā* (Arjuna), there is no destruction for him (or her), neither here nor in the hereafter, because any one who performs good actions never reaches a bad end.

This means that one who has done *kalyānam*, acquired the wealth of *vairagya* (dispassion) and knowledge never goes down in the ladder of evolution. He only rises up. And in the next birth also, he will continue to rise from where he had left off in this birth.

Question

How do the lower species get uplifted?

Answer

The theory is that the human being alone can perform deliberate actions and thereby produce *puṇya* and *pāpa*. When I depart from here, then the whole course of my journey is charted out for me depending upon my *karma*. Among the *karmas* accrued in my account, the most predominant *karmaphalas* determine my immediate destiny. [This is analogous to a situation where the strongest in a group of children come forward to get their candies first, followed by the next most strong child and so on.] In the next birth, when I exhaust these strongest *karmaphalas*, the predominant *karmaphalas* accumulated in that birth will in turn determine the next destiny and so on. This chain reaction continues until we reach some kind of mixture of *puṇya-pāpa* that is suitable for being born as a human being.

Eventually, it is my *karma* in that particular birth that will lead me to taking the form of a different species if necessary. But, it is believed that ultimately I will come back to the human birth. The idea is that the lower species do not have to determine their destiny. It is already predetermined, until the soul comes back as a human being. It is difficult to say how long it might take for us to regain the human form, but it is best to not take that chance, as far as gaining self-knowledge. This is reinforced in these lines from the *Kenopanishad* (2-5), '*iha cedavedīdatha satyamasti na cedihāvedīnmahatī vinaṣṭiḥ*', if you gain this knowledge in the human birth, then your life has become worthwhile; if not a great calamity awaits you¹.

¹ Summer 2003 *satsang*, transcribed and edited by Subbalakshmi Chandrasekaran, Chaya Raj and Jaya Kannan.