

Satsanga with Sri Swami Veditatmananda Saraswati
Arsha Vidya Gurukulam
Various Types of Karma

Question

Please explain the terms *sañcita-karma*, *prārabdha-karma*, *kriyamāna-karma*, and *āgāmi-karma* in detail from a Vedic perspective.

Answer

Well, what is *karma*? *Karma* means action. Here *karma* is action that is deliberately performed by a human being with a sense of *kaṛtrtvam* or doership. Any action that is deliberately performed by us is an action that brings about a result. It is an action for which we are accountable. An involuntary action like breathing etc. does not produce any result because there is no sense of *kaṛtrtvam* or doership involved in it. That is why if somebody who is fast asleep kicks his neighbor we do not hold him accountable for it because he did not intend to do it. Even in a court of law, if it can be proven that some crime was committed by a person when he was not in his right mind he may either not be punished or get reduced punishment. That is why the defense lawyer will also try to prove that his client was provoked, or did not intend to commit a crime, or something or the other like that. The idea is that only an action intentionally done makes one accountable and produces a result.

An action that is in keeping with *dharma* or righteousness produces what we call *punya* or virtue. If that action is in violation of *dharma*, it creates the opposite. Therefore, *punya* and *pāpa*, virtue and vice, are the results of actions that are either righteous or otherwise.

As human beings, we are constantly performing these deliberate actions. One of the main reasons why actions are performed is the fulfillment of desires. We are born with all kinds of needs. We are born needy and most people also die needy. As these needs arise in the mind, the mind is prompted or sometimes compelled to perform the action to fulfill the needs or desires. Therefore, actions are usually performed as motivated by desires, by needs, or by expectations or demands. Since there is no end to desires, the fulfillment of one desire brings in its wake another desire. That being the case, human beings are continuously performing actions from birth to death. And, therefore, we keep on accumulating the fruits of these actions. The one who has a sense of doership and has performed the action is accountable for experiencing the results.

The next question is, “When will these actions give rise to results?” That depends upon the kind of action that has been performed. It is like asking when a given seed will result in fruit. That depends upon the kind of seed it is. Certain seeds bring forth fruits in about a year or two. Other seeds take a few years longer, perhaps five years or even ten. It depends entirely upon the seed. For instance, it may take a mango tree five years of growing before you get mangoes, while it takes a banana or plantain about two years to produce fruit; some seeds fructify soon and some take time. Similarly, there is no rule that an action that is performed now will produce results immediately. Some actions do give immediate results. Eating food appeases hunger as an immediate result. But when I perform an action of charity, service, or worship, it will produce results only in its own time. By the same token, if I hurt somebody, steal something or cheat somebody those actions will also bring about results in their own time. Therefore, of the number of actions that we perform during this lifetime, there are many that yield results in this lifetime itself, while there are many others that will perhaps not fructify during this lifetime.

One may ask what happens to those actions, which do not fructify in terms of results during this lifetime? They are stored in an ‘account’ for us to experience their outcome in the future. And, therefore, those results will be experienced in a future lifetime. It can be the following lifetime or a future lifetime; we do not know. We call them accumulated results or accumulated actions. The accumulated actions, which are waiting to fructify in the future, are called ‘*sañcita-karma*’. *Sañcita* means that which is accumulated. A *sañcaya-* is a collection. *Sañcita* is that which is collected or accumulated. Now, there is no beginning to this creation. Therefore, each one of us must have gone through countless human births and, therefore, performed countless actions. It is therefore possible that there are countless actions in our ‘account’ that are waiting to fructify. Theoretically, this can result in countless births; there is no end to the process of exhausting the results of the actions we have performed because we do not know how many they are. Not only that, but in the very process of experiencing the result of an action, I perform some more actions. These actions also add up, and thus we accumulate a huge store of *sañcita-karma*. It is like a certain amount of my salary getting automatically deposited in the bank every month. The amount in the bank accumulates each month. Some of that accumulated fund is invested in short or long term deposits for a period of five years, ten years, fifteen years, or even thirty years. Therefore, periodically, some part of that invested money results in the maturity of a deposit and then I

get back that chunk of money. Similarly, of all the *karma* that accumulates, the result of some of it may 'mature' and I then get the result of those actions. This is called *prārabdha-karma*, and is that which has given rise to this birth and this life.

Of all the *sañcita-karma*, that part, which has fructified and resulted in this body and this life, is called *prārabdha-karma*. It is *pra ārabdha* or *prakarṣana-ārabdham*, that which has begun to fructify or produce its effect. However, our 'deposit' continues even while we exhaust our *prārabdha-karma* in this lifetime as we continue to perform new *karmas*. And, in turn, that which fructifies will determine our *prārabdha* in the next lifetime. So the total continually keeps adding up. That is how *prārabdha-karma* works. As I live in this present life and experience the effects of my *prārabdha-karma*, I continue to perform new *karma*. Some of this new *karma* may yield results in this lifetime and some of it may get added to my store of *sañcita-karma*.

The *karma* that I perform now are called *kriyamāna-karma* or *āgami-karma*. They are the same. *Kriyamāna* means that which is being performed and *āgami* means that which will give rise to result in the future. Thus, there are three kinds of *karma*: *sañcita-karma*, *prārabdha-karma*, and *āgami-karma*, which is also called *kriyamāna-karma*.

All action is *karma*, but it is classified into three kinds because we are experiencing the results of some of those actions in the form of *prārabdha-karma*. To become free from the bondage of *karma*, all our *prārabdha-karma* should be exhausted, which is impossible. The only way to become free from this cycle of *karma* is to recognize that one is *akartā*, actionless, and recognize our real status in the sense that doership is not our true nature. All my actions were performed by the ignorant 'I'; the enlightened 'I' has nothing to do with them. This is just as in a dream I may do all kinds of things, which, at that time, seem very real. The dream-*karma* may well even give rise to a dream result of pleasure and pain. When I wake up in the morning, however, I have nothing to do with those dream actions or results because the one performing actions in the dream is no more. Thus, when I wake up to my true nature of being Brahman, all the actions that I perform as a *jīva* are applicable no more. Therefore, the knowledge of the actionless self is the only means to become free from the bondage of action and its result.

Question

Do good thoughts and bad thoughts result in *puṇya* and *pāpa*?

Answer

A thought that occurs in the mind without any effort on our part does not involve doership. What brings *punya* or *pāpa* is an action, which involves a sense of doership. That is, whenever I perform a deliberate action, it can bring *punya* or *pāpa* depending on whether that action is in keeping with *dharma*. An action that violates *dharma* is *pāpa*. But this happens only when the action is deliberate. If I happen to kick somebody in my sleep, that is not a deliberate action. I don't think I will earn either *punya* or *pāpa*. Similarly, when a thought simply occurs in my mind, there is no deliberation involved. It is not of my doing; no doership is involved. Therefore, a thought occurring in the mind does not bring any *punya* or *pāpa*. Doership may be involved only in what I do with the thought. My action alone can bring about *punya* or *pāpa*. So we need not worry so much about the thought occurring. Sometimes, people feel bad if a bad thought occurs in the mind.

A thought can occur because of past *karma* of which we are not aware. We have no control over that and don't know what thought might occur the next moment. We need not take responsibility for a thought that arises in the mind. However, what we decide to do with the thought involves some deliberation or doership. If it is a bad thought, just let it go. Try not to identify with it. If it is a good thought, you can choose to identify with it and act upon it. Therefore, a thought per se does not bring about *punya* or *pāpa*. The important thing is to be watchful about our thoughts and not allow them to build up, especially in the case of anger. Be aware of it and don't allow it to intensify. Perhaps then it will not do much damage¹.

¹ 2005 Arsha Vidya Gurukulam Family Camp *satsanga*. Transcribed and edited by Jaya Kannan, Chaya Rajaram and Jayshree Ramakrishnan.