



Yasodhara Yoga Talks 1975
Karma Yoga

Swami Venkatesananda

Yasodhara Yoga Talks

KARMA YOGA

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This series of talks was given at Yasodhara Ashram in British Columbia in the Spring of 1975.

Swami Venkatesananda regarded these as Swami Sivananda's Integral Yoga.

Over the course of 10 weeks, Swami Venkatesananda spoke for roughly 20 hours on each of the five major branches of yoga - Hatha, Bhakti, Karma, Raja, and Jnana, devoting 10 hours to formal talks in the morning, and 10 hours to questions and answers during the afternoons on each of these topics.

One discovers in the course of listening to these talks that the five are not separate paths; that each branch of yoga incorporates elements of the so called 'different' paths. While many people often focus on just one branch of yoga, one cannot escape the realization that it would be far better to assimilate them all in some fashion in order to create a balanced approach to sadhana or 'spiritual practice.'

Swami Sivananda taught that the aim of this integration - Integral Yoga or the Yoga of Synthesis - is to avoid becoming lopsided. In so doing, the aspirant nurtures the whole being. As demonstrated in the lives of both Swami Sivananda and his disciple, Swami Venkatesananda, the words 'whole' and 'holy' are completely interchangeable.

Yasodhara 1975 - Karma Yoga

The talks begin with an important reminder, that yoga is not something which we do. Certainly people ask the question: if I practice Hatha Yoga, what must I do? If I practice Karma Yoga, what must I do? If I practice Bhakti, or Raja, or Jnana, what must I do? Swami Venkatesananda reminds us early on in these talks that such questions miss the mark if we are to uncover the truth concerning yoga. The statement that yoga is not something we do may prove all the more confusing when applied to Karma Yoga, the so called 'yoga of action,' but it is a puzzle that can yield some insight, and, therefore, a useful place to renew our exploration of what yoga is and what it means to be a yogi.

April 28 - Introduction

Recapitulating the discussion of the meaning of that word 'yoga,' Swami Venkatesananda reminds us that there is no union that needs to take place, since there is no reality to the division we give credence to. The division is merely conceptual.

When you realize that consciousness is indivisible and that motion is inherent in that consciousness, you realize that motion is beyond self. That realization is true unselfish or selfless action. Karma yoga is not found in the things we do. Just because I am washing dishes without being paid, that is not really karma yoga. We may extend it to that activity, but that is just by way of courtesy. Karma yoga in truth, is the action of an enlightened person, in whose vision there is not division at all, who has directly realized the indivisibility of consciousness and the indivisibility of motion within it. With IT, not within me.

April 28 - Afternoon Session Q/A

In the first afternoon discussion and Q/A, hope and faith are discussed.

April 29 - Vasana, Samskara - The Four-fold Impulse.

In the interests of mythologising the way we perceive the spiral of kundalini energy, Swami Venkatesananda discusses the spiraling movement in consciousness, both movement, and the psychological effect (the vasana), as well as touching upon what the yogis call the four-fold impulse away from the center, the four goal motivated strands: wealth - prestige, acquisition, possession, pleasure, order, moksha or freedom.

April 30 - Inner and Outer Nature of Experience and The Mechanisms Behind The Facet of Karma as Destiny

Having looked at the four-fold impulse away from the center, as well as the pull away including vasana and samskara, Swami Venkatesananda asks a simple question: 'Does the bowl say the soup is nice?' It sounds absurd, doesn't it? It is

not a behavior we attribute to the soup bowl. Strangely enough, humans make a similar silly connection between themselves and experience. Swami Venkatesananda looks at ego-sense as 'collecting bowl' (of experience) and discusses the self-arrogatingness of the ego-sense, which mysteriously manages to project itself as experiencer of all experience. In the process, we look at both the imagined as well as actual inner nature of experience - at what actually experiences. Here we also look at both the chitta and sanchitta, the computer that records all experience, and the mechanism involved in our compulsion to repeat experience, forming the most popularized aspect of karma, 'karma as destiny.'

April 30 - Afternoon discussion and Q/A

Although some aspects of mind were discussed in the morning talk the aspect of mind defined as 'Sankhala-vikalpatmakam-manah,' was tabled for this afternoon's talk. Mind, buddhi, ego-sense, and self-arrogating principal (the me) are all 'on the table here.' Before the discussion ends, Swami Venkatesananda makes an important distinction between the ahamkara and jiva.

May 1 - Orthodox Doctrine Concerning Karma

May 1 - Afternoon Q/A

The Q/A begins Swami Venkatesananda's examination of the notion of 'free-will' and this becomes the subject matter of the afternoon discussion - and is continued in the next talk.

May 2 - Free Will Continued - Pursuit of Pleasure - The simple and Natural Life of Swami Sivananda.

May 5 - True Yajana, Dana, and Tapas

Karma yoga is to be practiced in the 'yoga spirit' without a motivation. Can you engage yourself in Yajna - sacrifice, Dana - charity, and Tapas - the simple life, with freedom, meaning without attachment, without motivation? This is the vital question asked in this session. There is no division in consciousness, and if motivation comes into this Karma yoga, there is a corresponding spiral away from the center, our famous spiral of consciousness, creating a low density 'consciousness,' which we call 'ignorance.' Swami Venkatesananda points out that the karma yogi does not work towards a goal, nor promote his/her own welfare through 'selfless service,' which is merely motivated activity in disguise.

May 5 - Morning Session Continued and Q/A

After the morning talk, everyone went to lunch, and during lunch more questions were asked about motivation, the doer, the spirals, and high and low density consciousness. Due to this 'under the table' discussion, Swami Venkatesananda, before entertaining the question and answer period, extended the discussion of

the morning talk in order to illuminate the central points, and began with the central question: If there is no motivation, then who does what? Is the I, or the ego-sense the doer of these actions?

May 6 - The Classifications of Action - Karma - Vikarma - Akarma - Tamas - Rajas - Sattva

May 7 - Likes and dislikes - Disciplines of Karma Yoga

Likes and dislikes - forming of the individuality. The types of action: right action, wrong action and appropriate action. Sadhana - the state in which you are struggling to reach a state of yoga. Goals - aiming at abolishing the division, also siddhi (the perfection) and moksha (enlightenment), non-attachment to the action, the avoidance of motivation, even if the reward is enlightenment or moksha.

On the disciplines of Karma Yoga: Engage yourself in such actions would as thin out selfishness. Nothing but total inner awakening can really remove selfishness. But in the meantime, while you go on living this foolish life, make your selfishness thin as possible, as weak as possible. Engage yourself in charity. Engage yourself in selfless service. Unselfish service is extremely difficult to understand, let alone do. And, again, totally unselfish service, or 'selfless service' is possible only to the enlightened person who has realized the individualized self, does not exist. So, till then, watch yourself and see how many ways you can detect the operation or function or the action, or activity of the self.

May 8 - The Bhavanas

Intro to the Bhavanas, or the 'Essential ingredient' of Karma Yoga: Niskhamabhavana or the absence of desire. Swamiji explores the spirit of renunciation, and by way of example, cites the life of Swami Sivananda.

May 9 - The Main Bhavanas

In this last talk of the Karma Yoga series, Swami Venkatesananda discusses the main Bhavanas: Niskamabhavana, Nimittabhavana, Narayanabhavana - or as it may also be called 'Atma-Bhavana. He begins by giving us a caution regarding the usual translation of bhavana: 'Bhavana has got about twenty or thirty meanings. The meaning in which is usually used is 'inner attitude.' To use the (more grammatically correct) phrase 'inner motivation' is dangerous, because it's the 'motivation' of non-motivation.

THE YOGI'S KARMA YOGA

Many people have mistaken yoga to mean the union of two independent objects. Looking at an empty bottle, one sees space inside it, space which appears to be confined by the bottle. One also sees space surrounding the bottle. So that, when the bottle is broken, there is an apparent union of the space in the bottle with the space outside the bottle. In fact, no union takes place, because space cannot be divided. Space is, after all, indivisible. And so, the division of space that one sees, and the reuniting of space that one sees when the bottle is broken, is merely apparent, illusory, conceptual. Similarly, the definition of yoga as a 'coming together' or 'integration' or 'union' can be equally misleading.

Much like our conceptual division of space, all kinds of silly concepts are raised by the mind, creating a division where no division exists. In our study of hatha yoga, we looked at this 'dividing factor', that which is called the 'self' or 'ego-sense', and found that the hatha yogi attempts to do something, be it sand on one's head, or hold one's breath, in order to realize that the self does not exist in the same way that this chair exists, that the self is not a factual entity. All our efforts at giving up the self, transcending the self, destroying the self, etc., have proved ineffectual, because we have been trying to remove something that does not exist; we are trying to cure phantom pain. Instead of dealing with the dealing with the ego-sense at its own origin, and seeing that it does not exist, we attempt to cure it, and thereby, we ourselves are endowing it with an apparent reality.

This mistake is made with all notions, even with what you call a 'bad habit'. The moment you have called it a 'bad habit', you have given it its own independent reality. No one has ever seen a cigarette jump all by itself into somebody's mouth, nor a goblet of wine pour itself down someone's throat. You can say you have been 'tempted by the devil', but you yourself make smoking or drinking a habit. You are the one who picks up that cigarette. You are the one who smokes it.

The ego-sense is affirmed in your rebellion against it. You may eventually open your eyes to this, but since you have created it, the ghost of it remains. So, in yoga, one must go back to the very source in order to become aware of that which is beyond self. Why 'beyond' self? We must go beyond because we started with accepting the self as apparent reality, even if illusory and temporary. That it does not exist is not your realization. The oneness of space is not what you see. You see this space as a room. You may grant that all which is outside the room is space, but as far as you are concerned, that all this space is indivisible is not your realization.

Do you see the point? You are in it, in this trap. You insure that the trap is not strengthened. If you are able to see that the trap becomes stronger by acceptance - attempting to build a fortress of security, or by rejection - kicking at the nonexistent walls, and therefore, another form of acceptance, than you must

come to ask if there is a third method whereby one understands that a trap is no trap? One must see that it is a trap because one sees it as trap. One must see that the totality without being trapped by the fragment. Do you see how simple this really is?

A person may be contemplating this whole business for a very long time, holding up the glass jar, contemplating space, when suddenly a whole new viewpoint comes through: 'My god, why did I think space moved inside the bottle. The bottle moves, not space'. In that moment, the indivisibility of space suddenly becomes real for that person. The glass bottle no longer obstructs the understanding. That is called yoga. The word 'realization' is often used, but not because the totality became unreal at any stage, but because your consciousness assumed the existence of this fragment - the trap, and instead of realizing the totality, kept struggling with the trap itself, thereby giving the trap reality.

In our study of hatha yoga, we took note that the yogi is not interested in making the trap strong, or making it sturdy, or living for multiples of three hundred and twenty billion years, but to realize that body or no body, there is something which is outside the self - 'outside' in the sense of not trapped or confined to the body, indivisible, which the body obeys, and which enables this body to live, to grow, to die and decay. This something is beyond the self. This realization of the indivisibility of the consciousness, of the indivisibility of energy, which alone is true, which alone exists, is yoga.

Yoga itself is indivisible. It is not as though I become a hatha yoga, and someone else becomes a karma yogi, and someone else becomes a raja yogi. No, no. In studying hatha yoga, you have already seen that the practice of hatha yoga involves devotion, traditionally regarded as the province of bhakti yoga, and meditation, traditionally regarded as the province of raja yoga, and also deep understanding, often considered the prerogative of jnana yoga.

We are about to investigate karma yoga. The word 'karma' means action. In light of what we have just about truth, or 'oneness' being indivisible, some of you might find the notion of action problematic. For example, one might well ask if action means the creation or the perpetuation of duality? Equally puzzling to some is how action is possible in the indivisible oneness. Luckily for us, and for the karma yogis, everything is action. Hatha yoga, asanas, pranayama, all of that, is action. Any mental activity, be it thought or spoken word, is action, and as action, is work. The work might be yoga practice, or it might be business administration, but is work none the less.

Fortunately or unfortunately for us, there are not many texts on karma yoga. There are practically none. I hesitate to say none, because two texts do deal with karma yoga. One is Mimamsa, which is not really karma yoga as such, but was considered to be. The other text, the Bhagavad Gita, is frequently used by yogis. Since the Bhagavad Gita is considered the gospel of action, it is frequently regarded as the gospel of karma yoga. In the Gita, you find a statement about

action which has a remarkably realistic outlook on life: You cannot remain doing nothing even for a single moment (III-5). Is it possible to do nothing? It is not. To do nothing is an absurd expression. Perhaps you may not think of sitting idle, or lying down, or gazing at the ceiling as doing something, but they are all acts of doing. You have a body which is endowed with some energy, and as long as that energy is there, there is motion, and therefore, action. You are doing something all the time.

You remember our discussion of the spiral? Action appears to confirm the spiral movement away from the center. In fact, any action seems to be a movement away from the center. Why? We have fixed in our minds that motion itself is 'movement away from' a particular point; that either one stays put, or moves away from point A to point B. For some strange reason, people do not realize that space is non-divisible space, and that any movement within the infinite, stays within it, and does not leave it. Thus, it is not understood that the glass jar moves without moving space. The space is not in the jar; the jar is in space.

And so, action itself seems to create a duality, a motion away from self. And what is more, there is not only motion, but side by side with this implied movement away from the center, there is motivation. It is motivation that keeps the whole thing going. The motivation is not only related to the motion, the motivation becomes the goal. And that goal is quite far away from center, where I started.

We can illustrate this with the sport of horse racing. You have the starting point, and at some point further down the line, you have the goal post or 'finish'. You start. The karma, or action is the running. Where do you run to? You must reach that goal, the finish line. Our minds are unable to avoid these three: the starting point, action, and goal. Our whole life is goal motivated.

As we explore karma, we shall see that both action and motivation are fraught with many dangers. There could be 'wrong movement' which might destroy us all. There could be 'wrong motivation' which might destroy us all. To stop motion is not possible, as it is against nature. To remove motivation seems superhuman. And so, the yogis, in their wisdom, gave actions and provided motivations for their students. In fact, they gave those students an abundance of them.

For instance, very young children who are bubbling with energy might appear a little mischievous. They are not really being naughty. They are simply full of energy. They are not like us. They are bubbling with energy. Mothers who can see this abundance of energy, understand that they are not really being mischievous, and take the child, play with it, twirl it, give the child some way to vent the energy for fifteen minutes or so, and then the child tires. All that bubbling gets worked out. Becoming fatigued, the child usually lies down, and goes to sleep.

This plan is more or less what they carried out in karma yoga text, Mamamsa. They packed the student's day from four in the morning till ten at night with such activity that the student yearns for the clock to strike ten. Surely, there was no

time for mischief.

For instance, Ahnika - it literally means 'Daily Routine', is a small little Hindu book which prescribes the daily routine for religious Brahmans. That person gets out of bed between four and half-past four, and immediately begins what the text prescribes. In this case, it is prayers. This kind of thing may not appeal to you, but, regardless, the manner of the prayer is very beautiful. For example, in the prayer, the Earth is regarded as 'Mother': My nourisher, you gave to me, and nourished me, and still, I am going to have to put my foot upon you. Please forgive me. The entire day is one continual round of prayer and ritual. Breathing, brushing your teeth, cooking, saying grace before meal, and then the eating itself, every activity of the day is looked upon as ritual, so that there is never a moment when there is not ritual and prayer going on. Their idea was simple: action is inevitable; so, pack that action with what they regarded as 'proper motivation'. They felt that 'right action' and 'right motivation' were sufficient to take the sting out of karma.

In ancient India, it was sufficient to say that the motivation for all this prayer and ritual was being able to go to heaven. That was, unfortunately, the mischief in it, because that meant that all the time, all the day long, there is always a motive: 'Why am I doing this? Because I want to heaven. I do not want to go to hell'. If you were to ask them what is wrong with hell, they probably would only be able to answer 'Hell is terrible. Heaven is wonderful'. It was not until Krishna came along that understanding was emphasized.

Krishna saw that as soon as any motivation was allowed, and given some kind of privileged label like 'right motivation', the door is open to all kinds of mischief. For instance, you can kill your 'enemy', because it is considered 'righteous'. You might even receive a medal. The more you kill, the larger the medal. If you kill one man in the street, you are hanged. If you kill ten men in 'the field', you are promoted. If you kill one thousand, you are decorated. That is called administration. Our soldier is taught to feel that it is all right to kill all those people, because 'They are my enemies'.

But then, suddenly he may begin to think that all he needs to do to kill people, and 'get away with it', is to call them 'enemies', which is becoming a politician. Once he does that, there is no problem.

Krishna saw this. He saw that as long as motivation was considered 'right', action will continue to be problematic. He understood that the mind can and does cook up a motivation for any thing at all, and make that motivation sound 'right'. In which case, if one believes that right motivation justifies an action, and makes it right, the mind can always provide a motivation so that the action seems justified, or, is made into 'right action'.

And so, it is in the Bhagavad Gita that Krishna not only helped to stop this trend, but actually provided a means to reverse it. He begins by throwing out the idea of

heaven as motivating factor. Of course, Krishna does not say in so many words that heaven does not exist, but he does say not to look for it. You might even go so far as to say that Krishna is implying that going to heaven is useless. Why? As long as one is caught up in motivation, there is movement away from the center. As long as there is movement away from the center, one keeps wandering, confused, and without yoga.

We keep coming back to this question: 'How to get back to the center?' In asking that, we must also ask 'How to discover what seeks, provides, and thrives, or takes advantage of motivation?' It is easy to tell someone that it is the ego that needs and seeks motivation, and that the ego provides, feeds and thrives on this motivation, but it is perhaps not so easy to see it. How does one see that truth? The discovery of this truth is said to be karma yoga, discovery in the purest and simplest sense. For once the truth is discovered, it is like a jar being broken. The jar covers, and seems to encapsulate. Once this idea, like the glass, is shattered, space is realized to be indivisible. The discovery merely means that which has covered the truth is shed. The discovery does not imply that something comes into being which was not there before. The jar breaks, the cover is shed, and which was forever one is seen to be indivisibly one from then on at all times. In karma yoga, this indivisibility is discovered, and therefore, it continues to be so at all times, even during activity. Knowing that motion cannot be stopped, the motion remains without motivation. Finally, by the discovery of the truth of the indivisibility of consciousness, the motion in consciousness is also seen to be beyond self. That realization itself becomes the wellspring of pure selfless, or unselfish life, and of living.

Karma yoga is, therefore, the action or activity of a perfected person, of an enlightened person. And yet, the steps towards this perfection are also regarded, by courtesy as karma yoga. Otherwise, karma yoga is not what we do. You may wash dishes without being paid, but you are not necessarily doing karma yoga, unselfish action. In truth, karma yoga exists only in the action of the enlightened person, in whose vision there is no division at all, and who has directly realized the indivisibility of consciousness and motion within it; within it, and therefore, not within me.

I think this is where many people have erred, not only in regard to karma yoga, but in regard to yoga in general. They have treated yoga as doing: 'If I practice hatha yoga, what must I do? If I practice karma yoga, what must I do? If I practice bhakti yoga, etc., what must I do?' What they are really expressing by such a question is this: 'By doing something, we hope that we become what we are supposed to be'. People have always tried this. In the Bhagavatam, you have a story about a young man who dresses up like an expectant mother, pillow around the waist, and in the garb of a woman. It is obvious to us that dressing up like a pregnant woman will not make anyone pregnant with child, especially a man. Such a process cannot be an external one. Likewise, the process of karma yoga must be internal. It must be from within outward. So that, it is the inner spirit, or the wisdom which comes first, if it is to come at all. Once that wisdom is there,

the action flows. The master said 'Be good, do good'. Notice He said 'be good', first.

Yet hope is what most people have. Why hope at all? It turns out that hope is merely a 'cover-up' for hopelessness. A Karma yogi has no hope; not because everything is hopeless, but because he knows that hope, like belief, is fictional. Is not that so? When you say: 'I hope it is going to be good', is not there another thought also, one which comes before: 'I am afraid it is going to be not so good' It is only then that you say: 'I hope it is going to be good'.

A karma yogi, and for that matter, any yogi, looks for truth, for facts, and has no time for fiction. Hope, fear, belief, all of these, are not based on what is known for certain, and therefore, are not regarded as truth. In fact, they are regarded as lies.

Yoga students are often astounded to hear this kind of thing said about hope. It might bring them some comfort to point out that on one level, hope does serve some purpose. For example, in the yoga text called the Chandogya Upanishad you find a statement to the effect that hope is to be exalted above all else. The text can say this, because, in the purely dualistic context in which this statement is made, hope can be regarded as the power that sustains everything in this world. That, no doubt, is what St. Paul had in mind when he made the now famous pronouncement: Now abideth these three - faith, hope, and charity.

But the greatest of these three is charity. In some of the modern translations, you now find the word 'love' substituted for 'charity'. In a purely dualistic context, these three - faith, hope, and charity - are the powers that sustain the world. The yogi does not deny that hope has that power. You can see how, in the case of illness, for example, a person's hope keeps him alive for several years, where ordinarily, the illness would have killed another in just a few months. Some might call this kind of hope 'obstinacy'. But hope, or whatever you wish to call it, has that power, that energy. Perhaps you might regard this as splitting hairs, but hope is not really what is called 'will power'. Will power is aggressive, driving, masculine. Hope is really more feminine. And on that dualistic level, it has such a tremendous energy.

We have noted that the enlightened person is the living example of karma yoga. There is no need for hope in such a person. The yoga aspirant, on the other hand, is trying to purify, trying to reach enlightenment. No doubt, there is, in that aspirant, a lot of hope. There is, for example, in the endeavor of cultivating the spirit of karma yoga, the hope that one day it will be there. That very hope keeps him going. Of course, that means that there is a motive, a motivating factor, and as such, it will not succeed. Enlightenment comes only when the motive is dropped. It is one of those unfortunate things. If you have no hope at all, you do not enter, but, if you cling to hope, you do not reach.

What about faith? Faith is something different from hope. In order to see this, one must first distinguish between faith and belief. First, look at belief. What is

belief? 'Belief' is a statement that is made by someone in whom you have confidence, but which makes no sense to you at all, and which you accept because that person said it, and therefore, 'It must be true'. On the other hand, faith is quite different.

You and your friend decide to go down to the lake for a swim. She goes in first, and she tells you that the water is too cold. She normally does not tell lies. She tells you, 'If you jump into the lake, you not only will not enjoy it, but you might catch cold'. You believe her. Then you walk down to the beach, and rush into the water until you are knee deep. At that point, you know that it is very cold, and therefore, can see that what she said was true. At that point, you say: 'I have got faith in her'.

Of course, at that point, you still do not know whether you would get a cold if you jumped into that water. However, by the fact that even while knee-deep in that freezing water you are shivering, you now have faith in her. That is, you have a veiled experience; not a head-on collision, but a veiled experience of the truth. Then you have faith in her. If you jump into that water, and you have to be taken back home in a stretcher, then you know she was right, because there is direct experience, self-knowledge.

Faith like hope, has its own unique energy. This is why we have dwelled on the distinction between faith and belief. It is important to be clear about this, because most often, in the religious community, people use the word 'faith' where only the word 'belief' can be tolerated. They have no faith whatsoever. They speak of God, or whatever, but their words are empty. Belief has no power to sustain you.

What is more, if your practice is based on belief, then when you inevitably find yourself in another camp, say a group which believes in 'science' and they say: 'Nonsense. Absolutely ridiculous', and you are exposed to their own brand of persuasion, you drop your yoga beliefs, and your practice along with it.

Finally, although it may never be possible to say with certainty whether it is the goal that supplies the motivation, or the motivation that creates the goal, life itself teaches us in ways that slowly make it more and more evident that goal oriented motion is a trouble maker. Unfortunately, you cannot cancel something which has already arisen - a subject which we shall discuss when we come to the different types of karma. You probably know the famous example of this situation: 'An arrow having been shot from the bow', or, 'A bullet from a barrel cannot be recalled'. When we become aware of the facts concerning our life on earth, we must realize that we have already been caught in a spiraling motion away from the center of consciousness. All goal-orientated motion is spiral movement away from the center, and this is where we get caught, or hooked.

In our study of karma yoga, as with all the other yogas, we must come back to our discussion of the spiral, the motion of kundalini energy, and its return to its own source, not merely because it is good to have things repeated, nor merely to help

with the much needed demythologization of kundalini as a mysterious mystical power which awakens for the yogi sitting in the icy caves of the Himalayas. We return to discuss it, because it is there, functioning everywhere in our life, if only we would see it.

We can see that motion has a starting point. If that starting point is returned to straight away, not missed as in the case of the spiral, a circle is formed. Movement within a circle is complete unto itself, and is certainly not movement as we know it. If you have looked at car wheel spinning very fast, you have noticed that beyond a certain speed, it no longer looks like it is spinning. The wheel is completing the circle thousands of times per minute. Motion is only noticed when it spirals, only when it is movement away from the center. In fact, only spiral movement is seen, observed, felt, experienced.

The eyes open, and immediately one is caught in goal orientation. Like entering a sports field and immediately becoming aware of the goal posts, you enter life, and are given goals. Even if, right from infancy, your aim is total freedom, then the desire to remain free itself becomes your goal. It may be built right into your cells, your tendons. Minor spelling differences aside, this is what is called 'a tendency'. It is there, all the time. You wake up, open your eyes, and it is there.

Discussions about the value of hope and whether or not hope is good or evil, do not change this simple fact. As soon as you wake up, you see your life is caught in the trap called 'hope'. Unless you have the courage to see unreal as unreal, you do not deserve the realization of the real. We must, therefore, discuss, what we may later discard as unreal.

PURUSARTHA - THE FOURFOLD PURSUIT

Having seen that life is goal oriented, what does one do? Not only yogis, but wise men from various traditions have suggested that we counter goal orientation with some special motivation. There is a sanskrit word 'purushartha' which can be defined as 'objects legitimate to pursue'. In the East, you hear the expression 'the fourfold motivation'. They are not really four goals; they are the purushartha - 'the objects which are legitimate to pursue'. Whether there is something above and beyond them which may be grander, or ultimate, is not the point. The 'purushartha' are the immediate objects legitimate to pursue. The fourfold motivation qualifies as 'purushartha'. It is not four separate motivations, but rather a single motivation, like four strands bound together. Although each of the strands has a sanskrit name, they are not unique to the East; they are universal.

Dharma is the name for one such strand. The dictionary lists quite a number of different meanings, the order of duties of rules and regulations, the social order, as division into classifications like householder, student, recluse, renunciate. These are all artificial divisions. After all, people usually do not fit into the pigeon holes allotted to them by political, moral, or religious authority. Simply because a man is born into a Brahman family does not, in itself, give the quality of a Brahman. I need not be studious, simply because I have become someone's student. Simply because I hold house does not mean I live a householder's life. Or, living a householder's life, I need not hold a house. There is always a certain amount of coercion in all this. Coercion, in turn, breeds conflict. In any conflict, it is a game of chance regarding who wins. Sometimes the authority wins, and sometimes a rebel. It is a seesaw, which can go on eternally.

The most usual translation is the rather loaded word 'righteousness', and because that is so loaded with meanings, the meaning we will adopt is simply 'order'. One could argue that this is splitting hairs. From the pulpit you hear 'righteousness', and from the Prime Minister, or President, you hear 'order'. In any case, in order to avoid confusion, let us simplify it further. When the word 'dharma' is used, what is being suggested is that one of the major goals should be to generate and sustain order in your life.

Two of the strands of the four may surprise you. They are given names 'artha' and 'kama'. Normally, 'artha' is taken to mean 'material possessions', or 'wealth', while 'kama' is generally taken to mean 'the pursuit of pleasure or enjoyment'. They considered both of these valid motivations. They surely would not have to convince anyone. Anyhow, they must have realized that some of this was inevitable, and so they included it.

The fourth strand is given the name 'moksha', or 'liberation', and it is regarded as total freedom in which there is no enslavement of any kind. It is difficult to discuss moksha without returning to our models of energy moving in

consciousness, the circle and the spiral.

In moving away from the center point of origin, the spiral, or goal orientated motion, seems only to travel farther and farther away with each rotation. However, whether you believe it or not, no matter how far from the center the spiral travels, there is a force, emanating from the center, which is intense, which pulls on the spiral, pulling it back towards the center, towards itself. And, in much the same way, no matter how powerful the temptation to reach out to these goals may be, the center of consciousness is pulling you back. That constant pull towards the center is there throughout our life. It does not disappear because we are engaged in other activities.

During the day, your consciousness spreads out, out, out, as far out as you can reach. Since the center is constantly pulling you back, there is a tug of war throughout the day. You push, and the center pulls. Perhaps this is one explanation of fatigue, because it is otherwise difficult to understand why fatigue has to happen at all. If we are able to eat and breathe, and otherwise constantly supply the energy that is getting burned up, why must we eventually feel so worn out? Perhaps fatigue happens because you are willfully driving yourselves, pushing, defying the constant pull back from the center.

Perhaps this battle of push and pull also explains why you sleep. Perhaps, at one stage, the center inevitably wins the battle. Perhaps, after a long period of externalized motion, when through fatigue, there has been a weakening of the motion of the spiral, the center is able to pull you back, and, because you still do not want to be aware of the center of consciousness, you fall asleep.

The movement away from the center is not like a conventional circular outward spiral, and this is because of the constant pull exerted from the center. The spiral moves back and forth, towards and away, or if you would like it put in human terms: up and down. You seem to be climbing away, but still you come back. You push towards the self-assumed goal, and at the same time, feel the pull of center. Of course, 'up and down' may not be as suitable to describe this motion as are the words: 'push and pull'. After all, in the cosmos, what is 'up' and what is 'down'? And therefore, it is more suitable to say 'push and pull', or 'for and against', 'towards and away'. All our lives, we are torn by these two: 'towards and away'. In raja yoga, you will find what is called 'ragadvesa' or, 'the inner torment created by for and against', or what is stated as 'I like this, and I do not like that'. Later on, we will be discussing this again, because, as you shall discover, it is one of the main themes of raja yoga.

Against the backdrop of all that we have discussed so far, you can see that this terminology - 'towards and away', 'for and against', and 'push and pull', which we have used to discuss the action of the spiral, may be used to further our understanding of 'predisposition of the personality'. For example, in the case of people for whom order in life is more important than wealth, the pull towards wealth is not as strong as the pull towards order. On the other hand, some people

are able to sacrifice a lot of pleasure for wealth. In their case, the pull towards wealth is not as strong as the pull towards pleasure. Of course, as to the relative strengths of each arc within the spiral, infinite variations are possible.

If a chart were drawn of these arcs, it would somehow have to depict that every arc not only touches the personality with, but at the same time also touches the cosmos. In hatha yoga we said that macrocosm and microcosm were the counterparts of each other. We are like receivers which tune to various stations or channels through which, in total, the entire universe is broadcast. In the case of the subject of karma, it is important to see that each action, represented by one's spiral, or spiral movement, touches the personality and also the external world, universe, cosmos.

So that, if you translate a particular arc as saying: 'I must become wealthy', it touches the personality, and expresses not only the acquisition of wealth in action, wealth, but also expresses its equivalent reaction. First, like a horse with blinkers, you sanction, 'by hook or crook', wealth as the goal of life. That goes out as the action motivated by desire to become wealthy. However, at the very same time, that action also 'touches' or spreads out in the external world, in the cosmos, in its own way. You may not see it, but that is another matter. Whether or not you see it happen, it still happens.

The arc touches the microcosm, quite literally, and therefore, creates and leaves an impression at that point of contact. The internal effect, the microcosmic effect of that spiral is regarded as 'vasana' and 'samskara'. These two words are often thought to be interchangeable. However, vasana is psychologically deeper. You can think of vasana as the conditioning, while samskara is outward growth of that conditioning. If vasana is the 'body', samskara is the 'dress'.

After creating the vasana and samskara internally, the spiral continues, and as it leaves the microcosm with all the energy - motivation, it also goes out into the external cosmos, the macrocosm and becomes what is regarded as destiny, fate, and reaction. Most people regard this macrocosmic effect as the sole definition of the word 'karma', but of course, that is only part of the story.

Within the context of vasana and samskara, what is meant by the word 'dharma' is not cosmic order. Cosmic order is beyond the ego-sense, and therefore, not something that the individual can create in his-her own mind. In fact, cosmic order, which in sanskrit is given the name 'rtham', is almost equivalent to 'moksha', or 'liberation'. Within the context of vasana and samskara, dharma means that order which has been imposed or superimposed by the human mind, i.e., rules and regulations.

You can see that all societies try to divide themselves into distinct 'classifications'. One society may use the word 'castes', another may substitute 'guilds', another various 'strata': intellectuals versus non-intellectuals, administrators versus non-administrators, traders versus non-traders, or the business men versus all the

rest of us. But no matter what words you use, it all comes down to the same thing, 'division of society'.

Having created classifications, divisions, someone assumes a position of authority, usually someone who is powerful enough to make himself accepted as an authority. Most people are pleased to have someone in authority. In fact, there is only authority because you accept it. If you did not accept authority, it would not exist. A particular scientist is an authority on the nature of the universe simply because you have accepted him as such an authority. It is the same with all people in authority. If you were to brush them aside, much as you would do snow that lands on the shoulders of your overcoat, the authorities would all fall away like so many snow flakes. You do not do that, because you like to have, and therefore, want to have someone in authority. You put them there, and then crawl to them on your knees. Someone who assumes this authority lays down the rules, the duties, and responsibilities. You should be aware that this is most often the real context in which dharma is to be viewed.

In this context, people who find themselves among the 'privileged' never quote the laws of dharma when it goes against them. For example, a Brahman or swami may quote the dharma in order to let it be known that all should respect him, fall at his feet in his presence, and that kind of thing. But does he also read to you from the same book about the duties of a monk who has renounced the world, a sanyasi? No, if had to do that, he would probably run away, or jump in the lake. He uses the law of dharma to let you know that he is superior, or born superior.

And so, this is the type of which is subject to perversion. When perversion takes place, it leaves a stamp of perversion within the human mind, which inevitably creates the karma of reaction. In total, this makes three distinct aspects of karma. First, there is the action itself, with its motivation. Secondly, there is the impression that is left in the individual's own mind or personality, and thirdly, there is the reaction these two bring about in the cosmos. It is not all that different from the simple law of physics that you learned in school: 'every action is followed by its equal but opposite reaction'.

This is true of all motivation, and of all action. It is not true of moksha, because moksha is not a goal as such. But you can see that it does apply to all the rest. In the second strand of the fourfold motivation, artha, you are told that it is all right to earn wealth. However, regardless of what the scriptures say or do not say about how to earn it, it is very difficult to prevent perversion. You can always introduce a rationalization to justify why a certain kind of earning is all right. It also leaves the taste for wealth, power, prestige, acquisition, possession. It creates the habit in me. And, it brings about a reaction externally. That this is also true of kama, the pursuit of pleasure, I think needs little if no comment at all. It is a case of 'the more the merrier', till a breakdown occurs, and that is that.

The great sage Sri Shankaracharya once sang a song about a young man who lived a life of enjoyment, and who inevitably grew old. The song mentions that

although body had grown old, the desire within him had not; it was still as vital as ever. The old man sat at the edge of the lake, still dreaming of the 'good old days'. He was beyond doing anything about his desire physically, so what else could he do? He sat at the waters edge, and went on 'chewing' his desires, dreaming of them.

Dharma, artha, and kama, and have been called 'valid goals of life', because they were seen to be inevitable. However, those who stipulated rules and regulation to govern this fourfold motivation, thought it fit to point out that it is only all right to pursue artha and kama, wealth and pleasure as long as both remain within dharma and moksha. They said: 'Think of wealth and pleasure as a stream, or river. You must build two strong banks on that river: one is dharma, and the other is moksha. They hoped that one day, there would be an awakening to the fact that your life is going come to an end, an awakening to the fact that throughout your life you have been hunting for wealth and pleasure without ever being satisfied with all that you have enjoyed. In other words, they hoped that the pull towards the center would one day be strong enough, that like nightfall and sleep, we would suddenly collapse into the center, and look for, and find liberation. That was terribly optimistic of them, I think. Perhaps we should not be so hard on them. Suffice it to say they were great optimists.

If you are serious students of yoga, seriously interested in the fourth strand, freedom, you need not be as interested in the samskaras, as you need to be in the vasanas. This is because it does no good worrying over whatever reaction is going to invariably take place. If a bullet has left the barrel, it is going to reach its target, if not now, sooner or later. And so, the yogi does not waste any energy over it. It is far more important to ask about the impression that is currently being created, right at the moment. By the motivated action, by the selfish action, by the ego-motivated action, and to question about how to deal with that. If you have killed one hundred people, and wish to only worry about the payment in kind for each one of those murders, you will have a very long wait indeed before you have put that worry behind you, because, obviously you cannot die one hundred times in one lifetime.

In spite of the fact that some reaction is coming, what the most important thing to deal with is the habit of aggression that in turn becomes the habit of murder. And so rather than worry about what may or may not come back as the reaction, and when and how it may happen, the correct emphasis for the student is on the internal tendency, and the reason is obvious: once the taste has been created, that tendency craves repetition. How tendency, which demands and craves repetition, is dealt with becomes the most important factor in the life of a yogi.

THE ELEMENTS

We began to discuss the concept of destiny by saying that it is based on the notion of the two forces that pull in opposite directions, and also the motivated action, which gives the spiral a personality. The two forces are unequal and in the initial stages the attraction towards the center is not strong enough to counteract the attraction for more experience - the 'I am this' is not as strong as the 'I want that'. Since the energy misses its starting point, it can not complete the circle, it must spiral away. Had the movement of energy not spiraled off looking for more experience, the vibration would still have resonated throughout the cosmos, but the vibration would not have created any problem, since the movement of energy would have been satisfied, complete unto itself. However, the energy, having missed its own starting point, finds that it is not complete.

Recognize that no one will be able to give you the correct answer as to why this energy spiraled off in the first place. We can inquire into it, but the inquiry only begins after the thing has happened. We only ask what the meaning of life is after life has commenced. We can only ask why we are born after we are born. You can speculate on this issue of the spiral, but cannot be there to watch it happen before it happens. That is why, in all honesty, every idea offered as an explanation of why the spiral gets born must be regarded as speculation.

This is not to say that any further inquiry into the nature of the spiral will not shed some light on the truth. However, as said previously, you must be daring in order to see the real as real, because in order to see the real as real you must first see the unreal as unreal, something which requires much courage. If you are daring, your discoveries may prove surprising.

For example, it is common to think that the spiral movement itself is the problem. However, it may not be. The Bhagavad Gita implies that all vibrations take place within the same cosmic consciousness-energy. If this is so, then the spiral itself must also be the same consciousness-energy. People call the cosmic consciousness-energy 'God', or 'Ishvara', but it really does not matter what you call it. It is always there, always present, no matter whether you name it or not. It is continually present, and when it moves in a certain way it, there is collision and fusion, producing, all within itself, what you know as the 'diverse elements'. In the Gita, Krishna lists these diverse elements: VII-4 - Earth, water, fire, air, ether, mind, intellect and egoism, thus is my nature divided eightfold and then, immediately after giving the list, Krishna is very quick to add: VII-5 - This [the list of eight]] is my inferior nature, O mighty armed Arjuna; know thou as different from it, my higher nature, the very life-element by which this world is upheld.

However, the translation of 'apara' as 'inferior' and of 'para' as 'superior', might easily lead to unnecessary confusion, which could easily be avoided if you discard

the world inferior, and replace it with either 'outer' or 'material', and likewise replace 'higher' with 'inward' or 'spiritual'. Krishna's implication is that these eight elements: earth, water, fire, air, ether - space, mind, intelligence, and ego-sense did not come into existence because you or I wanted or desired them. They are there as the material part of cosmic nature, the *apara*. They are there. Do not ask why.

But, of course, you do ask why, because you think that by asking why you have found a very intelligent method of arriving at the truth. If you have not seen that in asking, 'Why is this world here?', you have isolated yourself, created the division of you and the world. Later on you may try to rationalize, 'Water and I, we are part of the same cosmos'. But your rationalization is merely an after-thought. In deep sleep, where you do not question, you are free of division. And yet, it has not occurred to you that the freedom of division might have something to do your lack of questioning, because it has not occurred to you that questioning creates division.

In the human being, the first five elements correspond to the five senses. The earth element corresponds to smell, the water element corresponds to taste, the fire element corresponds to sight, the air element corresponds to touch, and the ether, or space element corresponds to hearing. That is simple enough. Now, how do we define the remaining three?

In the Scriptures, you often find 'mind' defined as that which names objects, or entertains them, and that which knows precepts. Those are all functions of the mind. And this thing, we call 'mind' constantly keeps identifying objects, whether those objects be another human being, a carpet, or a book. The mind, in fact, is almost like a material substance. Certainly in relation to the *jiva* - spirit, the mind indeed seems like solid material substance. The quality of space being sound, the quality of the mind is just one step behind, as a definitive sound. Space is the medium for the transmission of sound, and mind is just one step behind it, defining the transmission, giving it a name. The element of fire, or light, is what gives shape. But the mind gives it a definite shape, sticking its own kind of label on it, and identifying that shape. That is the function of the mind, all of which it does very nicely, even without this thing called 'my mind'.

It is the function of the mind to label things. One step behind it is the *buddhi*. It is not easy to translate '*buddhi*' into English, and in some ways, it might be better not to try. One can only say that '*buddhi*' is like a discriminative intelligence, an intelligence that distinguishes. To understand this a little better, you must understand more about the function of the mind. When the mind looks at a little boy or little girl, it does so without suggesting any real distinction, because, after all, these are merely names, merely labels. Going purely by the description I have given the mind, what is the difference between a boy and a girl? You say, 'One is male, and the other is female'. Words. Spelling. Labels.

The *buddhi*, on the other hand, says, 'Ah. This is male, and that is female'. It does

more than label. It distinguishes. Splitting hairs? You will be amazed to what extent these so called 'philosophers' of India have attempted to differentiate, and even then, they are dissatisfied because they feel that the results too grossly represent what they are trying to express.

Buddhi, the distinguisher. Again, be very careful here. The mind labels, the intelligence distinguishes. Do not make the dangerous assumption that we are calling the buddhi the perceiver. The perceiver is ever the one cosmic consciousness. Even the word 'interpreter' can get you into trouble. Buddhi can be said to 'interpret only' in the simplest sense, because judgment, which some people wrongly consider part of interpretation, is not done by the buddhi, but belongs to this stupid little thing called the self-arrogating principle of the ego-sense.

By itself, the ego-sense does not get mixed up in judging. It merely assembles all the material objects, the sensory experiences, the stimuli, and along with that, it assembles concepts, precepts, labels, words, and the discriminations that are made by the buddhi. It does all this without a single judgment. All the judgments: 'She is a good person, he is ugly, that one is vicious,' are made by the self-arrogating principle, none of which exist in nature. You have male in nature, and you have female. You have hair in nature, and you have skin. Yet such things called good, evil, pleasure, pain, beauty, ugliness, do they actually exist in nature? They are not even distinguishing marks. You may call them 'mental attributes', but what does that really imply? It implies that they are not facts with a substantiality, like physical realities, but exist nowhere but in the mind. It is the same with happiness. You are cheerful, and you are uncheerful. Where does that exist?

On the human level, we are always dealing with the interplay of personalities. In light of what we have just said, how can one deal with this? The answer is quite simple. One gets hold of the fact, and when that happens, the fiction evaporates. If you come to me, and hit me on the head, I must get up, and go to the first aid station. I may even be able to stop you from hitting me on the head, if not the first time, then perhaps the second time. Then I go off to the first aid station. All the rest of it is utter nonsense and fiction: that you are my enemy, that I must become your enemy, that you hate me, and I must hate you, the whole lot.

What about feelings? The feeling of pain may arise, but is there a need for the feelings of psychological hurt to arise? Before going any further, I must tell you a lovely little story that was told to me by a university professor who I happen to know. I suppose I should apologize for changing the ending ever so slightly, but after all, it is a story in any case; so, why not fix it up just a little bit more?

A young man, who had just become the administrator of a district goes to an open-air performance of a play, and there witnesses a beautiful girl walk out onto the stage. From the very first sight of her, he is totally enamored with her. Unfortunately, he is a newly appointed vip in the district, and so he feels that he

cannot propose to such lowly person as an 'entertainer', and so he swallows the feelings of love that are bubbling up in him, and goes home after the event is over. That night, he develops a fever, and for the next couple of days, he is confined to his bed. In the meantime, the troupe moves on, so that when the young man goes to look for her, she is gone. He continues to dream of her, day and night, for a long time, but eventually his reason prevails. He puts the memory aside, gets married, and raises a family. Ten years later, he comes to hear that the same troupe is returning to the district to perform again. He goes to the play, hoping to get a glimpse of his lost love. As the curtain rises, he is overcome by the return of the feelings that he had suppressed all these years. Like all senior administrators, he no longer is obsessed by ambition. And so, as soon as the play ends, he immediately rushes over to tell her of his love. Reaching the little wagon around which the actors are beginning to gather, the administrator sees his lovely girl, and falls at her feet, sobbing: 'Please, listen. You are the most beautiful woman I have ever seen. Years ago I wanted to approach you, and tell you of my admiration, to tell you of my love. I was afraid for my reputation. I was a fool. Please, please, come with me.' Other actors who overhear this, begin to laugh. The beautiful woman tells them all to be quiet, and then says to the administrator in an astonishingly different voice: 'I am sorry, my friend. I cannot go with you. I am not girl. I am not a woman. I am man.' Then and there, the bubble broke. Then and there, all his feelings of being overcome by love for her vanished. That is exactly like what self-knowledge does for you. The very moment that you come to grips with the fact, with truth, all feelings of hurt vanish. I hesitate to say that you see all emotion is an illusion, or that all emotion ceases, because emotion is a very loaded word, and we often mean many things by it.

For example, when you walk in the jungle or desert, and you suddenly see a snake jump out at you, you react to it. It is not fear, it is something else. Fear happens only when you begin expecting that something bad will happen, say, walking at night and starting to worry that someone may jump out from behind a bush. You are expecting something. Expecting that somebody might jump out at you, you are already paralyzed. Should a dog rustle the leaves, you might collapse straight away. If you are without expectation, one hundred percent of your energies are available for any eventuality.

So, perhaps it is better to say that after self knowledge, you may still act, and you may still react; you may do all sorts of things, apparently moved by some emotion, but all psychological hurts, grudges, hostilities, all of these things are gone, because, like the actress, the fictitious element which is assumed by the self-arrogatingness of the ego-sense, all that, is seen as fiction. It is not facing the unreal, not facing unreality; it is realizing the unreal as unreal.

He hits me. The only fact is that he hit me. I realize that all the rest is fiction. I do not have to stop any thoughts from proceeding, because there is no thought which needs to be stopped. He can tell me that he has been planning it for weeks. What difference does that make? Furthermore, if he has been planning to hit me for weeks, that is his problem. This self-arrogating 'me' is neither the experiencer

nor the doer. Even the ego-sense does nothing.

The ego-sense is like the director of the whole show. It does not do anything. It directs all the doing. If you were to employ me as a caretaker on these wonderful grounds, there might come a time when I would go sit outside on the hillside. Then, if someone came along, and asked me 'Where can I find the yoga class, I would tell them where to go. If someone else came by looking for the kitchen, I would direct them past the guest house, and over the hill along the right path. The director performs no functions, per se, and yet has all this useful information at his fingertips. That would be ego-sense.

Mind, on the other hand, does have a unique function of its own. Mind produces and registers precepts, and uses the ego-sense only to coordinate them, and requires the buddhi to distinguish between male and female, between a tree and a building. It is the mind's role to perceive, and to label: This is water. It is the function of the buddhi to distinguish: This is water and that is coffee. The ego-sense is the assembly point. The ego-sense is not non-existent. The ego-sense is not the thing we call the 'me'. The 'me' is the self-arrogatingness, which is completely fictitious.

In all discussions about destiny, ultimately everyone wants to know about this phrase 'being the master of your own destiny'. What chooses? In the Bhagavad Gita, the line of thought is, as we have been saying, that all these eight elements are only the outer nature of consciousness, and that only the para, or inner nature, or consciousness, can experience, and therefore, express itself, so that none of the eight, including the eighth, can have anything whatsoever to do with choice. You will find some texts saying that the ahamkara, or ego-sense is considered capable of making some kind of choice, although, such theories are best avoided.

The Kathopanishad also attempts to answer the question of who the enjoyer or experiencer is: Who is the experiencer of all experiences? 'When these three: jiva, indriya, and mind come together', it says, 'there is experience'. Jiva is like a cell in the cosmic consciousness. Indriya are the sense organs. They must all be put together along with mind for there to be experiencer and act. Otherwise, nothing happens. The Kathopanishad is one text that makes no reference to the ego-sense. This is in direct contrast the list which Krishna has given in the Gita. You will find that the yoga texts either deny the existence of ego-sense, or they define its role as that of coordinator.

The eyes see. The ears hear. The tongue tastes. Skin touches. Nose smells. Mind labels. Intellect distinguishes. What then is ego-sense? Ego-sense in this context, is like a begging bowl, merely collecting, synchronizing all these things. The eyes see a certain gadget, while at the same time, the ears hear it. The sight and sound have to be put together in order that the intelligence can see that the sound comes from the object that the eyes see, and that both are not coming from two completely different and distinct things. In which case, a collecting bowl is

needed.

However, be very careful here. You have heard the old expression: 'A place where even angles fear to tread'. You must be cautious not to assume or take for granted that you understand the extent of the role the ego-sense plays in the actual collection process. The ego-sense is a collection box, which does collect all the bits and pieces of what you call sensations. However, for some very strange reason, the bowl seems to think that it is more than a bowl, and considers it also experiences the stimuli. Whereas, in reality, it is the consciousness, the intelligence, that really experiences the stimuli. This is our problem. It is what my guru, Swami Sivananda, called 'self-arrogating nature'.

In light of this, Krishna felt that the ego-sense had a valid job to do, and its own role to play. Therefore, the word used in the Bhagavad Gita for ego-sense, 'ahamkara', is peculiar to itself, and not the same ego-sense that certain texts, such as the Yoga Vasistha declare as unreal. In the Gita, the ego-sense is very much like a sixth sense, or a seventh sense if you wish to include mind as the sixth sense. As a sense, it merely is like a collection post, or, if you will, a lounge at the airport, where all kinds of various gatherings take place.

The ego-sense is not unreal. The bowl is not unreal. The taster of that food is not unreal. Yet, somehow, and we do not know why, the ego-sense is able to say, I see this. I smell this. I taste this. The 'I' does not see, smell, or taste anything at all. The 'I' merely collects all of it for the intelligence to experience. The real experiencer being cosmic consciousness, it is the self-arrogatingness of the ego-sense which is to be seen as the unreality. In our case, the ego-sense itself says, 'I experience'. That is the only unreality.

If that is seen as unreal, then the whole picture will at once become entirely clear to you. Earth, water, fire, air, space, intelligence, mind, all that is there, and millions and millions of ahamkaras, millions and millions of spirals in this universe, with the experiencer in all cases being the one cosmic consciousness. There are millions of trees, billions of blades of grass, all of them springing from the same earth. You may see them as growing differently, but is it really so? There are millions of spirals springing up, existing in consciousness as manifestations of cosmic energy. And none of this creates any problem or trouble. Perhaps even individuality can be represented in all this. Yet only this much can be said for certain, ego-sense is there, but as pure collection post, not as experiencer, which alone is the consciousness, the intelligence, inherent in all.

Perhaps another analogy will help paint the picture more clearly. In the natural world, you have various kinds of storms. You have hurricanes, cyclones, and tornadoes. Though they all have their own particular characteristics, and distinct personalities, they do share one particular feature that dominates the personality of them all - whirling wind. Wind, of course, is not only a feature of these storms. Wind is everywhere. Motion is, after all, the nature of wind. But when wind assumes the special character or personality, not unlike the self-arrogating ego-

sense of the whirlwind, there can be trouble.

The tornado is not unlike our spiral. The cyclone and the hurricane also have a similar personality that whirls around an area where there is no cyclone or hurricane, an area that meteorologists call the 'eye'. Funny that it should be called that. Of course, it is spelled differently than 'I' but the two are really much alike. What is the eye of the hurricane? It is nothing. And yet, you should not think of it as nothing; it can destroy a village, or lay flat an entire city.

Wind is life giving. It is everywhere. Suddenly it begins to move haphazardly, in a disorderly fashion, or in an orderly fashion in relation to the eye of the cyclone. From our point of view, as soon as it does, that movement takes on its own personality. Of course, its personality lasts only as long as the low or the high pressure or whatever lasts. Yet, during that time, the whirling wind can be subject of much attention. You have certainly read or heard such accounts, some rather vivid, where, for example a hurricane appeared to be 'dying', using up all its force, only to suddenly set off over the ocean, refresh itself, and then turn to attack the coastal towns. Such are the descriptions of ghosts, evil spirits, demons and demonesses in ancient scriptures. Your meteorologists even give names, to these cyclones and tornadoes, usually female, making them seem all the more like real personalities.

Before this wind became such a famous personality, it was merely a gentle breeze, or almost totally calm, like the so called eye of the storm. Journey into this 'eye' and you will find no gales, no violent winds, no signs of any storm, nothing. In the same way, you will also find that there is nothing to this thing called I. Our trouble begins when the ego-sense oversteps its own role. Mysteriously, on account of this self-arrogatingness of the ego-sense, a personality seems to get formed. From that point onwards, the personality gives rise to motivation, and this continues to drive this whirlwind called 'I', until, as with the storm, the pressure generated around the 'I' mysteriously dissipates. That is called moksha.

The self-arrogatingness of the ego arises in between the ego-sense - the bowl, and the experiencer of all experiences, the intelligence. This intelligence, which others have called 'the mind', operates around the ego-sense. How does this intelligence reach out on a cosmic level?

To begin with, let us return to Krishna's statement in the Gita: VII-5 - Krishna has told us that all the elements of this universe have both an inner and outer nature. The inner experiencer of all the eight outer elements is regarded as the jiva, or 'living soul'. What is a soul? The soul has been wrapped in all kinds of romantic imagery, but the soul is nothing more than a cell, a cell in cosmic being, of which, it is said there are an infinite number. The coming together of the outer nature of the cosmic being, which is material, with the inner nature of the cosmic being, which is the cell, happens at an infinite number of points. Each cell becomes the experiencer, and that cell is surrounded, as it were, by this material nature, which becomes its own experience, and there is whirling, and whirling,

etc. The soul, which as a cell of cosmic being is also non-different from the experiencer of all experiences - cosmic consciousness, is in constant contact with matter, its own outer nature. This cell in the cosmic body is what experiences all experiences.

Unlike the tornado or hurricane, which can be studied, and understood, the mystery of why the self-arrogatingness arises in between the ego-sense and the cell of cosmic being may never be explained. Unfortunately, that is not the only dissimilarity in that analogy. The tornado or hurricane is very destructive, but its life history is very brief when compared to the so-called living personality of individualized mind known as the 'me', or 'I'. In this regard, we need to cite a more appropriate example.

This individualized mind called 'I' is like a computer, or more exactly, the habit of the self-arrogatingness of the ego-sense becomes like a computer. In the center of the cell, as in the center of the cyclone, there is only stillness, pure emptiness. Suddenly, the self-arrogatingness of the ego-sense comes into being, and around that begins a whirling motion, which gathers and stores, much like a computer would, data that otherwise would have passed directly through the cell without creating any trouble. Unlike the trees, which do not get excited when their leaves fall, the self-arrogatingness of the ego-sense, when experiences pass through, gets very hot and bothered indeed.

The aspect that goes on recording data and preserving it is known as the chitta. Whereas all the experiences would have otherwise simply come and gone without leaving a trace, the chitta registers all experiences and expressions, not making any distinction between what is gets fed in, or passes through, and what spews out of it. The computer does not see the difference between these two.

The chitta becomes so heavily loaded with memories that it acquires almost a real personality. Every time something is experienced, the computer is loaded with vasana and samskara. Every time a habit or tendency is expressed, a deeper groove is cut in the storehouse of recordings. The chitta continues with this, operating like a personality, gathering around itself matter suited to its own functioning. Once the computer has been fed some experience, it craves repetition of that experience. The chitta is, therefore, like a living computer. And in order for it to 'live', to function, it must continue to acquire.

In Eastern philosophy, you find various theories regarding reincarnation. You will more fully appreciate the complexity of some of these theories if you take into account the fact that some mystics regarded this 'living computer' as the driving force behind reincarnation. Their explanation was that when the physical body died, the chitta, wishing only to repeat its own life's experiences, gathered that to itself which would enable it to experience more of the same, that the chitta would search for the kind of body, the kind of office, the kind of environment that was suitable to the kind of experience and expression that the chitta was seeking. They never suggested that the individual chitta ended up making the actual

choice. Rather it was suggested that the actual determination was made by cosmic intelligence. That makes more sense, because, otherwise one would be at a loss to explain why the chitta would choose, for example, to be born blind.

Even without the ability to take a new body, the power of the chitta would still present enormous difficulties. Much like the old proverb, As you sow, so you shall reap. The chitta places one at the mercy of all the groves that have already been cut into the memory. But if the chitta does have the ability to perpetuate its own existence, to acquire a new body when its old one becomes useless, then our situation becomes considerably more complicated than the old proverb implies. And, the mystics argued that our situation is further complicated by the fact that when new experience is fed into this living computer, it is completely assimilated and so, resides unobtrusively with all the previously assimilated experience. Each absorbed experience becomes part of field of knowledge, no longer recognizable as a single experience, similar to assimilation of language. Your 'living' language, which you now speak with great fluency, is not recognizable as all the multitudes of rules which were learned one by one over the course of time that it took you to speak it. All those individual rules are completely integrated and become a unified knowledge. You are no longer aware of them as you speak and think in that language. Likewise, in the case of the chitta, your own particular unified body of knowledge creates its own 'personality', and of that, you are also unaware.

Thus, when these mystics spoke of something which survived death, and that lived on birth after birth, it was chitta's 'personality' of which they were speaking. Contrary to the usual perception of reincarnation, which sees death followed by a rebirth, these mystics argued that there was really no death at all. They argued that the 'I' went right on living. To them, the occupant merely went off in search of new molecules with which to build a new house in which live out and express new experiences.

As part of the mechanism which this chitta has set in motion, three classifications of action - karma: sanchitta, prarabha, agami.

All the subtle residue of the actions that are stored in the chitta are called the sanchita, which, in sanskrit, literally means 'collection'. It is this collection which goes looking for a suitable environment in which the reactions of those actions can be worked out. This sanchitta, therefore, attracts to itself those conditions, events, and happenings that are conducive to its present life. This is an enormous thing. We do not even know how much is there in it. Out of it comes the prarabha, the inevitable reaction. The prarabha is just that little part which has become operative now, in this birth. The agami is what is being fed in now and which will lead to future complications.

Strangely enough, if you go back and examine Krishna's statements regarding all the elements of nature, you will find that in the context that we have been discussing it, chitta is not mentioned. Why? In actuality, there is no such thing as

chitta at all. That which is called 'chitta' is born of a confusion in which the self-arrogating principle regards a certain field of consciousness-intelligence which sits around it as 'its own private property', whereas, no such thing as 'private property' really exists. There is nothing called 'my mind' to be found anywhere. Neither is there anything to be found called 'my intelligence'. The 'my' itself being like the eye of the cyclone, non-existent. This 'my mind' is merely a limitation, a vasana, born of a foolish assumption of the self arrogating principle called 'ego'. The 'I' gets born, and therefore entertains: 'This is my mind'. The 'I' itself being empty, how can there be something called 'my'? If the 'I' itself is absent, how can it acquire a thing called 'my mind', also known as 'chitta'?

Yes. There are cells, what you like to call souls, billions and billions, an infinite number of them in the macrocosm. These are a part of cosmic consciousness, the ninth element of nature. Cosmic being is one and indivisible, and all the other eight elements, which you like to think of as microcosm, are also macrocosm. And the cell, which you also like to regard as microcosm, that too is macrocosm. That cell is the jiva, non-different from cosmic being. It only assumes a limitation, which only appears to limit all the eight elements. What you call the 'ego' is born of that limitation.

Words, words, words. In reality, there are no limitations. Yes, of course, there are cells, just like there are cells in the physical body. But the cells are non-different and indivisible from the totality. And so, as a cell in the totality, it is not truly a cell at all. It is the totality. That is the puzzle. And if the mind boggles at this, and collapses there, you will have enlightenment.

THE DOCTRINE OF KARMA

The law of the conservation of energy tells us that matter is never completely destroyed, but simply changes its function, static energy becoming kinetic energy, and so on and so forth. Matter is never able to get lost, but merely changes in form to something subtler. The same law of conservation can be applied to the spiraling which suddenly and mysteriously takes place in consciousness. As soon as the spiraling takes place, there appears to be a dramatic thinning out of matter around the spiral. Actually, the same amount of matter around the spiral exists, but that field of matter is now more subtle. That surrounding field of subtlety is regarded as a 'personality'. This personality begins to pulse, and each impulse that it has leaves its own trace. Normally, it is not possible for the impulse not to leave some kind of impression behind.

At this point, you might find it interesting to note that, in common parlance, the word 'vasana' is taken to mean 'scent'. If you have ever handled incense, you will know that it is natural to retain some scent of the incense on your person for quite a long time after you have touched it. If you wash your hands with soap that is scented, your hands retain its scent. You cannot see the scent, yet it is there. The vasana also leaves a subtle scent, or impression behind. However, there is one major difference: the scent of the incense or soap acts upon on your hand, and so it remains, in itself, insentient to that scent. Whereas the scent of the vasana leaves an impression upon consciousness, upon sentience itself, and so a craving for its repetition becomes at once instantly operative.

Consciousness, being sentient, has power to act. In India, for example, some female devotees have been known to make to love to statues of Krishna and other deities. They may kiss or hug a statue, and thereby obtain feelings of delight. When they finish, and go off, the statue is left behind. What does the statue do? Obviously, nothing. The statue does not run after them in search of more love. However, should a girl depart after kissing a real boy, it is possible, and even likely that the boy might run after her looking for a repetition of that kiss. Why the boy wants a repetition and not the statue is simple to understand. The boy is a sentient being, and he responds to the kissing, and craves a repetition. Likewise, when an impression is produced in consciousness - energy, that impression itself can act. It is one of those dangerous things to play with, because, you can try to attempt to 'work through' a particular craving, but the working through is also leaving something behind, which, in turn, makes that impression which you are trying to work through stronger and stronger instead of weaker. With every repetition it only gains more strength. It is not worked out. It is worked in. That is what so dangerous about playing with vasana.

Every action experienced by the senses, or expressed by the me sends out an impulse. Where is that impulse sent out to? From the purely material point of view - the material viewpoint which expresses that the 'I' is different from 'you',

the impulse is regarded as going out into the external world. The impulse gets sent out, but leaves an impression behind. Both the impulse and the impression make up the sanchitta karma, the storehouse. Furthermore, whatever comes out of 'you' returns like a boomerang. It may not happen in a time frame that is easy to spot. Look at what happens in nature. Land may erode from one area, and fill in the land that has eroded from another. Eventually, nature will refill that also. It may take two hundred thousand years, but no matter. It is a basic law of material existence. As long as we share material existence with the rest of the universe, we are bound by this law.

The East has called this 'the law of karma'. Some have also called this inescapable law 'the law of retribution', because they wanted to create an expression for it that would evoke fear in you. They could not help behaving like school masters who wanted to put a little bit of fear into the minds of their students. However, it is better to strip away all such excess verbiage and see the inescapable not as punishment but as a pure and simple case of the law of compensation or balance. Nature is so nicely organized that it balances itself. Everything balances immediately. If a rock falls into the lake, a trough is built up all around where the rock falls in. Immediately water flows into the trough to fill it up. It must do so; it cannot do otherwise. And even though we may try, we cannot prevent nature from restoring the balance. It does it all the time, from moment to moment.

When you stand on the edge of a chair, your body automatically begins its balancing act. Should you begin to fear the outcome, should you begin to fight with the body's balancing act, the same motion that would have balanced you, will cause you to fall. But even that falling is part of nature's balance. In your eyes, you simply fall. In nature's eyes, so much agitation is imbalance. It is not possible for nature to tolerate imbalance. In which case, in 'falling', balance is restored. In much the same way, the law of karma returns everything to a natural state of balance.

The Eastern religious orthodoxy warns that if you get vicious, hit someone, you will become paralyzed, or lose an arm. They warn that all pursuit of pleasure returns as pain. They warn that by selfishly accumulating for yourself, you are only digging your own a hole of adversity and poverty. They say the reason for this is 'God's retribution'. However, they need not have said so. There is no need to raise the notion of retribution when nature's balancing act explains the mechanism of karma. Therefore, why adopt the notion of retribution at all? Better by far to drop it, and take note that the law of karma is a pure act of balancing that the divine intelligence in nature is performing at all times. See that what you give forth, comes back. If you go on accumulating, exploiting and accumulating, you are bound to upset the balance, which nature has no choice but to restore.

Personally, I have never been able to reconcile myself to this notion of retribution, and would not have even mentioned it, were it not that this orthodox idea of retribution is widely accepted. However, does not it seem silly that God

should have to 'punish'? In the first place, do you really think that you are so very important? And secondly, do you really think that the omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent, whatever it is, should have to stand in front of you, and roll up its divine shirt sleeves in order to dish out a particularly suitable punishment? That ancient idea is ridiculous, if not blasphemous. And why such a vengeful divine father? Why not a helpful divine mother? Why not a devoted and fond mother who gives a bitter medicine to her child, not out of spite, but in order to cleanse the body of the poison the child has accidentally swallowed? It seems unfortunate, however, that people need to cling to such images to explain the law of karma, when the simple explanation of nature's balancing act will do nicely.

Let us look why the pursuit of pleasure leads to pain. If you look at your the pursuit of pleasure, you will see that you are always wanting more and more pleasure. At the very end of the experience of pleasure, you say, 'I want more'. And so, at the point where the pleasure ends, a feeling of being unsatisfied begins, and that, in effect, leaves a pain behind. Thus, pursuit of more pleasure becomes, at the very same time, a running away from pain. The ascetics tried to reverse this process. Their idea was to cause pain in pursuit of pleasure. In performing acts of self-mortification, a person would go on hurting and hurting the body such that in stopping, the person would be filled with great relief. In turn, the relief was associated with pleasure. But, of course, it was not pleasure. It was merely relief. In truth, that is really all that is involved in self-mortification. You may have thought it was a serious business, but it is actually a rather silly affair.

Being serious students of karma yoga, let us ask: What makes the operation of karma possible? Karma is only made possible by that very strange thing called the me and the 'me's very strange notion called 'mine'. Somehow this cell - soul - of consciousness, this jiva, this cosmic particle is made to feel, that the physical body is 'mine', is 'me'. Like a string attached to a ball, the me is the mysterious link which makes the law of cause and effect operative. Perhaps you remember when you were young, and you played with a ball on the end of an elastic string? In India, as in the West, city children are often given such ball with which to play. In the West, there is even a paddle to which the string is attached. To play, the ball is thrown or paddled and the fun is that no matter in what direction it is sent, the ball always comes back. The harder the ball is sent away, the faster it comes back. This is always the case as long as the string remains attached to the ball. Should the string snap in the process, the ball naturally keeps on going, and the game is finished. In the same way, the me links consciousness with all the eight elements of materiality. As long there is a link, there will be a reaction following every action. And, because action is simply projected by the me, the impulse to perform that action does not actually leave you. It is circulating, because it has become a part of the living computer you call 'the personality'.

Various names have been given to the phenomenon of projection. For instance, the concept of the 'etheric double' can be traced to projection of action by the me. So can another concept called Chitra-Gupta, which may seem particularly

Eastern at first glance, but is really quite universal. The East Indian religions depict the Chitra-Gupta as a little God that sits on one's right shoulder. And, interestingly enough, that little god is supposed to take note of everything you do, observing all your actions, be they actions in thought, word, or deed. As the story goes, the Chitra-Gupta sits there observing everything, until you die, whereupon, Chitra-Gupta takes you to the High Court of Yama - the deity presiding over death, so that you may be judged. You can imagine the picture they paint of this: the great Yama is seated on his royal throne, with you are in the docket, shivering in your shoes. Never mind that after death you do not even have a body, let alone shoes; you are there, shivering. And Yama looks down, and asks to hear about all you have done. At which point, the Chitta- Gupta starts rattling off everything that you have done, good and bad alike, not sparing a single detail.

Although it is interesting to examine the meaning of Chitra-Gupta, as a proper name, equally interesting is the simple word meaning of the two Sanskrit terms: chitra and gupta. The word 'chitra' translates as 'picture', while the word 'gupta' translates as 'hidden'. Thus, the 'Chitra-Gupta', or the 'hidden picture' is another term for what the psychologists have called 'the unconscious'. In the Psalms you find, perhaps this is not the precise wording, but it is something to this effect: God keeps all the actions of all of us with hidden pictures. The Sanskrit word 'yama' is also significant. Yama means 'regulator', or 'restrainer'. Thus, to regulate, to restrain, to limit, to terminate, all of that is implied by this word given as the name for the deity of death, Yama; the idea being that there is something built into the system which, at a certain point in the course of things, says: 'That is enough. That will do for the present'. What is it that decides how and when things are to be regulated? Can it be explained? It is possible that there may be no explanation. Yet, the human mind, the human intellect itself demands an explanation. And so, explanations have been conjured up to explain it.

In India, there are various explanations given to explain how and when death takes place, as well as explanations regarding the stages that follow death. The orthodox explanations conjure up images of divine courts and divine judges on thrones, a Lord Yama, and all that kind of thing. However, perhaps it is merely that the personality, with all the impressions of past actions stored in the chitta keeps whirling and whirling after the body is discarded, can attract, as it goes on whirling, all that is appropriate for it to experience, including all the elements necessary for a new body. Such a thing may be the Chitra-Gupta, Yama, etc., all rolled up in one. Since no one knows for certain about any of this, it should be said, in all fairness to the orthodoxy, that the images which the ancients have conjured up may in some way 'depict' what actually happens.

For those who have pondered this mysterious life and death regulating mechanism, one question looms in everyone's mind: How is the chitta, once it has disconnected itself from the body, able to get into the next one? It is a big question, and there seem to be almost as many theories as there are thinkers. Even in the Upanishads themselves, you find a number of different theories, a fact which in itself is fascinating. Many theories presented by the Upanishads are

graphically represented, and not to be taken literally. If you can manage to interpret them metaphorically, you will find them stimulating to contemplate.

Perhaps you will be intrigued by one of theories in the Upanishads, which says that the personality only takes birth three times. Or, perhaps you will be taken with perhaps an even more interesting doctrine that says that with each birth, the entire history of evolution is re-enacted. As that theory goes, when the body is ready to die, the personality drops it, and hangs 'in the clouds' without shape, size, form, etc., and after some time - please remember this is only a metaphor, falls back down to earth, and there gets mixed with minerals in the ground. In other words, water remains water, but the spirit that was in the water drop enters into the earth. Of course, it may not be pleasant to think you were a mineral not so very long ago. But never mind, because as the theory goes, you soon entered into the root of a plant, and became plant. You grew as plant, as a fruit, or as lettuce. And the fruit or vegetable eaten by man became seed, whereupon entering the woman, found itself swimming in a vast ocean. In that ocean, you became fish. And so, much like the scientific theory which say that we were all aquatic creatures once upon a time, this theory also has us as aquatic creatures, only not so many million years ago.

Various rules, we call them 'the rules of the game', must be applied to all such theories. One such unchangeable rule is that life, the life that we are given, is very short. In view of this, it is clear that it would be impossible for all the faculties and potentialities, which have been gathered into this personality, to be experienced in such a short lifetime. This may be one possible explanation why people die without ever even coming close to using the number of brain cells with which they are born. Perhaps the unused brain cells represent possibility of fulfilling the billions of potentialities, which lie completely hidden, unused, undiscovered. Perhaps, having been born with so very many of them, and having lived without fulfilling them, the potentialities are carried over by the personality at the time of death, in hopes that rebirth will afford the opportunity for these potentialities to become manifest.

Unfortunately, or fortunately, as the case may be, the clock is running all the time. Scientist's have recently verified the existence of this clock. They have appropriately named it the 'biological time clock'. This clock is radically different from the clocks which man has invented. Science has finally noticed that on the biological level, each individual cell has got its own calendar with its own lifetime written on it. They have discovered that there are various inherited tendencies, which are genetically hidden in the body at birth, and which manifest in their own time, and in their own way. Aside from how you are living now, this genetic information is a major factor in physiological disposition.

It also has become obvious that physiological predisposition need not come from a previous birth, because such characteristics are obviously inherited from your parents. However, lest you think that the ancient theorists who pondered reincarnation would now have difficulty reconciling these modern day

discoveries, you should know that it was the ancient's understanding that the departed personality chose the parents from which it was to be born. Therefore, it would not be out of place for them to argue that if the law of balance made it appropriate for the personality to experience rheumatism, then parents could be acquired who could contribute the genetic predisposition for that rheumatism.

All such determining factors have to do with actual physical laws. That the body was born of Mr. & Mrs. So-and-so, who had various congenital problems, or possibilities, and had transmitted these to you, all that is explainable on the physical level. So, what has any of this to do with this thing called the me? It is very important to remember that just because we can link various aspects of disease and deterioration to physical laws, we must not preclude the me from our inquiry. There is a certain part of the karma, which is allotted, so to speak, to this embodiment, and which is determined only at the time that the me determines - this is very tricky to express - 'the identification process'.

And so the question arises: 'When does the baby acquire an identity for itself?' Does it happen at the time of conception? Does it happen to the foetus before birth? Does happen at birth? Does it happen sometime after the birth? When does the jiva identify itself with a particular embodiment? It seems that the camps are divided. You can, of course, divide the camps into two groups: those who insist, they know the answer, and those who admit, they do not. It is silly to evolve a dogma, because nobody knows for sure when this identity is acquired. And since nobody knows for certain, one might just as well say, 'These are all the possible theories', and leave it at that.

However, one thing is certain: once identification is made, karma has begun. That is the prarabha karma. Remember, 'prarabda' literally means 'that which has commenced'. Since it is inevitable that all prarabdha karmas have an effect upon the material plane of existence, they all must have a reaction on the material plane as well. This is, of course, the major difference between the prarabdha karma and the karmas that reside as impressions in the storehouse we call the sanchita. The sanchita karma, which lies dormant within you, need not commence, but has the potential of doing so.

Yogis are regarded as capable of escaping the fate of sanchita karmas. Perhaps you have heard it said that the yogi is 'capable of working out all the sanchita karmas'. There is a simple explanation for this 'ability'. The storehouse of impressions, after all, cannot, in themselves create impulses, because the same factor that creates the impression is also the factor that creates the impulse, namely the me. Since the yogi has realized the truth concerning this me, there is no way for the impulse to get started, and thus, it cannot generate anymore new karmas out of the existing storehouse.

One who understands all this, not intellectually, of course, but on the level of realization, is able to live an enlightened and wise life. Such wisdom has two immediate practical benefits. First of all, even though prarabdha karmas may

subject the yogi to pain and adversity, misfortune, disrespect, etc., the yogi is now capable of looking on it all with utter equanimity, assuming or knowing - preferably knowing - that all that is happening is that the balance is being restored. Thus, the yogi avoids becoming morose, feelings of dejection, self-pity and feelings of remorse. Secondly, the yogi does not look put the blame of the misfortune on some external cause. And therefore, the yogi does not blame others for misfortune or pain. When one ceases to blame others, one ceases to judge them also, and so there is an end to hate.

Everyone knows the famous statement of Jesus on the cross: Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. One can only speculate what the actual meaning was, but it is possible that we have interpreted it completely backwards. His statement most often interpreted to mean, 'Forgive them, because they did not know they were killing your only son'. However, in understanding the wellsprings of action, Jesus could have meant quite the opposite: Father, I know this is my karma. These foolish people do not understand what is happening. They think they are killing me. They do not know what actions they do, and what actions are my own. They are missing the point. But we must not blame them for wrongly blaming themselves. We must forgive them.

For a real yogi, there is a third benefit to understanding the law of karma. For, not only does the yogi who understands the law of karma retain balance in the advent of pain or suffering, not only does that yogi cease blaming others, but, in addition, that yogi has nothing but good will for you, whoever you are. Even if person comes to the yogi wanting only to hurt or kill him, that yogi has no feelings of blame; the yogi only wants to help rectify the unbalanced feelings in the would-be murderer, to help him towards an understanding of karma, to help him see the truth.

The reaction is the part of karma that restores the balance. People often refer to it as 'God's will'. There is nothing wrong with this except that it leaves an opening for people to say: This suffering I am undergoing is God's Will. But, you know, even though it is God's will, I really do not deserve it. That is the only problem with calling this law of karma by the name of 'God's Will'. Perhaps it would be better to make a substitution for that word 'will' and call this law of karma 'God's Grace'. That is closer to the truth.

KARMA, FREEDOM & FREE WILL

One question that people always want answered is where the notion of choice fits into the scheme of karma yoga. Probably the best way to examine the notion of choice is to ask ourselves where it exists in our own lives. This is more difficult to do than one might think. I do not wish to sound fatalistic, but if by 'fatal' we mean 'a condition which ultimately must lead to death', then life itself is fatal. Where is there choice in that?

People often ask me: Did you choose to become a swami?, meaning, 'Did you choose to do what you are doing, or do you think you are doing it because it is your destined path?. In order to answer this question in the context of Karma yoga, one would have to put this question differently: Does the effect of past action, which comes back as either the consequence - the retribution, or the reward - the so called 'fruits of past actions'? or, the same thing: Does it come back in the form of an experience, or does it come back in the form of an expression? In this context, the answer must be that whatever 'comes back', can only come back as experience, not as act. And since it does come back to one as an experience, it has finality, an end, and therefore, is finished. It does not compel one to act in a certain manner now.

Look at the simple case of one person insulting another person. When action of an insult is made, the reaction usually comes back immediately in some form or other. Let us say that reaction takes the form of a smashing blow. The action, the insult, has met its reaction, the blow; it is finished. Of course, there is something else called habit, the samskara, which is deep within, and which will no doubt continue the battle. The compulsion to act violently is that samskara deep within you. If that is there, then that is where the responsibility for violent action arises. The responsibility for the action is in you; it is not outside.

What does this imply about free will? If there is a free will, where does it come from? If your response is that free will comes from the individuality, then what you are in effect saying is that free will comes from the 'me'. If free will comes from the 'me', the personality, with all its samskaras, then it is not really a 'free' will but is conditioned will. Only at the point where the individual touches the cosmic consciousness, and therefore, where there is cosmic consciousness, is there freedom. However, at that point, there is no individual, only the soul or cell, the cell of cosmic being. The freedom is there, because at that point it does not need any expression. Why should it need expression? It is.

Is there a free will? Man certainly assumes that he is endowed with a will. And perhaps, there is something which could be construed as a free will, something within this 'me' principle that is able to either fix the attention on the 'me', or on questioning it constantly. That something, which one could construe as 'free will', is possible. Put differently, it is possible for one to reach a point where he or she

no longer wishes to remain foolish, no longer wishes to remain ignorant, and at that point the 'will' appears to turn towards 'the light'. But is any other aspect of this 'will' free? We are not free to choose what we will receive, because that is all a part of the reaction that is coming from all the accumulated actions of the past. Thus, as far as experience is concerned, one is not free to choose. However, in regard to action, or further reaction, one does seem to have one fundamental choice: to face darkness or to turn towards light. When the sun goes down, it is going to get dark. That is determined. Are you going to meditate, or are you going to play poker? That is up to you. When it comes to free will, that is about it.

If you are inclined to argue that even that is predetermined, you will find that is not exactly correct either. The samskaras, the habits, the patterns, the predispositions are all piled up from the past. But, do not forget the intelligence. The intelligence in you, not the 'me' but the thing that is before the buddhi, which way is it facing? Okay, granted that it is become habitual for the intelligence to reflect only the samskaras. Yet, there is also something else always there, that being the consciousness, or cosmic being. The attention, or intelligence, can choose to turn from the one to the other. How can it do so? It can do so, because it is, by definition, a discriminating intelligence. If the intelligence appears to suffer from some kind of limitation, it is only because one does not see that the real limitation is caused by the strong influence of the samskaras, the constant pull of the habits. But the fact that there is a strong pull of habits does not mean that there is no intelligence, and it does not mean that you are helpless.

Even the expression often touted by the yogis: As you sow, so you shall reap, need not be true. For example, I have a garden in Mauritius at a place where I spend some time. I go into that garden, and I sow it. But I never reap anything from it, because I travel all the time, and I am never there at those times when it yields up its 'fruits'. I work there. That is nice. I can see what is planted, and so on. But I may not even care to reap it. Why? What for? Perhaps if you say, As you sow, so shall it grow, that might be more accurate. Of course, if, on the other hand, you had a motivation in sowing, that motivation will itself compel, and drive you to reap. Since we are so 'motive oriented' in every thing we do, it requires a very distinct and definite effort, if one may call it so, to turn away from that, and to turn towards the light. It is not child's play.

If one is able to turn towards the light, then the light itself will be reflected in the buddhi. However, one should not get the idea that it is all easy from there onwards, because it is always possible to slip up; a reason that yogis suggested yoga practices which cultivate meditative tendencies. After all, how does one become a chain smoker? People are not born chain smokers. The smoking habit is cultivated. Even so, the satsang habit, the habit of being in the company of the wise, can be cultivated. So that, in the right company, in the right environment, one cultivates meditation, which itself is a turning towards the light.

Since we are now dealing with karma yoga, another question comes up: 'In terms of the law of karma, where is choice?' In terms of prarabha, it is clear that one has

no choice about whether to allow prarabha or not, because the reaction has started, and it is going to have to work itself out. However, if one has turned towards the light, and if, in between all this sowing and growing of the seeds of karma, there has been a revolutionary transmutation within, then it is possible to look at whatever comes, without getting tangled up in it. Then, no matter what experience comes your way, it is possible for it to pass right through without any bother to you. Misfortune only comes along because one is running after good fortune, struggling to make good fortune happen, and in that struggle, unavoidably exploiting others. That karma of exploitation must inevitably have its reaction, which comes back with equal force upon that exploiting factor we call the 'me'. Yet, if, in the meantime, the me, the motivating factor, has been seen for what it is, then the prarabha has nothing upon which to act, and therefore, cannot cause any further suffering.

Is that all? Not quite. Although suffering may cease, the balancing does not. It continues, having a definite effect on the external world. Where is choice in all this? There is none. It is like the weather. Weather patterns may not be predictable, but when a hot air mass hits a cold air mass, one gets some very definite weather. Choice is not a factor. The weather happens. If it rains, and you are outside, you get wet. If you are inside, you stay dry.

This may sound terribly unorthodox to many practitioners of yoga. However, if you read the discourses of Ramana Maharshi, you find similar statements that sound completely radical: 'You have no free will', he said, and when he said that, he meant more than just having no choice about having to undergo what was coming in the form of the reaction. Most oriental metaphysicians feel that one has a choice over present action. Ramana Maharshi went one step further by saying that one does not even have a choice over that. He said that one is so heavily conditioned by samskaras and vasanas that even what you call 'present action' is predetermined. Did he feel that there was any arena in which there was freedom? Yes, he did. However, that topic falls into a different arena, and we must leave it for latter on.

Most people are terribly frightened by the idea that we have no freedom of choice. The orthodox metaphysicians, for example, felt that free will could remedy conflict, and that without free will, conflict would be unending, locking human kind in an utterly helpless eternal battle between immortal foes. To this, Ramana Maharshi boldly replied: So what? Rice boils on the stove. But you do not have to boil, unless you foolishly identify yourself with the rice. In other words, with what do you identify yourself? The body? What is it that thinks the body is mine? The me? The me assumes that what happens to the body is happening to 'me'.

That 'me' does not even exist. That, more or less, was the crux of Ramana Maharshi's response. Put more simply: do not worry about all that goes on. Do not worry about earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, pestilence, etc., because you are infinite consciousness, which is unaffected by all of that. Ramana Maharshi saw that only the 'me' is effected by such things. Since he did not accept the me as

real, he did not accept all those things as problems.

There is freedom of choice. To whom? To that consciousness, that being the sole consciousness, the sole reality. It is only that which throws up a thing which is called 'Alexander' or a thing called 'Isabelle'. It does not call it 'Alexander' or 'Isabelle'. The mother or the father calls it so. The infinite intelligence throws up a thing that you call 'earth', or a thing which you call 'water'. That infinite intelligence, being the desirer of everything, being the doer of everything, being the experiencer of everything, that has freedom of choice, and total freedom of action. It is not bound by anything. That is what has free will.

That is what is known as 'creative', as 'creative wil', as 'creative action'. That infinite intelligence, to use a very common word, has 'power' - power to do. That is the only thing that does have power to do. Its power can do: kartam can undo akartam or it cannot do, anyatahkartum. The intelligence does not regard all this as power, because at the stage where such power exists, there is no experiencer to call it so. We think we have power, and imagine that we can do this or that: I entered into deep meditation, and I willed it to happen. Some times something does happen. When it does, we do not even stop to wonder if there was another element involved besides our will.

As, for instance, kakataliya, the sanskrit expression which appears in the Yoga Vasistha, which roughly translates as 'accidental coincidence'. A person tries to will something, or another person prays for something to happen. Should the action happen to coincide with the prayer, that person automatically assumes that he had something to do it, and feeds the belief that a person can somehow force cosmic consciousness do something. What a devilish notion.

Interestingly enough, the word 'demon' means precisely this. A demon is not someone some physical monster with huge teeth, four noses, etc. A demon is merely one who tries to directly meddle with the cosmic forces. Since the power to act comes from intelligence, all demons eventually wind up in the soup sooner or later.

We like to claim some credit for all the various 'good things' we are engaging in, to claim some credit, for example, for all our karma yoga. But, karma yoga is only there when the 'non-existent me' is realized to be non-existent, which is self-surrender, or self-sacrifice, or whatever you want to call it. So if you walk around considering yourself a saint who 'does marvelous things', there has been no karma yoga for you.

Swami Sivananda never so much suggested that He did anything, not even to say, 'God has made me His instrument to do this'. Why? Because for Swami Sivananda, the 'me' did not exist, not even as 'instrument'. In His presence, one might see someone transformed, and as a spectator, attribute this power to Swami Sivananda. I might rationalize the whole thing, especially if I am His disciple, and say 'Swami Sivananda is such a pure person that God works through

Him'. But that is not right either. As with any real saint, He is not there at all. He has already dissolved in that intelligence, in that divinity. The truth is that God, or the intelligence we call 'God', does it - does everything.

This truth can be received intellectually, and if that is the only way it is received, it is useless. Realization, true realization is not had, ironically, by an act of will. Like food, which when assimilated, becomes you, the truth, when assimilated becomes you, and you become the truth. Questions like 'Must I pray?' or 'Should prayer be dropped?' vanish only when the idea of 'I' is dropped. What replaces it is spontaneous, appropriate activity. So that, you pick up the phone, hear someone saying that So-and-so is dreadfully ill. Immediately, at that moment, some mantra, some prayer may fall out on the lips: Om tryambakam yajamahe sugandhim pushtivardhanam urvaarukamiva bandhanaan-mrityormuksheeya maamritaam. But there is no thought or question about whether it should be done, and, of course, most important of all, you are completely aware that it is not a question of: 'Your will be done'.

It is like vigilance. Vigilance is not an act of mind. Vigilance is itself the nature of cosmic intelligence. It is not there in order to keep from allowing a habit to exist. To understand that habit is bad, the intellect will suffice. For even the intellect can recognize that habits compel one to do the same actions over and over again, and as such, to be bound up in the both the mechanical and the meaningless. Though most people do not see it, what is regarded as mind is really no more than the habitual. If you were to pull all the habits down, and do away with them, you would not find mind there at all, at least not as you now know it. When the habits are all gone, what remains? Intelligence. The intelligence is totally free of habit, completely non-mechanical, and totally unpredictable, and, vigilance is part of its nature.

Vigilance sees something that the intellect cannot, that 'I' has no free will. It is not possible, because much like the forming of a tornado, when the personality condenses, it is dense, and, as it grows stronger, the density of its field increases, reducing the transparency of the cell, and therefore, reducing the field of perception also. Since personality is unable to perceive anything beyond, the 'me' is assumed to be all. It is itself the cause of its own conditioned, or limited vision. The condensed personality is so very dense that, like the tornado, it blocks the light, giving it shape, but also keeping the light from shining through to reveal its essential nature.

Another little example might help you catch a limited vision of this dilemma. If we sit in an unlit room with large glass window at twilight time, there is some light inside, and some outside. If someone were to install very bright flood lamps in that room, and flood that room with light, you would no longer be able to see outside that room, and even though it was not totally dark outside, it would appear that way to anyone inside the room who tried to look out the window. In a vaguely similar way, the condensation of the cosmic material that forms this personality is dense, and so, vision through it of some light beyond it is not had.

All that appears visible is 'me'.

Vigilance sees the 'I' is not doing, is not capable of doing. When such vigilance manifests, whatever action happens, is perfect action, absolutely perfect. Then, there is no need to practice karma yoga. That is karma yoga already.