

Satsang with Sri Swami Tattvavidananda Saraswati
Arsha Vidya Gurukulam
The Essentials of Hindu Dharma - 4

Question

Swamiji, what is a human being's future after the death of the body? What is the Hindu view of life after death and also the Hindu view of the heaven?

Answer

One important hallmark of Hindu *dharma* is the theory of reincarnation. When a human being comes into life in this world, we do not agree with the view that he has started the life at this point alone and that there was nothing earlier to it. In fact, we say that though it appears that life started at this point from date of birth, there is a history behind this individual. We find such wide variations in the environments in which different individuals take birth. Some individuals are born with a silver spoon in their mouth; some individuals are much less privileged at or after birth. All such variations are accounted for by invoking a history for each individual. So it is really a pilgrim's progress. The birth is not the beginning of a person and death is not the end of the individual. The person is making a journey and this life happens to be just one leg in that journey. After death, if he has led a virtuous life, he goes to other levels of existence called heaven. But in Hindu philosophy, there is no eternal heaven. A person acquires heaven by the dint of his virtuous life and having acquired it, he will stay there for a while enjoying a few things only to return back. Because there is no eternal heaven, because there is no infinite virtue in any *jīva*, this journey continues till he realizes his own essential Divinity and becomes, thereby, one with the Godhead. Till that point, this journey continues. And so, if he leads a virtuous life, he goes to the heaven and comes back. Otherwise, he has to account for all his actions in every possible way. There is no way of putting an end to everything just by going to heaven.

Question

So would it be correct to say that human beings should reach their Divinity while they are in this body, that they should achieve their own inherent *svarūpa*, their own inherent nature while living in this life itself?

Answer

Yes. We talk of a heaven and we also say that a human being by virtuous actions can reach the heaven and enjoy a few things there. However, our emphasis is not at all in reaching the heaven for enjoyment. To encourage a person to lead a virtuous life, we talk of a heaven because heaven happens to be an important content of a religious mind. In any case, we emphasize that the heaven is not eternal and also that even by gaining heaven you are not going to gain anything everlasting; you have to come back and start afresh again. And if you have done some wrong actions in this life or in earlier life, you have to account for all those actions. Therefore, despite our description of heaven and its glories, our ultimate emphasis is on an individual's effort to recognize or manifest his own Divinity - because he happens to be the Divinity. He is not the person which he takes himself to be. He happens to be the Divinity and he should make an effort to manifest that Divinity. The entire emphasis is given on manifesting that Divinity and reaching that exalted state of being one with the Godhead, the origin of this universe.¹

¹ This transcript is based on Swami Tattvavidanandaji's TV interview in California with Mr. Vijay Kapoor. Transcribed and edited by Mohan Bhujle.