

Satsang with Swami Veditatmananda Saraswati
Arsha Vidya Gurukulam
More on Karma

Question

Why do good people suffer from a lot of pain?

Answer

Everyone has pain. By suffering pain, you exhaust *pāpa* quickly. How do you know that bad people don't have pain? Everyone has pain. Good people, you think should not be in pain; and others, you think, deserve the pain. But most people suffer from pain. Pain does not always mean it is a bad thing. Very often pain comes to us and changes the direction of our life. Sometimes, it can be a blessing. Sometimes, it points out to an illness. There is no gain without pain. Pain draws our attention to something. At times, it tells us that we are violating something.

Question

Do you believe the world is fair and no evil can happen to you when you are good?

Answer

I don't know what is meant by evil happening to me when I am good. I believe there is a basic fairness in the world. Evil cannot come to me when I am good because evil cannot be where good is. But will there be pain and loss for me? Yes, of course. There will always be those, and these experiences are due to our *prārabdha karma*.

Question

We save so many premature babies. When they grow up, some are disabled, some are in discomfort, and some are a burden to whoever is taking care of them. I'm sure many of them must be feeling, "Why am I alive?" Did I do anything wrong in saving the lives of such children and will it affect my *karma*?

Answer

If you have informed the parents and they have agreed to the treatment, you have to treat the children, which is the law. You don't have the freedom not to treat the children, because the law requires you to do that. Since you are abiding by the law, and since you are not doing it for your personal benefit, you are not incurring any negative *karma*. I don't think it is for the doctor to decide when the child should die.

Question

How can one make sense of getting a parking ticket when trying to help someone?

Answer

The punishment could be from previous *karma*. In this example, getting the parking ticket perhaps exhausts some *pāpa*. In the process of helping, you attain some *puṇya*.

Question

Why is our presence here not due to our choice, but due to circumstances beyond our control? Does everyone have a destiny? Is the concept of choice an illusion?

Answer

The question is, "Is there free will or is it destiny?" It is both. Life is a combination of free will and destiny. In any situation there are many factors beyond my control. I cannot control what happens. But the way I respond to the things that happen to me is my choice. I have that much choice. It is not a whole lot of choice, but I have that much; and that much is enough. You have some part in the decision of what and who you are. What we call destiny of today, was the free will of the past. Destiny is not arbitrary. I made some choices in the past, and created the present. Thus, the present is the product of the past. Therefore, the future is the product of the present, and we can use the power of choice productively to create a desirable future.

Question

What is *nishkāma karma*?

Answer

Nishkāma karma is doing *karma* with no agenda. In performing *karma*, one needs to watch the mind and see if by helping others, am I helping myself in some way? In helping others, am I looking for a benefit? The mind always calculates, “What is in it for me?” Even if you have an agenda, as long as you are benefiting others, then also it is *nishkāma karma*.

Question

Can you give us an example of *nishkāma karma* in our life?

Answer

You do many things without expecting anything. But you don't have to do *nishkāma karma* all the time. However, when opportunities arise, you can help without expecting any personal benefit. One common example is raising your family.

Question

When you help others in order to make yourself happy, how is it different from acquiring wealth or power, which is done to make one happy?

Answer

When you're trying to please someone, if they are pleased, it should be okay. If they are unhappy, it should also not bother you. The very act of doing is what should make you fulfilled. The outcome should be of no consequence to you personally. The very doing should be a matter of joy for you, and that is *nishkāma karma*.¹

¹ Based on satsang with Swamiji in Long Island, NY, Summer '03. Transcribed and edited by Anjali Bhat and Aparna Modi.