

Prarabdha Karma

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From: LINK: Shyamasundara (Dasa) ACBSP (Astrologer)
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Date: 03-Oct-94 07:43 EDT
To: Vedic Astrology (Symposium hosted by Shyamasundara Das) [42]
Subject: Prarabdha Karma

Hare Krsna!

A long time ago Mother Urmila posted a message that I had wanted to respond to. But I was unable to do so because I was in the middle of packing and moving to Florida and have been traveling since then. I will save you the trouble of retrieving the text by duplicating it in full and then making my comments. This may be a very long posting and I am purposely not breaking it up in segments because I need to get a response from devotees as soon as possible. So please excuse me if this text is long. Urmila writes:

Text 45521: 22-May-94 22:59 /61 lines/ Urmila (Devi Dasi)
ACBSP (ISKCON School) Receiver: (Vedanga Jyotish) Vedic
Astrology <402> Subject: karma

In reading the comments about p-karma and a liberated devotee remaining in the body, as well as taking future bodies, I was reminded of a purport in the fourth canto:

Srimad-Bhagavatam Canto 4: Chapter Twenty-nine, Text 69: PURPORT

"It has been explained in the previous verse that all desires on the mental platform become visible one after another. Sometimes, however, by the supreme will of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, the whole stockpile can be visible all at one time. In Brahma-samhita (5.54) it is said, karmani nirdahati kintu ca bhakti-bhajam. When a person is fully absorbed in Krsna consciousness, his stockpile of material desires is minimized. Indeed, the desires no longer fructify in the form of gross bodies. Instead, the stockpile of desires becomes visible on the mental platform by the grace of the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

...the point is that a living entity has immense and unlimited desires for material enjoyment, and he has to transmigrate from one gross body to another until these desires are exhausted.

No living entity is free from the cycle of birth and death unless he takes to Krsna consciousness; therefore in this verse it is clearly stated (sattvaika-nisthe) that when one is fully absorbed in Krsna consciousness, in one stroke he is freed of past and future mental desires. Then, by the grace of the Supreme Lord, everything becomes simultaneously manifest within the mind. In this regard, Visvanatha Cakravarti Thakura cites the example of mother Yasoda's seeing the whole cosmic manifestation within the mouth of Lord Krsna. By the grace of Lord Krsna, mother Yasoda saw all the universes and planets within the mouth of Krsna. Similarly, by the grace of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Krsna, a Krsna conscious person can see all his dormant desires at one time and finish all his future transmigrations. This facility is especially given to the devotee to make his path clear for returning home, back to Godhead.

Why we see things not experienced in this life is explained herein. That which we see is the future expression of a gross body or is already stocked in our mental stockpile. Because a Krsna conscious person does not have to accept a future gross body, his recorded desires are fulfilled in a dream. We therefore sometimes find things in a dream never experienced in our present life."

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We may accept, on the basis of this purport, that a liberated devotee can fulfill his p-karma in the subtle dream bodies, rather than having to accept many gross bodies. Of course, this discussion does not concern the situation where a liberated soul accepts a physical body solely to fulfill some specific preaching mission.

There are more relevant quotes on this subject - a section near the end of "Prayers by the Personified Vedas," in Krsna book comes to mind, where Prabhupada writes that the suffering and enjoyment of a devotee are not due to his previous activities but to the will of the Lord. Prabhupada writes at length on the subject, clearly referring not only to the perfected devotee, but to the aspiring Vaisnava as well. (Text 45521)

My response:

It seems that Mother Urmila has misapprehended the definitions of the different kinds of karma that are mentioned in the essay I wrote (section Fate

Freewill and Law of Karma). To summarize, they are:

Karma is divided up into two categories; Sancita karma (stored up), and Kriyamana karma (newly created).

Sancita karma is further sub-divided into another two categories namely Anarabdha karma (effects which have not yet begun) and Prarabdha karma (functional karma which is already acting).

From these definitions Anarabdha Karma (a-karma), a subset of Sancita karma, is the stored up karma whose effects have yet to be experienced. Prarabdha karma (p-karma) on the other hand has already been set in motion. The evidence for it is seen in the mirror - your body.

It seems that Mother Urmila has confused the two types of Karma. She says:

"We may accept, on the basis of this purport, that a liberated devotee can fulfill his p-karma in the subtle dream bodies, rather than having to accept many gross bodies."

Whereas Srila Prabhupada says:

"Sometimes, however, by the supreme will of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, >>the whole stockpile<< can be visible all at one time."

This "whole stockpile doesn't refer to p-karma but a-karma. Even then this only happens "sometimes" and is not the rule but the exception.

The next sentence, however, refers to the transformation of a-karma into p-karma.

"Indeed, the [stockpile of] desires [a-karma] no longer fructify in the form of gross bodies [p-karma]."

If, as Mother Urmila states, a devotee can fulfill his p-karma in the dream state, then when all the p-karma is finished he will wake up dead. A most unsettling experience I'm sure. For when the p-karma is complete the body falls off.

Desires are the seeds of karma which cause us to take material births. Prabhupada says: "in one stroke he is freed of past and future mental desires." This also refers to a-karma, which are the result of desires in the past and which become our desires in the future when they fructify. Also kriyamana karma (k-karma) will create future desires but as stated in the essay, to such a nirapeksa devotee this type of karma cannot cling just as

water cannot cling to a lotus leaf. There is however no reference to the present karma represented by our material body in this purport.

Then Srila Prabhupada says:

"Similarly, by the grace of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Krsna, a Krsna conscious person can see all his dormant desires at one time and finish all his future transmigrations."

Again by definition "dormant desires" does not refer to p-karma but to a-karma.

Finally Srila Prabhupada says:

"That which we see is the future expression of a gross body or is already stocked in our mental stockpile. Because a Krsna conscious person does not have to accept a future gross body, his recorded desires are fulfilled in a dream."

These two sentences do not at all refer to p-karma but rather to a-karma which gets destroyed in dreams and thus never becomes p-karma.

Then Mother Urmila refers to " - a section near the end of "Prayers by the Personified Vedas," in Krsna book comes to mind, where Prabhupada writes that the suffering and enjoyment of a devotee are not due to his previous activities but to the will of the Lord."

I looked this up but could not find the reference she was referring to. This doesn't mean it's not there, I just could not find it. Perhaps she could provide the text for us. Aside from that it is moot as to whether our suffering and enjoyments are due to past karma or the will of the Lord. The mechanism of karma, as Krsna explains, is very complex, and who but Krsna is the ultimate sanctioning agent in reference to whatever karma we get? Ultimately all karmas are awarded by Krsna for our benefit. We have such vast oceans of karma at our disposal that it would not be difficult to tailor-make a program for our rectification.

The only reference to karma near the end of the "Prayers by the Personified Vedas" is as follows:

"How the living entity becomes liberated from material nature after surrendering unto the Supreme Personality of Godhead is illustrated by a sleeping man within a room. When a man is sleeping, everyone sees that he is present within the room, but actually the man himself is not within that body, for while sleeping a man forgets his bodily existence, although others may see

that his body is present. Similarly, a liberated person engaged in devotional service of the Lord may be seen by others to be engaged in the household duties of the material world, but since his consciousness is fixed in Krsna he does not live within this world. His engagements are different, exactly as a sleeping man's engagements are different from his bodily engagements. It is confirmed in the Bhagavad-gita that a devotee engaged full time in the transcendental loving service of the Lord has already surpassed the influence of the three modes of material nature. He is already situated on the Brahman platform of spiritual realization, although he appears to be living with the body or within the material world. Srila Rupa Goswami stated in this connection in his Bhakti-rasamrta-sindhu that the person whose only desire is to serve the Supreme Personality of Godhead may be situated in any condition in the material world, but he is to be understood as jivanmukta, that is to say he is to be considered liberated while living within the body or the material world. The conclusion, therefore, is that a person fully engaged in Krsna consciousness is a liberated person. Such a person has actually nothing to do with the material world. Those who are not in Krsna consciousness are called karmis and jnanis, and they hover on the bodily and mental platform and thus are not liberated. This situation is called kaivalya-nirasta-yoni. A person situated on the transcendental platform becomes freed from the repetition of birth and death. This is also confirmed in Bhagavad-gita, Fourth Chapter. Simply by knowing the transcendental nature of the Supreme Personality of Godhead Krsna, one becomes free from the chains of the repetition of birth and death, and after quitting his present body he goes back home, back to Godhead. This is the conclusion of all the Vedas. Thus one should surrender unto the lotus feet of Lord Krsna after understanding the prayers offered by the personified Vedas."

There are stronger statements in the Bhagavatam which indicate that even if one is liberated they must still undergo their prarabdha-karma. We have in our essay given several quotes from Vedanta-sutra, Upanisads, and the 3rd and 11th canto of Srimad Bhagavatam. The quote above from Prayers of Personified Vedas also indicates that the karma continues but the person is jivanmukta. I recently found an even stronger indication from Srimad Bhagavatam as to the relationship of a liberated soul and his p-karma.

SB 5.1.16:

"Even if one is liberated, he nevertheless accepts the body he has received according to his past karma. Without misconceptions, however, he regards his enjoyment and suffering due to that karma the way an awakened person regards a dream he had while sleeping. He thus remains steadfast and never works to achieve another material body under the influence of the three modes of material nature."

PURPORT

"The difference between a liberated and conditioned soul is that the conditioned soul is under the concept of bodily life, whereas a liberated person knows that he is not the body but a spirit, different from the body. Priyavrata might have thought that although a conditioned soul is forced to act according to the laws of nature, why should he, who was far advanced in spiritual understanding, accept the same kind of bondage and impediments to spiritual advancement? To answer this doubt, Lord Brahma informed him that even those who are liberated do not resent accepting, in the present body, the results of their past activities. While sleeping, one dreams many unreal things, but when he awakens he disregards them and makes progress in factual life. Similarly, a liberated person - one who has completely understood that he is not the body but a spirit soul - disregards past activities performed in ignorance and performs his present activities in such a way that they produce no reactions. This is described in Bhagavad-gita (3.9). Yajnarthat karmano 'nyatra loko 'yam karma-bandhanah: if one performs activities for the satisfaction of the Supreme Personality, the yajna-purusa, his work does not produce reactions, whereas karmis, who act for themselves, are bound by the reactions of their work. A liberated person, therefore, does not think about whatever he has ignorantly done in the past; instead, he acts in such a way that he will not produce another body by fruitive activities. As clearly mentioned in Bhagavad-gita: 'One who engages in full devotional service, who does not fall down in any circumstance, at once transcends the modes of material nature and thus comes to the level of Brahman.' (Bg. 14.26) Regardless of what we have done in our past lives, if we engage ourselves in unalloyed devotional service to the Lord in this life, we will always be situated in the brahma-bhuta (liberated) state, free from reactions, and will not be obliged to accept another material body. Tyaktva deham punar janma naiti mam eti so 'rjuna (Bg.4.9). After giving up the body, one who has acted in that way does not accept another material body, but instead goes back home, back to Godhead."

Even though there are so many clear verses such as this one some devotees still object and cannot accept them. I am not exactly sure why that is. Perhaps it is because the emphasis in all verses which I presented from various sources had to do with karma and to these devotees it seemed too fatalistic. Or that the supremely independent nature of Krsna was not adequately represented - that Krsna could, in one stroke neutralize all karmas. I do not argue against that proposition, Krsna can do anything. But what does Krsna actually do? What He does we learn from sastra.

One thing that does seem lacking in the presentation, and that I would like to rectify, is how, despite a devotee being locked into a certain load of p-karma, Krsna interacts with that devotee. Just because a devotee has to

experience his p-karma this doesn't preclude Krsna's presence in his life guiding him at every step. It seems to me that some devotees think that these are mutually exclusive and that is the root of their objection. In the presentation I made I emphasized the karma because the issue was Fate, Freewill and the Law of Karma. But now I would like to emphasize how Krsna interacts by His freewill with the living entities and how this influences their use of their freewill within the framework of karma.

I am requesting that those who have a different angle please send some quotes, or ideas about how to approach the situation. They can send them to me personally or to the conference.

Your servant

Shyamasundara Dasa

Text 48350

From: Jagadisananda (Dasa) ACBSP (Los Angeles)

Date: 04-Oct-94

Subject: Prarabdha Karma

I think the bulk of ISKCON devotees' understanding of karma is summarized in NOD Chapter one. Refer to the entire section "Relief from Material Distress". Here is a small quote from that section:

"It is stated in the Padma Purana that there are four kinds of effects due to sinful activities, which are listed as follows: (1) the effect which is not yet fructified, (2) the effect which is lying as seed, (3) the effect which is already mature and (4) the effect which is almost mature. It is also stated that all these four effects become immediately vanquished for those who surrender unto the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Visnu, and become engaged in His devotional service in full Krsna consciousness."

So how do we understand this section of NOD in light of Sancita karma, Kriyamana karma, Anarabdha karma and Prarabdha karma? The next sentence in the purport after the above quote is as follows: "Those effects described as almost mature refer to the distress from which one is suffering at present, and the effects lying as seed are in the core of the heart, where there is a certain stock of sinful desires which are like seeds." The almost mature effect also referred to in number 4 above, seems to be p-karma. The purport says that all four become immediately vanquished. So one may conclude that a devotee is above karma and directly under the supervision of Krsna. Or maybe

all of this is just inconceivable and should just be left alone. Kind of like the raging discussion on the jiva in Philosophical Exchange.

Text 48447

From: Urmila (Devi Dasi) ACBSP (ISKCON School)

Date: 04-Oct-94

Subject: karma

Thank you, Shyamasundara Prabhu, for responding to my text. I am busy preparing for the upcoming educational conference, moving the gurukula here, and finishing up a school quarter, so I don't think I'll look through that long Krsna book chapter for the quote to which I referred. In any case, it was not as specific as the one from the fourth canto.

I suppose I wonder whether or not we can *assume* that every devotee, even those who are liberated *have to undergo the full force of already fructified karma.* First, there *are* some cases where Krsna changes the devotee's body, thus immediately changing the matured karma: Vasudeva, the leper that Lord Caitanya cured, the snake who was swallowing Nanda Maharaja, Gajendra the elephant and the crocodile that was fighting with him, kadamba that Rama and Laksman transformed, etc. There is also a statement by Rupa Goswami that at initiation one's body changes to that of a brahmana like bell metal can be changed to gold by alchemy.

Clearly, we do *not* generally see that a devotee's body undergoes some sudden or dramatic change when he or she begins to chant, or takes initiation. Rather, those who wear glasses continue to wear them and those who have chronic illnesses continue to have them. Yet, there are many sastric statements that clearly state that Krsna, not karma, controls a devotee from the moment of sincere surrender (from the Ramayana, quoted in Caitanya Caritamrta).

I suppose I see it like this. Our karma is custom-made according to our mentality. When we become a devotee, some of our mentality immediately changes. Krsna may then consider that the karmic reactions for that aspect of our sinful nature are unnecessary. Yet, some of our sinful mentality may continue. Even after years of chanting, in fact, we may still tightly hold on to some anarthas. Because those desires probably had their root before this life, and because our present body and suffering are a reaction to those desires, the Lord may feel that the karma we would have suffered is still appropriate. Or He may feel that it is appropriate to a somewhat lesser degree. Because our most deep-rooted desires are often the most difficult to eradicate, a devotee may, indeed, appear to be working under karma and much of

his or her chart may be mostly accurate in regard to specific events. However, this will not be as "solid" as with a non-devotee. And, not only can Krsna completely take away karma, or reduce it; He can give us a reaction that ordinarily we wouldn't have had until 10 lifetimes from now. Because of our devotional service, we may be ready for the lesson earlier than expected.

It does not seem reasonable to me that if all our mature karma were finished, that our body would die. If Krsna can arrange for a nitya siddha, who has no karma, to have a physical body, then why can't a sadhana siddha continue the body of his previous karma in the same way?

Of course, Lord Brahma advises that we see all suffering as due to our karma, and we simply await the mercy of the Lord. I am not trying to present the above as if I'm an authority; I'm simply wondering. Please excuse me if I have written something foolish.