

Bhakta's efforts never go in vain

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Think of a person who has committed a sin, say murder or burglary. The person is sentenced to imprisonment for a certain number of years depending on the gravity of the crime committed. Once in prison, efforts are made to reform such a person. There have been several instances where a prisoner gets reformed and transforms into one of fine qualities by several acts of goodness while in prison. In some special cases, the prisoner may also be released ahead of time in recognition of these changes. Providing an opportunity for a prisoner to get reformed and sending a reformed person back to the society are the hallmarks of a good law and order system in any society.

Is there a path of transformation for an individual?

One of the biggest limitations of the Semitic religions is the complexity arising out of single birth concept. If a person has been living a life of vices and has been bad throughout his life, then he needs to seek pardon and repent before his death to get redeemed. What happens if the person did not seek repentance during this life time? He/she was perhaps not yet ready mentally to make this transition. Will he/she be eternally condemned or is it simply bad luck for him/her? The person simply lost an opportunity to get reformed and become a worthy individual.

A related question that arises is, "If someone notwithstanding their past deeds develop true devotion over time (spanning several janamas) due to certain turn of events, what is their fate?". Will they be out of the reckoning on matters related to self-evolution and liberation? If we look at the past history of great *sants* and sages we get a different understanding of this aspect. A closer look and understanding of the lives of Sage *Vālmīki*, who was a hunter and *Purandara Dāsa* of the recent past, who was a money lender suggests to us that everybody gets an opportunity to transform, self-evolve and get liberated.

Therefore, it is not surprising that *sanātana dharma* principles are aligned to this basic feature. Lord Krishna emphasizes this aspect through a few *ślokas* in chapter 9 of *Bhagavad Gītā*. We shall see two of them in this writing.

Self-Evolution – A Divine Guarantee

Even if (*api cet*) a person was following inappropriate practices and not leading a life of purity in thought, deeds and action (*sudurācārah*), later becomes fixed in my thought and worship (*bhajate mām*) in an uninterrupted manner (*ananyabhāk*), it must be understood that such a person (*saḥ*) has indeed reached a state of purity (*sādhureva*). It must also be understood that he/she indeed (*hi*) has made the right approach and choices (*saṃyag-vyavasitah*) in his/her life.

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अपि चेत्सुदुराचारो भजते मामनन्यभाक् ।
साधुरेव स मन्तव्यः सम्यग्व्यवसितो हि सः ॥ 9.30

*api cet-sudurācāro bhajate mām-ananyabhāk
sādhureva sa mantavyaḥ samyag-vyavasito hi saḥ*

There are two aspects in this *śloka* that needs correct understanding. One is “making the right approach and choices” and the other is “becoming filled in the thought of the Lord in an uninterrupted manner”. These two are clearly related to one another. To transform from a situation of leading a casual, undisciplined and valueless life to one of uninterrupted thinking of the Lord requires one to make certain choices in life. It does not happen overnight. The right company of people, the role of a Guru to guide this transformation process, the intense personal desire to make a change in oneself are some of the elements of this transformation process.

Quite often such a change in the trajectory happens on account of some significant life events. These may be in the form of disappointments and tragic happenings which are unexpected and untimely. Rather than getting depressed of such events and outcomes in life, if an individual begins to think that this is how the grace of the Lord befalls to change the trajectory of life then the rest follows.

Such a person very quickly (*kṣipram*) becomes (*bhavati*) one of high values and virtues in life (*dharmātmā*). Furthermore, such a person also attains (*nigacchati*) everlasting peace and tranquility (*śāśvacchāntim*). Oh! Son of Kuntī (*kaunteya*) be known of this fact (*prati jānīhi*) that my devotees (*me bhaktaḥ*) never perish (*na praṇaśyati*) or get lost into nothingness after all these efforts.

क्षिप्रं भवति धर्मात्मा शश्वच्छान्तिं निगच्छति ।
कौन्तेय प्रति जानीहि न मे भक्तः प्रणश्यति ॥ 9.31

*kṣipram bhavati dharmātmā śāśvacchāntim nigacchati
kaunteya prati jānīhi na me bhaktaḥ praṇaśyati*

Transformation into a true seeker is rewarding

In these two *ślokas* Shri Krishna has provided enormous hope and a firm assurance for a true devotee. Just because there was a certain way of life that one followed such a person will not be denied entry into the domain of devotion and ultimate liberation. This is a statement of hope. To make a transition from a life of “not so good” practices to a true devotee of the Lord long standing efforts are required. Therefore, the second statement that the efforts of a bhakta are always rewarded is a grand assurance and a motivator for an evolving bhakta. The two *ślokas* taken together provides a clear agenda for a true seeker. There is no need to worry about how one has conducted the life so far. The focus is towards the future only.

It is therefore important in our life to make the conscious choice to be a true seeker. A firm resolve made in this respect is the most appropriate step we could have taken in our lives as Shri Krishna points out in the *śloka*. Thereafter it merely requires certain practices that we need to imbibe to make this transformation. The role of a guru and a *satsanga* are two important elements in this journey that we make. A guru may not handhold 24x7 but will intercept at the right time and resolve the confusions that we have while making this journey. The guru will provide an enabling framework for us to perform the journey of self-transformation. He/she may point to a book, a way of adjusting the daily life or an activity to start which will put us on the right path. Above all, the guru with compassion will provide invisible support to every genuine effort that we make in this direction.

A *satsanga* will play a role similar to a tree guard fitted when a new sapling is planted on the road side. The tree guard will protect the sapling from grazing cattles and ensure that it grows in a safe environment. In the same way the *satsanga* will provide the safety shield when an individual is embarking in this exercise of transforming into a true seeker. It will play the crucial role of reorientation of the mind into matters of devotion.

With these two elements well established in our life, the transformation will become rapid and fruitful. We will begin to experience a state of contentment. The anxieties and the needless distractions in life will slowly recede to the background and instead the thought of the Lord will engulf our mind. This is the hallmark of a true devotee and all past life choices and actions become meaningless and irrelevant. The only agenda is true devotion leading us on the path of self-liberation.