

Chase Money or Accumulate Merit?

Ram (James Swartz)

2010-06-10

Source: <http://www.shiningworld.com/site/satsang/read/1614>

Cathy: Hi, Ram. Something else I wanted to ask you about. I have this lovely 98-year-old client whom I do respite work for three afternoons a week and give lunch to five days a week. We get on really well and enjoy each other's company. Her daughter works full-time. When Irene (my client) had a fall yesterday (she is okay), it came to me that really she needs someone there full-time. I knew this meant I would lose her as a client (as I have other clients during the mornings) but it felt like the right thing for Irene. So I rang her daughter and told her. She offered me the job (full-time) but it meant I had to quit my current job and then when Irene passed away I would be left without a job (it takes a long time to build a full-time roster, I was lucky someone changed jobs within the company so I walked into one). So I said I could not, even though I would have loved to.

Now, my questions are: 1. Should I have accepted her offer and left it to God to look after the rest? 2. Should I have rung her daughter and told her I thought Irene needed full-time care, knowing very well I would lose all those hours of work which I would not get paid for (I am guaranteed 60 hours a fortnight wages)?

I am not asking you what I should do per se, but I am trying to figure out the right way of living my life, if you know what I mean, and I am using this as an example to learn.

Thanks, Ram.

Ram: Hi, Cathy. That's tough one. It seems to be a conflict between money and doing what is right. But it is not as simple as that, because *Isvara* will take care of her if you do not, so you do not have to feel bad about it. For a spiritual person, the choices one makes should be related to the relative degree of agitation that the alternatives will produce. If you say you will take care of her, you will be agitated because you would lose money, but you would feel good for doing something that made you feel good. So you would accumulate some good *karma*. If you don't take care of her, you will not be agitated on account of the money, but you will be agitated because you lost any opportunity to learn how to do things without monetary reward. But even then you are not necessarily closer to freedom. When we say that *samsara* is a zero-sum game we mean that the upside and the downside of any course of action is perfectly balanced.

Either way you have to deal with the agitation. So how do you deal with it? You offer it to *Bhagavan* because the desire for money and the desire to help are both *Bhagavan* – you did not set yourself up for this conflict. You know that what happens is basically *Bhagavan's* problem and you do what you do with equanimity, *karma yoga*. Or you use the agitation to direct your mind to where there is no agitation, i.e. the self. The means to freedom is a composed mind, so you should do whatever most quickly leads to a composed mind. In this case there is no violation of *dharma*, so you are free to choose either course of action. There is ultimately no right or wrong choice, as all choices have positive and negative consequences and if you accept whatever comes from your actions as *prasad*, you are sitting pretty.