

***Prasada Buddhi* Does Not Preclude Taking Action**

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Tobias: Hi, Ted.

I have a question about *karma yoga*.

When thinking about the *prasada buddhi* aspect, we are taught to gracefully accept what comes to us. We are able to do this once we understand *Isvara* to be the universal order that governs the world and as such is the one that determines the results of our actions. If I am holding a pen and open my fingers, thanks to *Isvara* (in the form of the law of gravity) the pen falls. As such, even when sometimes we get a result that is not aligned with our desires, we can take comfort in the understanding that the result is all part of the perfect functioning of *Isvara's* order. It's all good to this point and very aligned with dealing with cases where circumstance throws us a curve ball.

However... what about cases where we are wronged by someone else? To make it concrete, let's say I have a relative who treats me very unfairly and has a generally selfish attitude, and acts disruptively. How are we to apply the *prasad buddhi* principle in this case? Are we to say something like, "Their bad actions are simply the result of their psychology/genetic make-up, and therefore I don't take it personally"? *Isvara's* order naturally produces such occurrences, so why not gracefully accept them the same way we accept getting a flat tire. This is my current understanding. Is that correct?

Ted: Yes, your understanding is correct – though there is something more to consider.

Just as the "bad" – let's assume them to be *adharmic* actions – are the result of the person's psychological and genetic make-up, which in turn we can only conclude is the result of forces initially set in motion by *Isvara*, so are your responses. So, while you may understand that the actions are actually motivated by factors beyond the person's control, and thus be able to maintain a deeper sense of peace in the face of those actions, *Isvara prasada buddhi*, or an attitude of glad acceptance of the results of one's actions, does not preclude you from responding in a manner that you feel is appropriate in terms of your *svadharma*. More to the point, *dharma* is only protected and maintained by those who act in accord with it. If you do not address *adharma*, you are essentially giving *adharma* freedom to reign.

There is no rule on how you should respond to anyone else's behavior. And we needn't feel compelled to address every little *dharmic* transaction. If we did, we would be consumed with trying to right wrongs and change people's behaviors, and consequently would have no time for self-inquiry and would likely have quite an agitated mind. However, if you feel moved to address an issue or call someone on his or her ill behavior, then you have the right to do so. Before reacting, however, be sure to consider two factors: (1) to what degree might your judgment concerning the behavior be colored by your own *vasana*-based *raga-dveshas* (i.e. subjective likes and dislikes) rather than objective ethical norms, and (2) to what degree might your reaction further agitate your own mind.

Ideally, *karma yoga* is underpinned by an understanding of the universal order that allows one to

function appropriately and effectively within its context without mental disturbance. In other words, if you truly appreciate the fact that the *dharma* field is a grand organic mechanism that operates according to an intrinsic self-sustaining design that enables it to accommodate any action by spontaneously reconfiguring its impersonal, inviolable, infallible network of cause-and-effect occurrences in a way that invariably serves the best interests of the total, then you can take the action you, as a part of that mechanism, are programmed to take without all the mental agitation that normally accompanies our actions.

In terms of your example, you don't have to be pissed at your relative in order to identify that his or her behavior is inappropriate, and you don't have to respond to the behavior in anger, and you don't have to feel guilty about having responded as you felt was appropriate after due consideration just because you have heard that you are "supposed to" turn the other cheek, so to speak, or simply accept whatever takes place with an attitude of gratitude. Even more to the point, you can still have an attitude of gratitude for whatever takes place, for life is a zero-sum game and every situation has an upside and a downside. You can see the situation as an opportunity to uphold *dharma* or to further cultivate *antahkarana shuddhi* (i.e. purity of mind, which essentially means a mind free of binding *vasanas*) or both. Or you can see the situation as just another frustrating instance of how the assholes of the world get away with making life miserable for everyone around them because there seems to be no justifiable "spiritual" recourse.

What it all boils down to is the understanding that is informing your response and the quality of mind with which you respond in whatever way you do.

Tobias: Second, are there any ties to the theory of *karma* here that should be considered? For example, should we say that when someone wrongs us, that we must have "deserved" it in some way do to past *papa karmas*? Many Hindus, as you may know, think along these lines. I am skeptical about this line of reasoning, as it leads to morally troubling conclusions, like saying the children who are in the victims of ISIS violence somehow deserved it, based on actions in past lives. In fact I seem to remember reading something from Swami Dayananda that indicated we cannot apply *karma* theory in this way. Can you help me sort this one out?

Ted: There are indeed ties to the theory of *karma*, for the details of every experience (i.e. situation, circumstance, event, encounter) have be set in place due to previous actions. Life in the apparent reality is essentially nothing other than *karma-phala* (i.e. the fruits of previous actions).

Acknowledging this fact, however, does not preclude one from taking preventative measures or remedial actions with regard to *adharmic* actions or injustice. In other words, while the *karma-phala*, or *prarabdha karma*, associated with a particular body-mind-sense complex might predispose the apparent individual to certain circumstances, part of that *karma-phala/prarabdha karma* involves the circumstances that allow for the prevention or alleviation of abuse and pain.

Moreover, it is never the case that innocent individuals who suffer injustice personally deserve the abuse that is being inflicted upon them. This line of thinking is the result of a misunderstanding of the law of transmigration. It is not the person who travels from body to body, from birth to birth, but rather the *vasanas* associated with the subtle body informing the body-mind-sense complex of the apparent person. This is why we don't remember our past lives (though admittedly there are rare cases in which the *chitta*, or memory, aspect of the subtle body does retain recollections of previous incarnations). Thus it is not the case that the person

deserves the abuse, but rather that the *vasanas/karma-phala* associated with that particular body-mind-sense complex have predisposed it to certain circumstances – and those circumstances may or may not include other body-mind-sense complexes whose associated *vasanas* predispose them to take action to help the victim or prevent the abuse from happening again.

Tobias: By the way, I understand in the final analysis we can say that no “real” harm has been done, since all is ultimately *atma/brahman* and the world is *mithya*, etc. However, I had a relative who was struggling with this type of issue recently and wasn’t at the point where an appeal to the highest truths of Vedanta would do much good (i.e. the person is still a “doer”).

Ted: Yes, in the final analysis, no “real” harm has been done. But since our spiritual growth (i.e. the purification of the mind) is forged by means of our reactions to circumstances, it is important to act to act in accord with *dharmā*. Moreover, since our whole lives are spent living within the context of the apparent reality, we might as well use our free will to make it as enjoyable an experience as possible.