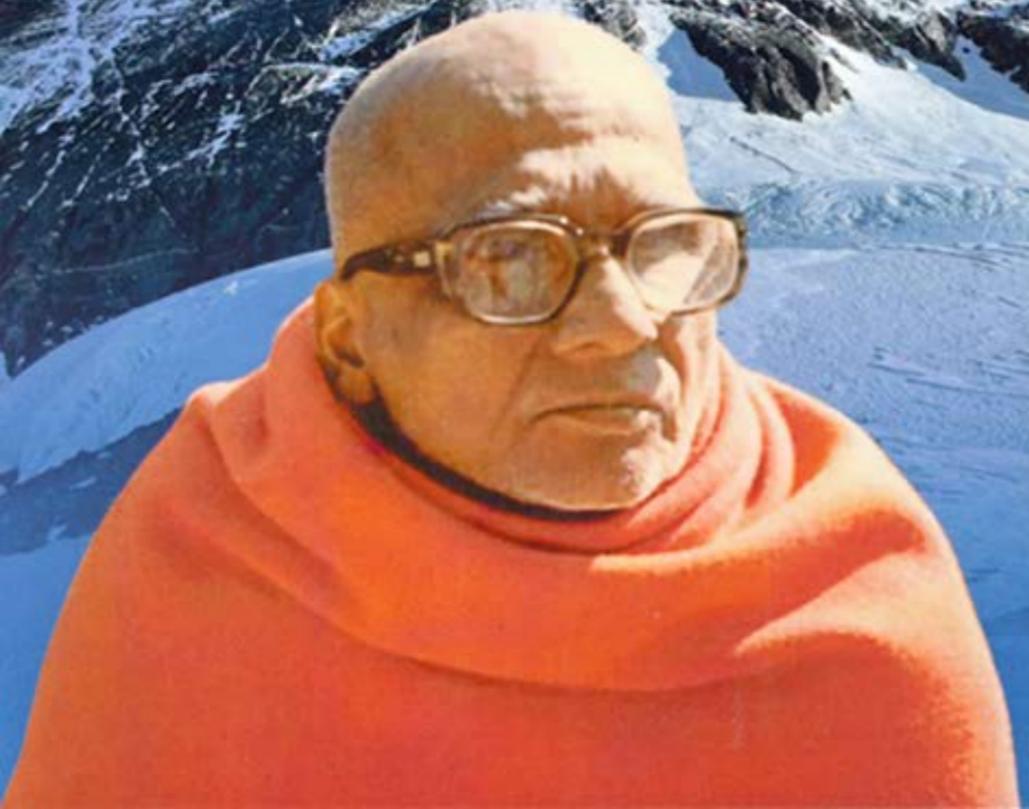




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# ***THE LAW THAT DETERMINES LIFE***

**SWAMI KRISHNANANDA**



# THE LAW THAT DETERMINES LIFE

SWAMI KRISHNANANDA



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## **PUBLISHERS' NOTE**

The 25th of April 2022 marks the auspicious occasion of the Birth Centenary of Worshipful Sri Swami Krishnanandaji Maharaj. To commemorate this sacred occasion, the Headquarters Ashram has decided to bring out booklets comprising the illuminating discourses of Worshipful Sri Swami Krishnanandaji Maharaj for free distribution.

Worshipful Sri Swami Krishnanandaji Maharaj arrived at the holy abode of Gurudev Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj in 1944, and remained here until his Mahasamadhi in November 2001. Swamiji Maharaj was a master of practically every system of Indian thought and Western philosophy. "Many Sankaras are rolled into one Krishnananda," said Sri Gurudev.

Over the years, Swami Maharaj gave many profound and insightful discourses during Sunday night Satsanga, and on holy occasions such as Sri Gurudev's birthday, Sri Krishna Janmasthanami, Mahasivaratri, etc., and also during Sadhana Week and Yoga Vedanta Courses conducted by the Yoga

Vedanta Forest Academy of the Ashram. Sri Swami Maharaj always spoke extempore, spontaneously, without any preparation, and every discourse was fresh, unique, and divinely inspired. The audience was bathed in that stupendous unfathomable energy that radiated from Swamiji Maharaj during these discourses.

We are immensely happy to bring out some of Sri Swamiji Maharaj's discourses in booklet form as our worshipful offering at his holy feet on the blessed occasion of his Birth Centenary.

The present booklet, '**The Law that Determines Life**', consists of an enlightening discourse by Sri Swamiji Krishnanandaji Maharaj on the law of karma.

May the abundant blessings of the Almighty Lord, Sadgurudev Sri Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj and Worshipful Sri Swami Krishnanandaji Maharaj be upon all.

—The Divine Life Society

## THE LAW THAT DETERMINES LIFE

The main question which engages one's attention almost every day is of the way to tackle what may be called the 'human situation' in the world. Man's circumstances are very much related to what he does and what he is yet to do. And it is not easy for him to decide what is the best for him. He bungles in his choice of 'his best' and suffers as a consequence. This happens because he does not feel competent to judge the various factors which go to constitute the result of an action. In short, man suffers from ignorance of the laws of life. He has 'to know' how 'to act' at any given time.

Most people come to grief due to the wrong notion that they can succeed by 'asserting' themselves. The truth is just the opposite. The false idea that self-assertion can bring success is based on the ignorance of the fact that there are also others in this world who can equally assert themselves and stand against the assertion from any particular individual or centre of action. No one has ever succeeded in life, who confronted the 'others' in the

world with his ego. All egoism is met with an equally strong egoism from outside. To take always one's own standpoint, whether in an action, an argument or even in feeling, is to court 'opposition', while the law of life is 'cooperation'. Self-assertion, thus, is contrary to Nature's laws and shall stand defeated in the end. All egoistic action, whether in mind, speech or body, evokes a similar action from other centres of force in the world and to live in such a condition is fitly called *samsara*, and experience in which perpetually warring elements react against one another and bring about restlessness and pain. The remedy against *samsara* is the art of 'appreciation' of the existence and feelings of others who also demand an equal recognition in the scheme of creation. Whenever you say or do anything, start it from the standpoint of the other who is in front of you, listens to you or is concerned with what you do. You are then more likely to succeed in life than by any other means which you may think is really effective.

But what is to be done when, for example, an enemy attacks you? Are you to assert yourself, or not? Here, again, the decision that you take should depend upon the nature of the consequences that would follow from the step that you take. The

unselfishness of an action is judged from the extent to which it is conducive to the realisation of a higher value in life. To know whether a value is higher or otherwise, it has to be viewed both in its quantity and quality. Quantitatively, is it beneficial to the larger number of people possible? And qualitatively, does it tend to the realisation of the highest reality capable of being conceived as accessible? Or, to put it concisely, how far is it spiritual? The comfort of a lesser number may be sacrificed for the good of a larger number. But this is not the only standard of test. It is also to be judged from the extent of the spiritual value involved in it. For instance, the values attached to the existence of a spiritual genius, a saint or a sage, cannot be sacrificed for the vote of a large number of people against him. Here the quantitative test cannot be applied. Though there is only one Sun, its value as energy and light excels that of a thousand fire-flies. The qualitative test is higher than the quantitative one. The Supreme Atman is more than the quantitative aggregate of the entire universe.

All these implications it is that make it a little difficult for an ordinary man to decide the nature of the action that he has to take in his daily life. It calls forth a superior type of understanding (*viveka*). If, in

attacking an enemy, the quantitative and qualitative tests are both fulfilled, that step has to be regarded as right. But one cannot attack another merely because one does not like that party. That would be the usual unspiritual attitude born of personal desire and ego. The spiritual test has to be applied, and, in fact, the quantitative test is an aspect of the spiritual standard of judgment. The ultimate deciding factor is *dharmā*, the spiritual law of the universe.

An action is an effort towards the achievement of an objective. Man does not simply exist. He ever tends to become something else. The impulse for action is ingrained in the constitution of one's individuality. Action, thus, is an expression of the very make-up of the individual, and one's entire life is action. Life and action have come to mean one and the same thing. The desire to possess and develop relations with external phenomena is the vital spring of all action. The desiring individual is not always clear about the nature of the object of desire. This confusion in the mind ends in the commission of unwise deeds in relation to the objects outside. Actions are one-sided in their motives, for the doer of the action has generally a constricted vision which alone is allowed by any particular course of action. This course is taken without the knowledge of all

the consequences of the action, which are wound up with the structure of the universe as a whole. Just as a good physician, while prescribing medicine for a disease, is cautious also of the reactions that the medicine may produce in addition to its curative or healing effect, an expert handling of situations in life requires the engagement of oneself in action with a knowledge of the different reactions they produce in addition to achieving the temporal desired objective, for, usually, one is oblivious of these side-effects when the mind is concentrated on the empirical result in view. The individual, when craving to fulfil a desire, has a rough idea of the nature of the effort required to fulfil it, but does not know that the source of action may disturb several other aspects of life and bring as a reaction suffering and grief in the end, though it may, for the time being, cause an enchantment into the belief that the desire is fulfilled. This is why the world is filled both with pleasure and pain—with foreseen effects of desires as well as their unforeseen results. An individual is born in a particular environment either because of a past wish cherished to live in such a condition or an unknown consequence of desires. The miseries of the world are the forms of the reactions of deluded actions performed previously by its inhabitants. The

world is a name given to the situation or manner in which individuals experience the fruits of their own desires and actions. It is the shadow cast by the wishes of its contents and it is what these wishes are and what they sweep away from pure existence with the winds of the forces moving towards their fulfilment. We are asked to perform action without regard for fruits, because the fruits are not in our hands, they are determined by the general law of the universe which we, as individual sources of action, can neither understand nor follow.

The accumulated and cumulative effects of actions done in all the past lives of individuals are packed into a concentrated residuum of potentiality in their subtlest and innermost layer, constituting the causal world. The aggregate of all actions of the past deposited thus in a latent form, in each one's individual capacity, is called *sanchita karma* (accumulated action). This potential aggregate is carried by the *jiva* in all its incarnations and this never gets destroyed until the *jiva's* attainment of *moksha*. The determining factor of every incarnation of the *jiva* is the characteristic of that portion of *sanchita karma* which is separated out as a specific allotment to be worked out in a given type of environment. This allotted portion of *sanchita*

*karma* is called *prarabdha* (that which has begun to produce effect) *karma*. The *jiva*, after being born in an incarnation by the force of *prarabdha*, performs further actions in its new life, called *agami karma*, the results of which are added on to the unspent portion of *sanchita karma*. This implies that the *sanchita* cannot be exhausted and, consequently, the series of rebirths not ended until the *jiva* ceases adding of new *karmas* to the old *sanchita*. The technique of performing actions without producing reactionary effects is called Karma Yoga. The doctrine of Karma Yoga, especially as propounded in the Bhagavadgita, is a commentary on the principle of universal action and reaction and the way to one's redemption from its bondage.

The resultant force of an action has one's future determined by it. Patanjali, in his Yoga-Sutra, says that the class of society into which one is born, the length of life which one is to live, and the nature of the experiences through which one has to pass, are all determined by the residual potency of past actions. These potencies become active in this life itself or in a life to come. A famous verse proclaims: "The nature of one's life, action, wealth, education and death are all fixed up even when one is in the womb of the mother." Human effort has a relative

value and forms a part of this universal law of self-completeness, displaying the manner in which the impersonal reality behaves when it is cast in the moulds of personality and individuality. The doctrine of *karma*, therefore, is not a belief in fatalism as is often wrongly supposed, but the enunciation of a scientific law that operates inexorably and impartially everywhere in the universe, like the principle of gravitation.

Often it looks that we are constantly in need of an impetus to push forward our drooping spirits and to feed the flame with oil. But it is in the true spirit of Karma Yoga that we have to launch forth any effort, in the sense that every viewpoint that we take has also to take into consideration every possible aspect of the matter and not merely one or two sides which are visible to the eyes. The reasons behind the shortcomings of a person, a family, an institution or a nation are not always clear before one's vision, for, though these causes may be simple, one may not be willing to bring these issues into the daylight of understanding. The reason for this, again, may be variegated; it may be an incapacity to investigate, a blind faith, a personal prejudice, or a mixture of certain factors which ordinary dispassion cannot disentangle from the massive network of

which it consists. To maintain one's balance and peace of mind in this structure of God's creation is difficult. Part of our sufferings, anxieties, ambitions and dissatisfactions may be traced to this patent fact of life. In every strata of human society, the main difficulty that confronts one is the mix-up of principles with personalities. This is a sociological derivative of the famous metaphysical doctrine of '*adhyasa*', and our happiness is in proportion to the extent we succeed in extricating the principle from the personality, in whatever walk of life we may be, and wherever we are.

Swami Sivananda's views on self-effort and necessity may be stated as follows:

An animal that is tethered to a peg by a rope of a given length has freedom to move within the circle drawn by the radius of that rope. But it has no freedom beyond that limit; it is bound to move within that specific range. The position of man is somewhat like this. His reason and discrimination afford him a certain amount of freedom which is within their scope. But the reasoning faculty is like the rope with which the animal is tied. It is not unlimited, and is circumscribed by the nature of the forces which govern the body through which it functions. As long as man has consciousness

of personality, or individuality, and insofar as it is within his capacity to exercise the sense of selective discrimination, he is responsible for what he does; he is an agent or doer of the action, and such actions as these are fresh actions or *kriyamana-karmas*, for they are connected with the sense of doership. But if events occur when he is incapable of using this power of understanding, as, for example, when he is not in his body-consciousness, or when things happen without his conscious intervention in them, he is not to be held responsible for the same, as these are not fresh actions but only the fruition of a previous deed or deeds. Though every experience bears, to some extent, a relation to unknown forces, its connection with one's consciousness constitutes the meaning of a fresh action. Effort is nothing but consciousness of initiative as related to oneself, whatever be the thing that ultimately prompts one to do that action. It is not the action as such but the manner in which it is executed that determines whether it is a *kriyamana-karma* or not. A *jivanmukta's* actions are not *kriyamana-karmas*, for they are not connected with any personal consciousness. They are spontaneous functions of the remaining momentum of past conscious efforts which are now unconnected with the consciousness

of agency. Experiences which are forced upon oneself or which come of their own accord, without the personal will of the experiencer involved in, them as an agent, are not to be considered as real actions. An experience caused by mere *prarabdha* does not cause another fresh result, but is exhausted thereby, while the *kriyamana-karma* tends to produce a fresh experience in the future, because it is attended with the sense of doership.

Sometimes, the causative factors of actions may manifest themselves, not through the consciousness of the experiencer, but through an external agency or occurrences having causes beyond human understanding. Even when a person is goaded by another to do an action, it is only an aspect of his desserts, in relation to the other's, that works. In the state of spiritual realisation, such incitations cease. Efforts are automatically stopped on the rise of Self-knowledge, which is the goal of all effort, and not before that. As long as there is body-consciousness and world-consciousness, man will perforce continue exerting himself to achieve his desired end. The consciousness of effort is the natural concomitant of the consciousness of imperfection. Man, being what he is, continues by his own nature, to put forth effort until he reaches

his goal. The question of free-will and necessity is a relative one, and it loses its meaning on the dawn of the wisdom of the Self.

The law of *karma* does not annoy one who has succeeded in overcoming the consciousness of 'individuality' and thinks, feels and acts in terms of the constitution of the universe taken as a whole. There cannot be an effect of reaction unless there is a localised centre which can receive the reaction. The impersonal consciousness is no such centre and so the reactions of *karma* cannot find a target where this realisation takes place. This is a clue to even our daily activities in life, and we *can* remain unaffected by the reactionary forces of the environment outside, for where no self-centred thought exists, the experience of reaction, too, cannot be. This rule applies not only to the *siddha* (perfected one) but also the *sadhaka* (aspiring one), for the law of *karma* is the law of Nature, which exempts no one from its restrictions and also excludes no one from its beneficiary clauses. *Karma* is, thus, not merely the law of individualistic action but also of the working of the cosmos in its eternal completeness.

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