

Directing Your Destiny Despite the Setbacks

By CHAITANYA CHARAN DAS

Is our life predestined? Or is it in our hands? Modern thought has deemed that our endeavour alone determines our success. But with competition intensifying, changes accelerating and many unpredictable and uncontrollable factors determining results in today's complex world, many people are re-examining this belief.

A brilliant student, for instance, despite diligent studies, gets average marks, whereas a mediocre student, with last-minute cramming, gets high grades. Why? Are we just unwitting players in a cosmic lottery, with chance as the supreme arbiter? Or are results handed down by destiny? Some fear that lazy people may opportunistically argue, "As the result is predestined, why work hard?" and so become irresponsible and fatalistic. However, knowledge of destiny does not justify fatalism because the Mahabharata clarifies, "Destiny determines the results of our actions, not our actions themselves".

Vedic texts explain that these two ideologies, karma-vada (endeavour alone determines success) and daivavada (destiny alone determines success) are the two extremes of human imagination. In reality, success requires both endeavour and destiny. For example, in agriculture, a good harvest requires both diligent ploughing and timely rains.

When people are uninformed about the role of destiny in determining results, failures make them feel hopeless. "I am worthless and cannot do anything well", they say, even when they have the potential to perform well in the future. Consequently today many needlessly suffer from an inferiority complex, low self-esteem, depression and self-pity.

Krishna says in the Gita that though we don't determine the result, we do play a significant role. The farmer must plough the field for favourable rainfall to produce crops. Similarly we must endeavour for destiny to produce results. Hence the Gita urges us to perform our God-given duty without attachment.

We need detachment because our material happiness and distress are predestined by our own karma from past lives. We cannot change them no matter how hard we work. But by doing our present duties industriously and honestly, we can get our destined happiness. Also we can make for ourselves a bright future destiny, even if our present is bleak.

Moreover, even at present, destiny limits only our material happiness, not our spiritual happiness. All of us have equal opportunity to rouse our dormant love for God and experience oceanic happiness thereof. This supreme fulfilment is available, just by chanting the holy names of God. No inimical destiny can prevent us from achieving divine bliss; rather, when we take one step towards God, He takes a thousand steps towards us.

Even a little spiritual dynamism brings enormous returns. And as we are intrinsically spiritual beings and as our lasting satisfaction comes from spiritual devotion, we can rejoice in knowing that our real happiness is not destined, but is in our own hands. Hence the need for caution to not let over-endeavour for material aggrandisement deprive us of the time and energy to strive for lasting spiritual enlightenment. Let us therefore do our best — materially and spiritually — and leave the rest to God.

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