



Relish your privilege

Arise! Awaken! Understand and avail the great opportunity at hand

— *Katha Upanishad 1.3.14*

Vedic texts explain that human beings are privileged with intelligence far superior to that of the lower species. The difference is seen in the way animals (the word 'animals' refers generically to all subhuman species) and humans act. Animals act according to their instincts, whereas we can curb our instincts and act with discrimination. If a donkey is going through a fruit market and sees a juicy fruit on a cart, it will instinctively move its mouth toward the fruit – and be beaten with a stick. But a human being, even if instinctively attracted to the fruit, will try to be self-restrained, if unable to purchase it. If the donkey has past experience of being beaten, it may curb its instincts. Such curbing may be seen among circus lions trained by the ring-master. That brings us to the crux of the difference between animals and humans.

The Vedic texts explain that animals can act only in the material realm, through the bodily activities of eating, sleeping, mating and defending. Most of the time, they act instinctively; whenever they appear to discriminate in these activities, they are acting according to the instinct to defend themselves. Humans have the instincts to eat, sleep, mate and defend. What makes us special is our discrimination, which enables us to understand:

- ◆ The futility of bodily pleasures: All material enjoyment is limited – inescapably. We enjoy material pleasures only in youth when the senses are healthy and capable of enjoyment. Even then, we can at best enjoy only for a few minutes at a time, after which the body's capacity to enjoy is exhausted. That little enjoyment results in suffering: Smoking leads to lung disorders, drinking to liver diseases, meat-eating to heart problems and illicit sex to AIDS and sexually-transmitted diseases.
- ◆ If material enjoyment is futile, are we not meant to enjoy life at all? We are to enjoy life to the fullest, declare the Vedic texts. Not by ignorant material enjoyment, but by enlightened spiritual enjoyment. The Bhagavad-gita (15.7) explains that we, as spiritual beings, are parts of the supreme spiritual being, God, who is the source of unlimited, everlasting happiness. By connecting with Him through chanting of His holy names, we can find the happiness that we are always searching. Thus, our human discrimination is the springboard that catapults us to life's supreme happiness

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