

This way to heaven

Author : Swami Brahmavidananda

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Akshara-brahma-yoga/Topic of imperishable Brahman(chapter 8...continued)

In the eighth chapter, in the sixth verse, Krishna had mentioned that, after death, one reaches the place one thinks of at the time of death.

Yam yam vapi samran bhavam tyajayante kalevaram

Tam tam evaiti kaunteya sada tad bhavabhavavatah || 6 ||

Kaunteya (Arjuna)! At the time of death, remembering whatever thing one gives up the physical body, having thought about it always, one reaches that alone.

He elaborates upon this into a very *Hindu* concept of what happens after death. He talks about it very briefly in verses 24, 25 — the solar and the lunar paths .

Agnirjyotirahah suklah sanmasa uttarayanam

Tatra prayata gacchanti brahma brahmavido janah || 24||

Departing there (through the path) in which the deity of the fire, the deity of the light, the deity of the day, the deity of the bright fortnight (of the waxing moon), the deity of the six months of the northern solstice (the sun's travel towards the north) are present, the meditators of Brahman go to the Brahma-loka.

Dhumo ratristatha krshnah sanmasa dakshinayanam

Tatra candramasam jyotiryogi prapya nivartate || 25 ||

The yogin, (travelling by the route) where the presiding deity of the clouds, the deity of night, the deity of the dark fortnight (of the waning moon), and the deity of the six months of the southern solstice (the sun's travel towards the south) (are present), having gained the world of moon returns.

One basic assumption in all of this is that you have been living a *dharmic* life, a life committed to the universal ethical values, etc., and some worship i.e. performing those *vedic* rites, *yagnas*, and other religious *karmas*, the rituals, and *upasanas* connected to it. Those who have lived that kind of life will generally die during the bright fortnight in the six months of the northern solstice between January to July. If this happens, they go by the solar path (*surya-marga*) to *Brahma-loka*. *Brahma-loka*, the seventh heaven, is the highest dimension you can go to by your *karma*, and if you go to this loka, you will live there for a long, long time. Then, at the end of the *kalpa*, (which is four *yugas* and, therefore, time will be dependent on which *yuga* the person would have died in) when *Brahma-ji* becomes free (now he is too busy with the creation; there is a mixture here of spiritual and Pauranic thinking coming together), he teaches. There, taught by *Brahma-ji*, you will gain *moksha*. Until then, you have to hang around there and, of course, you will have a great time there because that place is free from the trials and tribulations of life.

My intention at the moment of death may give me a direction. One can't always count on that because when one is struggling between life and death

For the vast majority of us whose lives have been a mixed bag and, at the same time, we have been living a decent life, if one dies in the dark half of the fortnight and the sun is in the southern solstice from July to December, then one will go through the lunar path—the smoky path—into a higher dimension (the first six dimensions of heaven) but lesser than *Brahma-loka*. You will have a good time there, but you will not be there till the end of the *kalpa*. After maybe a few years, which are equal to a hundred or two hundred years in today's world, you are born again to pick up the journey where you had left off earlier. You will have to pick up your spiritual connections again and go through all the trials and struggles of life, you will have to learn greater commitment to *dharma* and *moksha*, and continue your journey to *moksha*. Therefore, they say that those who go by the lunar path come back, and those who go by the solar path don't come back.

There is an interesting possibility here that Krishna mentions:

Abrahmabhuvanalloka punaravartina Arjuna |

Mam upetya tu Kaunteya punarjanma na vidyate || 16 ||

Arjuna! All the worlds (where beings exist) up to the world of Brahma-ji are subject to return. However having reached Me, Kaunteya (Arjuna), there is no rebirth.

Those who go to *Brahma-loka* and are distracted when *Brahma-ji* is teaching, because they are leading a fun-filled life there and, therefore, don't understand the truth, come back in the next *kalpa* to pick up the journey again. So, in a manner of speaking, you are better off if you go back via the southern way and return because then you can re-start your unfinished journey faster.

This is a paradigm Krishna uses because of the popular belief that we become what we think of at the time of death. It's only partly true. It's also a question of how one has lived one's life. If I have lived my life thinking where the party is tonight, I am not going to think of *Ishwara* when I die. My intention at the moment of death may give me a direction. One can't always count on that because when one is struggling between life and death, one may not be consciously thinking of anything other than the struggle itself. Therefore, it's better to focus on how I live my life (which is dedicated to seeking as well as managing the other needs in life) and towards gaining my *moksha* in this lifetime itself. Why leave it for another lifetime? Birth and death are not in our hands, very few of us can will it. I have heard of one guy who did it and that was Bhishma in the *Mahabharata*.

I will add here that these two paths have been revealed in the *Bhagavad Gita* and in the *Vedas*, and, therefore, have to be taken as true. It is reassuring to know that everything does not end with death. However, the emphasis is on doing all that one can do to gain *moksha* in this lifetime itself. Here and now; we do not believe in postponement! After all, that is your true nature, and one only has to recognize it with the help of this teaching. Until it is clear, one leads a lifestyle of *sanyasa* or *karma yoga* as the case maybe.

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