

Karma Bandha and Mokṣa: Kārmic Bondage and Liberation

Karma is a commonly used and frequently misunderstood term. Here, Dr. K.S. Sripada Raju shares some thoughts on kārmic bondage and liberation and Vivek Subramanian summarizes those thoughts.

Karma signifies not only action (a new impulse, a new energy poured into the scheme of things) but also the consequence (*phala*). Karma is a flow, a process (not an event), and a continuum of an individual's actions and their results.

The Kārmic process involves at its core eight factors (*aṣṭa mūrtis*): the doer (*kartru*) with intentionality (deliberate or accidental), orchestrated in a supporting environment of the five elements (*pañca bhūtas*)—space (*ākāśa*), air (*vāyu*), energy and fire (*tejas*), water (*jala*), and earth (*pṛthvī*)—and the framework of time set by the Sun and the Moon. The doer's intentions and actions are influenced by the three *guṇas*—*sattva* (purity), *rajas* (activity), and *tamas* (inertia).

The Kārmic process—the combination of the doer, the supporting environment (*pañca bhūtas* and two factors of time through Sun and Moon), and the three *guṇas*—is also known as *aparā prakṛti*. Most of us dwell in this realm of *aparā prakṛti* governed by the ongoing chain of cause and effect. Our identity with the ego complexity of the Kārmic process leads to bondage (*māya bandha*). The ultimate goal is to evolve to the realm of *parā prakṛti* where the individual is liberated from this kārmic bondage.

This requires our pursuing the spiritual path through continuous inquiry into our true nature (*ātma vicāra*). The right understanding/recognition that we are not the doer or the enjoyer (being part of the cause and effect chain) and the realization that we are merely a serving instrument of God (without ego) leads to *mokṣa* (freedom). This detached engagement is the spiritual path of unconditional love and ultimate freedom.



Aparā Prakṛti	Parā Prakṛti
Māya Bandha	Ātma Jñāna (Seeing SELF-Presence all around)
Ego creating bondage	Recognition that you are not the doer/enjoyer but merely a serving instrument of God. This liberates the individual from Kārmic bondage. This is the spiritual path of unconditional love and ultimate freedom (<i>mokṣa</i>).

Proper mental attitude is very important in determining the outcome. It is rightly said:

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mana eva manuŝyānām kāraṇam bandha mokṣayoḥ

The mind alone is the cause of both bondage and liberation in human beings.

In the following, we discuss several facets of this statement.

No Running Away: One cannot escape the Kārmic process since the Kārmic process (the cause and consequence chain) goes on independent of or in spite of the individual. That does not excuse one to become reclusive or play the victim (my karma/my fate!!!), since inaction also has consequences. One is required to make conscious moral choices (*dhārmic* intentions/legitimate desires) and perform one's duties (employing one's unique personality/*guṇas*, talents/gifts). One is required to be engaged (with detachment) and the consequences will eventually visit the intender/doer. "He who sows the wind, reaps a whirlwind."

Creating Your Own Destiny: If you want to lead a happy life, you must do the deeds today that will create happy experiences in the future. Because the future depends on what you do today, you create your own destiny. It is your responsibility to gain right knowledge (*ātma jñāna*... knowledge of SELF) and follow the path of spiritual discipline (*sādhana*) and create your own destiny.

Opportunity in Calamity: Like the beautiful saying "O Lord, give me the strength to accept what I cannot change, the power to change what I can, and the wisdom to know the difference," it depends upon us how we choose to respond to various (seemingly unfavorable) situations. Gandhi and Nehru saw being jailed as opportunities to reflect. Nehru wrote some of his best books while being held in jail. Instead of blaming our fate, when we choose the appropriate response, this action is promptly supported by the natural eight forces/supporting environments.

Freedom, Unconditional Love, and Bliss: The objective is not to disengage from daily life. On the contrary, through ongoing inquiry (with enlightened guidance) and acquisition of right knowledge (*ātma jñāna*) [1], the individual should develop a sense of sustained detachment (non-reaction to success and failure, pain and pleasure, likes and dislikes, pro-active pursuits and detached engagement). In other words, the doer should recognize oneself as a mere serving instrument of God, offer each and every action to God, and accept the fruits of the actions as *prasāda* [2] from God. This allows for disassociation from the ongoing Kārmic chain and bondage (*samsāra*) and becomes a pure-play (*līlā*/ a *cid-vilāsa*) of unconditional love, joy, and ultimate bliss.

[1] Please refer to the 'Śrī Rāma-hṛdaya' passage in chapter 1 of the book *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* by Swami Tapasyananda (Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, 1994).

[2] *Prasāda* is anything that comes from the Lord—both the tangible results and the intangibles. It includes an attitude, a way of looking at an object, which itself is born out of the understanding that everything comes from the Lord.