

# INTRODUCTION

*The self, deluded by egoism, thinketh: 'I am the doer.'*<sup>3</sup>

*– The Bhagavad Gita*

“Nobody truly ‘does’ anything. We are all instruments through whom the Divine Will functions. This is according to me the true meaning of ‘universal brotherhood’; we are a brotherhood of instruments through whom God’s Will functions.”

This is what my spiritual guide and contemporary Advaita sage Ramesh Balsekar (1917-2009), spoke about at the daily talks that were held at his home in South Mumbai. He would explain in a step-by-step manner how he not only reached this conclusion based on his personal experience in daily living, but also how the same message was echoed in the Indian scriptures, as well as the teachings of the Buddha, Jesus, and 20th century masters like Sri Ramana Maharshi.

*The deeds are, but no doer of the deeds is there...<sup>4</sup>*

– Gautama Buddha

*Actions form no bondage. Bondage is only the false notion, 'I am the doer.' Leave off such thoughts and let the body and senses play their role, unimpeded by your interference.<sup>5</sup>*

– Sri Ramana Maharshi

*Mysterious is the path of action. Though I do nothing, they hold Me responsible for the actions which take place on account of prarabdha (destiny). I am only their witness.*

*The Lord is the sole doer and inspirer.<sup>6</sup>*

– Shirdi Sai Baba

Ramesh would explain this ancient truth in simple terms with reference to one's daily living. At the outset, he would ask us to investigate the matter and state that upon doing so, we would inevitably reach the conclusion that our actions (what we 'did' or decided to 'do'), depend on our thoughts, and nobody could know what the next thought was going to be. If such was the case, then how could we call it 'our' action?

He would also explain how our actions were based on something we saw, heard, tasted, touched, or smelt. And none of these were in our control. For example, we saw something because we were present at a certain place at a certain time, and therefore happened to see it. This in turn led to our action. If we were not there at a certain time and place, our action could or would not have happened. More importantly, something had to happen while we were there, else our action would not have happened.

When Ramana Maharshi said words to the effect that there was truly no free will, someone put up his hand and said, “My putting up my hand is indeed my free will to do so.” To this, Sri Ramana replied that if he had not said there was no free will, the individual concerned would not have put up his hand.

Our decisions, Ramesh would go on to say, are based on our genes and conditioning – neither of which were made by us or were in our control. We did not choose our genes, nor did we choose our environment – geographic, social, economic and so on – that formed the basis of our conditioning. We have been bombarded with conditioning from day one – at home, in the relevant society, in school and college, as well as conditioning in the church, mosque, or temple.

Therefore, is it really our ‘doing’ when there are so many factors involved that are beyond our control, which shape all our decisions – all that ‘we’ think we ‘do’? Or, are we a part of the functioning of Totality, which causes to bring about exactly that what is supposed to be brought about in a given situation, at a particular moment in time?

Sathya Sai Baba had something pertinent to say on this subject, as can be seen from the extract below:

“Now you might say, ‘But I have free will. How can I just accept God’s Will?’ There are two ways of looking at that. One is, if you have been considering this whole problem for some time, you may understand that this world in which we live, is similar to a dream.

Swami (referring to Sathya Sai Baba) says so, the great sages of old say so. Do you remember what we said about your nighttime dream? You can ask yourself, suppose in the nighttime dream, you said that you have free will to do this or that? In the dream, free will has no meaning whatsoever, because when you awake, the dream disappears. Similarly, in this waking world, Swami says you *seem* to have free will, and you should act on that premise. You come to a decision, and then you engage in action – and you may feel that you are acting according to your will.

“After the action has taken place, you look back and say, ‘Oh, I could have done it this way or that way instead and exercised my free will.’ But the fact is that you acted in a certain way.

“What were the influences that caused you to act in that way? Were these influences your free will? No. Undoubtedly not. From the time you were born, you have been filled with influences and ideas from every direction...

“Now, when we decide on any course of action, we plan what we are going to do, but we cannot count on our plans being successful, can we? Very often it does not turn out the way we planned. So the factor that makes the result vary from our plans is the presence of the Lord in every action that we take. Swami says it is best to conclude that everything that happens is God’s Will, and not struggle against it. Just accept it as God’s Will and ask for God’s Grace. He says that is the height, the summit of devotion.”<sup>7</sup>