

Up, Down, All Around

Q&A with Brahmachari Uddhav Chaitanya in Bentonville, Arkansas

Transcribed by Preeti Narain

What happens to the soul after death?

When we go, then we will know. Right now, I don't know what the death of this body feels like. And no, I don't remember from past lives either.

Our Hindu scriptures teach us that we have no control over what we face in this life, because it has already been decided based on our past actions. However, we do have free will on how to respond to the situations we must face. This free choice lays the foundation for what we will face in our future.

I am a cook, so I will give you a simple cooking example. If you want to make *idli*—good *idli*, not the ready mix—then you can't wake up one morning and decide you want *idlis* for breakfast (unless you mean tomorrow's breakfast). For good *idlis*, you have to lay its foundation the previous day. This I learned through direct and bitter experience. Once, at a *bhiksha* in Sidhabari, I got *idlis* that were as hard as cricket balls! I couldn't stop from asking, "Can you give me a hammer and a chisel?"

Don't get distracted. This is not a cooking class. The point is, preparation is necessary; *idlis* won't happen by accident. "I was making *paraathaas*, but they came out as *idlis*." Cannot happen. The foundation for today's *idli* was laid yesterday. So too, whatever decision you make today, whatever action you take today, however insignificant, will be the blueprint for your next birth. It is immaterial whether or not you remember your past. Understand the sequence.

What is the ideal deal? Self-realization. Aim to finish all your imprints (*vasanas*) that force you to act. Wash them off in this very life. No imprint, no blueprint, no next life or

death. Once these imprints are done, you are left with the absolute, unshakeable knowledge of the core of your existence: pure Consciousness, the ideal deal.

Don't seek scriptural knowledge to customize and tailor your next life. Through *karma yoga*, *bhakti yoga*, and *jnana yoga*, put forth effort to finish all your imprints here and now. If there are any remnants, you will need at least one more birth.

I know you are also asking about the in-between stage of leaving one body and entering another. In *Bhagavad Gita*, it says once the *jiva* leaves, it goes toward whatever is heavier in him. If you have more sins than merits, you go to *naraka*—a reform house, where you get ample time and opportunity to think about what you have done. By the way, paying the consequences for, or reaping the fruits of, an action does not automatically remove the imprint. It just shows the final consequence of an action. The imprint can be removed only when you take human birth again, and with effort, conquer the habits. From *naraka*, you can take human birth if you have some merits in your bank account. Yes, you have to have some merits just to get the good fortune of human birth—so don't take it for granted. If you have many merits, you go to *svarga*, finish the balance, and come back to Earth. The scriptures are very clear about it: Once you are done with your merits, the powers-that-be make sure that you are kicked out.

Shrimad Bhagavatam says it is obvious from a person's face whether he has come from *svarga* (e.g., balanced faces) or *naraka* (e.g., crooked body shapes). In *Garuda Purana*, this is called *mukha-samudrika lakshana*. The face is a modified, solidified shape of the ego. Imagine what your face looks like after a fight with your boss. Now imagine what it looks like after coming back from a family vacation. Who knows, it may look the same! Sorry, wrong example. Okay, imagine your face as you walk out of your *puja* room after meditation. Get the picture?

In what form do we hang around between death and rebirth? Explain the process by which this form gets into the mother's womb.

The form you are asking about is called an astral body. All the special software (subtle body) that you have in this hardware (gross body), gets packed up. The mind, intellect,

impressions, memory—everything bundles up and pushes off. The entire subtle package travels on the support of space and air, in different forms, different shapes—all temporary. If you can see these forms, you can see these forms. If not, they are there. Don't worry, most of them have their own business to attend to and won't disturb you. Only the disturbed ones tend to disturb. Consider these subtle beings as the "Casper the Friendly Ghost" variety. Grayish in color, if you can see. They are all over.

Now, when this astral being finds the right allotted space (its new home), it enters the mother through the father. This process is clearly outlined in *Aitareya Upanishad*. The *jiva* enters through the head of the fetus, which is why you can see and feel, on the top of a baby's head, a soft spot that pulsates. Mothers apply oil there to harden the skull and protect it. This spot is from where the *jiva* enters and, if it attains liberation, also from where it exits.

***Bhagavad Gita* says we are *Brahman*, not the ego. But when we are born, we don't come with any ego**

Ego is there. It is unmanifest, waiting for the opportune moment to express. By the time a child is around two years old, it starts expressing. The subtle body carried forward from the past life, so it is not that there is absence of ego.

Why is man made like this? Man isn't. Man just gets caught up in this kind of extroverted life. It is a matter of individual choice—to get caught up or to be free. Man is essentially Divine. Miseries are manmade due to identifications. Someone said, "God made man. Man made money. Money made man mad." Madness was not part of the original blueprint. It is an external virus because of which the computer has to be debugged. This debugging process is known as spirituality.

Do you believe that you have found the truth, found all the answers? Are you still looking for explanations?

With logical conviction and proof from the *shastras* (scriptures), no, I do not look for answers and explanations anymore. Clarity at the intellectual level is there—24/7, even when I am working. Things keep happening and experiences unfold and pieces fit like in a

jigsaw puzzle. Spiritual learning is 90% direct experience and 10% logical understanding. When the experience unfolds, it's like, "Wow! This is exactly what I read and this is exactly what is happening." Experiences like these have grown multifold in the past 13 years, so much so, that even validations and explanations no longer rise or surprise. Yes, the search is over, because the *shastras* gave all the answers. They also gave foolproof methods, which, when practiced, result in valid and direct spiritual experiences.

Why do you wear a *bindi*?

To get your attention. . . . *Chandana*, *bhasma*, and *kumkuma* are not just for women, but for men also. They aren't meant to be fashion statements. When applied, they activate the nerves in the center of the brow and help immensely in maintaining focus and balance.

They also repel negative vibrations. Everyone radiates positive or negative energy. There are cameras that photograph auras. If you have done lot of *puja* and *dhyana*, you radiate a deep blue light. Those with frustration and restlessness radiate more reddish or yellowish colors. Persons with much negativity have darker, blackish colors. Wearing *chandana*, *bhasma*, and *kumkuma* helps remove or alleviate negativities. By the way, *kumkuma* is another natural form turmeric; don't use colored corn flour.

Removing negativities is also accomplished through the intense chanting of mantras. Repeated for a long time, these mantras give a lot of spiritual energy and your whole system gets heated up. *Chandana*, *bhasma*, and *kumkuma* ward off this heat generated in intense spiritual practices. Like this, there are many more reasons.

Describe a typical day in your life.

Hmm . . . pretty boring. I get up around 4 or 4:30 in the morning. I normally just freshen up and sit for meditation for a couple of hours. After meditation, I go out and jog for four miles (not in winter). I come back and do my *Surya Namaskara* 22 times. Then I bathe, do *puja*, and do my *japa*. By then, it is around 10:45. I have some fruits for breakfast. Until this time, I don't take any calls.

This is how it is when I am in Dallas. When I travel, I try to stick to the same pattern, but usually miss out on exercising and put on more weight. But I catch up when I get back. After breakfast, I read or chant, for an hour, either *Ramayana* or *Bhagavatam*. At 11:45, I prepare lunch. I have a weird diet. My breakfast consists of fruits. In the afternoon or night, I have raw vegetables and nuts. So my eating pattern is like this: In the mornings I go bananas, and in the afternoons and nights, I go nuts. In addition to the raw vegetables, I eat some cooked food. I love to cook and I love my creations. At around 11:45, I cut my vegetables and cook my food. By 12:30, I'm done eating, cleaning, and putting the vessels back in their place. I spend the next three hours contemplating and writing some articles for Mission magazines or booklets.

At 3:30 p.m., I drive to my daily university talk, Monday to Thursday—each day at a different local university. Various types of people attend these discussion classes. There are those who are born here (homegrown), those who are imported from India, Caucasians, Chinese, African-American . . . I get back around 6:30 and freshen up.

The daily *arati* begins in our ashram shrine at 7:15 p.m. After this, I conduct some *satsanga*—whether it is teaching Vedic chanting, or chanting *Hanuman Chalisa*, or talking on *shastra*. This is on weekdays. On weekdays, people are busy, so I am free and left to myself.

On weekends, I get busy and busier. My day starts the same way on Saturday, but I have to cut down on certain parts. We have a meditation class 8-8:45 a.m. It is a guided meditation class, wherein I guide them through different processes of contemplation. *Vishnu Sahasranama* chanting is 9-9:30, followed by a 1.5-hour discourse on the same subject. Our overflowing Saturday Bala Vihar session is held 11-12:30.

Most Indians here speak so much in English. I didn't want to lose my vocabulary in my native tongue and noted that 60% of Dallas' IT people are from Andhra, so I started Vedanta classes in Telugu. They love to hear something in Telugu and I like keeping up with my language skills, so I have a lecture in Telugu, on different subjects, 4-5:30 p.m. on Saturdays.

Almost every Saturday evening, we have some kind of *satsanga* in the form of a lecture series. I have already completed one round of *Bhagavad Gita* and *Vivekachudamani*. Now we are doing Upanishads and various introductory texts.

Sunday begins at 7 a.m. with Vedic chanting in the shrine (*Suktas, Rudram, and Ganapati Atharvashirsha, etc.*) At 9 a.m. begins our first Bala Vihar session of the day. We have a general prayer assembly for 30 minutes, after which I address the kids for ten minutes. The talk is on some cool stuff, a topic that keeps their interest.

I am glad to say that we have around 93 volunteer teachers and around 20 kids per class. So when all the teachers (two per class) take their students to their respective classes (by grade), I do the adult-sitting: I conduct a class for their parents. I tell you, babysitting kids is manageable, but managing adult-sitting is no joke! But we are in a set pattern now and it is a class where I talk based on the given text and then we open the forum for discussions and questions. It is a very beautiful, interactive session when you have 150 people: 150 kinds of ways of looking at the same thing—keeps it interesting.

The teachers' meeting is held 10:40-11:10. All the volunteer teachers come together and discuss things done, things to be done, problems, fix-its, etc. The second Bala Vihar session begins at 11:15. My break is 1-3 p.m., after which, our third Bala Vihar session begins. We have 530 kids as of now. The numbers keep rising steadily.

The Sunday evening lecture series is 7:30-9 p.m. Like this it goes on, my Monday to Sunday.