

Up, Down, and All Around

Part III of Q&A with Brahmachari Uddhav Chaitanya in Bentonville, Arkansas

Transcribed by Preeti Narain

Why is Lord Krishna portrayed as mischievous and not as straightforward as other forms of God?

Who said Krishna is not straight? He is as straightforward as a *jalebi*. *Jalebi ki tarah seedhe saadhe hain!* The ways of the Lord should be understood properly. If you're looking for a role model, follow Rama. If you want to know how to deal with intricate situations, follow Krishna. What Krishna did may not look so straightforward on the surface, but through an in-depth analysis, you will see the rightful sincerity and need of the time.

Yes, He was mischievous, showing us a livelier side to life, the sparks of joy in life's monotony. But I disagree that Krishna was not straightforward. We may not understand what He did and why He did it, but the fault lies in our ignorance, not in His actions. We are not straightforward enough to understand the Lord's depth. Straighten yourself out and you will understand Him better.

Can you explain the seemingly unjust killings of Karna and Drona on the Mahabharata battlefield?

When Drona heard Yuddhishtira say, "*Ashvatthama hathah kunjara,*" he alighted from his chariot, sat on the ground, and did *prana-bandhana* (a *pranik* technique to control breath and willfully leave the body). By the time they cut his head off, Drona was already dead.

The first reason for Karna's death was that Karna had unknowingly, but wrongfully, learned knowledge from his guru. Karna's fault was in his wrongful utility of rightful things—using *dharmik* power for *adharma*. People like this are geniuses gone awry, like this teenager who created and distributed a virus that crashed almost 60% of heavy servers. Such people have immense knowledge, but use it for an unrighteous cause.

Karna had such ability, but he willfully used it to help Duryodhana. He knew it was wrong, but he chose that platform anyway.

Define *punya* and *papa*.

Punya means “merit” and *papa* means “sin.” We earn *punya* through righteous (*dharmik*) acts and *papa* through wrongful (*adharmik*) acts—acts at the levels of body, speech, and mind (*kaya, vak, manah*). But understand clearly that one act doesn’t cancel the other. Do something wrong and cover it up by doing something good—won’t work. Your debit and credit sheets are assessed separately, not in comparison.

Our present age of *Kali Yuga* is one of the best times in one aspect: In any other *yuga*, if you even think something bad, it is considered a sin. In *Kali Yuga*, this law has been relaxed, so bad thoughts don’t count. Only bad speech and actions do.

If you act righteously, you earn merits. Merits and sins get exhausted once you experience their fruits. There is no cancellation policy between the two. *Pujas, tirtha yatras*, or Ganga-dipping won’t clean-out cancel your sins.

Did you know . . . there were over 15 million people who bathed in the holy Ganga during the 2001 *Kumbha Mela*. It was the largest religious gathering in the world at that time, and it had the least number of casualties and health issues.

There is a great, divine power in the holy waters, and in regular *pujas, vratas*, and *havans*. But, at most, these meritorious acts grant the devotee the confidence and willpower to face the music of his sinful deeds, not cancel them. If I am due for a heart attack, that’s what I’ll get; but my spiritual practices will have the counter-effect of increasing my merits to such a level that I can face anything without getting perturbed. This is as good as it gets.

How can you teach your children to have a goal in life?

First ask if you have a goal in your life. As parents, you need to give your kids a direction and a goal. Set them on the right track, on a righteous path. Is it not true that if a garden even slightly starts to go bad, you have to be alert and quick to weed and maintain it, no matter how troublesome it is? Weeds grow faster than you think. Keep

postponing your lawn maintenance and before you know it, you have to search for the spot where your flowers used to be. It is not the fault of the earth or the weeds or the flowers; it is the fault of the gardener, because he did not do his duty.

It is a parent's duty to guide his child in the proper direction. There are two extremes: the US method and the India method. I've seen both go wrong. Letting a teenager go his own way and make his own decisions—ones that will make or mar his life—is just as insane as wanting to control his every move.

I met an American university student. He said, "Right now, my dad is paying for my tuition, my dorm, and my personal needs. I manage my own life and do what I want, when I want. In two years, after I finish my education, my dad said I have to pay him back." It's like they had a signed contract. His father had told him, "Live your own life and don't forget to pay me back. Otherwise, I'll see you in court." This is one extreme.

Then there was a kid who didn't know how to manage his life at all. The choice was left in the child's hands, but at that age, with barely any experience, and temptations high, a youngster's choice is not always the right one. I knew an Indian fourth-year medical school student who went to his father one day and said, "Being a doctor is good and I like it, but I'd rather be a chef." Can you imagine it? There's nothing wrong with being a chef, but after three years of medical school, he came back in utter confusion! This is because the kid was never fully clear on how tough, deep, and intense medical school is, and how much effort is required. With his Indian background, his parents may have told him from the start, "No, you have to become a doctor!"

To guide someone you deeply love and care about, to give him some direction and a goal—before any instructions, before reaching out to him with support—there is an important first step: See him and love him as a person, not as a relation. We may say we do what we do because we care, because we love, but our love has to be expressed in the right way. Your love and caring should not become chains that bind your loved one and stop him from naturally unfolding. Your loved one has to feel a rapport in your love, not bondage. Trust has to be created. Love and trust between two people has to translate

into acceptance, where each party accepts the other "as is." Once you gain your child's trust, they will readily follow your advice, because they are sure that you will tell them only what is for their own good.

I'm not focusing on what the goal should be or how clear the goal should be. The first requirement is to create a bridge between the two persons, whether parent to child or peer to peer. After you have created the bridge and provided a goal, along with clarity and guidance, you have to leave it to individual choice. However much you may love your child, the bottom line is that the choice is individual. And if the child's choice is wrong, if you need to explain more clearly, wait for the right time before intruding. You may have taught your child clearly, repeatedly, but when life's bigger decisions confront your child, he may not be ready for them. Be patient, alert, and effective—it's all in the timing. Everything has its time. There is no point in getting frustrated. Wait for the opportune moment and when it is ripe, seize it. Be humble, alert, open, and large-hearted.

Please give us a few tips to enhance "thinking out of the box."

I like Taco Bell®'s ad for this: "Think out of the bun." We get so habituated to so many psychological patterns fed to us through propaganda, that it's hard to find original people. Do you remember when you first came to the US? The first shock was, "Oh my God! I have to do everything myself?! Cooking, cleaning, lawn mowing!" Because if you call your \$80/hour-plumber, you will have a whole other set of complaints! Therefore, many people think it's easier to become a handyman than to pay through the nose. And this is how they end up spending their weekends at The Home Depot®!

Thinking out of the box is hard for most of us because we do not readily accept change. Life brings, with every experience, a new dimension, but we are not available to its beauty and wonder because we find it more comfortable to live in our age-old patterns. This brings stagnancy, which expresses as midlife crises, depression, frustration, fear, and pain. People who haven't changed for years, and refuse to change, live a stagnant life. Have you seen how stagnant water stinks after some days? So too, our personality starts to stink when we stop spiritually growing and going with life's flow.

Worst of all, when we do realize we are stuck, we try to find a way out, but only through the same rut of set patterns. Every new experience forces us to adapt, but we remain stuck due to fear and anxiety. We stick to our patterns like a plaster body-cast. Imagine how much it hurts when you try to pull the cast off. With each pull, there is tension and fear, and so most of us choose the trodden path—even if it does not fully solve our problem. In our comfort zone, we conveniently, yet miserably, stay inside the box.

Thinking out of the box is explained thoroughly in *Bhagavad Gita* 2.14: *Agama-apayino'nityah tans-titikshasva bharata*. This is acceptance—of all that life brings—with a smile, and it's the best way to keep the mind at ease and think out of the box.

Someone in Mumbai overdid yoga and was hospitalized. Can yoga be harmful?

It's a simple principle. Eating food is fine. Overeating is not. The immediate consequence of overeating is an upset stomach. The eventual consequence of regular overeating is obesity. My principle is simple: Madhya Pradesh *mein gadbad* to Uttar Pradesh *mein gadbad* (upset stomach, upset mind)—it's a direct link. Imbalance here (in the stomach) creates imbalance here (in the head). These slim Hollywood people go on severe dieting and end up with severe medical issues.

Yogic *asanas* are good for getting the body in shape. Disciplining the body is good, but if you overdo it, especially *pranayama* without proper guidance, you will get one of the hardest kicks of your life! *Kundalini shakti* is more powerful than a hundred nuclear weapons fired simultaneously. Don't mess with it just because you can read the steps in English. The point is to learn and practice correctly, in a balanced way.

Why isn't it good to start something (a new project) on *amavasya*?

It depends on which part of the world you come from. If you are from Tamil Nadu (India), *amavasya* is considered auspicious. There are different calculations applicable with different types of logic. Follow your system of faith; each has its own purpose.

Once, when I was in Chennai, I brought in a large coconut leaf to help with some stage decoration. The volunteers got really upset with me because the leaf is apparently used in funerals. Different customs in different places, so when in Rome . . . this is *samanya*

dharma and it is different in each place. For instance, if you are in a desert and want to purify something, your purifier is sand, not water (as is the case in other places). If you are in the Himalayas, snow is the purifier. You can rub an object in the snow and consider it as purified. One follows the *samaanya dharma* of that geographical location.

Do we need to believe in *Rahu-kala* and *Yama-gandam*?

There are different *kalas* (time periods) where the scriptures prescribe “do this” or “don’t do that.” Only if you are doing something specific or special (*vishesha karma*) should you check out *Rahu-kala* and *Yama-gandam*; astrology is a beautiful science in itself. For daily duties (*nitya karma*) like brushing my teeth, using the restroom, or going to the office, there is no need to check, because *nitya karmas* don’t come under the purview of *Rahu-kala*. Only *vishesha karma* and *vishesha dharma* falls into this category.

Most of the *panchangas* (almanacs) are written topographically for the Indian subcontinent. So time zone adjustments are needed if you don’t reside in India. It’s pretty accurate.

Thank you very much for listening so patiently. I hope this Q&A session has not led to more questions for you.