



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

STORY OF THE MYSTERIOUS “KARMA”

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Abstract : What happens to life after the physical body drops dead? When and how does life enter the new-born? Right from the beginning, all thinking minds have been bothered by these and other related questions like : Is there God, or Parmatma? What is the Soul or Atma; if it exists? Etc. Different people have come out with different answers. And they all differ! There is no consistent answer or theory! The one most popular is the Doctrine of Karma, propounded by the Vedic philosophers of India. The questions as well as the so called ‘answers’ continue to challenge the world intelligentsia and there is no unified view on the subject, till today!

In this little presentation the author has made a humble effort to synthesize the freely available material on the subject, from the Vedic Scriptures, and that from the popular Science, into a ‘sensible whole’; attempting to address the questions under reference and trying to understand their popular answer in the form of an interesting story. Items marked (*) below, are the author’s original contributions and it is obvious that some thought or the other, contained there-in, does not come up to popular expectations; after all, we are trying to ‘know’ the ‘un-knowable’! Readers are therefore requested to kindly mail their comments to the author, (cdr.varma@gmail.com); for, it may be possible that together we may arrive at a ‘unified’ view!

Contents :

- ♪ The Karma Principle
- ♪ Question of “Free Will”
- ♪ Dharma & Swa-Dharma
- ♪ Definition of Yoga
- ♪ Different Yoga-s
- ♪ Goal of Karma
- ♪ Karma, Akarma & Vikarma (*)
- ♪ Ego Vs. Doer-ship (*)
- ♪ Bhav & Karma-Bandhan
- ♪ Yagya-Bhav (*)
- ♪ Sakshi-Bhav
- ♪ Discussion on “Four Varna-s”
- ♪ Types of Karma
- ♪ Brahman as Paramatma
- ♪ Discussion on “First Cause” (*)
- ♪ Paramatma as “First Cause”
- ♪ Four-dimensional Space-Time “Net” (*)
- ♪ Vedic concept of “Creation”

- ♪ Vedic Gods as “Force Fields” (*)
- ♪ Atma & Paramatma
- ♪ Discussion on “Subtlety” & “Omni-presence” (*)
- ♪ Discussion on “Manifestation” (*)
- ♪ The ‘Drama’ of Karma
- ♪ “Avidya” as “Software” (*)
- ♪ “Prarabdha” & “Purushartha”
- ♪ Four “Ashrama-s”
- ♪ “Kaam” & Happiness (*)
- ♪ Discussion on Karma as “Kaushal” (*)
- ♪ Discussion on “Free Will” (*)
- ♪ The “As-If” Philosophy
- ♪ Conclusion (*)

Hari Om.

“Karma”, the much talked-about Sanskrit word, in its simplest sense means : ‘Deed’, ‘Doing something’, Anything, that you think ‘you’ do... i.e. an ‘Action’! And the ‘one-line’ “Karma Principle” is, the well known proverb : “As you sow, so shall you reap”... You do ‘good’ things, good things will happen to you... and vice-versa. The simple, principle of ‘cause & effect’... Or, the famous “Third Law” of Newton, “To every action, there is an equal & opposite reaction”.

What happens if you do not ‘do’ anything? Is there no ‘action’ then?

That is where things start getting complicated, because, that is not in your hands. Even if you lie in the bed... you may think that you are not doing anything, but you are wrong! That itself... lying in the bed without physically doing anything... is also Karma. Even ‘thinking’ is Karma... if you are ‘doing’ the thinking... And, if you have thought about it, you are always ‘thinking’... ‘Not-thinking’ does not appear to be in our control!

What ‘action’ is it then, if any, ‘doing’ of which, is in our control, if at all?

We begin our story with this interesting question... the question of the so-called “Free-Will”! Well, a number of very wise people over the eons have, in a manner of saying, burnt a lot of their gray-matter, in attempting to throw light on this apparently simple issue. The conclusions arrived at by them, encompass the entire spectrum : from “There is no free-will at all”, (the **Fatalist** view); to, “We have a one-hundred percent free-will”, (the **Materialistic** view). To a Fatalist, we are pure automatons... totally in the hands of an alien power... the ‘God’. A Materialist, on the other hand, thinks there is no other God than he, himself!

What is the **Truth**? This is what is claimed to be contained in the “Veda-s”, world’s oldest religious scriptures... “It is simply a matter of one’s Karma”, the Vedic Seers would answer.

Incidentally, the Vedic philosophy of India, is not a mere philosophy; it is supposed to be the “vision” of the “truth”... that is why it is called “Darshan”, the “seen”; and the Vedic philosophers are called the “Seers”... the enlightened-ones who have... not ‘heard’, but ‘seen’... the truth; the “Rishi-s”, or, the sages.

It is important, therefore, to understand : How does this Karma ‘work’? And this is what we shall attempt in our ‘story’... The story of ‘mysterious’ Karma... For, even the God, Lord Krishna, acknowledges in Geeta : “*Gahana Karmano Gatih*”, He tells Arjuna... “The ways in which the Karma ‘works’, are mysterious indeed”...

The word “mystery” is important... A ‘mystery’ is to be ‘understood’ & ‘lived-with’, whatever you understood; unlike a “puzzle” that you tend to ‘solve’ & ‘forget about’, solved or un-solved! Those who ‘understand’, become “mystics” & live happily. Those who consider life to be a ‘puzzle’, remain miserable!

Let us, at the on-set, remember that a “Guru” is given a highly prominent place in the Vedic philosophy... “*Saakshaat Parabramha*”, i.e. “The Supreme Lord incarnate”! Kabir, the great ‘mystic’, goes one step further, saying that the Guru is even “greater” than God. You know, the Guru is more than a teacher &/or preacher... but more than the God? And yet, Kabir is right! The “spirit” is ‘infinite’, and our faculties are ‘finite’; It is therefore not possible to either ‘put’ the spiritual-knowledge in ‘words’, or, to be able to ‘understand’ it, only from the scriptures. It has to be ‘realized’ in one’s soul. And for that, one needs a ‘soul to soul’ transfer. And that is what the Guru does, with his love & compassion... “*Balihari Guru Aapno, Govind Dio Milaye*”, sings Kabir, “Kudos to my Guru, who has brought me face-to-face with God...”

Now, the entire original ‘material’ on the subject is in “Sanskrit”... Fortunately many translations of Vedic Scriptures such as the Shrimad Bhagwat Geeta, & various “Upnishad-s”, are available on the Internet itself. Geeta, a relatively short scripture, of 700 odd couplets, covers all possible aspects of ‘human living’, containing “the essence” of the entire Vedic literature... This is not ‘plagiarism’ though, for Veda-s are supposed to be recordings of ‘God’s voice’ & not ‘written’ by any particular individual(s); and Geeta is also, the God’s sermon only... perhaps the only ancient text, in which the God directly addresses the man!

Let us begin our discussion on Karma, with another equally well known & perhaps, equally mis-understood, Sanskrit word, “*Dharma*”; the two being intricately linked with each other.

“Dharma” which is (mis)-translated in popular English as “Religion”, is formed from the Sanskrit root “*Dha*”, meaning ‘to uphold’, ‘sustain’, ‘support’... Dharma is “that which holds together the different aspects & qualities of an object, into a whole”. It is “The Essence of being”, without which a thing cannot exist! “*Dharma Sarvam Pritishthitam*”, say the Vedic Seers, i.e. “everything in this world is founded on Dharma”. It is therefore, the “essential nature” or the “natural tendency” of things. For example, the fire ‘burns’, so the Dharma of fire is “to burn”. A fire cannot be called “fire” if it cannot ‘burn’! On this analogy it is the Spirituality, which is not quite the ‘Religion’, that is supposed to be the essential nature of Man... And his Dharma!

In fact, every creature (“*Jeeva*”), is born with, its Dharma, or, “*Swa-Dharma*”... “*Swa*” is Sanskrit for “one’s own”. The Vedic philosophy, or “Religion”, as one could say, is simply that one should act in total conformity with one’s Swadharma... And, therefore, ‘to understand your Dharma’, is important, before performing any Karma! There is a nice story to illustrate the point :

A Gyani, the man of ‘knowledge’, was crossing a river... It was rainy season... The river was in spate but the Gyani was a good swimmer... (“*Gyan*”, the knowledge of the “truth”, is comparable with “swimming” in many ways!). As he neared the mid-stream, he spotted one little scorpion, going up & down in the rushing waters. He picked up the insect to save it from drowning, placed it in one of his palms & kept swimming with the other hand. The scorpion stung. The Gyani shrugged his hand & the insect fell out in the waters. He picked it up again & keeping it in the other palm, continued crossing the river. In no time the scorpion stung again... Again it fell out in water... Again it was picked up... Again it stung... And so on.

By the time he reached ashore, both the Gyani’s hands were swollen & painful. But he was pleased on placing the insect safely on shore. One person who was watching all this drama, couldn’t help asking : “Sir, You were trying to save that wicked little creature & yet it kept on stinging you. Why did you not leave it there itself to die?”

Gyani’s reply is beautiful. He said : “The Dharma of the scorpion is ‘to sting’... It was simply ‘acting’ out of its Dharma. Even in the face of death, it did not leave its Dharma! So, how could I leave *MY* Dharma, as human being... i.e. ‘love & compassion for one & all’...”

This is the real Gyani, to the Vedic Seers... A true “religious” man! For, what he did, was ‘following’ his Dharma... Without worrying about the consequences...

And that is the ‘key’ point... Doing Karma, as per Dharma, but **without ‘worrying-about’ the ‘fruits’, their-of!** To my understanding, this is Geeta’s “message” of foremost importance in life... Prince Arjuna gets disillusioned in the battlefield when he realizes that the warriors on the enemy side are none other than his own close relatives & friends. “How can I fight my own kith & kin”, he asks, “Besides, would ‘killing’ them, not amount to ‘*Paap*’, ‘(sin)’?”

Lord Krishna makes him realize his ignorance of the Truth of the matter. “That, (the ‘ignorance’), is the only sin”, He declares. He tells Arjuna that as a warrior, his Dharma in the battlefield, is ‘to-fight’, and that; he must do only that, without worrying about the

consequences. “Do your Karma in accordance with your Dharma, without any ‘attachment’ with the result there-of”, He commands. “Leave that (the ‘result’), to me”, He adds.

All actions, (*Karma*) beget results, (*Karma-Phala*)... And, the ‘right way’ of living, recommended by the God is : Doing Karma, in accordance with one’s Dharma, **while** remaining un-attached with the results there-of... In fact, surrendering them... to Him!

And this is known as the path of Action, or, “**Karma Yoga**”... the ‘subject’ of our story!

There is another ‘way’, that of ‘Total Surrender’...

Perhaps, out of compassion... because it is not easy to ‘know’ your true Dharma, in all the various “roles” that you ‘play’ in life, at different places & at different times... which He has enumerated in His long sermon; that the Lord ‘summarizes’ at the end, “ Abandoning **all your Dharma-s**, surrender to Me, and Me alone... and **I shall** save you from all the sins”...

And that is the path of Devotion, or, “**Bhakti Yoga**”! Easier? In a way yes; because the Lord is taking your total responsibility... But more difficult in actual fact; because here you are required to ‘give up’ your “doing” too!

There is one more ‘path’ that the Vedic Seers acknowledge; the path of ‘Pure Knowledge’, or, “**Gyan Yoga**”, which says : Once you “understand” the “Reality”, ‘right living’ follows... In fact, there are many more *paths*... Though J. Krishnamurty says : “There is no path”; what I think, he means is that there is no “one”, or, a “universal” path... one has to carve-out one’s own path”... which is what Buddha has said in his famous sermon : “Be your own light”!

You can find a lot of literature on these ‘Paths’... They are ‘complimentary’ to each other. But, whichever ‘path’ you follow, depending upon what suits your basic nature, or, Swa-Dharma; to ‘reach’ the ‘goal’... which incidentally, is ‘common’ to all paths... You cannot get away from Karma... For, whatever you do; gathering knowledge, which you ‘do’ in Gyan-Yoga; or singing devotional songs, which you ‘do’ in Bhakti-Yoga; you *ARE* performing Karma! Only thing is that you need to do *THAT*, “skillfully”... “*Yogah Karmasu Kaushalam*”, says Lord Krishna in Geeta; meaning, “Yoga is dexterity in action”! We will look into that, as we go along.

A literal translation of the Sanskrit word “yoga”, is “**Addition**”; one of the four fundamental operations in Arithmetic; ‘addition’, ‘subtraction’, ‘multiplication’ & ‘division’. This is relevant... for; ‘Yoga’ is a path leading to the unification of “Atma”, the Soul, with “Parmatma”, the Supreme God.

It is this ‘**Unification**’ that is said to be the ultimate ‘**purpose**’, or, the common ‘goal’ of every living being, according to the Vedic Philosophy. So, we are born again & again... till we fulfill this purpose... or, till the end of ‘Creation’... whichever is earlier! For, it is the same ‘goal’ of the entire ‘Creation’ too... To go back to the ‘Creator’... We shall go there, a little later!

Let us first discuss the three ‘terms’ that Krishna uses for ‘Karma’, in Geeta : “*Karma*”, “*Akarma*” and “*Vikarma*”.

‘Karma’, an action’, as we said, has two sides to it : One, a sense of “doer-ship”, (*Karta-Bhav*)... And two, the desire to enjoy the fruits there-of, or, the “enjoyer-ship”, (*Bhokta-Bhav*). The two are ‘complimentary’... but ‘mutually exclusive’... & this is important!

“*Bhav*”, by the way is ‘an attitude of mind’ and we shall be talking more about it in our story. “Mind”, on the other hand, is a subject in itself, with multiple aspects! We can only touch-upon the few, we come across, in our story!

Almost all of us, most of the time, perform our actions with both, the *Karta-Bhav*, as well as, the *Bhokta-Bhav*. Our actions are motivated either by the desire of gaining something, or, by the fear of ending-up with something, we don’t want... Thus, from the very beginning itself, our minds get focused on the “fruit”... i.e. we become ‘attached’ to the ‘fruits of our actions’, (*Karma-Phal*)! This is what is actually meant when we use the word : “*Karma*”... i.e. “Action in the ‘generic’ sense”... & this is also addressed in the Vedic scriptures, as “*Sakaam Karma*”, (Karma with “*Kaam*”, Sanskrit for “desire”), or, “*Sabeej Karma*”, (Karma with “seeds”, synonym for “desire”)...

And all that the Lord recommends is, that the Karma must be performed with no ‘Attachment’ with the *Karma-phal*, i.e. without the *Bhokta-Bhav*! This is what is conveyed in the most famous verse from Geeta : “*Karmanye-va-dhikarastey Maa Phaleshu Kadachina*”... “Your ‘*adhikaar*’ is only on ‘doing’, (or, ‘not doing’) Karma, not on the fruits there-of”... “*Adhikaar*” can be ‘loosely’ translated as

“Control”... Or, “Right”... In fact, it is closer to “a Privilege”! “You are privileged, only ‘to act’, the result there-of, is not under your control”... It had never been!

It is worth looking at the Lord’s total recommendation in Geeta. “Fix your mind on Me only, place your intellect in Me, & you shall, no doubt, live in Me alone”, He tells Arjuna... “If you are unable to fix your mind steadily upon Me, then by ‘*Abhyas Yoga*’, (constant practice), seek to reach Me”, He adds... “If that is not possible”, He continues, “be you intent on performing actions for My sake.... And if even that is not possible”, He concludes, “then, taking ‘refuge’ in Me, (*Mat Yogam Aashritah*), self-controlled, (*Yat-Aatmavaan*), renounce the fruits of all your actions, (*Sarva Karma-phal Tyagam Kuru*)...”.

Do you think it is possible for a normal human being, to perform Karma without any *Karta-Bhav*? Not at all! On the other hand, it is perfectly possible to perform Karma, without any *Bhokta-Bhav*. In fact, in all ‘inspired’ action, i.e. when one is totally absorbed in what he is ‘doing’, with what J. Krishnamurthy calls “Single-point Attention”... one does tend to ‘forget’ about the ‘end result’... & enjoys the action itself, remaining un-attached with the enjoyment of the results there-of, at least for that duration. And, this Karma, with only the *Karta-Bhav*, but without the *Bhokta-Bhav* is, really, a “Non-Ego-centric Action”!

Incidentally, *Karta-Bhav* is not quite the “doer-ship”! It is just one of the attitudes of the “mind”; it should therefore, not be confused with ‘total mind’, or, “ego”. “*Karta-Bhav*” by itself, is not “ego”! Unfortunately the words “Doer-ship”, “ego”, “mind”... have all been so ‘freely’ used in English, that the clarity regarding the distinctions between them, has been totally lost. “Ego”, in fact, is *Karta-Bhav plus Bhokta-Bhav*. Yet, when we normally say, “Doer-ship” in English, we actually mean “ego”; which is in-correct... The way to understand it is that : The *Karta-Bhav* is like the ‘sperm’ & the *Bhokta-Bhav* is like the ‘ovum’... Unless they are ‘together’, there is no life... i.e. the Ego!

Thus, while the word “Karma” is used by the Lord to refer to “Action” in the generic sense, i.e. an “Ego-centric Action”, ‘with total Ego’, (i.e. *Karta-Bhav plus Bhokta-Bhav*); the Karma with only the *Karta-Bhav*, but without the *Bhokta-Bhav*, (i.e. the ‘Non-Ego-centric action’), is what Krishna calls “*Akarma*”, or the “Inaction”. And it is this Karma, i.e. the *Akarma*, that is also addressed as “*Nishkaam Karma*”, (Karma without “Kaam”), or, “*Nirbeej Karma*”, (Karma without “seeds”), in the Vedic Scriptures.

The third term, “*Vikarma*”, which Krishna uses, only once, in Geeta, is a little controversial, as different ‘scholars’ have translated it differently.

The literal meaning of “*Vikarma*” would be ‘the Karma that is “opposite” of Karma’, and the Great Indian scholar, Adi-Shankaracharya... & therefore, his followers... have interpreted it as “*Nishiddh Karma*”, i.e. the ‘Forbidden Action’. But that does not appear to be correct, for that would make it ‘subjective’... Something that you consider ‘forbidden’ may be found to be highly ‘recommended’, by me... & vice-versa. It therefore, does not ‘fit’ with the other two terms, which are not ‘subjective’, but ‘universal’ in their application!

Osho defines *Vikarma* not as Karma ‘done’ by somebody, but the ‘Action’ that is just ‘happening’, all around us... For example, we breathe; the blood circulates through the body; the food is digested; the heart beats; etc... All these ‘actions’ he puts under the category of “*Vikarma*”!

It therefore appears appropriate to consider *Vikarma* as ‘action’ without the ‘total Ego’, i.e. *without both*, the *Karta-Bhav*, as well as, the *Bhokta-Bhav*... And there-by, as Osho says in his characteristic elegant manner : “An ordinary person (*Bhogi*), lives in **action**, (*Karma*); a realized person (*Yogi*), lives in **inaction**, (*Akarma*); and only the God, (*Paramatma*), lives in **non-action**, (*Vikarma*)”... Which is true! For, only God *can* live in *Vikarma*... the “Non-Action”... i.e. appearing to be ‘Non-acting while Acting’!

Vinoba Bhave, the well acknowledged “Karma Yogi”, gives another ‘clue’ through his relationship :

Karma + Vikarma = Akarma

Although his definitions of the three terms are at a slight variance, Vinoba’s remarkable ‘equation’ can be ‘solved’ following our interpretation : If you understand rightly, the ‘working’ of God, ‘*Vikarma*’; and perform your Karma in the light of that knowledge, i.e. you realize that every significant thing in life happens on its own... In the famous words of Buddha : “Events happen, deeds are done, but there is no individual ‘doer’ there-of”! You will then enter into a state of *Akarma*. For example, by ‘understanding ‘ “Breathing”, a *Vikarma*, & ‘doing’ it in a ‘controlled’ manner, (*Karma*), one can attain “Samadhi”, which is a state of *Akarma*, the ‘Inaction’.

Vinoba, as indeed the Vedic Seers, rightly emphasize the significance of “*Bhav*”. A “*Bhav*”, meaning ‘intention’ or ‘inclination’, is also an ‘aspect’ of the mind. For the time being, we leave with the understanding that the word “*Bhav*” stands-for “*thinking*” in the famous quote : “Nothing is good, or bad, but **thinking** makes it so”. As I said, we shall ‘encounter’ it again, in our ‘story’.

Now, the ‘generic’, (desire-prompted, or, “ego-centric”) Karma always begets Karma, i.e. the *Karma-Phal*. This is what we said in the beginning... ‘Every action has an equal & opposite reaction’. That is the ‘law’ governing the simple, or, ‘gross’ matter... The ‘desire’, being just a ‘thought’ in mind, is also matter... but it is more ‘subtle’ & therefore, more complicated to comprehend.

The ‘desire’ can be understood to act like a seed... One seed produces one tree, but that one tree will have a number of ‘fruits’ & each fruit, in time, will produce numerous seeds of its own. So, very soon there will be more & more seeds... And, with time, even more and more trees... & so on. You can see how quickly a single Karma can land one into innumerable Karma! This is called the ‘binding effect’ of Karma, or, the “*Karma Bandhan*”. When you are ‘born’, you ‘come’ with a bundle of ‘*Karma-Bandhan*’, which is the same as your ‘*Swa-Dharma*’. Acting in accordance with your *Swa-Dharma*, therefore, you ‘unwind’ your *Karma-Bandhan*. How?

Well, if we also ‘do’ Akarma, it would mean that the “seeds”, or the ‘desires’ behind our Karma, are such that they do not ‘germinate’ at all... (In the language of the Vedic Seers, the seeds are “roasted” in the “fire” of our Gyan)... i.e. there is no resultant *Karma-Bandhan*! Thus to live in Akarma, is to remain ‘free’ from the ‘binding effect’ of Karma... We only ‘un-wind’ our old *Karma-Bandhan*, without ‘adding’ any new!

The other, equally significant aspect of the Lord’s recommendation is, to note that by living in “Akarma”, you are actually ‘giving-up’ or ‘sacrificing’ your *Bhokta-Bhav*... Sacrificing your ‘negativity’ to Him... Which is equivalent to giving “*Aahuti*”, or, performing “*Homa*”! And this has to be ‘Total’... For, not only do we enjoy the fruits of our own actions, but also the fruits of other's actions impinging on us... The entire *Bhokta-Bhav* has to be ‘sacrificed’!

This is the true definition of “*Yagya*”... & the word “*Yagya-Bhav*”, loosely translated as an “Attitude of Sacrifice”, is to be understood as an “ism”, like ‘Capitalism’, ‘Socialism’, etc... Just more sensible than all of them put together; it says that whatever material possessions we have, belong NOT to us, like in Capitalism... NOT to the Society either, like in Socialism... BUT to God... For, we cannot create or destroy anything... and, without Him, we cannot even have, or, use anything! In fact, without Him we are dead... which is a fact! And therefore, all that the Scriptures require us to ‘do’, is that when we use, whatever He has only allowed us to use... in accordance with our previous Karma... we should do that in the spirit of “*Puja*”, i.e. ‘giving it back to Him’. Then it becomes His “*Prasada*”... the sacred ‘offering’ of the Divine... that must be ‘shared’ with others! This is “*Prasada-Bhav*”, the ‘Peace & tranquility’ attitude of Mind.

This “Cosmic Law”, as ‘seen’ by the Vedic Seers, is “universal”... We can also ‘see’ it... being followed by every sentient, as also, insentient member of Creation... except the “ignorant” human beings! The Sun, the Moon, the Sea, the Earth, trees, animals, the whole lot of them, including the “awakened” human beings, the ‘Yogi-s’, are perpetually living in ‘*Yagya-Bhav*’... A true ‘Yogi’ does not perform any action for his own selfish interests, but for communal ‘good’, with an attitude of sacrifice. Thus, while living in Akarma, he is not a ‘doer’ of ego-centric actions, “*Karta*”; he is the ‘witness’, “*Sakshi*”, of the act, which is only ‘happening’ through him!

Let us take the example of Arjuna. Since Arjuna is an Archer... his Dharma is Archery... Now, in the battlefield he faces a situation, which demands action! His Karma has to be rooted in his Dharma... & in *Yagya-Bhav*! Krishna therefore tells him that he should shoot his arrows, remaining unattached with the ‘result’ of this action of his... And, if he does that, he would no-longer be the ‘doer’ of that action... The action would only ‘happen’ through him... He would just be a ‘witness’ to the ‘drama’...

Normally what we do? We look at our actions, with the ‘glasses’ of *Bhokta-Bhav*... And that changes our world-view... That was the reason that Arjuna had got ‘deluded’ in the first place!

This concept of being a **Witness** to your own self, i.e. living in “*Sakshi-Bhav*”, is unique in Vedic philosophy. And it is simply beautiful...

Your 'Inner-self' or, the 'Conscious energy' that Nisarga Dutt Maharaj, an acknowledged Gyani, rightly calls the "**Awareness**", in "**I Am That**"; (*the collection of his Talks & a 'must-read' Book*), is in actual fact, a 'Witness' to the Karma that you perform, through your Body, Mind, &/or, Intellect, (**BMI**)... The "you" that thinks itself to be “your” BMI, obviously can not be the "real" you! It is actually your "false-self", or "conditioned" Awareness, which Maharaj calls the "**Consciousness**"... And all that you have to 'do', is to, "Realize that **YOU ARE THAT** 'awareness': and not the BMI...", as the Veda-s declare.

Doing your Karma with 'Awareness', you are a "Witness" to the Karma being done by your false-self or, ego... And then you are living in 'Akarma'... This is precisely what Vinoba's "equation" conveys, too!

The 'one-line' Karma-Yoga to me, therefore, is, "Do Karma, in *Swa-Dharma*, with *Yagya-Bhav*"...

In fact, if your Karma is really deeply rooted in your Dharma, the *Yagya Bhav* will automatically happen! And that is the Vedic concept of Karma, i.e. "*Swantah Sukhaya, Bahujan Hitaya*"... That which results in, "Bliss to one's own heart; Well-being to every one"...

Karma have also been 'classified' into : the "*Nitya Karma*", or the 'Compulsory Actions'; the "*Naimitta Karma*", or the 'Obligatory Actions'; & the "*Kamy Karma*", prompted by 'desire'. The "*Nitya Karma*" that we have to perform for maintaining our existence, e.g. Eating, Bathing, Clothing, etc. are "non-binding". The "*Naimitta Karma*" are those that we perform to fulfill our duties towards parents, other relatives, friends, etc. They are supposed to be 'binding' only if they are not performed. The "*Kamy Karma*" are the 'Non-mandatory Actions', & like the 'generic Karma', they 'bind', unless performed with "right skill", (*Kaushal*)!

The 'purpose' behind all Karma, however, remains the same... i.e. the unification of "*Atma*" with "*Paramatma*"... So, let us now look at the Vedic concept of "*Atma*" & "*Paramatma*"...

I think all the 'religions' of the world acknowledge that there is a "Creator" who 'created' the world... something like a 'potter' creating a 'pot'. Thus there are two 'elements, the Potter & the Pot. But this is not the complete picture, for; both, the potter & the pot are 'made-of' the same "stuff"... the 'mud'! Is that the 'third' element? Vedic Seers complete the picture... "The world 'of the Creator', has been created 'by the Creator', and 'for the Creator', they say... The mud, the pot & the potter, are all one & the same... *The Brahman*! Like the 'dreaming', the 'dreamer' & the 'dreamt'... There is no 'duality'...

It is this "*Brahman*", (not "*Brahmin*", the "*Varna*"), that the Vedic Seers refer to as "*Paramatma*"... "The non-dual *Brahman*", which is the only "Reality", according to them!

Vedic Seers 'see' the 'Reality' as that, which is "*Shashwat*", i.e. that, which never changes! What 'changes' with time, is 'transitory' or, "unreal". It may 'seem' to be real, for as long as it lasts, but it is not, in reality. The 'Reality', or, "Truth", on the other hand, has no beginning, no end... it lasts for all time.

This can be understood by comparing with what happens in a movie theatre. As long as the movie is 'running', it does appear to be real. We identify ourselves with the characters... laugh with them... cry with them. But after it is 'over', what remains is, only the screen on which the film was being projected. Then only, one realizes that because there was that stationary screen behind, it was possible for the movie to be projected at all... & appear to be 'real' too! The 'Reality', the Screen, always was... the movie, the un-real, 'came', 'ran' for some time, and got 'over'. The 'Reality' is "*Niraakaar*"... that which cannot be 'seen' by the organs of perception, i.e. the un-manifest; and all that is "*Saakaar*"... i.e. can be 'perceived', the manifest, is un-real... This is the well-known concept of "*Maya*", the illusory power of *Paramatma*!

Notice however, that with the above definition, even the world becomes un-real...Not that it does not exist! It does... & also appears to be real, for as long as it exists... or, we exist... But only because it has the stationary background of the "*Brahman*"... Incidentally, the Sanskrit word for the world is "*Jagat*", which literally means "that which is always on the move", or 'ever changing'... & therefore, 'un-real'.

As you must have noticed, we have brought 'time' into our discussion... For, it is simply fascinating, whether it is 'time' that has set our world 'rolling'; or, is it the perpetual 'motion' that the world is in, which has given 'birth' to time? God only knows! James Clerk Maxwell, the 'father' of Electromagnetic Field Theory, has written : "... Time is a mystery which man cannot endure to contemplate until eternal Truth enlighten it."

'Time', as the popular Science tells us, is the 'fourth dimension' of the "Space-Time Continuum", in which we live. "Things" need space, to exist, and they move, (or, "change"), over time, in space-time. And this "change" follows the logical "Cause & Effect" law, in sequential order of time... i.e. first there is 'cause', then its 'effect'... which, in time, may (or may not), become the 'cause' of subsequent effect (or effects). And so on.

The obvious question is : what was the “**First Cause**” behind all these effects, that we are ‘witnessing’... or, more accurately, ‘living’ today?

For that, Science has no answer. Can it have... in future? I don’t think so!

Physics tells us that the universe started with a ‘big bang’; from a ‘hot ball’ of ‘almost’ zero size but ‘almost’ infinite mass. Scientists can ‘predict’ various events that ‘must have happened’, but only from the time, which is 10^{-43} seconds ‘after’ the big bang took place. What happened ‘before’ that, or at ‘zero’ time? They do not know! The ‘zero point’ is called a ‘singularity’ and no Physical theory is applicable to singularities, any way. There is however, another reason too.

The space is not ‘continuous’ as it appears... Just as a ‘picture’ is ‘granular’, i.e. made of numerous dots or, ‘pixels’, of various colours, which, together, ‘create’ the picture, but in-between the dots there are blank spaces... Similarly, the ‘empty’ space is also made of three-dimensional cubes, or, ‘cells’; each ‘cell’ having the ‘sides’ measuring an incredible 10^{-33} cm, called the “Planck’s Length”. Distances shorter than this ‘fundamental length’, it is assumed, are impossible in our world, in exactly the same way that there can be no portion of ‘energy’, less than a ‘quantum’ of ‘action’.

Now, the time that light will take in covering a distance of 10^{-33} cm. will be of the order of 10^{-43} sec. That lays down the ‘size’ of our space-time ‘grid’... three spatial dimensions of 10^{-33} cm. each, i.e. Planck’s Length... and one time dimension of 10^{-43} sec. duration, called “Planck’s Time”, or, “Cronon”, the ‘quantum’ of Time.

Since we make our predictions based on the ‘information’ gathered from the ‘reflected light’, as every observation requires an energy exchange (photon) to create the observed ‘data’, it is not possible to ‘predict’ the ‘history’ of the universe, from the time, ‘zero’ to 10^{-43} sec... The light cannot ‘come back’, after ‘covering’ one Planck’s Length, ‘before’ that length of time... So, what ‘happened’ during the first 10^{-43} seconds of the Big Bang, can never be ‘seen’! All our so-called ‘knowledge’ about the ‘First Cause’, therefore, is nothing but speculation... Concepts only!

And that calls for caution, as Swami Chinmayanand rightly observes, “Non-comprehension leads to mis-comprehension”! In fact, this is how “*Maya*” comes into play... The principle of “*Maya*” functioning in an individual is called “*Avidya*”, (Ignorance)... And this is another tem that would creep-in again & again, in our story!

According to the Vedic Seers, It is the Brahman, or, Paramatma that is the “First Cause”... **It** always was & will always be. **It** cannot be ‘known’, because **It** is ‘un-knowable’ as an object! **It** can only be intuited, subjectively; & therefore, cannot be ‘put’ in words, because the moment you put something in words, it becomes an object’. So, all that the Vedic Seers have said are “pointers”... Just the “Finger to the moon”!

One concept that we can nevertheless, draw from the fore-going discussion is, that our space-time is a four-dimensional ‘net’, something like the fisherman’s net is, in two dimensions. I wonder if you have noticed the way the fisherman’s net is used for ‘highlighting’ the ‘background’, in movies etc... I have used it extensively in exhibitions & stage performances. Ordinarily it covers & ‘hides’ the background, particularly in dim lighting... but, if you use fluorescent lights behind the net, positioned at the correct ‘angle’, it gives a wonderful three-dimensional effect.

It seems reasonable to assume, therefore, that our four-dimensional space-time ‘net’, (or, more appropriately, “sponge”), which houses our world, in perpetual motion, is ‘conceivable’, only because it is ‘immersed’ in an unmoving background... normally it is covering & hiding this background, nevertheless that ‘background’ is ‘accessible’ to the ‘seekers’... This is precisely, what the Vedic concept is! Brahman is like the Sky, ‘covered’ by the clouds of ‘ignorance’, (*Avidya*)...

The other popular scientific version, that our universe is spherical, with a finite size, in an infinite space; and has come into existence due to the motion ‘in-side’ this infinite space, also matches well with the Vedic description of creation of the universe.

There are many ‘stories’ in the Vedic literature about how the universe came into being... Depending upon what is the context, or, ‘who’ is telling ‘whom’, i.e. at what ‘level’! The ‘established’ version, however, goes like this... “Every once in a while, Paramatma “desires” to become “many” from “one”, and a universe ‘springs out’,.....”

Paramatma, the Un-manifested Reality, is addressed as the infinite ‘reservoir’ of all that is... It is “**Chetan**”, (*intelligent*) Life-energy, or, ‘*Consciousness*’, that manifests **It-self** into “**Jadhh Padartha**”, the ‘unconscious matter’... (Akin to the Energy being converted into Matter, & vice-versa)... So, from “One”, It becomes “many”... the Un-manifest, manifesting into His ‘Creation’... And, hence the ‘Duality’, which is inherent in manifestation... It is like looking at the seed as the un-manifested form of the tree”, which is the same as saying that the tree is the manifested form of the seed”... The “two” are “one” only, with just a ‘qualitative’ difference between them!

How the ‘manifestation’ takes place?

There is supposed to be an elaborate ‘procedure’... We need not go into all the details... Let us just look at the initial part, which is relevant for our story!

The Creation ‘starts’ with the manifestation of Paramatma into “**Ishwara**”... You can call Him ‘The First God’, since He is, so to say, the overall in-charge of the Universe.

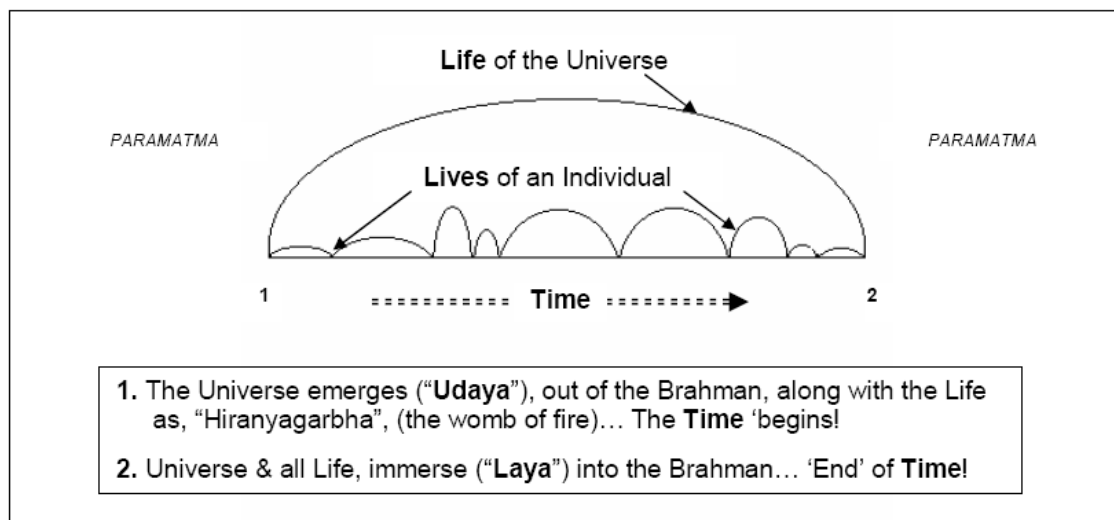
The Hindus have 33 crore (*one crore = 10 million*) Gods... They have deified all the ‘powers’ of Nature... almost everything, from food grain to sky... And all these names are also the names of God... In fact, the ‘sound’, (“Naad”), behind each name, and even the sound behind all sounds, the “**Anahat Naad**”, or the “**Omkaar**” (ॐ); they are also the names of God only! However, when we say “God”, we are usually referring to Paramatma...

Well, the next stage in “Creation” is *Ishwara*’s manifestation into “**Trideva**”, the three famous Hindu Gods, the “Trinity”; which comprises of, “**Bramha**”, (which is different from “**Brahman**”, the Paramatma, as also from, “**Brahmin**”, the “**Varna**”), who creates the universe, “**Vishnu**”, who preserves the creation, and “**Mahesha**”, or, “**Shiva**”, the eventual destroyer of all...

The universe comes into existence in the form of “**Hiranya-garbha**”, ‘the womb of fire’... (Equivalent to the Big Bang?)... and at the time of “**Maha-Pralaya**”, the great-extinction, it gets “**Laya**”, i.e. ‘merged’ into “Paramatma”, together-with its ‘*Ishwara*’ & ‘*Trideva*’.

This “**Leela**”, or the ‘Cosmic play’ of Paramatma, goes on, incessantly... Infinite numbers of universes keep spontaneously emerging & immersing continuously... and in so doing, Paramatma, living in *Vikarma*, has no *Karma-Bandhana*!

Incidentally, I do not see any difficulty in identifying these first four Vedic *Devtas* with the ‘**Energy Fields**’ of the four fundamental-forces, recognized by Physics, to be responsible for creation of the universe... *Ishwara*, the ‘first born’ in any universe, who is ‘behind’ every thing & is yet ‘hidden’, tallies well with the “**Gravitational Field**”; *Bramha*, the Creator, can be compared with the “**Electro-magnetic Field**” which is responsible for conversion of Energy into Matter & vice-versa; *Vishnu* can be the “**Strong Nuclear Field**”, which keeps the Protons ‘bound-together’ in the Atomic Nucleus; and *Mahesh*, (popular as Lord Shiva!), is the “**Weak Nuclear Field**” that allows Radio-Active decay. This may well remain as just a ‘concept’, unless of-course, some clever fellow, perhaps a disciple of Maharshi Mahesh Yogi, ‘proves’ it to be true!



Now, as our particular universe came into being, it contained in its womb, the *Hiranya-Garbha*, all 'life' too... in 'seed' form... like a fertilized egg exists in the womb. In time, it has grown into the flora & fauna that we see today... like the single fertilized egg grows into innumerable 'cells'... different group of cells forming different organs & performing different functions...

Essentially, therefore, we are 'parts' of one & the same 'Cosmic Body'...

And, with time only, as we 'die', the 'life' will also cease to exist, as the universe itself merges back into Paramatma. **'Life', like 'matter' & 'energy', cannot be created or destroyed!**

This also explains the concept of 're-birth'! During the 'life' of the universe, whose life-span, incidentally, also depends on Paramatma's 'desire', each living being undergoes a number of 'transformations', i.e. changes of "*Naam*" & "*Roop*", (names & forms), or, cycles of birth & death.

And hence the concept of "*soul*", the 'life-energy' that keeps the living being alive, every time it is born, till it dies!

An ordinary soul is supposed to undergo eighty-four lakh (*ten lakh = one million*) transformations during 'one' life of the universe! But, perhaps, the 'short-cut' is available... Yoga! Provided, you are "*Kushal*", i.e. 'skilled', in performing your Karma... For, "*Yogah Karmasu Kaushalam*", as Lord Krishna says!

Incidentally, not every Religion, even those who believe in 're-birth', accept the existence of Atma. But, the Vedic concept of "Non-Duality" is unique in its vision, that the Atma & Paramatma are essentially one & the same!

The 'Soul' is anyway eternal as it comes directly from Paramatma, the infinite 'reservoir' of life-energy & the common driving force, inside everything, living, as well as, non-living; & goes back to Him only. It is like taking the electrical connection to your house, from a powerhouse... It would be incorrect to say that the electricity in your house is in any way different from the electricity in the powerhouse. According to the Vedic Seers, the Non-Dual Brahman is "*Ano-raniyan, Mahato-mahiyam*", i.e. 'smaller than the smallest', at one end; while also being 'bigger than the biggest', at the other... When we consider the "*Mahat*" end, i.e. 'large', or, the 'gross' aspect of Brahman, we call Him "Paramatma"... And when we look at the "*Anu*" end, i.e. 'small', or, the 'subtle' aspect of Brahman, we call Him "Atma"! It is as simple as that!!

The Atma is also called : "*shoonya*", meaning 'Zero'; which is the obvious, 'smaller than the smallest' possible!

The concept of "*shoonya*" has been an invaluable gift of the Vedic Seers to Science! They have also provided the scientific definition of "*Infinity*", in the well known Sanskrit verse, that says : "If you take out the 'infinite (Brahman), from the 'infinite' (Brahman), what is left, is also 'infinite' (Brahman)..."

According to Physics, matter exists in four forms : Solid, Liquid, Gas & Plasma. It is same as classifying it into : Very Gross, Gross, Subtle & Very subtle. This is therefore just a small 'window' in the total 'existence', which extends from the 'infinite gross' matter to the 'infinite subtle' matter. We can compare the situation with the 'Energy Spectrum' where the 'Visible Spectrum' is only a small 'window' in the total range!

Now, because it is so subtle, so as to be 'zero', the Atma too is "un-knowable"... Because our intellect has to be subtler than the object of knowledge!

And, that also makes the Atma, & therefore, the Paramatma i.e. the Brahman, "*Omnipresent*"!

Let us understand it this way : Suppose there are two chairs in a room. I am sitting in one chair. So, obviously, I am 'not there' in the second chair! And if I want to 'be' in the second chair, it will take me some amount of 'time'... to get up from the first chair, walk up to the second chair, & sit on the second chair. Now, suppose I have a bottle of perfume in my hand & you are occupying the other chair. The moment I open the bottle, the smell of the perfume reaches you... It takes virtually no time in traveling from one chair to the other... because the perfume is subtler than me.

So, 'subtlety' of a thing can be measured by the 'time' it takes in 'permeating', or, 'spreading' from one position to another. "*Shoonya*" means 'infinite subtlety'... which means that Brahman takes 'zero' time in moving from one place to another... that is the same thing as saying that He occupies both the chairs, simultaneously... He is, therefore, all pervading... *omnipresent*!

According to the "Relativity Theory", no two events can be simultaneous... This is because it deals with gross matter, i.e. towards the "*Maha*"-end of the spectrum. Every thing is 'certain' & 'well defined', at that level.

The theory obviously 'fails' while dealing with subtler matter, i.e. at the "*Anu*"-end of the spectrum, where Heisenberg's "Uncertainty Principle", is applicable. The 'experimenter' himself affects the experiment, at that level of subtlety. Nothing is 'certain' or 'well defined'!

And equally obviously, the two theories cannot be 'combined' into a "Unified-Field Theory", that Einstein had dreamed of; because the "whole" is more than the sum of the "parts". Brahman is the total spectrum... the entire existence! We are looking at **It**, through just a little 'window'! The 'Totality' is 'Certainty', as well as, "Un-certainty"!!

The "Quantum Theory" that is applicable at the 'subtle' level, is based on 'probability'... There are 'infinite' possibilities for a single 'event' to 'happen'... And with a sample size so large, any outrageous thing is likely to happen... This is the Law of Large Numbers! It says that the probability of any possible event (even an unlikely one) occurring at least once in a series, increases with the number of events in the series. For example, the odds that you will win the lottery are very low; however, the odds that someone will win the lottery are quite good, provided that a large enough number of people purchased lottery tickets.

And therefore, where there should be 'chaos', there is perfect 'order'... For instance, the individual decays of a radioactive material are random and cannot really be predicted, but because of the great number of atoms present in any sample, the statistical measure called "Half Life" is absolutely accurate... not affected by any change in physical or chemical conditions! For example, the half-life of a particular radioactive isotope of thorium is 8 minutes. If 100 grams of the isotope are originally present, then *exactly* 50 grams will remain after 8 minutes, 25 grams after 16 minutes (2 half-lives), and so on... Of course, the 'atoms' that were present in the 75 grams that is no longer present as the original substance after 16 minutes, have not disappeared, but remain in the form of one or more other substances in the isotope's radioactive decay series... But which particular 'atoms' will 'stay back' & which will 'decay'; the atoms have no choice! There is no 'personal' Free-will; only the Divine Will!!

You might have noticed, quite often you take a particular action, with a particular expectation; and that comes through. It is mostly because the possible 'out-comes' were virtually infinite. In fact, every 'cause' has infinite 'effects'... Just as every 'effect' had infinite 'causes'! But you take it as your "doing"... And, if it does not come through, you "blame" God!! This is "*Attachment*".

Incidentally, "expecting" the *Karma-Phala* is absolutely natural... It is only the "Attachment" to it, which is the 'seed' of all our 'sorrows'! "Accept your *Karma-Phala*"... that is the 'bottom-line' of Karma Yoga!

Now, something that is *omnipresent*, obviously becomes "*Omniscient*"... because **It** will "know" every thing... Nothing can be hidden from **It**! And, that makes **It**, "*Omnipotent*" too... for, knowledge is power!! So; that is what Brahman is... the 'omnipresent', 'omniscient', and 'omnipotent', God of all gods! The Paramatma, as well as, the Atma!!

So, if Atma & Paramatma are one & the same; what is meant by "Unification of Atma & Paramatma"?

The mystery lies in the "duality", which, as we noted, is inherent in the very process of "manifestation"! In our physical world when energy gets converted from one form into another, it is said that a small portion of energy is always 'lost'... But, energy can neither be created nor destroyed! So, what happens? Well, this 'lost' portion of energy gets converted into 'heat', and therefore, 'wasted' in the sense that it cannot be put to any useful purpose! We may use the same analogy in the "conversion" of 'life'... from one birth to another... from *Hiranya-Garbha*, to our present state. And hence the concept of *Avidya*... the layers of 'Ignorance'!

It is logical to conceive that the 'life' first appeared on earth in its 'immovable', ("*Achala*"), form... the mosses, plants & trees... before evolving into the ("*Chala*"), 'movable' form. There again, first there were simple, single-cell creatures, like the Amoeba.. & so on. We may consider them to be just 'gross bodies', propelled by the 'souls'. That is why, perhaps, it is said that Amoeba never dies... If you 'divide' its 'body' into two parts, both remain alive! The soul being subtle, occupies both the 'bodies' spontaneously! The Amoeba 'dies' only when its 'body' gets physically destroyed.

Thus, with the so-called 'evolution', the individual Karma go on 'increasing', with the consequent *Karma-Bandhan*... both quantitatively, as well as, qualitatively! In the process, a 'subtle' body, representing the total *Karma-Bandhan* of the creature, ("*Jeeva*"), starts 'forming', & takes its place *between* the 'gross' body & the 'soul'... & even after the 'gross body' is destroyed, this 'subtle body' still remains 'alive'... in the form of a 'covering' on the 'soul'... which, generally keeps getting 'thicker' with the number of births.

This 'covering', or "*Avidya*", is supposed to be composed-of the 'superposition' of, what the Vedic Seers call : "*Sattwa*", "*Rajas*" & "*Tamas*", the three "*gunas-s*", (Temperaments or, Qualities), in the *Jeeva's* inner personality. "*Sattwa*" creates 'virtuousness'... "*Rajas*" creates "*Vikshepa*", (mental agitations)... & the "*Tamas*" creates "*Aavarana*", (Intellectual veiling)... Together they produce infinite variations in *Avidya*... like the 'shades' formed by mixing the three basic colours in various proportions!

These three '*guna-s*' are supposed to be the fundamental 'building blocks' of all matter, i.e. equivalent of the "Quarks" in Physics. "There is no one, on Earth, or even in the Heavens, who can remain 'free' from these three *Guna-s*, born out of the subtle matter", declares Krishna, in Geeta.

The *Jeeva's* Soul, called "*Jeevatma*" with the covering of "*Avidya*", becomes deluded & forgets its true identity. The *Jeeva* therefore, starts to "think" that he is "different" from the 'un-manifested' Brahman, or, Reality. And, it is this "*Jeevatma*" that takes birth, again & again... in different bodies (Names & Forms)... till the layers of "*Avidya*" on it, are erased completely... or, the 'end' of time... whichever is earlier!

This is the 'manifested' Brahman, which is you, I, the entire Creation...

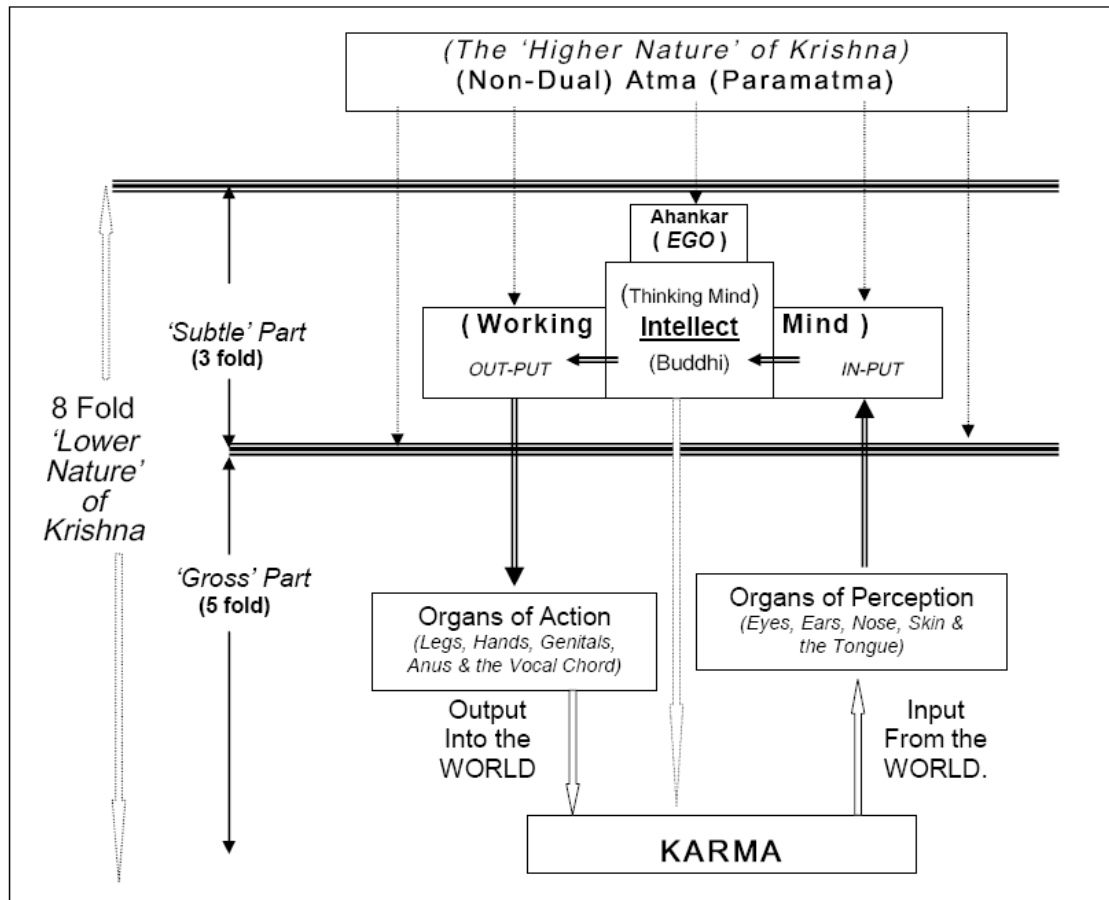
Unfortunately the subject has been analysed by so many scholars, in so many ways, that the basic principle is virtually over-shadowed by a plethora of 'words'! In the language of Geeta, Krishna, representing the "Reality", has a 'two-fold' "*Prakriti*", (Nature)... the "Higher Self", (*Para Prakriti*); & the "Lower self", (*Apara Prakriti*)... The Higher (or 'spiritual') "Self" is the Atma, or Paramatma, by which He 'upholds the world', ("*Yayedam Dharyatey Jagat*")... His eight-fold Lower (or 'material') "self", is composed of eight elements : "*Bhoomih*", (Earth); "*Aapah*", (Water); "*Analah*", (Fire); "*Vayuh*", (Air); "*Kham*", (Sky); "*Manah*", (Mind); "*Buddhih*", (Intellect); & "*Ahankar*", (Ego).

Now, the "gross" part of our 'material self' is supposed to be made up of the 'gross' components of the "*Panch Mahabhuta-s*", 'the five Great Elements', i.e. "*Bhoomih*", (Earth); "*Aapah*", (Water); "*Analah*", (Fire); "*Vayuh*", (Air); & "*Kham*", (Sky)... This is our 'physical body' & when we 'die', the 'physical body' also dies, gets de-composed & its constituents get merged with the five Great Elements... Back to where they came from!

Therefore, the "subtle" part of our 'material self', that is made up of the 'subtle' components of the same "*Panch Mahabhuta-s*", is the combination of the "Mind, Intellect & Ego", (*Man, Buddhi & Ahankar*). To get some idea of the 'subtlety' of these elements, you can visualize that 'thought' moves faster, & therefore, is subtler than 'light'... 'Mind' is subtler than 'thought'... Intellect is subtler than 'Mind'... & the 'Ego' is subtler than the 'Intellect'! Thus, although it is a single entity, "*Avidya*", it has three distinct 'layers' of varying subtlety... Call it the "Total Mind", divided into 'Conscious', 'Sub-conscious' & 'Super-conscious'... or, "Total Ego", divided into 'Id', 'Ego' & 'Super-Ego'... These are obviously, 'concepts' only!

I find that the concept of Ramesh Balsekar, a disciple of Nisarga Dutt Maharaj, is simpler to understand. He conceives that we have a "Working Mind" & a "Thinking Mind"; the 'working mind' is free from the 'clutches' of 'Time' i.e. it 'lives' in the 'present moment' only, while the 'thinking mind' is always 'moving' in 'Time'! You can 'feel' these two parts as separate... Whenever you are doing some work, the 'working mind' is fully engaged in the work only. The 'thinking mind' however, is constantly 'chattering' in the background, moving either from 'past' to 'future', or, from the 'future' into the 'past'... once in a while, even 'succeeding' in 'distracting' the 'working mind', which, then is 'put back' in the 'present', by "*Ahankar*", or, 'Consciousness', the 'third entity'. So, again there are "three parts", whatever 'names' you give them. Together, they form the total 'Mind', or, "Ego"!

The 'Drama' of Karma



The whole 'drama' of Karma can be conceived as follows : The Sense-organs provide the information of the perceptions to the Mind, (Working Mind), who, after arranging it in 'order', dispatches the same to the Intellect, (Thinking Mind). The Intellect, after taking into account its own 'stored-up' "impressions" of similar (or dissimilar) experiences in the past (with projections into the future, as applicable), comes to a 'decision', which it conveys to the Mind, for 'execution'. The Mind, in turn, issues the necessary 'orders' for the organs of Action, to act upon. Each 'act' leaves its own subtle "impression"... thereby adding to the existing 'bundle' of such 'impressions'... This goes on happening, at every moment... Consciously, as well as, Un-consciously...

It is these subtle "impressions" in the Mind-field, known as "*Vasana-s*", which play the most crucial role in the entire 'drama'! They 'lie', un-manifest to our Sense organs... & often to our own mental & intellectual perceptions... manifesting into 'desires'... & 'actions'... in time... with associated *Karma-Bandhan*.

The subtle part of our '*prakriti*', with its bundle of '*vasana-s*', can be conceived to act as "**software**", for the "**hardware**" that is provided by the 'gross' body. This "software" keeps getting "updated" with every subsequent birth... for, as we noted, it does not 'die' with the physical body, remaining attached with Atma, and 'roaming around', as "*Jeevatma*", till it finds another suitable "hardware", i.e. name & form, (*Naam, Roop*), for taking the next birth into. In fact, it is an "Intelligent Software" that 'designs' its own 'hardware'! Scientific findings on the 'development' of foetus in the womb that mimics the process of entire Evolution; and the 'structure' of our brain that incorporates our Animal-backgrounds, such as the "Reptilian Brain" etc. are adequate proof of this "Cosmic Drama"!

The "Intelligent" Software contains all the 'information' : On the *Naam, Roop* of the 'body' to be 'acquired'... Up-to-date 'account' of all the Karma that the *Jeeva* has to face... Even, the exact "time" when the *Jeevatma*, has to leave the 'gross body'... etc. If for some reason the *Jeeva* 'dies' before this time, which is called "*Akaal Mrityu*", (the untimely death), the *Jeevatma* 'roams around' on this Earth, "*Bhoo-loka*" only, till its time gets 'over'... The *Bhoo-loka* is also called "*Mrityu Loka*", the 'abode of Death', because all *Jeevas* here, have to undergo "Death"!

Vedic Seers describe different “*Loka-s*”, or ‘abodes of existence’, for *Jeevatma*, during its ‘waiting period’... i.e. when it is without a physical body. That should obviously depend upon the ‘thickness’ of the Avidya layer that it carries... i.e. different ‘values’ of subtlety! Unless it has become ‘smaller’ than the “Space-Time” grid, (i.e. 10^{-33} cm. by 10^{-43} sec.), it will stick around in our own universe, I presume! Any way, I don’t think that we need to go into the details. It is sufficient for us to know that unless this deadly “software” is completely ‘erased’... which is possible by our (future) Karma only... we are compelled, to be born again & again, into the wombs, that it ‘selects’... which is, again, in accordance with our (past) Karma only!

As you know, we are born by the union of the male & female elements. Same two elements, (“*Tattva*”), are behind the creation of all life, i.e. the “*Purush Tattva*”, that stands for the male element, the sperm, the Consciousness, (or the *Karta-Bhav*, the ‘positive energy’); & the “*Prakriti Tattva*”, the female element, the Nature, the ovum, (or the *Bhokta-Bhav*, the ‘negative energy’). Neither element can produce ‘life’, by itself. Even when they unite, ‘life’ is produced only in the presence of *Jeevatma*... i.e. only when a *Jeevatma* also enters the womb, does the ‘fertilized egg’ start ‘dividing’ & further ‘sub-dividing’!

This explains why it is not so easy to ‘produce’ life in the Laboratory! Same principle applies to our efforts in “Cross fertilization”... Unless there is a ‘matching’ *Jeevatma*, ‘cross-fertilization’ does not work too!

So, it is as per the decision of *Jeevatma* that the “*Jeeva*”, or, the living being, is born to particular parents, (i.e. the genetic make-up), & the environment. He then has a choice... to live like a puppet, getting more & more entangled in ‘*Avidya*’... or, to make efforts & acquire the ‘skill’, (*Kaushal*) to perform Karma so as to ‘cut’ all his *Karma-Bandhan*...

Now, the *Karma-Bandhan* that we bring with us from our previous lives, comprises of “*Prarabdha Karma*”, “*Agami Karma*” & “*Sanchit Karma*”. This has been nicely explained in the Scriptures, through the analogy with an Archer... He has a lot of arrows in his quiver; some on his bow, ready to shoot; & a few, that he has already fired... Now, he can ‘do’ something about the first two; but he has no choice about the last! Arrows that have already been fired are bound to ‘bear fruit’. This is referred-to as his “*Prarabdha Karma*”; the other two being “*Sanchit Karma*” & “*Agami Karma*”, respectively.

Our Karma, in the present birth, i.e. our ‘response’ to the “*Prarabdha*”, is called “*Purushartha*”. ... If it is performed as *Akarma*, we get rid of the corresponding *Karma-Bandhan*... otherwise the existing ‘bundle’ of the *Karma-Bandhan*, just ‘grows bigger’! In fact the ‘purpose’ of ‘*Purushartha*’ is : “Attempt’ to attain freedom from the ‘bondage’ of Karma, by performing Karma”... This is like using one thorn, to extract another... A person with the right ‘skill’, (*Kaushal*), is supposed to ‘extract’ one thorn with the other... till the last thorn; & then dispose away even the ‘left-over’ thorn... possibly in a way that benefits others!

Four *Purushartha-Karma* have been identified in the Vedic Way of Living : “*Dharma*”, “*Artha*”, “*Kaam*” & “*Moksha*”. We have already talked about the first, “*Dharma*” which is the ‘Code of Right Conduct’ & the ‘Foundation’, for the other ‘three *Purushartha-s*’...

The second, “*Artha*”, stands for ‘money’. Money is vital for our survival. So it must be ‘earned’... By rightful means of-course, (rooted in *Dharma*)... And not hoarded, (spent with *Yagya-Bhav*)... Etc. etc...

The third, “*Kaam*”, has a wide ranging meaning but is generally translated as ‘sex’... The Vedic Seers divide the life span of human beings into four ‘Stages’, called “*Ashrama-s*”... Starting with “*Balya-Ashram*” or Childhood stage... to “*Grahashthya-Ashram*”, or the married life, (“*Grahashthya*” is Hindi for Family)... then “*Vanprastha*”, with literal meaning ‘living in a jungle’... & finally “*Sanyas*”, meaning ‘renunciation’. Now, when you are in the *Grahashthya-Ashram*, you ought to engage yourself in *sex* too! Needless to add, it has to adhere to your *Dharma*... And, that is ‘spirituality’!

Vanprastha, I suppose, is not possible today, as it was originally conceived... We don’t have enough jungles now, for one! But I think it is an important stage in human life... When you are ‘over’ your Prime... Grown “gracefully gray”, so to say... Have handed-down the ‘baton’ to the younger generation... But you are still useful to them, & to the Society at large... You live away from the hustle-&-bustle... In a remote but ‘livable’ place... Still available to them for consultations & advice!

And once you decide ‘enough is enough’, you ‘graduate’ to *Sanyas*... Renouncing everything... So that there is no hindrance for the union between the “You” in you, & Paramatma... And, that is “*Moksha*”, the fourth *Purushartha*... meaning “liberation”... from the cycle of births & deaths, which is the basic purpose of life according to the Vedic Seers!

The word “*Kaam*”, in its generic sense, stands for “Desire”, (“*Kaamna*” or “*Ichchha*”). In fact, it is “*Kaam*” only, that in its divine nature, the “*Ichchha Shakti*”, or the ‘desire’ of Paramatma, gives rise to the Universe... However, as the individual souls commence their ‘outward journey’, they keep moving farther & farther away from the ‘divine’ nature of “*Kaam*”... & as they do so, “*Kaam*” turns into worldly desires & cravings, in them!

It may be useful to clarify our ideas about the ‘nature’ of ‘desire’! We desire ‘that’, what we do not have... & ‘think’ that if we ‘have’ that, we will be ‘happy’. ‘Pursuit of happiness’ is the major goal of human life. We feel happy if one of our desires gets fulfilled. But we do not realize that more than one ‘new’ desires are ‘born’, in the process... Thus, there is a ‘higher’ increase in the total number of desires, Entertained; than the increase in the number of desires, Fulfilled... As a result, the ‘happiness’, actually goes down!

$$\text{Happiness} = \frac{\text{Number of 'desires', Fulfilled}}{\text{Number of 'desires', Entertained}}$$

Further, if a particular desire does not get fulfilled, we get filled with ‘anger’! It is the ‘desire’ & the ‘anger’, which, according to Krishna, are our greatest enemy that ‘force’ a man to commit ‘sin’... “When a man thinks of objects, attachment for them arises in him... From attachment, desire is born... From desire arises anger“, He tells Arjuna, “From anger, comes delusion... From delusion, loss of Memory... From loss of Memory, the destruction of ‘discrimination’ ... & from destruction of ‘discrimination’, he perishes”....

As we noted, the total *Karma-Bandhan* with which we take birth, also includes the bundle of ‘*Vasana-s*’ that we had ‘stored-up’ till our last incarnation... These are the ‘tendencies’ or ‘mental conditioning’, which govern our Karma (*Purushartha*) in the present incarnation. As the saying goes : “When you look at the world, you see, not what the ‘world is’, but what ‘you are!’”... You change yourself, & the world changes for you! In other words, it is not the world that has imprisoned you; it is you, who is holding-on to the world... You leave it... “Let go”... & you are “liberated”!

This is the Doctrine of “The Three”, (*Trivarga*), in which “*Moksha*”, (Liberation), is considered to be a ‘result’ of the first three *Purushartha-s*, only & therefore, not a separate *Purushartha*, i.e. there are only three *Purusharths-s*... i.e. Karma for which we have ‘choice’! Fourth, the *Moksha*, is not in our ‘direct’ control... We *can* attain it in-directly, however... By performing the other ‘three *Purushartha-s*’, ‘skillfully’!

Now, acquiring any ‘skill’ calls for two things : “Knowledge”, & “Practice”... So, too, for performing our Karma “skillfully”, we need “Gyan” & “Abhyas”! “Gyan” is the ‘true knowledge’ or ‘right understanding’ of all that we have noted in our story... & much more! That we get from, “*Sat Sang*”, (company of the ‘wise’ people); “*Addhayan*”, (‘reading’ or ‘listening-to’ whatever they have written or said); & “*Manan*”, (‘reflecting’ upon that); with “*Shraddha*”, i.e. full faith. “*Shraddha*”, is also an attitude of Mind, a “*Bhav*”! It is the “*Bhav*”, or the ‘right’ “attitude of Mind”, that you must have noted by now, which plays the most important role in all our actions...

And, to get into the ‘right’ attitude of Mind, we need rigorous “*Abhyas*”, a whole-hearted practice... “*Abhyasen Kaunteya*...” keeps saying Krishna, in Geeta... “With ‘practice’ only, O’ Arjuna, can you achieve...”.

Intellectually this is not difficult to conceive... In fact, it is (just!) : bringing the “Thinking Mind”, to remain ‘in tune’ with the “Working Mind”... But for that, your “Consciousness” also has to remain ‘in tune’ with the Thinking & Working Minds... And this is what, I presume, J. Krishnamurty means by “Single-point Attention”... Or, the Doctrine of “*Tripura*”, (Killing of the Demon Tripura-Sura), in the Veda-s... This is where the Guru becomes crucial! When we are dealing with ‘subtle energies’ we are required to be absolutely accurate... For, even a minor error may cause a major delay in our “evolution”... Or, may even ‘reverse’ the process altogether!

“*Gyan*”, (meaning, “understanding” the true knowledge), ‘sharpens’ your intellect... The intellect has to be ‘subtler’ than the subject that we want to ‘understand... & “*Abhyas*”, ‘maintains’ this sharpness! “*Gyan*” and “*Abhyas*” are the two ‘legs’ of any Yoga.

So, if one performs *Purushartha* with the ‘right’ skill, “*Moksha*” follows... & That is the “Union” of Atma with Paramatma! For, then he is able to realize that he is not the gross body, nor the subtle body, but the Brahman Himself... “The Truth”!

And when a “Seeker” comes to realize the ‘Truth’... he bursts into the exclamation : “*Aham Brahmasmi*”... “I am the Brahman”... the famous “*Maha Vakya*”, or, ‘the great declaration’, of the Veda-s! He is then said to be “Realized” or the “Enlightened” one!

The ultimate purpose of Karma, therefore, is to attain “Self realization”; or, “Enlightenment”!

There is another word for ‘Skill’... “*Vidya*”! It is translated as ‘Knowledge’, or ‘Education’; but actually it is the antonym of “*Avidya*”... *Avidya* binds you... And with *Vidya* you get ‘liberated’ : “*Sa Vidya Ya Vimuktaye*”...

With that, I think we have ‘reached’ an appropriate ‘place’ to conclude our story! Have we ‘covered’ all aspects of the mysterious Karma? I don’t think that would ever be possible. However, all ‘Theories’ apart, the fact remains that we do not know who we are in reality... from where we have come... & where we have to go... All we know is that one-day we will die, when all our material acquisitions will be ‘left behind’! Does this mean that we have ‘wasted’ our life? Don’t we also know that there have been, & are, people who have known, & know, the answer to such questions? Is it not worth the ‘effort’ to ‘find out’ what they have said? To get *Vidya* from them? And try to ‘understand’? That, I think, should form the ‘moral’ of our story!

Now, to the question of “Free-Will”, with which we had started... I think Ramana Maharishi gives the best reply : “The only freedom one has is to strive for and acquire *Gyan* which will enable him not to identify himself with the body... The body will go through the actions rendered inevitable by *prarabdha* based on the balance sheet of past lives, and man is free either to identify himself with the body and be attached to the fruits of its actions or to be detached from it and be a mere *witness* of its activities.”

You may perhaps, say : “We have a ‘limited’ Free-will”... And, the ‘irony’ is that we get “limited” by our own actions! This can be understood through the well known example, you might have come across : Suppose I ask you to stand with one foot ‘up’... You have the choice, to lift the left foot, or, the right foot... But once you have made the choice, i.e. lifted either foot, you get ‘limited’, by virtue of your ‘this’ action, in taking the ‘next’ action!

Despite ‘knowing’ the ‘reality’, we choose to live in ‘fictions’! For instance, we know that one can never be sure that the world will still exist tomorrow, but we always assume ‘as-if’ it will... This is the “**As If**” philosophy of the Kantian philosopher, Hans Vaihinger. In his “*Philosophie des Als Ob*”, he also comes to the conclusion that human beings can never really know the underlying reality of the world... As a result, they construct systems of thought and then assume that these match reality... i.e. they behave “as if” the world matches their models... Using the examples from the physical sciences, such as protons, electrons, and electromagnetic waves, Vaihinger argues that none of these phenomena have been observed directly, but Science not only pretends that they exist, but also uses observations made on these assumptions to create new and better constructs... This philosophy, though, is wider than just Science!

We can make use of the same philosophy in our daily lives, recommends Ramesh Balsekar, in his book : “Your Head is in Tiger’s Mouth”. He says, “If you truly understand & accept that you have no Free-will... that you have no control over anything... then, having accepted it, you should just go about doing your business in life as usual, *As If* you have a free-will... ‘Knowing’ deep down, that you have no free-will”...

If you really ‘do’ that... Well, then you are living in *Akarma*... And, getting rid of your total Karma-Bandhan, is then just a question of ‘time’...

According to the Veda-s, the “will” of the Enlightened-one is the “Will” of the God! And God has no limitation on His “Will”. In other words, you too can get over the ‘limitations’ of your Free-will... With your Karma!

That is why we had said, right in the beginning of our story, that the reply of the Vedic Seers to the question of ‘Free-will’ will be : “It depends upon one’s Karma”...

The Vedic Seers are no different from our Scientists. The Scientists ‘discover’ the “Physical Laws”; the Vedic Seers have ‘seen’ the “Spiritual Laws” & disclosed them to us... We have no choice, except to “follow” these Laws... Of-course, we do have the choice, if you call that a “choice”, i.e. of “not following” them... For, that is bound to put us in trouble only! This is all, that they warn us about... the Vedic Seers, as well as, the Scientists!!

For instance, suppose you ‘choose’ to ‘dis-obey’ the Law of Gravity... Throw a stone ‘up’ & ‘think’ it will not come down... Well, it certainly will... And, in the process may injure you too!

However, you can use this 'knowledge' to acquire the *Gyan*... That there is something called the "Escape Velocity"... And then, with *Abhyas* you can throw the stone with a velocity higher than escape velocity. Now your stone really does not come down!

Have you, in doing so, "defied" the Law of Gravity?

Obviously not!

You have "followed" it only... But with "skill"... And that is *Vidya*!

It only remains for me to thank you for sharing my thoughts with you. I also apologize for the 'hindrance' caused, if any, by the plethora of 'technical' terms that I had to use in our story... I did try to be as 'economical' with them, as possible... You see, the concept of Karma is the most spectacular contribution of the Veda-s, to the World... And it forms, literally, the foundation of the entire Vedic Philosophy... So, the 'story' of Karma *had* to cover the other essentials of the 'Big-Book'!

Hari Om.

