



S.K.S. SWAMINARAYAN TEMPLE (LONDON) – BAL YUVAK MANDAL

Westfield Lane, Kenton, Harrow, Middlesex, HA3 9EA Est. 1966 Charity Reg. No. 271034

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Characteristics of the Soul

The *jiva* (commonly translated as 'soul') is stated in the Vedic scriptures to be the actual identity of every individual living entity. It has been stated to be a particular energy of God, and as being part and parcel of God:

Lord Krishna: "O most intelligent Uddhava, the living entity, called *jīva*, is part and parcel of Me, but due to ignorance he has been suffering in material bondage since time immemorial. By knowledge, however, he can be liberated."

|| SRIMAD BHAGAVATAM: 11:11.4 ||

Similarly in the Vachanamrut (Gadhada Pratham - 64), the *jiva* has also been expressed as the body of *Purushottam* (the Supreme Lord) using a reference to *shruti* (the Vedas). Thus being related to God, it possesses certain transcendental characteristics. Though associated, the *jiva* yet remains distinct from God, just as we remain distinct from our three bodies (gross – *sthul*, subtle – *sukshma*, and causal – *karan*) that we have acquired as a result of our past deeds, while simultaneously residing in them. The *jiva* is inherently permeable (in that it is occupied by God), powerless and wholly dependent on God for its maintenance (also described in Gadhada Pratham - 64).

The *jiva's* nature is that of pure consciousness. It pervades entirely all three of our bodies, animating that which is inert. It is described as residing in the heart, though it is factually pure spirit and not composed of anything material. It is infinitesimally small yet self-luminous. It is beyond all matters of birth and death. The Supreme Lord says in the *Bhagavad Gita*:

"For the soul there is neither birth nor death at any time. He has not come into being, does not come into being, and will not come into being. He is unborn, eternal, ever-existing and primeval. He is not slain when the body is slain."

|| BHAGAVAD GITA: 2:20 ||

The Lord has described that the *jiva* is eternal; therefore it has always existed and will always continue to exist. It is totally indestructible.

"Never was there a time when I did not exist, nor you, nor all these kings; nor in the future shall any of us cease to be."

|| BHAGAVAD GITA: 2:12 ||

"That which pervades the entire body you should know to be indestructible. No one is able to destroy that imperishable soul."

|| BHAGAVAD GITA: 2:17 ||



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Through the evidence of observation alone we can ascertain that the physical body we are currently occupying is perishable, and is therefore contrary to our actual eternal nature. Just as the matter in our bodies recomposes itself many times throughout our lifetime yet we still continue to exist as the same person; similarly, we take on a new body when our current physical body becomes uninhabitable.

“As the embodied soul continuously passes, in this body, from boyhood to youth to old age, the soul similarly passes into another body at death. A sober person is not bewildered by such a change.”

// BHAGAVAD GITA: 2:13 //

“As a person puts on new garments, giving up old ones, the soul similarly accepts new material bodies, giving up the old and useless ones.”

// BHAGAVAD GITA: 2:22 //

This process of the reincarnation of countless *jivas* is governed by the laws of *karma* – which in turn is operating under the supervision of God, who is the dispenser of the fruits of all actions. The *jiva* is also known as the *kshetragna* (knower) in relation to the *kshetra* (that which is known) which is in reference to the body. Therefore the *jiva* is a mere witness of the material activities that we mistakenly believe we are personally undergoing. The false ego (*ahankar*) is what gives shape to our material existence, and the undergoing of material happiness and distress pertains simply to an interaction of material bodies. The soul is factually transcendental to these matters. The objection may be brought up: “If I had been existing prior to this birth, why do I not have any memory of it?” The Supreme Lord speaks thus in the *Uddhava Gita*:

“The mind, bound to the reactions of fruitive work, always meditates on the objects of the senses, both those that are seen in this world and those that are heard about from Vedic authority. Consequently, the mind appears to come into being and to suffer annihilation along with its objects of perception, and thus its ability to distinguish past and future is lost.

When the living entity passes from the present body to the next body, which is created by his own karma, he becomes absorbed in the pleasurable and painful sensations of the new body and completely forgets the experience of the previous body. This total forgetfulness of one’s previous material identity, which comes about for one reason or another, is called death.

O most charitable Uddhava, what is called birth is simply a person’s total identification with a new body. One accepts the new body just as one completely accepts the experience of a dream or a fantasy as reality.

Just as a person experiencing a dream or daydream does not remember his previous dreams or daydreams, a person situated in his present body, although having existed prior to it, thinks that he has only recently come into being.”

// SRIMAD BHAGAVATAM: 11:22.38-41 //



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The subsequent conclusion from the knowledge that the *jiva* is eternal and the bodies are perishable is that those material bodies we possess are entirely distinct from us, and similarly the relations of the bodies are in truth, unrelated to us. The bonds we share between families and friends are short-lived and only last for a meagre moment in time; since we have already formed and broken countless such bonds in our incalculable number of previous lives. The only relationship of the *jiva* that is genuine and permanent is the relation with its ever-maintainer, who is God.

From the fact that we are currently trapped in the cycle of reincarnation, we can know that up until our current life we have been harbouring some material desires; the reactions of which are keeping us in this cycle of birth and death. Since we are maintaining a desire to enjoy in this material nature, we are bound to its laws. A question may be raised: 'Are we to assume that enjoyment leads to bondage? We hear narrations of countless liberated souls who lived their lives in bliss, yet they were totally liberated from this material nature.' The scriptures say: 'The *jiva*'s constitutional position is in service.'

Every living entity in the world is constantly serving something or other; a parent is serving their child, the friend is serving the friend, the citizen is serving society and so on – yet in spite of all this service, we still experience distress at times and happiness at other times, but never the unhampered bliss and fearlessness we are all craving.

If the *jiva* was to take up service to its true relation (the Supreme Lord) it would certainly be liberated from material nature and achieve actual bliss. This is the conclusion of all scriptures. The Lord is the supreme enjoyer, and we are factually servitors of the Lord. We naturally exist in a co-operative relationship with the Lord; just as the different body parts like the hands and the mouth must co-operate to feed and nourish the entire body, we must render service to the Lord to become satisfied. Otherwise there is no possibility of satisfying oneself independently, just as the hands cannot nourish themselves with food without giving it to the stomach and when this is done then the entire body is satisfied.

“O learned Uddhava, those who fix their consciousness on Me, giving up all material desires, share with Me a happiness that cannot possibly be experienced by those engaged in sense gratification. “

“One who does not desire anything within this world, who has achieved peace by controlling his senses, whose consciousness is equal in all conditions and whose mind is completely satisfied in Me finds only happiness wherever he goes.”

// SRIMAD BHAGAVATAM: 11:14.12-13 //

NOTES:

Read Vachanamrut Gadhada pratham 13 – Nityanand swami's question