

Man, and Deed

POINTS TO DEVELOP

Our deeds or actions are preceded by thoughts, either conscious or sub-conscious

A man is known by his deeds.

The reverse is also true, as a man determines and is responsible for his deeds.

Internal and external factors determine the nature of deeds of an individual.

The central question of philosophy is free-will versus pre-determinism.

The theory of Karma is the metaphysical equivalent of Newton's Third Law of Motion in Physics.

Our deeds and our self are two sides of the same coin.

Our deeds determine us as much as we determine our deeds

"I think therefore I am" said Descartes, the famous French philosopher. For him our thoughts determined us as entities. This is true to a very large extent, as our actions are preceded by thoughts, either at the conscious or the subconscious level. In a somewhat different context Thomas Mann, the German playwright, had said, "There are two kinds of men in this world, men

of thought and men of action. Think like the men of thought, act like the men of action." However, thoughts being at an abstract level are not tangible enough to be taken notice of. Hence, we are judged only by our deeds.

If one is helpful, polite and considerate in one's actions towards fellow-beings, one is known as a kind person. The converse is equally true and a mean, rude and selfish person is regarded as bad. Growing urbanization and lack of roots in any given place have made us increasingly indifferent to the feelings of others and led us to adopt an apathetic attitude to most things. But our behaviour, 'good' or 'bad', certainly shapes our persona and determines our personality. Thus, our deeds determine us as they condition our behaviour and pre-dispose us to act in a certain way.

Our reputation and image is most definitely determined by our deeds. Also, our predispositions tend to be habit-forming, in that we have a propensity to act in a particular manner. Hence most people are shaped by their deeds and seem to

have little control over their actions. We usually act according to or in response to our surroundings-our circumstances and the environment which to a great extent modify our priorities and objectives.

Environmental factors are of two kinds-external and internal. The external factors are many like the climatic conditions, the economy, the state of the physical environment, societal pressures, etc. The internal environmental factors relate to the state of mind of the individuals and those closest to them, touching their personal life viz., their family. External factors can, and do, influence internal factors, but the reverse is seldom the case, that is, we can seldom alter our physical environment. However, there is also the important concept of volition. This may be interpreted as the interaction between impulses and inhibitions. Volition at the superficial level can be interpreted as will-power. Its action can also be observed to be working from inside, outwards, that is, it tries to affect the outward environment, albeit in a minor way.

Swami Vivekananda said that “Man is Master of his destiny”. He said that by will-power alone we can fully determine and control our actions and thereby change the course of Fate. This also brings us to the central question of philosophy-free will versus pre-determinism. The concept of free will is that we are, ultimately, the masters of our destiny. But many people believe, with firm conviction, in the inscrutable hand of fate. In fact, in India fatalism is very much present among all cross-sections of the population. Thus astrologers, soothsayers and Charlatans of all hues and colours receive tremendous encouragement and attempt to chart the course of many lives. We have more swamis and ‘holy men’ than the entire population of many countries.

However, the philosophical tradition of deeds determining fate cannot easily be dismissed. In fact, the theory of karma has often been called the metaphysical version of Newton’s Third Law of Motion, that is, “every action has an equal and opposite reaction”. The Biblical saying may be quoted here- “As you sow, so shall you reap.” This concept implies that we are a product of our actions-both past and present. This boils down to the fact that our deeds determine us. On the other hand, if we believe in the existence of free will, then we alone determine our deeds and are completely in control of our lives. This implies that we determine our deeds.

Perhaps both concepts are equally true and it depends on the immediate circumstances. Sometimes we may determine our deeds and at other times our deeds may determine us. At the philosophical level we can perhaps say that our deeds are the cause, while we, or our personalities, are the effect of the deed-.,

or vice-versa. Thus, we come to the old equation of cause determining effect, where effect also becomes the cause,

In conclusion, we may say that we and our deeds are inextricably linked, and determined and governed by each other. When we do something good, we become better persons, and the fact of being a better person prompts us to do better. Put simply, it means a good deed determines that we become good and by becoming good we determine that our future deeds are good, and the wheel comes full circle. of course, it does not work like a slot machine. Rather “Nothing comes from nothing/nothing ever could, so somewhere... (we) must have done something good.” It is a continuous process starting at birth and ending only when we are laid to rest.