

In order to explain to us how the karmas do not affect the Realised one, the Teacher gives this example.

Space is present everywhere. The contents in space can never contaminate it. A toddy pot may contaminate the surrounding atmosphere, the air, but not the space. The space in the pot cannot be conditioned by the contents of the pot. Similarly, even though a Realised man lives in the body, the body cannot condition him. At all times he is conscious of his oneness with the Infinitude. He being subtler than the subtlest, he cannot be conditioned by the vāsanās of his past actions.

But this body being prārabdha – that which is the result of past actions which have already started yielding fruits – has to continue existing till it exhausts itself by itself.



ज्ञानोदयात्पुरारब्धं कर्म ज्ञानान्न नश्यति ।
अदत्त्वा स्वफलं लक्ष्यमुद्दिश्योत्सृष्टबाणवत् ॥ ४५२ ॥

*jñānodayātpurārabdham karma jñānānna naśyati,
adatvā svaphalaṁ lakṣyamuddiśyotsṛṣṭabāṇavat. (452)*

452. That work which was performed before the dawn of Knowledge and because of which this body is conjured up, is not destroyed, by the Self-knowledge without yielding its fruits just like an arrow shot at an object.

The vāsanās which have started yielding fruits before the auspicious hour of Realisation, will not cease to yield fruit after Realisation. At a particular stage in his pilgrimage of life an individual realises the Truth. Śaṅkarācārya at the age of twelve, Vivekananda at twenty-four and Buddha at forty-two are some of the examples. But before Realisation, the individual had already been conceived in his mother's womb and had started his earthly career. The great pilgrimage that has started is, in itself, an expression of the past vāsanās. The karma that has started manifesting does not end

because of jñāna. Because of its prārabdha, the body continues to exist even after Realisation. The body has to go through all its experiences because of its past karmas.

From the standpoint of the Realised man, it is prārabdha of the body and so it has to live through it. In our case, it is our prārabdha and hence we suffer through life whether we like it or not. The Realised man is not involved in the experiences of the body. It is only others around him who get involved with it.

Irrespective of the involvements of the subject, the prārabdha will not end without yielding its dues. The arrow that has left the bow must reach its target. After leaving the bow it cannot be stopped. You may change your mind only before it leaves. Once it has left it shall certainly reach its target.

The āgāmī-karmas are the total arrows in your quiver. Out of them you have taken one, fitted it to the bow and pulled the string. Even at that point you can stop it. But having pulled it up to the ear and shot it, you cannot bring it back. It has to pant and exhaust itself. Nothing can be done about it.

This body is the arrow which has already started from the mother's womb and has been aimed at the tomb. From womb to tomb is its journey. In that flight, having started its career, nobody can stop it.

To elucidate clearly the subtle distinction indicated here, Śaṅkara gives in the following verse an unforgettable illustration –



व्याघ्रबुद्ध्या विनिर्मुक्तो बाणः पश्चात्तु गोमतौ ।
न तिष्ठति छिनत्त्येव लक्ष्यं वेगेन निर्भरम् ॥ ४५३ ॥

*vyāghrabuddhyā vinirmukto bāṇaḥ paścāttu gomatau,
na tiṣṭhati chinattyeva lakṣyaṁ vegena nirbharam. (453)*