

Free Will? ...Yes, A Fake Currency

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This is a true story of my friend Deepak, in his own words.

“I consider myself to be spiritual and enlightened and aware of Who I Am. I am anti religion to the extent that I consider all religions to be dogmatic, exclusive and ritualistic. I was born in a typical Hindu family, not too conservative, yet rooted in the traditions of basic pujas, superstitions and beliefs. I shied away from them from my teen years onwards, after my introduction to Bertrand Russell, Albert Einstein and George Bernard Shaw. The question ‘Who Am I’ first appeared before me when I was eight years old. But there was no one around to seek the answer from. I rebelled against all belief systems that appeared to draw strength only from blind faith or could not be explained by my logical mind. Intuition, ESP and sixth sense had yet to take root in my psyche. I was a rebel to the core.

I continued to abhor all religions, including the Hindu religion, in terms of everything that manifested in its name. The question ‘Who Am I’ stayed with me right through my adult years. I found myself on the spiritual path thanks to my Reiki teacher, and then there was no looking back. I knew that the long sought answer to the eternal question was ahead of me on this path. I got introduced to Osho’s teachings and my ultimate and only teacher, Ramesh Balsekar. And sure enough, the answer came in an instant.

The question: Who Am I?

The answer: I Am That!

The answer 'I Am That' rested on the foundations of understanding free will, or absence thereof. In my search of the past and present masters, teachers, scriptures and writings, I did not come across anyone who so clearly and simply explained this concept as did Ramesh Balsekar. Even Krishna has various veiled references to free will in the Gita, but consistent with his very playful nature, he leaves all of them subject to interpretation by the reader, and there have been interpretations galore! Ramesh explained it in terms of its applicability in daily living, because that is all we are concerned with, and therefore it hit the right chord. While the teaching and the understanding registered completely at the intellectual and intuitive levels, its validation also started appearing in daily happenings.

Little was I to know that the biggest validation was to come soon.

My horoscope reading at various times by various individuals had indicated that I would be under the malefic influence of Saturn for seven and a half years, popularly known as the sade satti in India. I was also advised against buying land or any property during this time. My logical as well as my spiritual self scoffed at this, and attributed it to a creation of the indigenous and entrepreneurial mind of Indian priests and astrologers and others who gain directly from spreading such fear, because along with every malefic effect in the horoscope, there is a 'remedy' for it as well! The remedy for sade satti consists of performing certain pujas, making certain offerings, wearing certain stones etc. The reason for my skepticism was that in Western astrology there is no equivalent of the sade satti, even though Saturn is very much part of the Western astrology system! Sade satti can supposedly have a malignant impact on one's health, relationships, finances and other

aspects of one's life. In general, one is advised to 'keep low' and be 'on guard' during this period. In other words, be very careful of your free will! It could create havoc.

In 2007, I had bought a piece of land, after a three year long search, with the intention of developing it into an organic farm and a healing center. When I saw the land, overlooking a lake and surrounded by hills, it was love at first sight! It was idyllic! After a year long search, I narrowed down on an architect and contractor, and the work began. Almost immediately after I signed up with the architect, it became clear that he was the wrong choice, and negative vibrations started emanating all around the project. The contractor turned out to be inexperienced for the job. In July 2009, there was an accident on the site, a newly raised slab came crashing down, and there was a fatality and injuries. The police descended on the site more intent on making gains from the tragedy, rather than placing responsibility for the accident where it belonged. There was finger pointing and passing the buck all around. I was in a state of shock. The project came to a standstill.

What did I do wrong?

In 2003, I met my childhood sweetheart totally out of the blue, after a gap of twenty years! It was like time had stood still. It was love at first sight! It was also the beginning of a very intense and satisfying relationship amidst great odds on both sides. The relationship derailed in the summer of 2008, got back on track later in the year, and again derailed in the summer of 2009. It had a disastrous effect on me, emotionally, mentally and physically. When the accident above happened in July 2009, I was seriously nursing the wounds of this broken relationship. I was devastated! My health started to deteriorate rapidly; bouts of high blood pressure, insomnia, and depression started plaguing me.

What did I do wrong?

My well wishers consisting of my family, friends and even strangers started rallying around me. Each of them had a suggestion and a piece of advice. References to sade satti and vastu started being thrown around. They started haunting me day and night. I lived in a beautiful apartment, had bought an idyllic piece of property, and was generally leading a quiet, spiritual life. Why were such 'bad' things happening to me? I started discussing it with Ramesh during my interactions with him. Since the teaching had already gone deep down, I myself started explaining it to him (and thereby to myself) that this was all a happening! At one level, the teaching helped tremendously in dealing with the situation. But at another level, I was restless.

Partly I was scared and insecure with what was happening, and partly I wanted to test the validity of this ages old belief system that was being thrown at my face. Could Shani (Saturn) really play such havoc? Could bad vastu really have such dire consequences? Was the Devi really upset with me and needed to be appeased?

It was a conflict inside my Self, the kind I had never faced in my entire corporate career! My entire being was in turmoil, and I felt shaken to the roots. Everything that I believed in and everything that was sacrosanct were falling apart. My spirituality itself was being questioned. And I was getting pushed towards something that I did not believe in and in fact abhorred. Where was my free will?

Before I knew, I had consulted with two famous astrologers, two vastu experts, one pandit, one counselor and my physician friend. Over the next two months, from July to September 2009, the following 'happened' out of my own free will:

- I had a vastu check done for my apartment. Various deficiencies were found and remedies were put in place. I now have a shrine, pyramids, wind chimes, Ganeshji, flowers, water bodies, crystals and mirrors in various places as suggested.
- I started performing a small puja at the shrine each morning.
- I started chanting the Hanuman chalisa each day, no matter where I may be.
- I have a pandit who comes each Saturday to perform a puja and chant for an hour to appease the Devi and Hanumanji.
- I performed the kaalsarpyoga puja in Trimbakeshwar, Nasik to appease Rahu and Ketu.
- I organized mahajaap over a period of two half days with 12 pandits to appease Mangal, Shani, Rahu and Ketu.
- I started wearing the pukhraj stone (yellow sapphire) in my right hand.
- I had a vastu check done at the land. It turned out that the South side needed to be made heavy. I started planting large trees on the South side.
- I made certain sankalps with the blessings of Lord Krishna at a shrine I visit in Haridwar.
- I had three counseling sessions with my counselor, and followed the advice given by her.

The results have been almost instant. The relationship is back on track, in fact it has gotten elevated to a much higher level. Even though the project has not started again, I have managed to get the architect and the contractor off my back, and organic farming is moving along at a steady pace. Most importantly, I have acquired total equanimity and peace of mind, and never felt better emotionally, mentally, physically. During this entire period, the rebel and rational in me were still kicking and alive, and I refused to indulge in certain other remedies suggested to me. I refused to go to the Shani temple every Saturday. I refused to make an offering of black sesame seed and oil every Saturday. I

refused to take anti-depressant pills strongly suggested by a famous psychiatrist who prescribed the same to me after diagnosing me with manic depression within five minutes of seeing me! I did not take any sleeping pills.

So where did free will end and where did destiny take over? What happened to my abhorrence for all rituals and blind belief and faith? What happened to my spirituality?

I have known Deepak since childhood. He is almost an alter ego. The dark phase that he encountered, the conflicts and the turmoil that he faced, and the questions he has raised regarding free will are genuine. I have seen and felt his pain very closely. Ramesh Balsekar was a teacher to both of us. As Ramesh used to say, “...yes, we have free will, but it is worth nothing. It is like a fake currency note.” A thought gets planted in the mind (not in our control), a biological reaction takes place based upon genes and conditioning (not in our control), free will is asserted and an action is performed, but having done that, the results are not in our control. Deepak’s free will caused him to fall in love at first sight with his childhood sweetheart and the land and there was a biological reaction in both instances. Thereafter, the results of those actions were not in his control, because his destiny, as determined by the stars (including Saturn!) had something else in mind for him. His destiny kept pulling him towards performing actions of his own free will, which once upon a time he would never have contemplated. As Deepak says, little did he know that Ramesh’s teaching would get validated in such a major way for him and for the benefit of others.

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