

meaning of life, which is to realise the soul and experience universal consciousness. This is reinforced by Guru Arjan Dev Ji, the fifth Sikh Master who says, *"Among millions, how rare is that Gurmukh (one who listens to the Guru's Teachings) who attains the Name (vibration of universal consciousness)."*

### Freewill to Love

Love is not an idea that a person may be taught or given, we learn what love is through experience. The reason that God does not force people to meditate on the virtues of God (Naam) with love, is because the love would hold no true value and we would also have no freewill to chose to love God. An analogy of a King and a peasant girl explains this, *"A King falls in love with a peasant girl. If the King wanted to force her to marry him, she would not have any choice but to do so. However, the King wants the girl to love him freely and truly, so he disguises himself as a peasant and allows her to fall in love with him, not because he is King, but because she loves him freely of her own choice, which gives that love true value"* (Peter Vardy).

### Scientific View

Science is very much based around determinism, and when it comes to human choices, psychology explains how environments precondition us to make certain choices. However, some scientists would disagree and say that our choices are completely free. Sikh philosophy does not have any trouble in accepting either of these claims, and is a parallel between these two viewpoints.

### Conclusion

Sikh dharma supports the soft determinist viewpoint, that most of our actions are free and the rest are determined. Sikh dharma essentially says that we have determined our own destiny through our past actions and desires (karma), and our current actions and desires are determining our future. Therefore, in the rare instance of great good fortune we understand this, and realise there is an action and consequence sequence, we should engage in good actions of meditation,

sharing and honesty, so to reap good effects that bring us to God-consciousness. Guru Amar Das Ji, the third Sikh Master says, *"O Siblings of Destiny, instruct your minds in this way. O mind, why are you so lazy? Become Gurmukh (one who follows the Guru's Teachings), and meditate on the Naam (virtues of God)."*

### Summary

- Sikh dharma supports the soft determinist viewpoint, that most of our actions are free and the rest are determined
- Our actions are free but we are still subject to the Will of God which is the Divine Law found in nature, including Law of Karma, action and consequence
- Our own desires and past actions (Karma) pre-determines and pre-ordains our destiny
- By great good fortune we realise this chain of action and consequence (Karma)
- Through freewill we chose our true destiny as a human being, which is realising God within ourselves. We chose to love God and do good actions of meditation, sharing and honesty that give us God-consciousness

# Freewill And Destiny



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**Sikh Dharma**

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## Introduction

The question of whether we are in control of our own lives, or whether everything is determined, has puzzled scientists and philosophers for centuries. The term freewill implies that we have completely free choice whereas determinism implies that our choices are preconditioned by earlier causes. Using Sikh dharma and philosophy, this question of whether there is freewill or determinism at play, shall now be explored.

## Standpoints on Freewill & Determinism

There are three main standpoints on where people stand in relation to freewill:

- Libertarians (Incompatibilists) - We are totally free to choose and therefore are morally responsible for all our actions
- Soft Determinists (Compatibilists) - Most of our actions are free and the rest are determined by other causes, although it's hard to draw the line of what is free and what is determined
- Hard Determinists (Incompatibilists) - Everything is totally determined and therefore humans have no freedom or responsibility, it's all an illusion

## Sikh dharma on Freewill & Determinism

In many of the world's scriptures there is a mention that some things in life are pre-determined, but what this really means is largely misunderstood. The SGGSJ says, *"By one's own actions, nothing can be done; destiny was pre-determined from the very beginning. By great good fortune, I meet my God, and then all pain of separation departs"* (Guru Arjan Dev Ji, p.135).

Another quote from SGGSJ says, *"All things happen according to the Will of the Lord God. No one can erase the pre-ordained Writ of Destiny. He Himself is the True Guru; He Himself is the*

*Lord. He Himself unites in His Union"* (Guru Ram Das Ji, p.41) and also, *"Union with Him, and separation from Him, come by His Will. We come to receive what is written in our destiny"* (Guru Nanak Dev Ji, p.6).

On the surface, the terms 'pre-determined' and 'fortune' appear to suggest that a human being has no freewill and everything is being determined by God and the universe. However, these quotations have been taken out of the context of the entire hymn. The context was, *"In the month of Katak, do good deeds. Do not try to blame anyone else. Forgetting the Transcendent Lord, all sorts of illnesses are contracted. Those who turn their backs on the Lord shall be separated from Him and consigned to reincarnation, over and over again"* (Guru Arjan Dev Ji, p.135), and *"In deep humility, I fall at the Feet of the Perfect True Guru (God)"* (Guru Ram Das Ji, p.41).

In context, it can be seen that the Word of the Guru (Gurbani) does not deny the fact that good deeds must be done through free will in order to get to God-consciousness, which releases us from the system of reincarnation. Also, these hymns show that in the state of deep humility we realise that in the greater scheme of things, everything is in the hands of God, because the reality is that there is only one source of light, which permeates and radiates in different colours, much like a prism. This does not mean to say that there is no free will, just that we are all at the hands of the Divine Laws of the universe that the Creator set up and which can be found in nature. This includes the Law of Karma, which is the law of action and consequence or what you sow you shall reap.

## Karmic Law of Action and Consequence

The system of Karma, gives us a greater insight into the workings of freewill and fate, and therefore give us an understanding of pre-determination and fortune. The SGGSJ says, *"According to one's desires, one's condition is determined"* (Guru Nanak Dev Ji, p.1342), and *"That alone is a good deed, O Nanak, which is done by one's own free will"* (Guru

Angad Dev Ji, p.787).

This hymn shows that pre-determination of a person's destiny comes from what the desires of the mind are, which may be good or bad. The hymn also shows us that good deeds can only be free, otherwise they could not be called good. A further clarification of this comes from Guru Nanak Dev Ji, the first Sikh Master who says, *"According to their own actions, some are drawn closer, and some are driven farther away."* Therefore, whether someone is destined to attain God-consciousness is a question of them desiring God instead of worldly attachment, and sowing the seeds of good actions, which has consequences of reaping good fruits.

## Pre-ordained Writ of Destiny

A question sometimes arises of what the 'pre-ordained Writ of Destiny' is? Guru Arjan Dev Ji, the fifth Sikh Master, explains this by saying, *"They spy on other men's women, concealed in their hiding places. They break into well-protected places, and revel in sweet wine. But they shall come to regret their actions - they create their own karma."*

The Guru therefore is telling us that we create our own destiny through our actions, and thus the pre-ordained writ of destiny is simply that which we have created for ourselves through our past actions from previous lives and our current life's actions. In other words, our destiny or fate is the result of the consequences of the actions we have committed. Guru Arjan Dev Ji, the fifth Sikh Master explains, *"O Nanak, only your actions shall go with you; the consequences of your actions cannot be erased."*

## Great Good Fortune

Another question is of that surrounding what having 'great good fortune' really means? This is referring to the very rare chance that a person realises the Law of Karma, that every action has a consequence, and how rare is that person who puts this into practice by doing good deeds, living honestly and meditating on God to achieve the