

Chapter 3: The Yoga of Action (karma-yoga)

In the second chapter Lord Krishna taught karma yoga and Jñāna yoga, focusing more on Jñāna yoga. Lord Krishna begins second chapter with Jñāna yoga and concludes the second chapter with sthira pragya. In between the two, he discusses karma and asks Arjuna to do his karma, which is to fight the Mahabharata war. Lord Krishna glorifies Jñāna yoga but asks Arjuna to do karma yoga. Arjuna finds this unacceptable.

Introduction Verses 1 to 7

Arjuna asks should I follow Jñāna Yoga or Karma Yoga. If you consider Jñāna Yoga is better, then why should I fight the war? In answering this question, we should note the following points:

1. There is no choice between karma yoga and Jñāna yoga. It is apples to orange comparison.
2. Qualifications for Jñāna yoga can be obtained only through karma yoga. Qualifications are detachment, purity, maturity. Many of us do not have these qualifications.
3. Moksha can be obtained only through Jñāna yoga.

Follow karma yoga to obtain qualifications; Use the qualification to acquire jñāna yoga; Use jñāna yoga to obtain moksham. All other yogas like japam, parayanam etc. are all part of karma yoga. There are no other yogas other than karma yoga and jñāna yoga.

Arjuna's question was wrong; both yogas should be followed. There is a choice regarding marga or lifestyle; one can follow sanyasa asrama or gragasthasram; but both of them should follow karma yoga and jñāna yoga.

Which is better? Grahasthasram or sanyasa asram? Krishna is clear that grahasthasram is better for most people.

Karma Yoga Verses 8 to 20

In these verses, Krishan elaborately discusses Karma yoga. Karma: Proper action; Yoga: Proper attitude. So proper action with proper attitude is karma yoga.

Types of actions:

1. Satvic – Promotes the spiritual progress the most; Best action; beneficiaries are more; unselfish
2. Rajasic – Mediocre; promotes some spiritual growth; Beneficiaries are less; confined only to family; selfish actions.
3. Tamasic – Does not promote spiritual growth but results in degradation of spiritual growth; Harmful action; worst action. I get the benefits, but others get harmed.

Perform panca mahā yagya to improve spiritual progress and become satvic. The goal is to become samatvam by accepting all results as a Eeswara prasada.

Follow Karma Yoga:

1. As the command of God, follow out of fear of God
2. As a sense of gratitude or yagya
3. As a purifier of kama and soga
4. As dharma by which cosmic harmony can be maintained.

Verse 20, second line to verse 29: Duties of a Jñāni

jñāni does not require any sadhana (karma yoga, jñāna yoga etc.) because he already achieved the goal of jñānam. But as long as he is in the society, he should follow karma yoga as a model to the society. In this verse, Lord Krishna is indirectly advising all elderly people to be role models for rest of the society.

Verses 30 to 35: Summarizes karma yoga; verse 30 is most important.

Krishna gives five-part process of Karma Yoga:

1. Make the Spiritual goal as the primary goal; all other goals are subservient to this goal.
2. Eeswara arpana buddhi: Dedicate all your actions to God so you don't hate any of your duty.
3. Eeswara prasadh budhhi: Be prepared for any future situations because future is not under your control. You are not the only one responsible for your success. Accept any result as Eeswara prasadam.
4. Nirmamaha: when success comes don't claim total credit.
5. Maintain mental poise/balance.

Verses 36 to 43: Obstacles of karma yoga:

Arjuna asks Lord Krishna what are the obstacles of karma yoga.

Lord Krishna answers Kama/krodha or raga dvesha; materialistic attractions; Artha kama is important, but dharma moksha is also important. But when artha kama becomes more important than dharma moksha, that becomes an obstacle. There are two stages handle this obstacle:

First Stage: handle in relative measures:

1. Dhamaha – Mastery of sense organs; don't let anything enter your mind without control.
2. Shamaha – Discipline of mind and thought pattern. Undisciplined mind tends to get attracted to anything.
3. Vivekaha – Discrimination; understanding that finite plus finite is always finite; insecurity plus insecurity is more insecurity. Understand that I am complete (poornatvam) with myself, and I will not be full of any amount of acquisition.

Second Stage: Obsolete solution is to discover fullness and

security within myself. Atma is not only in your body but also extends beyond your body. One should know this and own up to the fact that this formless consciousness is the real I. The real transformation is the transcending the form, that I am the formless consciousness. Body and mind are like the instruments I use to transact with the world. By claiming the new identity, we should change our orientation from physical body to formless consciousness. This new orientation is jñāna nishta. The physical body is limited, but I am not limited.

Jñāna Nishta is internalizing this knowledge and ready availability of this knowledge at the time of difficulty. This comes by dwelling on the teaching in any form – by teaching, writing, thinking, sharing etc.