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Efficacy of karma yoga in society

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Abstract

The word 'Karma' is derived from the Sanskrit word 'Kri', which means to do; all actions in Karma. Technically the word also means the effects of actions. In the connection with metaphysics, it sometimes means the effects of which our past actions were the causes. Karma Yoga is a mental discipline that allows a person to carry out his or her duties as a service to the entire world, as a path to enlightenment. We are all doing karma all the time. We are talking: that is Karma. We are listening: that is Karma. We breathe: that is Karma. We walk: Karma. Everything we do, physical or mental, is Karma and it leaves its marks on us. According to the Gita, any action done with Nishkamyā Bhava is Karma Yoga. Karma binds when it is done with a selfish motive, with the expectation of fruits. But when action is done without the expectation of fruits, it is liberating. If we act as an instrument in the hands of the Lord, as a participant in the cosmic activity of Nature, without expectation of fruits, that Karma will not bind us. Karma then becomes Karma Yoga. Feel that we are only an instrument and that the Lord is working through you. Surrender the actions and their fruits to the Lord. You will be freed from the bonds of Karma and enjoy peace.

Keywords: karma yoga, action, non-attachment, nishkamyā-bhava, swa-dharmna, atma bhava

Introduction

The Gita teaches the doctrine of uttermost detachment. It is a Sanskrit text written in Bhishma Parva of Mahabharata epic, comprising 745 verses. Philosophical concepts of Gita's are Ishvara (The Supreme Controller), Jiva (Living beings/the soul), Prakriti (Matter), Karma (Action) and Kala (Time). Bhagavad Gita proposed that true enlightenment comes from growing beyond identification with the temporal ego and self. According to Krishna, the root of all suffering and discord is the agitation of the mind caused by a selfish desire. The only way to douse the flame of desire is by simultaneously stilling the mind through self-discipline and engaging oneself in a higher form of activity.

The Gita formulates theories of the three paths (Bhakti, Gyan and Karma Yoga) without creating any conflict. In the current article, we are more focused on Karma Yoga or Yoga of action.

Karma yoga is the yoga of action or work; specifically, karma yoga is the path of dedicated work: renouncing the results of our actions as a spiritual offering rather than hoarding the results for ourselves.

As we mentioned earlier, karma is both action and the result of action. What we experience today is the result of our karma—both good and bad—created by our previous actions. This chain of cause and effect that we ourselves have created can be snapped by karma yoga: fighting fire with fire, we use the sword of karma yoga to stop the chain reaction of cause and effect. By disengaging the ego from the work process, by offering the results up to a higher power—whether a personal God or to the Self within—we stop the whole snowballing process.

In the practice of Nishkamyā Karma Yoga, there is no loss of effort. There is no harm. There is no transgression also. Even a little of this knowledge, even a little practice can protect you from great fear of birth and death with its concomitant evils. You will doubtless reap the fruits in this path of Karma Yoga, viz., Jnana. There is no uncertainty here. Matter is indestructible. Energy is indestructible. Even a little practice with the right mental attitude will purify the Chitta. The Samskaras of virtuous actions are imbedded in the Chitta. They are also indestructible. They are real, valuable assets for you. They will prevent you from doing wrong actions. They will goad you to do selfless actions. They will push you on to the goal.

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Selfless works will prepare the ground of Antahkarana for the reception of the seed of Jnana. The path of Karma Yoga eventually leads to the attainment of infinite bliss of the Self.

Work unselfishly with disinterested spirit. Always scrutinise your motives. Your motive should be pure. The fruits of actions vary according to the motive. Listen to this story: In Hanuman Ghat two girls were in a drowning condition. Two young men jumped immediately into the Ganga and rescued them. One man asked the girl to marry him. The other man said: "I have done my duty. God gave me an opportunity to serve and improve myself." He had Chitta Suddhi. The external action is the same (the act of saving the life) but the motive is different. The fruits also must be different. Never care for the fruits of your actions. But do not become a victim of sloth or inertia. Pour forth all your energies in the service of humanity, country, etc. Plunge yourself in selfless service. Fix your mind at the Lotus Feet of the Lord. Give the hands to work. Even when you work, work like the typist or the harmonium player who types or plays while talking to you, like the woman who knits and talks at the same time. Let your mind be ever attached to the Lotus Feet of the Lord while your hands are at work. The mind of the girl who has the water-pot on her head, is on the pot even though she talks and jokes with her comrades while walking along the road. You will be able to do two things at a time by practice. The manual work will become automatic, mechanical or instinctive. You will have two minds. A portion of the mind will be at work, while the rest of the mind will be in the service of the Lord, in meditation, in Japa. Repeat the Name of the Lord while at work also. Ashtavadhanis do eight things at a time. They play at cards, move the man in Chaturanga play (chess), dictate some passages to a third man, talk to a fourth in order and continuation, and so on. This is a question of training of the mind. Even so, you can so train the mind that it can work with the hands and can remember God at the same time. This is Karma Yoga and Bhakti Yoga combined.

Mind is so framed that it cannot work without expectation of fruits or anticipation of rewards for actions. If you smile when you meet your friend, you do expect a smile in return from him. If you give a cup of water to somebody, you do expect something in return from him. If you salute your friend on Mount Road, you expect him to salute you in return. This is the inborn nature of worldly-minded people. You will have to train the mind to work disinterestedly. You will have to tame the mind cautiously. You will have to discipline the mind with patience and perseverance. Worldly-minded people cannot understand the spirit of Nishkamya service as their minds are charged or saturated with impurities. Do service for some time? Then you will grasp the spirit of Nishkamya Karma Yoga. In the beginning all your actions may be selfish. But if you work hard in the field of Karma Yoga for two years, five of your actions will be unselfish and ninety-five will be selfish. Scrutinise your motives, purify them and try hard. After some years of incessant struggle, fifty actions will become unselfish. A good time will come when all your actions, hundred per cent, will be purely unselfish. You will become a perfect Karma Yogi like Raja Janaka. The time is not very far if you keep up the ideal before you daily and struggle hard to reach the ideal, and if you are sincere and earnest in your purpose.

The mind is filled with purity (Sattva) if you work without expectation of fruits, if you work for the sake of God, if you regard work as worship or Puja of Narayana, if you dedicate all your actions to God as Isvararpana. Feel and think that you breathe, live and work for God alone every second of your

life, and that, without Him, life is absolutely useless. Feel the pangs of separation while at work if you forget Him even for a fraction of a second.

A Karma Yogi should be absolutely free from lust, greed, anger and egoism. Even if there are traces of these Doshas, he should try to remove them. He should not expect any kind of fruits for his actions herein and hereafter. He should not have any desire for name and fame, approbation, appreciation, thirst for applause, admiration and gratitude. He must have a spotless character. He should try to possess this gradually. He should be humble and free from hatred, jealousy, harshness, etc. He should always speak sweet words. How can a proud and jealous man, who expects respect and honour from others, serve others? He should be absolutely fearless. A timid man is absolutely unfit for Karma Yoga. He is fit to assist his wife in cleaning utensils in the kitchen in the morning and in washing her clothes in the evening.

A Karma Yogi should have an amiable, loving, sociable nature. He should be able to move and mix with everybody without distinction of caste, creed or colour. He should have perfect adaptability, mercy and cosmic love. He should be sympathetic and tolerant. He should be able to adjust himself to the habits and ways of others. He should have an all-embracing and all-inclusive heart. He should always have a cool and balanced mind. He should have presence of mind also. He should have equal vision. He should rejoice in the welfare of others. A man who is easily irritated and who can be easily offended over trifling things is absolutely unfit for the path of Karma Yoga. He should have all the organs under perfect control. He should lead a very simple life. If he leads a life of luxury, if he wants everything for himself, how can he share his possessions with others? He should burn his selfishness to the very root. Let me remind you once more of the words of the Gita:

You do not lose anything in Karma Yoga. Even if you do a little service to the country or to the society or to poor sick people, it brings its own advantages and benefits. It purifies your heart and prepares the Antahkarana for the reception of knowledge of Atman. The Samskaras or impressions of these good actions are indelibly imbedded in your subconscious mind. The force of these Samskaras will again propel you to do some more good actions. Sympathy, love, the spirit of patriotism and service will be developed. Nothing is lost when the candle burns.

In agriculture you may manure and plough the land. Your efforts will be rendered futile if you do not get rain in the year. This is not the case in Nishkamya Karma Yoga. There is no uncertainty here regarding the result of any effort. Further there is not the least chance of getting harmed by practising this Karma Yoga. If the doctor is injudicious, if he administers the medicine in over-dosage, some harm will certainly result. This is not the case in the practice of Karma Yoga. Even if you do a little service, even if you practise a little Nishkamya Karma Yoga in any form, it will save you from great fear, from the fear of Samsara and of birth and death with its concomitant evils. That is the reason why Lord Krishna says to Arjuna

Karma in the Jain philosophy is divided into eight classes: those which act as an impediment to the knowledge of truth; those which act as an impediment to the right insight of various sorts; those which give one pleasure and pain; and those which produce bewilderment. The other four are again divided into other classes so minutely that a student of the Jain Karma philosophy can trace any effect to a particular Karma. Persons who by right faith, right knowledge, right

conduct, destroy all Karmas and thus develop fully the nature of their soul, reach the highest perfection, become divine and are called Jainas. Those Jainas, who, in every stage, preach the law and establish the order, are called Tirthankaras.

Subject to the law of Karma man has to work out the effect of his previous actions. This Karma is a kind of force which holds the soul in bondage and prevents it knowing itself fully. There are many varieties of this force. The bondage of Karma arises on account of tendencies, and the most predominant of these determine the type of the body which the soul would make for itself in its future incarnation. The sum-total of these tendencies is what is called character, and this character contains in itself the well-digested and assimilated experience of the entire past of the soul. Now, if we would analyse the idea of tendency, we would not fail to observe that it is the modification of the mind in particular ways. The Jain books teach that the Karmic force is the product of a kind of matter, the particles of which have become combined with the soul. This explains the nature of the force which prevents the soul from realising its own blissful nature. It is obvious that all that the soul has to do is to get rid of the particles of matter which it has drawn to itself. As soon as this is accomplished the soul is freed from all kinds of bondage and acquires perfect knowledge and bliss.

Karma is an energy which an embodied being generates—be it vital, mental or moral—and which keeps him in the mundane world, the Samsara. Karma, in short, is the whole Samsaric make-up of an embodied being. It is perfectly divested of the idea of sacrifice. Karmas which keep the individual in a backward condition are known as Papa; those which help him in advancement are Punya. The Jain philosophy gives a detailed enumeration of Karmas, and explains how they are attracted (Ashrava), how they are assimilated with the individual (Bandha), how their inflow can be stopped (Samvara), how they can be entirely worked out (Nirjara), and what the ultimate state of the perfected individual is (Moksha). This particular branch of philosophy, therefore, includes topics like sensations, perceptions, consciousness, pains and pleasures, moralities of life, moral depravities, building of the body and all factors of the individuality.

Arjuna said to Lord Krishna: “O Krishna, Thou praiseth renunciation of actions and then also Yoga (of action or Nishkama Karma Yoga). Of the two which is better? That tell me conclusively.” The Lord said: “Renunciation and Yoga by action both lead to the highest bliss; of the two, Yoga by action is verily better than renunciation of action. A Nitya Sannyasin or perpetual ascetic is one who neither hates nor desires, one who is free from the pairs of opposites. Children, not sages, speak of the Sankhya (Jnana Yoga) and Yoga (Karma Yoga) as different; he who is duly established in one obtaineth the fruits of both. That abode which is gained by those practising Sankhya is reached by the Yogis also.”

“He seeth who seeth that the Sankhya and Yoga are one. But without Yoga, O mighty-armed, renunciation is hard to attain to; the Yoga-harmonised Muni swiftly goeth to the Eternal. He who is harmonised by Yoga, the self-purified, self-ruled, with senses subdued, whose self is the self of all beings, although acting, he is not affected. He who acteth, placing all actions in the Eternal, abandoning all kinds of attachment, is unaffected by sin as a lotus leaf by the drops of water. Yogis, having abandoned all attachment, perform action by the body, by the mind, by the reason and even by the senses, only for the purification of the self.”

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