

# Karma Yoga

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## Karma Yoga

Karma means work or action. Yoga has many meanings; in this instance it means practice. Karma Yoga therefore means the practice of action. What kind of action? It is the practice of action to achieve the final goal of Moksha or liberation. Moksha is the liberation from suffering and unhappiness we encounter in our daily lives. Every living being in this universe wants happiness; it is the ultimate goal for everyone. We are all struggling to achieve this happiness. We all have moments of happiness, but how long do they last? The happiness we have is not permanent. And everyone wants this happiness to be permanent and continuous. They want this peace to never end. Looking at the unhappiness all over the world, it is easy to conclude that people are not doing a good job of finding this everlasting peace and happiness.

Karma Yoga is one of the paths taught in the scriptures, which, if implemented in our daily lives, will help in removing suffering and unhappiness. It provides us with a better understanding of who we are and teaches us the correct approach and attitude we should cultivate when we perform or undertake any action. If this teaching is properly understood and assimilated in our daily lives, it will go a long way in helping us reduce the suffering and happiness.

According to Vedanta, Moksha is the ultimate goal in human life. The scriptures teach that there are 4 paths which are available to reach this goal

1. Jnana Yoga – The path of Knowledge - to understand where this happiness resides
2. Bhakti Yoga – The path of devotion and self-surrender
3. Raja Yoga – The path of meditation and contemplation
4. Karma Yoga – The path of action with the right attitude

It is misunderstood, the scripture never says you can choose one of the paths and ignore the others. If you try to do that, you will never reach the ultimate goal. It is always a combination of the 4 paths. The mixture of emphasis on each path depends on the individual's attitude. Some people may prefer doing more of Bhakti and less of meditation, while for others it could be the other way around. The choice and mix depends entirely on a person's background and tendencies. The scripture never recommends a single or unique path to reach the goal. People can choose a mix of the four paths, which is best suited to them.

However, the Bhagavad Gita makes it quite clear that Karma Yoga is a pre-requisite when you start on our spiritual journey. It is the foundation step before you can embark on the other 3 paths. You hear stories of people giving up their current life styles and migrating into caves or

joining an ashram to meditate and lead a spiritual life. The chances of success are very low because these people have not assimilated the teachings of karma yoga. The physical body may be in the ashram, but their mind is all over the place. There is no peace in the mind. If your mind is conflicted and in turmoil, there is no way you can progress in your spiritual life. Even if you do not run away to an ashram, but start your meditation practice at home, the success rate will be low if your mind is not at peace. Peace and purification of the mind is first step in the journey of spiritual growth.

The focus of Karma Yoga is to bring about this peace and purification of the mind. No one can live in this universe without doing action and actions are the cause of all misery and unhappiness. Karma Yoga teaches us how to change our attitude and approach towards all actions we undertake so that we get to achieve this peace and happiness. The focus of this article is to cover this subject. This article is a two-step process to explain Karma Yoga.

- explain what is meant by Karma and who does Karmas
- explain the attitudes which will help in undertaking these karmas in a proper way

Bhagavad Gita is only place in the scriptures where Karma Yoga is dealt with in great detail. Most of the Upanishads and other scriptures deal primarily with the other 3 paths, with little emphasis on Karma Yoga. The Upanishads are meant for residents of ashrams, where the life style is one of full time spiritual pursuit. In comparison, the Bhagavad Gita is a teaching given on the battlefield of Kurukshetra, a metaphor for the battlefield of life itself! The Bhagavad Gita is part of the Mahabharata, the epic story of ancient India. In the middle of the battlefield, at the beginning of the war, Arjuna is confused because he will have to kill his beloved relatives in the battlefield. He is overcome with misery, unhappiness and grief and wants to walk away from the battle. Lord Krishna is his charioteer and he explains to Arjuna why he should continue with the battle and how to perform his duties and actions with the correct attitude. The Bhagavad Gita deals with a variety of subjects, but if you have to choose the most important teaching covered in this scripture, you will have to acknowledge that it is Karma Yoga. Karma Yoga is the main subject in the Bhagavad Gita.

And here is the direct lesson for all of us. The world out there is like a battlefield and we have to perform a wide variety of karmas, both pleasant and unpleasant. What is the correct attitude to follow so that we perform these karmas effectively and continue to be happy and peaceful? The teaching of the Bhagavad Gita, especially Karma Yoga is the best way to acquire this knowledge and implement it in our daily lives.

### **Who Performs Karmas?**

This may seem a strange question – if you are asked this question, your reply would be: “I do the karmas, of course!” Who is this ‘I’ doing the karmas. Not only doing the karmas, but who experiences the effects of the karmas? Who is the ‘Doer’ and who is the ‘Experiencer’? Where and who is this ‘I’? You may say the body performs the action. That may seem logical, but who tells the body to perform actions? You may say that the mind tells the body to perform actions. Who directs the mind to perform the action? The answer here would be ‘Ahamkara’ (literally, ‘I Maker) or Ego. The Ego is the boss who performs the karmas. Most people will agree with this, but if asked for more details about the Ego, very few will be able to give a proper answer. That’s because it’s a tough question with no easy answer. Fortunately, Vedanta teaches this concept very well by means of different scriptures.

Vedanta says there are only two things in the universe, the Observer and everything else. The Observer has many names in Vedanta – Sakshi (Witness), Brahman, Atma, Self, the ‘Real I’ are a few. Everything else is the Observed and is also called Prakrati or Nature, with names and forms. It includes the universe and all its physical and non-physical (subtle) content. Where does the Observer end, and where does the Observed begin? To answer this question, apply the following simple rule – If you know something, that thing is not you. If you see/know a book, you are not the book. If you can observe your hand, are you the hand? To say that you are your hand is absurd, you are not your hand but you possess a hand. If you apply this rule to everything observed, you will understand the difference between the Observer and Observed.

- The tree, car, animal or any external object is known to you so it cannot be you.

- Your hands, legs, nose etc are known to you so they cannot be you

- All your thoughts, emotions, feeling, memories or anything inside your mind are known to you so they cannot be you

- Your sense of individuality or ego, the feeling of ‘I’ is known to you. ‘I am rich’, ‘I am hungry’, ‘I am a father’, the ‘I’ in all these examples is known to you, and so you cannot be those things.

What is left after this analysis is the actual Observer of all the events, and this Observer is the ‘Real I’. This ‘Real I’ is the underlying reality of you, me and everything in this universe, including all the physical objects. According to the scriptures the nature of the ‘Real I’ is ‘Sat Chit Ananda’.

**Sat** = Real which is Unborn, Uncreated, Uncaused, Unchanging Observer. Being Sat only means that the Atma always existed even before the Big Bang 13.7 billion years ago, and it will exist even after the collapse of the universe.

**Chit** = Awareness or Pure Intelligence to create Conscious objects which can be observed

**Ananda** = It is Bliss because it is Complete Full and Self Sufficient.

If you look at Chit or Awareness or Intelligence more closely, you will realize that it must always have the following three elements.

1. If you are aware, then there should be someone who is aware. Awareness needs a observer/subject
2. To be aware, there must be some type of object of which you are aware. Awareness needs an observed/object
3. Awareness also needs intelligence so that observer knows and recognize what the object is.

Observer/Subject and observed/object are needed to complete the Awareness process. Usually Subject and Object are separate, but in the 'Real I' there is no separate subject and object, the 'Real I' is always Self Aware, it is aware of its awareness (it is witnessing its awareness). It is both the subject and object rolled in one. It is part-less, homogenous and non-dual. The 'Real I' feels complete because it has both the subject and object and it does not need anything else.

Our underlying reality is the 'Real I'. However, but if you ask this question to anyone, they will quite clearly tell you that they are not the 'Real I'. They have no feeling that they are the 'Real I'. What is the reason for this inability to experience themselves as the 'Real I' or SatChitAnanda Atma? The reason for this misconception or lack of knowledge is Ignorance. Ignorance is extremely powerful, it has the ability to veil or cover up the 'Real I', so that no one no longer feels they are 'Sat Chit Ananda'.

Ignorance in the presence of this 'Real I' becomes the Mind. Because of ignorance this mind is limited. This Mind is definitely Consciousness as it is in the presence of 'Real I', but it is ignorant of its true identity. We saw earlier that subject and objects are unified and homogenous in the 'Real I'. The Ignorance breaks down this unity and creates the Mind with duality where there is the separation between the observer/subject and observed/object. According to Vedanta, the following are the two main components of the mind:

**Buddhi or Intelligence:** This is the seat of the Subject, or 'Real I'. Buddhi being the Subject, it gives you the feeling of being 'I am'. This is the limited Ego we feel as 'I' every day. This Ego is the doer of karma. It is also the seat for free will, the 'will' to do any karma.

**Manas:** This the seat of the Object part of the 'Real I'. The Objects in the Manas are represented by waves or 'Vrittis'. These waves are made of the mind stuff or subtle elements. The waves in the mind are like the waves or ripples we see in a swimming pool. They are the "waves" of consciousness bouncing within the mind. These waves are still in the potential form

of all the possible Objects in the universe. When one of these waves collapses, it become one of the objects we see in the physical universe. The waves or 'vrittis' in the Manas come from many different sources

- Perception through the 5 sense organs – eyes, ears, nose, tongue and skin
- Memories
- Genetic and DNA tendencies

It must be understood that all the activity in the Manas happens independent of the Buddhi. Buddhi and Manas are two independent organs and have their own rules and regulations. They do not need each other to function, but they need each other to experience anything.

'I am' or Ego is part of the Mind and it is also a 'Vritti' or wave. It resides in the Buddhi. It is a different type of vritti because it gives you the feeling of being a Subject or 'I-ness'. All the other 'Vrittis' in the mind are Object focused.

The 'Real I' or Atma is the Observer of these 'I am' and Object 'Vrittis'. The 'Real I' is just an observer; it does not do any Karma. The doer of all karmas is the ignorant Ego or 'I am'

### **Understanding Karmas**

Now that we know that 'I am' or Ego is the doer of all the karmas/actions, let us try and understand how 'I am' or Ego actually performs karma and what we really mean by Karma.

### **How Do We Perform Karmas?**

It must be understood that **all** karmas happen in the Mind itself. To perform any karma we need a subject, who does the action and we also need an object, on whom the action is performed. We have the 'I am', the subject, in the Buddhi, and all the 'Vrittis', representing different objects in the Manas. We know that the Subject and Object were homogenous in the 'Real I' and due to our ignorance they have been separated from non-duality to duality. This separation is unacceptable to both subject and object; they have a mutual affinity for each other like lost lovers. They want to once again combine to feel full and complete, and return to the non-duality. They are missing the state of 'Real I'.

To achieve this union, sometimes the Ego looks out for Object Vrittis in the Manas and other times the Object Vrittis come looking for the Ego in the Buddhi.

- The Ego uses its 'Will' when it looks out for suitable Vrittis in the mind which will meet its needs, and satisfy a desire or solve a pending problem. This type of combination is be willful and done with a purpose. All willful action is initiated by the Ego. It is the Ego which tells the organs of actions to initiate the action. Walking, talking, grasping are some of the organs of action
- From our experience, we can easily confirm that the mind is never empty. It is always busy, some sort of activity is always going on in the mind. When there is no willful action, then the Object Vrittis come looking for the Ego. As mentioned, most of the object Vrittis come from the five sense organs. In some ways these Vrittis hijack the Ego and tell the Ego to activate the organs of action. We all experience this, we are at a salad bar and we know we have already had our share of sweets, but we still go ahead and eat another sweet against our will. In this type of action, the object vritti hijacks the Ego, and compels it to do something to satisfy its desire. These vrittis from the senses can be very powerful, and they are not easily controlled by the Ego.
- When the 'I am' and Object Vritti interact, you experience and know that activity in the mind. The experience right now in your mind is interaction of the Ego and the Object Vritti.
- There is so much activity in the mind that you are not aware of. Your liver, heart, lungs are all functioning, but you are not aware of their actions. Why? Because your Ego is not interacting with those Vrittis. To have any experience, the 'I am' or Ego and Object Vritti must interact.

It is part of nature when the Ego comes in contact with the Object Vritti, the Ego **MUST** make a response. All living being are pre-programmed and compelled to make this response. It is part of their genetic make-up. This applies even to a single cell body. Put a drop of vinegar and the cell will be repulsed and it will move away. Put a drop of liquid sugar, the single cell body will be attracted to the sweetness and move towards it. Basically the Ego of the cell is reacting to the Object Vritti. The Ego of the cell either likes the situation or dislikes the situation. This duality of like/dislike, attraction/repulsion, positive/negative, good/bad is the underlying force that compels the 'I am' or Ego to do Karmas. This logic applies to every living being, irrespective of what type of creature it is. Even human beings have to react in the same manner to every situation. They cannot remain still.

Whenever the Ego comes in touch with an Object Vritti, it cannot remain still, it has to act. The response is either Raga (like) or Dvesha (dislike). This response by the Ego is Karma. The interaction between Ego and Object is **NOT** Karma, it is the response of Like or Dislike which is Karma. Let us discuss some examples so that this point becomes clear.

- People think that when we talk it is karma. This is incorrect; talking is natural and is a standard feature which comes with the body. The human body is meant to talk. However if you talk negatively or positively about anyone, only then you have done a good or bad Karma.
- Walking is a natural action. There is no karma when you walk. However while walking you see an insect and with purpose you squash it with your feet. The intentional squashing of the insect is karma. However without knowing an insect comes under your feet, that is not karma because the Ego was not involved.
- As long as you have ears, you are going listen to things. For example, if you listen indifferently to all the chattering around you in the airport lounge, that is not karma, it is natural. However if you get irritated by all the noise around you, that is karma.
- Watching the physical world outside is natural. If you are standing in front of a few people, you cannot say you do not want to see them. Seeing is natural, you have no power to stop this. However, if you make a judgment, what a horrible shirt someone is wearing, or how nice this person is looking, these judgment calls are Karmas.

So you see how everyone is doing Karma on a continuous basis. It is only logical that anyone who does Karma also owns that Karma. We know that the Ego is doer of karmas, therefore 'I am' is the owner of all the karmas. This Karma goes in to the 'bank balance' for that person. As we shall see in the next section the Doer of the action which is Ego also should face the consequence of the karma committed.

### **Doctrine of Karma**

Any karma you perform, good or bad, must have a result. In Vedanta, this result is called Karma Phala (fruit). In Science, an equivalent scenario would be Newton's 3<sup>rd</sup> law of motion which says 'for every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction'. If you do any karma, it must have a reaction; this is the basic law of nature. If you do good actions or deeds, the reaction or results will be positive (punya kamas) and if you do bad karmas, the results will be negative (papa karmas).

The Doctrine of Karma as taught by Vedanta has an additional rule; it states that every karma yields two types of results:

- **Seen Result:** Every karma has a seen result. If you do any karma, it will have an immediate result which can be seen or felt immediately.
- **Unseen Result:** The same karma will also have a result which will be felt in the future. The result of the karma could be felt in a few seconds, 20 min, and next year, 20 years



later, in this life time or a future life time. When this karma will ripen and yields its fruit, no one knows, but it will definitely happen. You must reap what you sow. This concept is only logical and correct.

### **Some Examples**

- Let us say you give \$ 100 to charity. The immediate Seen Result is that you are poorer by \$ 100, but the Unseen Result is that you accumulated a Punya (positive) karma and this will result in some type of favorable situation in the future.
- You get angry and insult your close friend. The Seen Result is that your friend starts to cry and the Unseen Result is that you have accumulated a Papa (negative) karma and this will result in some type negative situation in the future.
- You drop your reading glasses from 10 feet. The Seen Results is that the glasses start falling downward as per the Law of nature, the Unseen Results will be evident when the glass hits the ground, it may or may not break. You are not sure until it hits the ground; the Unseen Results are delayed by a few seconds.

These pending unseen results are like your bank balance. Your bank balance will have all pending results of good karmas and bad karmas which were done earlier. The bank balance also includes pending karma phalas from your previous lives. Everyone has a balance of pending karmas which still have to yield their fruits.

### **Never Ending Cycle of Karmas**

Vedanta teaches that as long as you have pending karmas you cannot escape the cycle of birth and death. According to the Doctrine of karma, you are born to exhaust a certain (limited) amount of karmas phalas in each lifetime. It will be a mix of good and bad karmas. This mix of pending karmas will result in some situations which will make you happy, and some that make you unhappy. This is the nature of life; you will encounter a mix of happy situations and unhappy situations. This is everyone's experience.

When pending karmas are ready to bear the results or fruits, they come into the Manas as Vrittis. Once this happens, the Ego is forced to react to these Vrittis in either a positive or negative (Raga/Dvsha) manner. This will result in new karmas being committed. These new actions will bear their results in the future. You just have exhausted an old karma, but in the process have committed a new karma which will bear results at a future date.

It would seem we are trapped in this cycle of karmas. We react with existing karmas and then create another set of future karmas. This cycle seems never ending. Unless we exhaust these karmas we will continue the cycle of births and deaths.

The picture looks bleak and the problem seems insurmountable. How to get out of this cycle? This is where the teachings of Vedanta come in. We saw that the Ignorance of the 'Real I' is the cause of all problems. The only solution to Ignorance is Knowledge. The Knowledge you gain from the teachings of Vedanta is no ordinary knowledge, but is the knowledge of who you truly are. This Knowledge can set you free. If you know you are the 'Real I', than you will not do any action, you will just watch what is happening in the Mind. The 'Real I' does not do any Karma. Since you are not doing any Karma, you will not accumulate any future fruits, so your 'bank balance' should become zero. This knowledge cannot be theoretical in nature; it must be completely assimilated and integrated in your daily life 24/7. This is not easy, but it is the only way to overcome this unending cycle of birth and death.

As we discussed in the introduction, Karma Yoga must be the first step in this direction. Karma Yoga teaches us the correct attitude we must follow so that we do not any action which accumulate karmas.

### **Prerequisites to Karma Yoga**

It is not a question of understanding Karma Yoga from a theoretical point of view. We should assimilate this knowledge in our daily lives. In order to achieve this, we must be prepared to receive this this knowledge. This is only possible if we have the required prerequisites. It is like you want to do an advanced level , say 301, level course in any subject; you can only do this successfully if you have completed the 101 and 201 courses. These are the minimum prerequisites. In the same way you need some level of preparation to acquire this knowledge. So what are the prerequisites for Karma Yoga?

### **Living with Positive Values**

You set your own value system and live a life with these positive values. You are honest, your work ethics are sincere, you respect your parents, and you look after your family well. You are involved with your children; you help your friends in need.

Many people lead this type of life, they may also think they are leading a life of Karma Yoga. This is not Karma Yoga, but a minimum prerequisite for Karma Yoga. If you are not leading this type of life with positive values, it means you are not yet ready to assimilate the knowledge of Karma Yoga.

### **Living with Dharma**

Dharma is core value of the Hindu tradition. There are many aspects to it, but it can be summed up in one word: 'Ahimsa'. Ahimsa means doing action which does causes the least harm in any

situation – physical, mental and spiritual. It is difficult to do any action which will not cause some type of injury. If you plucking flowers, you are causing injury to the plant. While walking, you are hurting insects. If you do any action, there are always some people who are offended. A better interpretation of Ahimsa is to aim to minimize any injury to the greatest extent possible while taking any action. Even negative thoughts about a person is against Dharma.

Another core value of Dharma is ‘duty’ and ‘responsibility’. We saw earlier that our reaction to things and situations is to like or dislike something, or we run towards or run away from situations. When we are faced with difficult or unpleasant situations we sometimes tend to move away from them and take the easy way out. We tend to act in ways which are not conforming to Dharma. We rationalize this behavior by saying “only this once”. But when presented with a similar situation we react the same way again.

These are some of the core values which should become part of your day to day living. Before taking any action, you evaluate if any action you propose to take is following Dharma. If the answer is yes, only then should you undertake that action, leading a life with Dharma as your core value

Once again living a life of Dharma does not mean Karma Yoga. It is a bare minimum before you can undertake a path of Karma Yoga. Leading a life of Dharma is the essential and the first prerequisite for your spiritual growth.

### **Attitudes of Karma Yoga**

As mentioned earlier, one of the main focus of Bhagavad Gita is to teach Karma Yoga. It teaches us how to change our attitude toward Karma or action, so that we can lead a more peaceful life and reduce unnecessary suffering. Karma Yoga never teaches not to do action, not to do action is against your Dharma (duty) and your nature. People are born to do action; inaction is not an option.

Everyone is born to exhaust their pending karma phala. These can be exhausted only by doing action. Bhagavad Gita teaches that if these actions are done with the right attitude you can manage the impact of the fruits of the action much more effectively. The correct approach is to convert all ordinary actions to sadhana or spiritual practice. This is the underlying principle of Karma Yoga. What is this approach which will help you to do your daily mundane activities with a prayerful and devotional attitude?

Parts of Chapter 2 and Chapter 3, 4, 5 and 18 from Bhagavad Gita focus on Karma Yoga. In the following paragraphs, we’ll summarize some of the key teachings of these chapters.

## 1. Karma Phala Data (Giver of the Fruits of Action)

Who gives the Fruits of our Actions? Understanding this is the core value of Karma Yoga. Chapter 2, Verse 47 explains this concept brilliantly. This is one of the most quoted verses in the Bhagavad Gita

*“You have the authority or control on the action you do, but you have no authority or control on the results of the action”*

This is a profound and universal truth. It is applicable to everyone and to every action we undertake. We can only do action, but we have no choice or control over the results. This sounds like an obvious statement to make. But how often do we undertake any action without any expectation of what the result will be? But here we can acknowledge that we don't have any control on what the results of our actions will be. There can be four types of results for any action:

- The same as we expected
- Better than we expected
- Worse than we expected
- Completely opposite of what we expected.

I am sure all of us have experienced these 4 types of results. The question is who decides or controls these results. The Bhagavad Gita teaches us that it is Ishwara, Bhagawan or God who decides the results. Does that mean Ishwara is judgmental and uses His own likes and dislikes to pass judgment? The answer is No. Ishwara has a Will but it is unlike the human will, it has no Ragas (likes) and Dveshas (dislikes). Ishwara's Will is the Law of Nature. Ishwara controls this universe through the Laws of Nature. Once these laws are set in motion, Ishwara does not do anything. The Doctrine of Karma, which we explained earlier, is part of this Law. Good actions will result in Punya Karma phalas and bad actions will result in Papa Karma phalas. This Doctrine of Karma is the instrument which Ishwara uses to provide the results or fruits of your actions. The results you are getting now are based on pending phalas (fruits) of your past actions. It is not arbitrary. This is a Vedantic explanation of why bad things happen to good people and good things to bad people. It is because they are receiving the fruits of their past actions.

You are the Karma Karta (Doer or agent of action), while Ishwara is the Karma Phala Data (the giver of the Results of action).

This truth applies to all levels of society, and all types of action. Any business can plan meticulously all the actions to launch a marketing campaign. When the campaign has been launched, the business has no control on the results. The results of the marketing campaign are given by Ishwara, the Karma Phala Data. You can invest in the stock market, but you have no control on whether the stocks are going up or down. A doctor may prescribe and do all the right things while treating a patient, but the doctor has no control on the outcome of his effort. It is easy to accept the phalas for small disappointments, but much more difficult to accept the fruits when the results cause major damage and suffering. If you can understand that all the phalas are given by Ishwara, and try to assimilate this understanding into your thinking, so that it becomes a part of your customary attitude to life, the impact is reduced.

Someone might think that since I have no control on the results, why we should do any action. This may mean passivity. If you have been wrongly passed over for a promotion, it is your responsibility to bring it to the notice of the concerned people and not accept the phala with passivity and keep quiet. However you have to do all this within the confines of Dharma. Only the results are in the hand of Ishwara, but the responsibility to do action, the right action with Dharma is your responsibility. Doing no action is not the right action it is not part of Dharma.

As a summary, everyone must be mindful of this truth of Ishwara is the Karma Phala Data. This devotional attitude is the first right step in Karma Yoga.

## **2. Prasada Buddhi (Attitude of Gift Receiving)**

Even if you accept Ishwara to be the Karma Phala Data or Giver of Results, it is not easy to accept the results. We all know very well, if the outcome of any action is not as per our expectation it causes frustration and irritation. Negative emotions dominate and lead to unhappiness. We usually want things our way. In many cases this does not happen. This inner conflict is the major source of turmoil in the mind.

How to change our attitude to overcome these shortcomings? For this, Karma Yoga teaches the concept of Prasada Buddhi. You could say it is the perfect solution. Buddhi, in this case, means Attitude. Prasada has no exact translation, it could mean God's Blessing. When we go to a temple, after we offer our prayers, the priest will give us a Prasada which has been blessed by Ishwara. This prasada usually are dry fruits. When we receive this prasada of dry fruits, we receive them with humility and love. We bow our heads when we receive this Prasada because we know it has come from Ishwara. Even if we do not like dry fruits we will not throw it away in a trash bin, because this gift has come from Ishwara. We do this because we know this Prasada has come with Ishwara's Blessing and Grace.

In life too, we should receive the results of our actions as if we have received a Prasada from Ishwara. We accept the results of all our actions with humility, gratitude and love. This attitude of acceptance is called Prasada Buddhi.

If you can cultivate this attitude to all things in life, we can lead a life that is peaceful and calm, whatever up and downs life might bring.

### **3. Gaining Equanimity**

Once you understand that Ishwara is the Karma Phala Data, and that everything that you receive in life is a Prasada, we should be able accept the results of our actions with equanimity. This is easier said than done, because we are attached to the (expected) outcomes of our actions. A good definition of attachment is as follows

*“If any object or any person that is essential for your well-being, that is, you depend on that object or person for your happiness, then you are attached to that object or person”*

This attachment means we desire those objects and people, because they are essential for our well-being. We saw earlier that when Ego interacts with Vrittis in the mind, it cannot be still it has to react or do Karma by like/dislike or attract/repulse etc. This attraction or motivation to certain outcomes can lead to attachment. It would seem we are preprogrammed to attachment. This tendency to like or dislike makes it quite difficult to accept the Prasada with equanimity. On the surface, we may accept the outcomes, but deep down we are still unhappy. So how do we cultivate equanimity?

The easiest way to explain how to cultivate this attitude is to say we should elevate our motivation factor or upgrade our attachment to spiritual growth. What does this mean? Think of the various attachments you have formed as you journeyed through life - as kids we were attached to toys, then as we grew up we formed new attachments, like reading books or playing sports. Still later, we grew attached to our professions, and families. A broken toy has a tremendous impact for a kid, but the same broken toy will have not any impact when kid has grown to an adult. As you can see, when we get a new attachment, the previous attachment is reduced or disappears. If this true and correct, we should change our lifestyle and make spiritual growth our primary focus or attachment. We try and lead a spiritual life, if we can do this, then all our current attachments will move away or disappear. If this attitude of spiritual growth is our main goal or focus, then the previous attachments we have will not have a major impact in our lives. They will not bother us. Whatever negative or positive outcomes we have to face, we will be able accept them with equanimity because we are no longer attached to these expectations.

A devotional or spiritual life style is only way you can gain equanimity in life.

#### **4. Ishwara Arpana Buddhi (Attitude of Offering to God)**

We saw earlier that Prasada Buddhi is the right attitude towards any event that occurs in your life as if it is a gift from God. Arpana Buddhi is the other side of the coin – what should our attitude to our own actions be? Here, we cultivate the attitude of offering our actions to Ishwara. Both Prasada Buddhi and Arpana Buddhi are complementary. One is receiving and the other is giving.

To understand Arpana Buddhi properly you have to understand the concept of Yagna or Worship of Ritual Fire which was a standard norm in ancient India. The first half of the Vedas is focused on hymns, and instructions on how to conduct Yagnas properly. It was a very important part of people's daily life in ancient India. Yagnas were conducted for a wide variety of reasons, from a Petitionary Yagna to a Thank you Yagna. A Petitionary Yagna could be requesting Ishwara for a favor, like a child, or rains for the crops. A Thank you Yagna could be thanking Ishwara for blessings received, like having a good harvest. The ritual fire was a medium to reach the different powers of Ishwara. The priest would offer ghee or rice and other ingredients into the ritual fire so that it can be transported to Ishwara. The hymns will spell out the message being transmitted and also which power of Ishwara you are trying to reach. It is like a postcard message and the ritual fire is the messenger.

The offerings are made in the ritual fire to please Ishwara with your gratitude. The main motivation is to thank Ishwara and acknowledge that everything happens in the universe because of Ishwara. The rains are because of Ishwara, the child being born is because of Ishwara, the heart beating without resting, your ability to walk, talk and think and act are all because of Ishwara. There is nothing in the universe which is not due to Ishwara. All the talent and abilities you have are because of Ishwara. Bhagavad Gita clearly says you are a thief if you use all these gifts from Ishwara without 'paying' for them, and without acknowledging to whom all this really belongs. Most people use these talents selfishly thinking they are owners of these talents. Bhagavad Gita calls such people deluded and misguided.

In ancient India, Yagnas were one way of 'paying back' for all the blessings received in life. This is not like a business transaction because what is being offered in the ritual fire also belongs to Ishwara. Everything belongs to Ishwara. You do not own anything.

So what is it that you can really offer Ishwara, if everything is already his? The only thing you can offer is your actions. This is Arpana Buddhi. You do all actions as a dedication to Ishwara, you offer your actions with love and affection to Ishwara. Any action you do is done with a prayerful attitude. Even a mundane activity like washing the dishes, brushing your teeth, talking to people; in fact, all the actions that you do can be done with a prayerful attitude and this is Arpana Buddhi. If you are dedicating or offering all your actions to Ishwara, there is very little

chance that you will act in a way that is harmful and which is not according to Dharma or which is against the laws of nature.

All your actions (Arpana Buddhi) are done with a prayerful attitude and, all results thereof are also to be accepted (Prasada Buddhi) with a prayerful attitude. This is the core of Karma Yoga.

### **5. No Hidden Agenda**

It is quite normal for everyone to act to fulfill some desire - for their own self-satisfaction. Even when an act of charity is performed, which is a noble act, the end result is a feeling of self-satisfaction. This is a type of attachment. If you care for people or do a positive act, the motivation could be self-satisfaction. There is a hidden agenda and is present in most of our actions. Bhagavad Gita says that however noble our actions, if there is a "hidden agenda", as described above; it is an obstacle to our spiritual growth.

The solution recommended by Bhagavad Gita is to apply the principle of Arpana Buddhi. How? If we follow the path of spiritual growth, we know that Ishwara's divinity is present in every living being. Therefore, we should do all our actions towards other people with the same sense of humility and devotion as we would towards Ishwara. This is Arpana Buddhi.

This is not easy, but the first step is to recognize that everyone is a manifestation of the same Ishwara. This can be cultivated if spiritual growth becomes your main priority in life. If this is your main desire, then your subsequent actions will automatically move towards Karma Yoga and you will conduct yourself without any hidden agenda. You will help people and take care of people as if it is your duty and Dharma, and not because it brings you satisfaction.

### **Benefits of Karma Yoga**

Implementing Karma Yoga in our daily lives has many benefits. Let us discuss some of them briefly.

#### **No Karma**

As we have discussed earlier that we are compelled to do Karma by the force of Raga (likes) and Dvesha (dislikes). Since we do Karmas, we must receive its fruits. When we receive those fruits, it leads to further action. We are stuck in a never ending cycle of karmas.

Bhagavad Gita says that if you do any action with the attitude of Karma Yoga, if you dedicate your actions to Ishwara, you will not accumulate any karmas. You have completely identified yourself with Ishwara, it almost like Ishwara is doing action through you. This may seem quite



lofty, but it must be understood that this is only possible if you have surrendered yourself completely to Ishwara.

Even if you have not reached this elevated state of spiritual growth right now, following the attitude of Karma Yoga will bring peace and reduce inner conflicts in the mind. You will be able to navigate all the ups and downs in life with inner calm and steadiness.

### **Purification of the Mind**

The mind is full of Impurities. Desires, jealousy, anger, manipulation, lust are few of the many defects of the mind. Each of these impurities are Vrittis and they are very powerful; they force us to do Karmas every day, sometimes against our 'will'. These defects reside in the Manas and they manipulate the Ego to do the Karmas. As Bhagavad Gita says they are our biggest enemies. The only way to conquer them successfully is to implement the attitudes of Karma Yoga in our daily lives. Do all our actions with a prayerful and devotional attitude and accept all results with humility. Make spiritual growth and Karma Yoga our number one priority. If we can do this, all the impurities in the mind will automatically melt away. The mind will become purified and clean. When the impurities of the mind are removed by Karma Yoga our lives will be conflict free and peaceful.

### **Moksha**

The ultimate goal for everyone should be Moksha. Moksha is the liberation from suffering, and when you achieve Moksha, not only are you free from suffering, but also from the cycle of birth and death. Moksha is achieved when we have dissolved the Ego or 'I am' into the 'Real I'. We saw earlier that Ego is born out of Ignorance. Only Knowledge about the 'Real I' can remove this Ignorance. Nothing else can remove this Ignorance. This may not seem that difficult, but this Knowledge needs to be assimilated. This will not happen if your mind is not purified. If your mind is purified by Karma Yoga, this Knowledge about your 'Real I' will be absorbed more easily. So the most important benefit of Karma Yoga is that you are on the right path to the ultimate goal of Moksha.

### **Conclusion**

It must be understood that we do Karma only when we add Raga and Dvesha to the situations we face. This is the driving force behind doing karma. We will always face the consequences of our actions according to the Doctrine of Karma and this is a never ending cycle. If we do not make an effort to change we are destined to this cycle of suffering. Karma Yoga as taught in the Bhagavad Gita, with the emphasis on cultivating the attitudes of Prasada Buddhi and Arpana

Buddhi, is the ideal stepping stone to tackle this difficult task. If we can incorporate this attitude of doing any action with prayerful devotion, it will purify our mind. When this is done 24/7, the discovery and realization of the 'Real I' will lead all of us to the ultimate goal of Moksha.