

Chapter 3: Karma Yoga – The Yoga of Action

Towards the end of the second chapter, the Lord taught Arjuna about the renunciation (giving up) of action. He said that renunciation of action led to everlasting bliss and elevated one to the post of being one with God. However, as Arjuna was of a warrior clan, he was advised to do his bounded duty, which was, to fight in the battle. At this, Arjuna was dismayed and started entertaining the idea of becoming a saint by following the method of renunciation of action. He asks the Lord that if He considered Yoga of Renunciation of Action to be better than Yoga of Action, why then was He asking him to take the trouble of fighting and following the Yoga of Action? How was it possible for the Lord to praise Yoga of renunciation of action and at the same time asking him to follow Yoga of action? Something that Arjuna could not understand. He requested the Lord to direct him clearly, the one path, which was the correct path for him, that would uplift him.

At this, the Lord explained to Arjuna that He had given the sermon of Yoga of Renunciation of Action for the knowledgeable persons (to follow) and also gave the sermon of Yoga of Action for the persons who indulged in activities. It is not proper for active persons (*karmayogis*) not to perform work. They cannot initiate actions as well as give up work by taking refuge in renunciation of action. Both these types of behaviour are unworthy of persons following the path of Yoga of Action.

It is not possible for a *Karma Yogi* (following the Yoga of Action) to stay away from activity. He will be forced by desires and thoughts to do activities. He will only become a hypocrite and never become a saint. It is better if Arjuna focuses his mind unto the Lord, and works, towards the good of the society, which determines him to be a soldier and to act like one. The Lord then gives the example of the saintly King Janak, father of Goddess Sita, who did not renounce the Yoga of Action but instead executed his duties as the King, in the service of his subjects. The Lord impresses upon Arjuna that he should follow the examples of his ancestors and work in a non-attached manner and follow the path of Yoga of Action or else he would incur the sin of having broken the principles of the traditions of his reputed family.

Other people follow the path shown by important members of the society and do likewise. The Lord then gave His own example. As the Supreme Soul, He Himself had no compulsions with the type of activity He should do. He has nothing to gain or lose. Even then, He is performing actions in accordance to His prescribed duty. If He leaves His duty and renunciates His duty bound actions, then others will also follow suit. In these circumstances, He would be held responsible for the members of the society, not performing actions, in accordance with their duty-bound activities, thereby leading to the downfall of religion.

In the mind, intellect and senses reside the sensuality of desires. These form sheaths or coverings, over the knowledge of a person. Veiled knowledge causes unnecessary desires and propels one to stray away from one's bounded duty, towards one that is not his.

The Lord directs Arjuna that his only path of upliftment lay in carefully keeping his mind, intellect and senses fully under his control and in destroying the enemy – desire. Arjuna should strictly follow the path of Yoga of Action as was done previously by his ancestors, keeping the mind fixed on Him.