

Chapter 4:

Jnana Karma Sanyaas Yoga – The Yoga of Renunciation of Action with Knowledge

The Lord continues to tell Arjuna about the Yoga of Action. He mentioned that first of all, He had given this secretive knowledge to the Sun, who gave it to Manu (first human being), who then passed this knowledge to Ikshwaaku. By the passage of time, this yoga was lost through people with little knowledge and understanding. Lord said to Arjuna that He was imparting the same knowledge to him, as he was His dear devotee. He further said that it was He, who created the four classes of people based on their *gunas* (*Sattva, Rajas* and *Tamas*), the characteristics of nature and the kind of work they performed. They comprised of Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shoodras. Arjuna was a Kshatriya (warrior class); hence he had no right to run away from the path of judiciously fighting in the battle, just like his forefathers. Great persons like to emulate their ancestors. The benefit for his body, the society and the state lay in his following the Yoga of Action, as was done by his ancestors. If not, then all the three (he, his society and his state) would suffer.

When determining what is action and what is inaction, even intelligent people are sometimes at a loss to explain. The Lord then volunteers to teach Arjuna the basic understandings of the finer points with regards to Action (*karma*). Lord Rama and Raja Janak (father of Goddess Sita), had full knowledge and yet did not renounce their duty bound action of being a warrior. They readily took to arms whenever the occasion arose for a righteous war. Following the lines of activities according to clanship, all these *Karma Yogis*, (following the path of Yoga of Action), achieved union with the Supreme Soul. On the other hand, Ravana, Kumbhkarna and others of his like, performed duties, which were not righteous. This ultimately led to their downfall and destruction.

Again, the Lord directs Arjuna to do his duty as a member of the warrior clan and fight, rather than run away from it. It was unbecoming of him to take refuge in the path of renunciation of action and become a saint. He exhorts Arjuna to perform *KARMA YOGA* and fight the righteous war.

Knowledgeable persons can pursue Inaction in Action and Action in Inaction. Those persons whose all actions have been burnt in the blazing fire of knowledge are called *Pundits* (well versed in knowledge). The blazing fire as a result of offering of oblation is the fire of *yagnas* (sacrifice). Of all the types of yajnas, the yajna of knowledge is the highest. Just as the firewood placed in a *Yajna-kund* (fireplace) turns to firedust, in the same way, in the blazing fire of knowledge, all the actions performed are turned to the insignificance of dust.

The Lord tells Arjuna that many yogis offer wealth, austerity, and yoga as sacrifice. Others with subdued mind meditate upon Him. Others fulfill severe vows; offer sacred study and knowledge as yajna. Knowledge is the best purifier. Such a knowledgeable person with full faith, devoting wisdom and subduing his senses achieves supreme peace.

To achieve such knowledge, the Lord advises Arjuna to prostrate before one who is endowed with the knowledge of the Absolute, to serve him and be under his tutelage. Such a saint would then be able to give sermons showing him the path of knowledge, in order to attain the Absolute.

The Lord, as a final verdict tells Arjuna that such a *Nishkaam Karma Yogi* (a person performing actions without the eye on the fruit), endowed with full faith, whose mind is set on God, is the best Yogi. He is superior to others including a *Tapasvi* (one who performs penance), a *Pundit* (knowledgable person) and a *Sakaam karmi* (person performing actions with the desire of fruit).