

WHAT IS Karma Yoga?

IT IS SAID IN THE BHAGVAD GITA THAT WE MUST DO OUR DUTY WITHOUT THINKING ABOUT THE FRUITS IT WILL BEAR. **KARMA YOGA** IS SOMETIMES INTERPRETED AS BEING CHARITABLE WORK. **VEDANTA PHILOSOPHER SREEDHARAN** TELLS US ALL ABOUT KARMA YOGA.





Is it a type of yoga flow? Does it mean doing charity work? Does it determine our future? Karma Yoga can be one of the most misunderstood terms in the yogi world.

Actually, Karma Yoga is about right action. The word 'karma' means action, deeds or work. The words 'yoga' comes from a Sanskrit root *yuj*, which means to join. Put together, *Karma Yoga means selfless action performed in the spirit of service and sacrifice*. Karma and yoga - two Sanskrit words dating back thousands of years to ancient India - are so popular today they feature in the English lexicon.

We find today that most of us are saying "I can't wait to go for a holiday!" "How many more days until the weekend?" The strain of work leaves most of us desperately waiting for weekends and vacations, and with everyone around us feeling the same way, we have evolved to think this is normal. There are seminars on stress management and people continue to suffer stress – and related diseases, such as diabetes, hypertension and heart ailments.

Most people live their lives merely to fulfill their egocentric desires while craving for the result of action. Often, we find work a drudgery, a chore to perform only to pay the bills. Such action saps energy, enthusiasm and also creates chaos in relationships. For some, it leads to a mid-life crisis where they quit their job for a utopian life that remains elusive. Understanding and following Karma Yoga

can remove these negative impacts and help us find happiness in our work.

WHY KARMA YOGA ?

If you are spending 8 hours a day at work, it should be an avenue of joy and peace. Imagine most part of your work does not bring satisfaction or fulfillment, you will remain unhappy at work and in your personal life. Those who follow Karma Yoga, will do what they ought to do without stress or strain – and without the need to wish for holidays. Working in the spirit of Karma yoga will help you to be happily successful.

WHAT IS ACTION?

The physical body by itself cannot act. Actions are propelled by the mind or the intellect. Let us understand what is the mind and the intellect. Mind is the seat of your emotions, feelings, impulses, likes and dislikes. Intellect is the faculty of reason, logic and analysis. All human beings have this faculty. Actions can vary depending upon where it is propelled from. Based on this, there are three kinds of actions.

1. An action could arise from the mind, either from a like, dislike or feelings and emotions.
2. Actions could also arise from the intellect, from your reason or analysis. Or,
3. Action can arise out of a combination of mind and intellect, where your mind likes the action and the intellect supports the action.

Right actions are actions arising from your intellect or a combination of mind and intellect. Actions then becomes a purposeful, conscious and meaningful activity.

In everyday language, it is often used interchangeably with the term intelligence, however, there is a distinction: *Intelligence* is gained through books, schools, universities. You become well informed in one or more subjects which will help in enhancing your standard of living. Intellect is developed by independent thinking and contemplation. This improves your quality of living.

Life is governed by cause and effect. Success is an effect which belongs to the future and Right action performed consistently in the present is the cause.

TYPES OF ACTION

Actions can be of three types – selfish, unselfish and selfless.

1. *Selfish action* is propelled by a motive that benefits only the person performing the action - it is done for "I, me, myself".
2. *Unselfish action* is carried out for the sake of others, you identify a larger cause beyond yourself.
3. *Selfless action*, As the word itself suggests, there is no "self" or ego propelling your action. They are those obligatory actions which need to be performed whether you like it or not. Thomas Huxley says – *The most valuable result of any education is the ability to make yourself do the thing you have to do, when it ought to be done, whether you like it or not.*

Unselfish and Selfless action is Karma Yoga.

KARMA YOGA IN NATURE

Nature is constantly practicing Karma Yoga. Flowers give fragrance, the clouds give rain, the sun gives light and vitality to all beings, the earth yields vegetation and the nightingale sings – all without gaining anything for itself. This is the epitome of Karma Yoga. Spending more time in nature, observing closely, can help us understand Karma Yoga and is also meditative, enhancing our ability to be peaceful and content.

BASIC PRINCIPLES OF KARMA YOGA Swadharama – the starting point of Karma Yoga

Swadhama comes from two Sanskrit words – *swa*, meaning one's own, and *dharma*, meaning nature. Dharma means the essential quality that makes a thing what it is. For example, there can be no sample of sugar that is not sweet; the

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dharma of sugar is its sweetness. There can be no rose without its characteristic fragrance; the dharma of a rose is its fragrance. Similarly, human beings are each given a unique gift by nature. Some can sing, others are good at sports, some others succeed in business – each have their own swadharma. The opposite, paradharma (alien nature – not natural to oneself) leads to stress and strain. To practice Karma Yoga we must follow our swadharma.

Each human being has Swadharma. We often see children from a very young age displaying an inclination towards art or music or a specific subject in school. Parents must pay attention and guide their children towards choosing a career that is in line with their swadharama. This will help them reach their full potential, bringing out the best in them.

Impediments to Swadharma: Many are not following Swadharma because of the following reasons :

1. ARE YOU FOLLOWING A HERD INSTINCT? EG. YOU TAKE UP TO A PARTICULAR WORK BECAUSE EVERYONE IS DOING IT.
2. IS MONEY A MAIN FACTOR IN YOUR CHOICES RELATING TO WORK?
3. FEAR OF FAILURE TO PURSUE YOUR DREAM.
4. FAMILY PRESSURES.
5. LAZY THINKING – NOT ENOUGH THOUGHT ON IDENTIFYING YOUR SWADHARMA

WHAT IS SWADHARMA

1. ACTIONS WHICH INSPIRES AND MOTIVATES YOU.
2. ACTIONS WHICH ARE ALIGNED WITH YOUR CONVICTION AND CONSCIENCE.
3. ACTIONS WHICH BRINGS PROGRESS AND SATISFACTION.

THE TECHNIQUE OF RIGHT ACTION

1. Choose a field of activity according to your basic nature, your swadharma. Pursue an inspired goal, a greater purpose beyond your selfish interest. Strive for excellence in the process and this will help you to deal with the expectations of result of action.

2. Concentration – is when your intellect directs your mind to the present action without allowing the mind to go past worries, future anxieties or excitement in the present. It's the ability to fix one's attention to a single thought, to the exclusion of all other thoughts. A mind which wanders everywhere makes concentration difficult.

3. Consistency – Discipline of channeling all your energies towards your goal. This is a fundamental ingredient towards success. Through consistency, you gain control of your actions you will also never give up pursuing your goals.

4. Cooperation – helps you to deal with your ego. Success is a result of team effort. All success requires the contribution of many sources and people known and unknown. For example, a farmer cannot claim the success of a bumper crop all to himself; the sun provided light and energy, the soil provided nutrients, water helped the plants grow, Mother Nature ensured the right climate etc. To maintain a spirit of cooperative endeavor is essential to harness the collective energies and channelize them to achieving the goal.

An eminent philosopher, Swami Parthasarthy says , “To bring about sanity in this world, change TGIF to TGIM.” Looking forward to work and to Mondays .. will transform work into worship. This is karma yoga. It gives you the blueprint to right action. When the process is right, success is guaranteed.

Confucius says, ‘Choose a job you love and you will never have to work a day in your life’.

Steve Jobs stated, ‘Follow your heart, it somehow already knows what you truly want to become’.
‘Intense work is Rest’, said Swami Rama Tirtha.



SREEDHARAN is a new age philosopher and a Self-management expert. He has over 20 years in the study and research of ancient wisdom and its practical application in the modern world. His focus has been to help individuals to live life to their full potential, experiencing peace and prosperity. Sreedharan has conducted over 7500 lectures in various parts of the world for a diverse audience.

Sreedharan is the senior disciple of Swami Parthasarathy. Having completed the three year residential course at the Vedanta Academy, India, he has dedicated his life to help people improve their quality of living through Vedanta, the ancient wisdom of India.

