

Karma Yoga

The Bhagavad Gita Chapter 3, v15 to 20 states:

“Every selfless act, Arjuna, is born from Brahman, the eternal, infinite Godhead. He is present in every act of service. All life turns on this law, O Arjuna. Whoever violates it, indulging his senses for his own pleasure and ignoring the needs of others, has wasted his life. But those who realize the Self are always satisfied. Having found the source of joy and fulfillment, they no longer seek happiness from the external world. They have nothing to gain or lose by any action; neither people nor things can affect their security. Strive constantly to serve the welfare of the world: by devotion to selfless work one attains the supreme goal of life. Do your work with the welfare of others always in mind. “

Karma comes from the root verb “kri’ meaning to act. Karma Yoga is the Yoga of Action, Service or Work. It also relates to the Law of Cause and Effect.

The karma yogi works for the joy of work alone, not for the fruits or rewards work brings. He is unattached to these rewards and yet works as if he earnestly desires them. He is not ambitious yet works as hard as the ambitious man. He does not look for happiness outside himself knowing that true happiness is within himself. When he is no longer attached to the fruits of his actions, he finds the true joy of work. He sees the forces of Nature working through him and accepts whatever comes along without fear, knowing he will emerge whole, whatever the task.

“You have the right to work, but never to the fruit of work. You should never engage in action for the sake of reward, nor should you long for inaction. Perform work in this world, Arjuna, as a man established within himself – without selfish attachments, and alike in success and defeat. For yoga is perfect evenness of mind.” Gita Ch2 v47 to 48

The principles of Karma Yoga spring from the immutable Law of Karma, although they are often separated, where each thought or action will create an equal reaction. It is perhaps worth considering whether it is the word, thought or deed which is of most importance – what do you think?

Under the Law of Karma each person is master of his/her own destiny; we literally choose our own fate, although the web of karma is a complex one and our fate will inevitably be influenced by past as well as current karma.

Significant desires that are still present at death will mean that we are reborn and our future lives are not a punishment for past wrong deeds but an active desire for experience on the part of each soul.

Man’s law teaches the pursuit of happiness for the body, mind and senses whereas karmic law teaches us to be kind for the sake of our souls. However this does not mean we should suppress our own nature because each of us needs to recognize we are all capable of harmful thoughts and deeds, i.e. there is always positive & negative within, but with an awareness of what is within we can choose not to act upon the ‘negative’ whilst still recognizing it is present. Yoga helps us to increase our presence so we are no longer so reactive. Indeed the Karma Yogi looks on all experience as part of life in that it teaches valuable lessons. The Karma Yogi welcomes all experience as a learning ground – and ultimately nothing we encounter can be

considered to be good or bad – with the intricate web of karma we can never really never know, it is just is.

Action in Un-Action

Krishna teaches Arjuna that the idea that 'I' do this or that is an illusion; thoughts and their consequent actions are merely a process of nature simply arising, with the 'I' itself arising as one of the actions of Nature or Prakriti.

The aim of Karma Yoga is naishkarmya or action-freedom, which corresponds to the Taoist idea of Wu Wei or Inaction in Action. Here when the illusion of the ego acting is transcended without the interference of the ego all actions possess spontaneity appearing as a smooth flow; there is neither attachment to pleasure or pain and the Yogi is unaffected by the results of his actions. Feuerstein talks of the truly enlightened as having an economy and elegance of movement which is absent in most unenlightened beings.

Consider

Consider what action in un-action means to you. What would it be like to renounce all the fruits of your actions and can you see ways in which you could look to offer service to others in small and large ways? Would everyday tasks have a different flavour if both of these things framed your actions?

See other references from the Gita:-

Chapter 2 v47 to 53

Chapter 3 'Selfless Service' v1 to 43

Chapter 4 'Wisdom in Action' v13 to 23

Chapter 18 'Freedom & Renunciation' verses 2 to 32

Bhakti Yoga

The Bhagavad Gita Chapter 9, v26 to 28 states:

"Whatever I am offered in devotion with a pure heart – a leaf, a flower, fruit or water, I partake of that love offering. Whatever you do, make it an offering to me, the food you eat, even your suffering. In this way you will be freed from the bondage of karma, and from its results both pleasant and painful. Then, firm on renunciation and yoga, with your heart free, you will come to me."

'Bhaj' means to share in, to partake in, to love.

Swami Vivekananda describes Bhakti Yoga as 'the way to self-realization through the love of God'. Within yoga 'God' can be whatever the individual conceives it to be and therefore it embraces all religions. This is because within yoga we are encouraged to find a personal representation of Brahman who is by its very nature formless and therefore without form is difficult to connect to at the beginning. The chosen representation of God is awarded aspirational attributes to which we can relate and focus our love and devotion upon. To follow the path of Bhakti Yoga we are asked only to direct the natural energy of the heart so we may grow beyond the domination of the ego and the limited mind.

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In yoga an individual starts by choosing a simple object as a focus for his or her love, it could be a physical object such as a figure of a deity as a representative of Brahman, or it could be another person such as a beloved teacher or guru. Whatever the chosen object of devotion it epitomizes the individual's highest spiritual ideal. However the Bhakti Yogi must never regard the symbol as the be-all and end-all of his or her devotion but rather recognizes the essence of Brahman in it, as in all things, and loves it for that reason. His love must be pure and altruistic so he moves beyond the small self and surrenders. Gradually he or she progresses from gross physical symbols to more subtle manifestations of the Absolute, widening the scope for devotion to include all of creation. Eventually, the duality of worshipper and object of worship is replaced by the unity of the individual with the Universal God or Brahman; we find God as our own Self. The principle of Bhakti Yoga is that the things we love and dwell upon we become.

In Bhakti Yoga there are many different degrees of devotion, depending upon the stage of growth of each soul. The Bhagavata-Purana, composed in the 9th Century CE describes nine stages:-

Shravana	Listening to the names of the loved One, each name resting on a quality creates a devotional attitude
Kirtana	Chanting, songs of praise, hymns, psalms, or body, mind and song worship combined e.g. Surya Namaskar. These can lead to an ecstatic breakthrough!!
Samarana	Remembrance. Reflecting on the life incarnate of the loved One. The mind dwelling on Divine attributes or Divine mysteries.
Pada-Devana	Serves at the feet of the Master, self-surrendering, offering sacrifices of ones thoughts, words and actions
Arcana	Participation in rituals as an outward sign of inward grace.
Vandana	Prostration before the image of the Divine, worship of the one true God.
Dasya	Slavish devotion to God, taking refuge in Him, living through the Divine.
Bakhya	Feeling of friendship for the Divine. A direct channeling of passion for the Lord
Atman-Nivedana	Self-offering. Becoming the great soul. The increasing love and Devotion of the Bhakti culminates in the vision of the cosmos, penetrated, saturated and sustained by the Lord (see Ch 11 of the Gita)

Within Bhakti Yoga it is required that the faith should be alive, expending great emotional energy. We are utilizing man's natural tendencies for passion and love in a way that can be beneficial to all and can lead to self-realization.

Daily practices usually include:-

PUJA – Daily worship at the household shrine

BHAJAN – group chanting or singing of praises

SMARANA – regular meditation on the many forms of God involving a passionate wish to merge with the chosen deity

Consider

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The concept of devotion and self-surrender may be a difficult concept to grasp especially in societies where love is often reduced to a type of conditional love, where lust is often mistaken for love or at worst where devotion is seen to lead to a worrying fanaticism. Look at the different ways in which we can practice Bhakti Yoga and consider if there is a way in which you think this path could be relevant for yourself in this period of history. Also consider how if everyone practiced Bhakti Yoga what kind of society would be created?

In the Gheranda Samhita it says:

“Let him contemplate within his heart his special Deity; let him be full of ecstasy by such contemplation; let him, with thrill, shed tears of happiness and by doing so he will become entranced. This leads to Samadhi.” 7th Lesson, verse 14

See other references in the Gita:-

Chapter 7 v16 to v17

Chapter 9 v22 to v34

Chapter 10 v8 to v11

Chapter 11 v36 to v55

Chapter 12 The Way of Love

Jnana Yoga

The Bhagavad Gita Chapter 7, v10 to 15

“My eternal seed, Arjuna, is to be found in every creature. I am the power of discrimination in those who are intelligent, and the glory of the noble. In those who are strong, I am strength, free from passion and selfish attachment. I am desire itself, if that desire is in harmony with the purpose of life.

The states of sattva, rajas and tamas come from me, but I am not in them. These three gunas deceive the world: people fail to look beyond them to me, supreme and imperishable. The three gunas make up my divine maya, difficult to overcome. But they cross over this maya who take refuge in me. Others are deluded by maya, performing evil deeds, they have no devotion to me. Having lost all discrimination, they follow the way of their lower nature.”

Jnana means ‘knowledge or insight’. This is the yoga of wisdom where the follower of Jnana Yoga converts intellectual knowledge into wisdom. The process of self-enquiry is used to ultimately discriminate between what is real and what is unreal, what is eternal and what is finite meaning this type of path appeals to those who are more introverted or who have a disposition towards working with finer states of mind and discrimination.

The Jnana Yogi uses two main tools in his search for the Truth, Iccha (willpower) and the Buddhi (inspired reason). It requires a questioning mind that takes nothing at face value because this is a process whereby the Buddhi is cultivated to objectively discard everything that cannot be definitively known to be true, leaving only absolute truth. In this way Jnana Yoga is a kind of filtering process where the practitioner absorbs all information and considers it dispassionately. Gradually all unnecessary ‘knowledge’ and that we cannot know for sure is removed from the mind leaving a central core, which is the individual’s true self, uncoloured

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by false ideas and prejudices. So in essence the Jnana Yogi is seeking to clear away the veils of ignorance and let the light of spirit shine through.

The Jnana Yogi can listen to teachers, engage in discussion and study the wealth of books on religion, philosophy, medicine etc, written though the ages in different climates of opinion, and evaluate this wealth of information for the Truth; here contemplation upon the Gita and Upanishads is considered essential since they relate the experiences of other seekers of Truth. However the Jnana Yogi must, and even more significantly, study the workings of his own mind and become absolutely aware of the limitations of intellectual knowledge.

The path of Jnana Yoga demands tremendous mental discipline and the study of complex concepts can become an end in itself, so a real danger is the would-be Jnana Yogi gets side-tracked and loses sight of the goal, the growth and ultimate liberation of his of her spiritual self.

At some point along the path there must be a quantum leap beyond the boundaries laid down by mind and reason and a movement into the realms of faith, where the Jnana Yoga is in a state to recognize the Truth when it comes. Here the great truths will come from the inner silence within so a Jnana Yogi will gradually need to have established the stillness and silence within.

There are seven parts to Jnana Yoga:

Viveka	Discrimination
Vairagya	Dispassion
Tapas	Discipline
Mumuksutva	Longing for Self-Realization
Sravaṇa	Listening to great teaching
Manana	Reflection on what is heard
Nidhhyasana	Contemplation or meditation upon the teachings leading to Samadhi

The Jnana Yogi takes nothing at face value so s/he delves deeply inside constantly asking 'Why?' Questions are asked such as "Why do I habitually act in a certain way in certain situations?" or "Why am I here?" and ultimately these must be presented to the silence within. This is a process which takes the mind to the very end of our knowledge and we sit with the not-knowing at the very edge of the silence, where it becomes an almost visceral experience rather than a mental one.

At first questions will be personal in nature and as progress is made he will move on to more universal questions with the ultimate question being "Who am I?" *Kas Twam Asi?* In answer to the ultimate question we are told "Tat twam asi" or "Thou art that" i.e. we are Brahman yet the **Jnana Yogi will never know the truth of his being by merely believing this to be the case so he must eventually experience the Truth.**

Some practitioners may confuse psychological enquiry for Jnana yoga. When we examine our fears and desires seeking balance this is not Jnana Yoga in the true sense, Jnana Yoga is seeking to know the Universal Self present in all beings. We may however start with psychological enquiry and move into Jnana Yoga. In essence a Jnana Yogi must create a friction at the core of the mind so that an inner fire is stoked, and it is said eventually the inner flame consumes all doubts or questions and the seeker will be taken into the inextinguishable fire of the supreme 'I am', the Universal Self of pure light and consciousness, which is the real goal.

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Ultimately we are taking ourselves to the end of what we know to be true. James Hewitt in 'Teach Yourself Meditation' page 33 likens this process to peeling an Onion. He quotes a Sufi text as a summary of the process:

"I am not the body
I am not the senses
I am not the mind I am not this
I am not that.
What then am I? What is the Self?
It is in the body
It is in everybody
It is everywhere
It is the All.
It is the Self. I am it. Absolute Oneness."

See other references in the B.G:-

Chapter 4 v33, 37 to 42
Chapter 5 v4 to 5
Chapter 6 v29 to 32
Chapter 7 v1 to 30
Chapter 9 v1 to 15
Chapter 10 v10 to 11

Raja Yoga

In Chapter 6 of the Gita it states.

"When meditation is mastered, the mind is unwavering like the flame of a lamp in a windless place. In the still mind, in the depths of meditation, the Self reveals itself. Beholding the Self by means of the Self, an aspirant knows the joy and peace of complete fulfillment. Having attained that abiding joy beyond the senses, revealed in the stilled mind, he never swerves from the eternal truth. He desires nothing else, and cannot be shaken by the heaviest burden of sorrow.

The path of meditation frees one from all afflictions. This is the path of yoga. Follow it with determination and sustained enthusiasm. Renouncing wholeheartedly all selfish desires and expectations, use your will to control the senses. Little by little, through patience and repeated effort, the mind will become stilled in the Self." Chapter 6, v19 to 25

Note that in the Gita the term 'Yogi' does not simply refer to one who meditates but rather it also refers to those who elect to focus upon Karma Yoga, i.e. those who renounce the fruits of their actions and also those who elect to focus upon Bhakti Yoga, i.e. who devotedly renounce their own will for thine will or Jnana Yoga, where we gradually release identification with the body, mind and senses in an experiential way. Now here we are given a straightforward account of Raja Yoga, a practice which takes us inwardly where we direct the mind to a point of stillness, ekagrata (one-pointedness) so that the Self may be revealed.

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As an inward path Raja Yoga tends to appeal to the person who is naturally contemplative and enjoys being alone. It is a path for those who have sufficient self-discipline, self-reliance and faith to undertake regular periods of meditation.

There is a much more detailed account of Raja Yoga within Patanjali's Yoga Sutras where the techniques are outlined and the journey is explained, we are told however in the Gita that:

- We must find a conducive place for practice
- The head, neck and spine must be held in a straight, erect line
- We must find moderation in all things including our diet and sleep, avoiding treating ourselves too harshly or being too indulgent

Then with regards to the practice of meditation we are told that:

- The senses must be turned inwardly
- The mind must be brought to one-pointedness or stillness
- There should be no expectation or need for a particular result i.e. detachment

We are also told that to follow this path requires great will power and there needs to be a willingness to practice regularly with constant effort. We are told that that the desire to realize the Self within must be greater than our desire to find satisfaction in the outer world.

That we may eventually be established within ourselves and experience the abiding joy of the Self where there is absolute equanimity and unity with all.

Finally the Gita tells us that no effort on the path is ever lost and will always help us in our future endeavours.

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So in summary the Bhagavad Gita inspires us to:

- Learn to act without attachment to the outcome/fruits i.e. practice non-attachment (vairagya)
- See God or the Divine in everything
- Look internally for happiness and security
- Accept what appears to be good or bad with equanimity
- Align ourselves with All That is, acting for the good of all
- Develop our Buddhi faculty, our power of discrimination (viveka) so we are not swayed by aversion or desire i.e. by the sense mind, manas
- Take personal responsibility for the evolution of our consciousness, our fate or karma sits within our own hands
- Realize we are both different (jivatman) and the same time one (paramatman) and be willing to follow our own unique path, our dharma
- Seek enlightenment or the experience of our true Self, Paramatman, in the way that suits our own nature.

And remember, in the Gita it is said:

“All paths, Arjuna, lead to me.” Ch 4v12

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