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1. Episode Title: Episode #46 – Bhagavad Gita (Chapter 3, Episode 46) - Karma or Jnana: How to choose between the two?

2. Topics & Tags:

TOPICS: This episode discusses the distinction between Karma Yogis and Jnana Yogis, emphasizing Krishna's instruction to Arjuna that performing one's prescribed duties (karma yoga) is beneficial and necessary even for those aspiring to be Jnana Yogis. It provides three key reasons for the importance of performing actions and explains different types of karma: Nithya (daily), Naimitthika (occasional), Kamya (desire-driven), and Nishiddha (forbidden). The teachings are reinforced by the example of Emperor Janaka and other wise elders who attained self-realization through dedicated action.

TAGS: HH Chinna Jeeyar Swami, Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 3, Episode 46, Karma Yoga, Jnana Yoga, Karma, Jnana, Duty, Self-realization, Atma Sakshatkara, Arjuna, Krishna, Janaka, Nithya Karma, Naimitthika Karma, Kamya Karma, Nishiddha Karma, Dharma, Spiritual path, Action, Knowledge, Samsiddhi, Lokasangraham, Veda, Guru Parampara, Sthitha Prajna, Isha Upanishad.

3. Main Content:

Jai Srimannarayana! Priya Bhagavadbandhus (Dear devotees of the Lord),

People are of two types: Karma yo:gis (those who perform actions) and Jna:na yo:gis (those who seek knowledge). Karma yo:gis are those who are always focused on fulfilling their duties. They continuously carry on with their duties believing that it is the right thing to do. A Jna:na yo:gi is one whose primary focus is not work, but highly focused on realizing his swaru:pa (true nature). He is focused on sa:dhana (spiritual practice) for realizing his swaru:pa. Such a person is called a Jna:na yo:gi. His swaru:pa (true nature) is to be desirous of a:thma sa:ksha:thka:ra (self-realization). The term self-realization sounds heavy. What can we do? The term gives that feeling. It’s okay. We can use it because we got used to it now. Some desire a:thma sa:ksha:thka:ra (self-realization). It is referred to as self-realization. Some are of this type. There are others who think they must be doing some kind of activity.

In Bhagavad Gita Chapter 3, Sri Krishna says, “Don’t think that only those who are Karma yo:gis have the need to perform their duties.” Even for one who has the right to be called a Jna:na yo:gi, the best thing is to keep working. In fact, it is not necessary to instruct a Karma yo:gi to do his work. Who needs the instruction? Even those with the right and the eligibility to be a Jna:na yo:gi are benefited by karma yo:ga (the path of action). “The same [karma yo:ga] is good for you too.” It becomes necessary to instruct this [to Jna:na yo:gis]. God delivers this message to Arjuna in chapter 3. Because Arjuna has the urge to transform and be a Jna:na yo:gi at any cost. [He feels] “Therefore, I don’t need karma (action).” Karma (action) here refers to the war that he is currently faced with. [He feels that] it would be good to abandon this and become a Jna:na yo:gi. That is why he asked what a sthitha prajna (one with unwavering knowledge) is like. He wondered if he could fit in there somewhere. If he could fit in anywhere there, it would be his excuse to give up war and settle down in a forest. That knowledge affirms that it is appropriate for him as well to perform karma (action). Despite having the eligibility to be a Jna:na yo:gi, karma yo:ga (the path of action) is still the best way forward. That’s the purpose.

How long should one keep ‘working’? He explains the answer in verse 3.19.

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SLOKA WORD -

sathatham karma sama:chara

asakthaha thasma:th sathatham karma sama:chara

SLOKA MEANING -

Continue to work. You must keep working until your last breath.

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Sri Krishna says, “Continue to work. You must keep working until your last breath.” Arjuna asks, “Can I not be a Jna:na yo:gi? What objection do you have to that?” Even for a Jna:na yo:gi, performing duty is the best way. Why? There are three reasons for that.

First one: To perform work appropriate to one’s abilities is prescribed, not forbidden. This is reason number one. If something is forbidden, it’s not necessary to do it. No one can even enforce it. Therefore, the first reason is that if something is not forbidden and you don’t lose anything doing it, then do it. For a doctor holding a knife, cutting and sewing with it is not forbidden. If you say you are more skilled than the doctor and try it even for treating a patient, you will be jailed. However, it is not a forbidden act for a doctor. It is a permitted karma (action). Therefore you must do it.

Second reason: Doing something out of desire, is a sin. It is called ka:myam (an act driven by desire). What you are doing is not a ka:mya karma (desire-driven action). We talked about types of karmas (actions) earlier: nithya karma (daily routine actions), naimitthika karma (occasional actions), ka:mya karma (desire-driven actions), nishiddha karma (forbidden actions). Four types of karma (actions). Nithya karmas (daily routine actions) are those done as part of daily routines. Waking up, taking a bath, eating, going around, sleeping, etc. These are all nithya karmas (daily routine actions). Some are done because of a nimittha (specific cause). Perhaps you had to climb a mountain. It is not a nithya karma (daily routine action). It is naimitthika (an act driven by a cause). You had some work to do and so you had to climb up. You came down later. This is naimitthika (occasional). Ka:mya karma (desire-driven action): You felt like taking a swim, looked up a pool, paid for it, had a swim, and came back. This is ka:mya karma (desire-driven action). There is a bathroom in one’s house. There is water. He can take a bath there. However, he wanted to do something for fun and so he went for a swim. This is called ka:mya (an act driven by a desire). Nithya karma (daily routine actions), naimitthika karma (occasional actions), and ka:mya karma (desire-driven actions) – Nishiddha karma (a forbidden act): You go to a graveyard and take a walk there because you have some time to spare. That is nishiddha karma (forbidden action). You shouldn’t go. You can go if there is a need. It is not a place to go to all the time. This is nishiddha (forbidden). Oh Arjuna! To fight in the war is not a nishiddha karma (forbidden action). It is a vidhi vihitha karma (an ordained responsibility) for you. Therefore, it is not a sin. It is not ka:mya (desire-driven). So, it is not a sin for you.

Third reason: It is recommended that you must happily work.

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SLOKA WORD -

kurvanne:ve:ha karma:ni jijivishe:th sathagam sama:ha

SLOKA MEANING -

One should desire to live for a hundred years by performing actions.

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Veda itself says so! kurvanne:va (by performing actions). Also, there is e:va (only/indeed) added to it as well. Meaning you must continue to work. You cannot give up karma (action) at any time. Hence, karma a:charana (performing work) is an instruction of God. Because of these three reasons, one cannot abandon doing his work. For how long did we say he must be performing karma (action)? sathatham (throughout life). So, if you do what’s fit for you, param a:pno:thi (you will attain the highest benefit). You will attain better benefit than what others would get. So, do it. Sri Krishna instructs in chapter 3, verse 19.

If we are doing something, we can check precedence to see what others did. What did the Wise do when they encountered a similar situation? We should know this. What did great previous Elders do? In verse 3.20, Sri Krishna shows this to Arjuna as a prama:na (means to knowledge/evidence).

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SLOKA WORD -

karmana iva hi samsiddhim a:stthitha: janaka:dayaha |

lo:ka sangraham e:va:pi sampasyan karthum arhasi ||

SLOKA MEANING -

Indeed, Janaka and others attained perfection only through action. You should also perform action, keeping in mind the welfare of the world.

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The emperor Janaka… Everyone in that dynasty is called Janakas. We know of one Janaka who is the father of mother Sita. He is Janaka but it seems this Janaka is like a family name. Everyone has the name Janaka and a first name. Example: Mehta. All the family has the name Mehta. One is Ram Mehta and another is Krishna Mehta and some other Mehta, etc. Janaka is such a shared name in their family. Scriptures reveal a name called Si:radhwaja for the Janaka who is the father of mother Sita. He is thus Si:radhwaja Janaka. There is another ancestor in the family, Hrasvaro:ma. He is emperor Hrasvaro:ma Janaka. So, they are all Janakas. Krishna says janaka:dayaha (Janaka and others). Not just [Si:radhwaja] Janaka but there are many others in a similar state. They are not ordinary beings. They are all ripened in knowledge. They have a firm state of mind with proper knowledge. They are Jna:na yo:gis (those who seek knowledge). Despite being Jna:na yo:gis (those who seek knowledge), karmana iva hi samsiddhim a:stthitha:ha (they all attained self-realization only through karma a:charana (doing their work)).

Let’s assume self-realization is the goal. There are two paths to that goal. One is karma a:charana (performing actions) leading to self-realization. Another is jna:na a:charana (practicing knowledge) leading to self-realization. Here, there is the path where one gains knowledge through karma (action) and attains self-realization. Veda stated another path where one need not gain knowledge with karma (action) but attain self-realization directly from karma (action). God is instructing this to be the appropriate path. Why? We looked at the reasons earlier. One is that it is easier for all beings with a body to exercise karma (action). So, it is sukaram (an easy thing to do). It is something one is habituated to do. It is vihitha (permitted). It is not nishiddha (forbidden). It is not sinful. It does not make you accrue or incur any sins. It is also God’s instruction. There is jna:na (knowledge) as well but as long as you are in the body, despite holding onto jna:na (knowledge), you can’t avoid some bodily activities. Right? There are very few great souls like Sri Suka and Namma:lwa:r who didn’t think of it as necessary. Others won’t have such a state. So, they should keep performing norms with respect to the body. They should keep offering the body what it needs. Therefore, in the path of jna:na (knowledge), there is a chance of downfall trying to take control of the body through various ways. Hence, instead of that, via the karmic path, practicing that which is easier, does not accrue sin, and as instructed by God, is appropriate.

Because Janaka and the others believed this firmly, karmana iva hi (only through action), karmana: e:va hi (only through action). Sri Krishna used two words that strengthen the premise. He didn’t say they attained samsiddhi (perfection) with karma (action). He said they attained karma (action) alone. [They attained self-realization] through karma (action) and through karma (action) alone! Two words are used to emphasize the point: karmana e:va hi (only through action). Janaka, as well as those others are not ordinary beings. He stood as a role model for everyone passing through the journey of life by performing karma (action). Despite being a great jna:ni (knower), he led life, taking responsibility for the kingdom. Isn’t that something ideal for all of us? Whatever is permitted, we must do that karma (action) without any hesitation. Following this, we must make our life a successful one. This is the best process. Oh Arjuna! You should follow the same process too. In verse 3.20, Sri Krishna is taking Arjuna ahead, preparing him to do his duty. We shall also gradually move forward along with him.

Vande: guru parampara:m (I bow to the lineage of teachers).

Jai Srimannarayana!

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