

Ārṣa Vidyā Gurukulam, Saylorsburg, PA,

33rd Anniversary – August 11, 2019 ¹

Swami Pratyagbodhananda Saraswati on Karma Yoga Māhātmyam

One of the important verses in the Bhagavad Gītā is:²

*sannyāsastu mahābāho duḥkhamāptumayogataḥ
yogayukto munirbrahma nacireṇādhigacchati*

sannyāsa becomes a tragedy if a person is not ready (*ayogataḥ*), meaning not having the right mental disposition. A mature person (*yogataḥ*) alone can live the life of *sannyāsa*, a contemplative life. A *sannyāsī* lives with the teacher, does *pramāṇa-vicāra*, and learns Vedānta or the knowledge of the Self. Bhagavad Gītā or *śruti*, meaning the Upaniṣads, address only two persons. One



is a *karma-yogī* and the other is a *karma-sannyāsī*. Both are *jijñāsus*. A *jijñāsu* is the one who only wants knowledge and nothing less than that. A *jijñāsu* is a *mumukṣu*, one who desires freedom, and freedom can be gained only in terms of knowledge. This fact is very clear to both *karma-yogī* as well as *karma-sannyāsī*. A *karma-yogī* performs *karma*, daily duties (*nitya-karma*), and occasional duties (*naimittika-karma*), with a certain attitude. Whatever action a *karma-yogī* does, he/she does it enthusiastically and cheerfully. Doing a *karma* such as *pūja*, he/she performs it with enthusiasm. There is never a weariness, *āyāsa*, while performing the *karma*. He/she looks upon the *pūja* as the time one can spend with Bhagavān. My teachers, Swami Chinmayanandaji and Swami Dayanandaji, were always enthusiastic in teaching. I remember one time when after Swami Dayanandaji finished a course, Chinmayanandaji nonchalantly asked him, “When are you starting the next one?” Both the teachers were always positive and energetic. Once, some of the students of Swami Dayanandaji, told him that they wanted to retire. Swamiji immediately said, “What retirement? I am still working! Keep working. There is no retirement!” A *karma-yogī* keeps performing actions happily, as an offering to *īśvara*, as other-centered actions, and as a contributor. In this regard, he/she has this clarity of purpose in performing the duties. In due course, the *karma-yogī* gains the mental preparedness, in terms of emotional maturity, and a relative cheerfulness, required for the knowledge of the Self.

1 The 33rd anniversary of the Arsha Vidya Gurukulam, Saylorsburg, PA, USA was conducted on August 11, 2019 at the newly inaugurated Swami Dayananda Vijñāna Bhavanam. The talk by Swami Pratyagbodhanandaji on this occasion is summarized here. The talk was transcribed and edited by Krishnanand Maillacheruvu and V. Swaminathan, respectively.

2 संन्यासस्तु महाबाहो दुःखमाप्तुमयोगतः ।

योगयुक्तो मुनिर्ब्रह्म नचिरेणाधिगच्छति ॥ (Bhagavad Gītā 5.6)

Renunciation of action, Arjuna, the mighty armed, is difficult to accomplish without karma-yoga. Whereas, one who is committed to a life of karma-yoga and is capable of reasoning, gains brahman quickly. ((Note that the translations of the Gītā verses referred in this article are taken from Śrīmad Bhagavad Gītā, Swami Dayananda Saraswati, Arsha Vidya Research Publication Trust, Chennai, India, 5th reprint, 2015.)

The words of Vedānta serve like a mirror. Just as one looks in the mirror to see oneself, exposing oneself to the words of Vedānta, one gains the knowledge of oneself, provided one has the preparedness of the mind. The preparedness of the mind is nothing but the emotional maturity. One has to gain the maturity through *karma-yoga*. As Swami Dayanandaji used to say that a person is either mature or is maturing. He would never say that one is immature. *Karma*, performed with an attitude of *yoga*, provides the field for one to mature, to neutralize one's likes and dislikes, that is to convert one's binding desires into non-binding desires. One has to gain the maturity to manage one's likes and dislikes. It should not be the other way that one is managed by one's attachments and aversions. One who has accomplished the mastery over one's likes and dislikes is a *yogī* or a *yuktaḥ*. He/she can be a *karma-yogī* or a *karma-sannyāsī*. With consistent exposure to the Vedāntic teaching for a length of time, he/she gains the knowledge of the Self, and becomes a *jīvan-muktaḥ*. He/she is extolled as a *sthitaprajñah*.

Thus, Lord Kṛṣṇa advocates to Arjuna, “*tasmādyogī bhavārjuna* therefore, be a *yogin*.”³ Lord Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna to perform his duties as a *kṣatriya* in safeguarding *dharma*. In everyone's life, during all the waking hours, there are duties and duties. Swami Dayanandaji said that a person performing his/her own duties will be very humble. Why so? Because he/she knows that all the duties cannot be completely performed. The wife is humble because she knows that she cannot do all that she needs to do for the husband or family. The husband is also humble because he knows that he cannot fulfill all his duties towards the family. Therefore, a person who has duties is a humble person. One is humble in the sense that one refrains from demanding one's rights without performing first one's duties. The wife performing her duties towards the husband, the latter's rights are taken care of. If the husband performs his duties towards the wife, then her rights are taken care of. If one performs the duties towards others, and they reciprocate in turn, there are no conflicts. Conflict arises only when one asks for the right without performing one's duty. The concept of duty is ingrained in the Indian culture. This is our tradition. This is emphasized repeatedly in the Gītā in statements such as “*yogasthaḥ kuru karmāṇi*,” “*niyataṃ kuru karma tvaṃ*.”⁴ This is *karma-yoga* and is so beautiful!

Ego always manifests as one's likes and dislikes. How does one neutralize them every time they arise? This is done only through *karma-yoga* and this is beautifully exemplified by Lord Kṛṣṇa dancing on the head of the *kāliya nāga*. Every time the hood of *kāliya* goes up, the Lord strikes it. The poison comes out and the *nāga* becomes poison-free. Similarly, when the likes and dislikes come up, performing the actions with the attitude of *karma-yoga* neutralizes them. One is rendered free from the poison of likes and dislikes.

3 तपस्विभ्योऽधिको योगी ज्ञानिभ्योऽपि मतोऽधिकः ।

कर्मिभ्यश्चाधिको योगी तस्माद्योगी भवार्जुन ॥ (Bhagavad Gītā 6.46)

A *yogin* is considered superior to those who live a life of meditation, superior even to the scholars, and superior to those who perform action. Therefore, Arjuna! be a *yogin*.

4 योगस्थः कुरु कर्माणि सङ्गं त्यक्त्वा धनञ्जय ।

सिद्ध्यसिद्ध्योः समो भूत्वा समत्वं योग उच्यते ॥ (Bhagavad Gītā 2.48)

Remaining steadfast in yoga, Dhanañjaya, perform actions abandoning attachment, and remaining the same to success and failure. The evenness of mind is called yoga.

नियतं कुरु कर्म त्वं कर्म ज्यायो ह्यकर्मणः ।

शरीरयात्रापि च ते न प्रसिद्ध्येदकर्मणः ॥ (Bhagavad Gītā 3.8)

Do action that is to be done because action is superior to inaction. Even the maintenance of your body would be impossible by inaction.

One final thing that I want to share with you is the story of Mahārāja Parīkṣit. Swami Dayanandaji encouraged me to talk about Bhāgavatam. He told me, “You know both Vedānta and Bhāgavatam, and it is a very good combination.” While hunting in the forest, losing his bearings because of his hunger and thirst, Parīkṣit committed an *aparādha* to Śamīka ṛṣi by putting a dead snake around his neck. Finding the dead snake around the neck of his father, the ṛṣi's son, Śṛṅgī, was enraged, and cursed that the doer of the act will meet his death in seven days by a live snake. Thus, the cursed Parīkṣit knew that his death is imminent in seven days. He had no tension and was asking all the learned *maharṣis* only one question. “My death is around the corner. What shall I do? What should I listen to? What should I not listen to? How should I spend my time in these seven days?” Nobody could give him *amṛtatvam*, immortality, in seven days. Then, there arrived Śukadeva son of *maharṣi* Vyāsa, who always talked about reality.⁵ When you want to know, the teacher always comes to you. You are all here today. I am sure that every one of you can tell a story as to how you came to Arsha Vidya Gurukulam. Some *puṇyam* brought you here to get the *darśan* of Lord Dakṣiṇāmūrti and then the *darśan* of this teaching also. Parīkṣit surrendered to Śukadeva. He listened to the Bhāgavatam narrated by Śukadeva, forgetting his hunger and thirst, the very same things that brought him the curse of death. Having comprehended Śukadeva's teaching, “*ahaṃ brahma paraṃ dhāma brahmāhaṃ paramaṃ padam* I am *brahman*, the absolute and the ultimate destination, and that *brahman* is me,”⁶ Parīkṣit says in so many words, “*siddho'smyanugṛhīto'smi*,” “*praviṣṭo brahmanirvāṇamabhayaṃ*,” “I am blessed and have become fulfilled,” “I have gained that *brahman* which is free from fear.”⁷ One can see the *pratyakṣa mokṣa* of Parīkṣit.⁸ He gained *mokṣa* in seven days!

Therefore, a person who is a *jijñāsu* definitely gains *mokṣa*. He has no bad lot. Only thing that we require in our life is “*athāto brahmajijñāsā*,” “thereafter, therefore, an inquiry of *brahman*.”⁹ The word, *atha* (thereafter), is very important. After equipping oneself with the necessary qualifications, one begins the inquiry of *brahman*. The preparedness, in terms of the purification of the mind, brings out a desire to know. And knowledge alone can liberate. To gain this knowledge one goes to a teacher.¹⁰ One day, during the course, Swami Dayanandaji was making a joke. He said that earlier the students would go to a teacher and teacher will sit in one place and teach. Nowadays, the student goes and comes back, the teacher sits in one place! This is the difference between then and now. The teaching remains the same. Om.

5 The etymology of the word Śuka: शुद्धं शुक्लं कायति (गायति) इति शुकः *śuddhaṃ śuklaṃ kāyati (gāyati) iti śukaḥ*. One who sounds (or sings) that which is pure, unsullied is *śukaḥ*. [root कै (1, P) → शब्दे *kai* → *śabde*, to sound, *kāyati*; also, root गै (1, P) → शब्दे *gai* → *śabde*, to sing, to speak in singing manner, *gāyati*.]

6 अहं ब्रह्म परं धाम ब्रह्माहं परमं पदम् । (Śrīmad Bhāgavatam 12.5.11)

7 "सिद्धोऽस्म्यनुगृहीतोऽस्मि," (Śrīmad Bhāgavatam 12.6.2); "प्रविष्टो ब्रह्मनिर्वाणमभयं," (Śrīmad Bhāgavatam 12.6.5)

8 प्राक्कूले बर्हिष्यासीनो गङ्गाकूल उदङ्मुखः । ब्रह्मभूतो महायोगी निःसङ्गश्छिन्नसंशयः ॥ (Śrīmad Bhāgavatam 12.6.10)
prākkūle barhiṣyāsīno gaṅgākūla udaṅmukhaḥ | brahmabhūto mahāyogī niḥsaṅgaśchinnaśaṃśayaḥ ||
 Seated on the banks of gaṅgā, on darbha grass that are spread facing east, himself facing the north, Parīkṣit, who was free from attachments, and doubts became brahman (brahma bhūtaḥ bhavati).

9 अथातो ब्रह्मजिज्ञासा (Brahmasūtra, 1.1.1)

10 तद्विज्ञानार्थं स गुरुमेवाभिगच्छेत् समित्पाणिः श्रोत्रियं ब्रह्मनिष्ठम् । तद्विज्ञानार्थं स गुरुमेवाभिगच्छेत् समित्पाणिः श्रोत्रियं ब्रह्मनिष्ठम् (Muṇḍakopaniṣad, 1.2.12) To gain the knowledge of brahman, he must go with sacrificial twigs in hand to a teacher who is well-versed in scriptures, and who has clear knowledge about brahman. (Muṇḍakopaniṣad, Part 1 Swami Dayananda Saraswati, Arsha Vidya Research Publication Trust, Chennai, India, 2006.)