

# Nishkama Karma.

( Action Without Desire For Fruit )

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कर्मजं बुद्धियुक्ता हि फलं त्यक्त्वा मनीषिणः ।  
जन्मबन्धविनिर्मुक्ताः पदं गच्छन्त्यनामयम् ॥

“Wise men endowed with the Yoga (of Equanimity) renouncing the fruit of actions and freed from the fetters of birth, attain the blissful Supreme State”.

( Gita II. 51 )

The above verse points to the goal of a Niṣkāma Karmayogī. This goal is the attainment of the super-nal abode of eternal happiness. Happiness is the incentive to all action in the world. It proceeds from love and normally extends to one's family, other dependants and friends. With the growth of the soul, however, love expands and covers the community, country and finally the world at large, including within its orbit men as well as other creatures. At this advanced stage, unity of all life is realized, which brings eternal happiness to the Karmayogī. This is what is meant by realization of God by those who believe in His existence.

2. All living beings engage themselves in action in constant pursuit of happiness. Among them, man, who is endowed with discretion, acts with knowledge and a will; he is therefore responsible for his action. Beings occupying a lower level of existence stand on a different footing altogether. Nature has not blessed them with discretion; they act by instinct and are not responsible for their action. Karma is a necessity of life; without Karma existence itself would be impossible. Karma invariably bears fruit with the seed of rebirth in it, except when done without attachment and desire for return of any kind, but purely as an act of worship of God, or as disinterested service of humanity and other living beings, which is one of the chief methods of worship of God. Karma originates from Prakṛti, or the potential power of God and is of three kinds, *viz.*, Niṣiddha Karma, Sakāma Karma and Niṣkāma Karma, corresponding to the three respective

qualities (Gūṇas) of Prakṛti, which are Tamas, Rajas, and Sattva.

3. Niṣiddha Karma is action opposed to the laws of nature and forbidden by scriptures as it is harmful both to the doer and others involved in it. It hinders the spiritual growth of the soul, results invariably in its rebirth and is a source of great suffering to the doer, which may spread over a single life or a number of lives, according to the nature of the action. Such action is undertaken through delusion, regardless of its consequences and without consideration of one's capacity for it and is Rajasic or Tamasic by nature. The devotees of Tamasic action are unfit to be members of decent society.

4. Sakāma Karma is action done with self-interest, attachment and a desire for fruit. It bears the seed of rebirth to the soul, necessary for enjoying the fruit of action done. Sakāma Karma is natural in an average man, is inevitable in the early stages of human evolution and is preferable to Niṣiddha Karma, being generally harmless or less harmful to others. Such action is classed as mixture of Sattvic and Rājasa. Love for Sakāma Karma, done as service of mankind and other living beings, gradually matures into love for Niṣkāma Karma which is capable of ensuring eternal happiness. The effort involved in Karma, whether Sakāma or Niṣkāma, is the same; therefore Niṣkāma Karma is in all respects preferable to Sakāma Karma. As a step leading to Niṣkāma Karma,

Sakāma Karma has the sanction of the scriptures.

5. Niṣkāma Karma is action done as one's duty, without attachment and a desire for fruit. It is Sattvic in quality and ensures one's spiritual advancement leading to the realization of the goal of human existence. It fulfils Nature's laws and is highly recommended by scriptures. Niṣkāma Karma ordinarily consists of the service of God's manifestations at different stages of evolution *viz.*, men and other sub-human creatures suited to their respective needs, without expectation of return of any kind. The *Bhagavadgītā* recommends such selfless action because it contributes to general good and the devotee is thereby liberated from the bondage of rebirth. Niṣkāma Karma is complete when the fruit thereof is surrendered to God.

6. It is sometimes asked: how is it possible to lead a family life if man devotes himself entirely to Niṣkāma Karma and does nothing to maintain himself and his dependants? A little reflection will, however, show that there is really no scope for such a question. Man has no need to give up family life to be able to perform Niṣkāma Karma. He is bound to do, as a sacred duty, all that he can for the well-being of himself and his family instead of their being a burden on society; further his services should embrace others in need of help and sympathy, as far as circumstances may permit. What is wanted is only a change in mental attitude. He should

learn to serve his family and others outside the family without egoism, regarding them as part of the whole, *i. e.*, the world consisting of all kinds of life whose welfare is in the charge of its Lord, the Almighty God, and look upon himself as God's humble servant for carrying out his behests. All services rendered by him with this elevated outlook will be Nişkāma Karma. He has no need to neglect himself; on the contrary, he should look after himself and thus maintain him as a fit servant of God. As a devotee he need have no doubts regarding his own future in the face of the Lord's assurance that He takes upon Himself all responsibility for the welfare of His devotee. In short, the Nişkāma Karmayogī is expected to wipe out his egoism and look upon God as the only protector of the world, and to do such service as comes in his way with sincerity and without attachment and desire for fruit. From Sakāma Karma to Nişkāma Karma is a big leap; it is a process of slow growth which takes time proportionate to the intensity of effort of the aspirant. With faith and persevering practice, man can so regulate his life that all his activities may be made Nişkāma (disinterested) with resultant benefit to himself and to the world at large.

7. According to the Vedānta, God is both transcendent (Nirguṇa) and immanent (Saguṇa). In the first state He is formless, inconceivable and indescribable; the holy scriptures (Vedas) also describe Him inadequately. Perfected souls realize Him, but like

the Vedas they are unable to describe Him. Vedānta holds that such perfected souls get indissolubly united with Him, thus leaving none with first hand experience to describe Him to the world.

8. The Saguṇa state of God has two aspects:—Saguṇa Nirākāra and Saguṇa Sākāra. In the Saguṇa Nirākāra state He is Saguṇa because of His manifesting Himself as the universe with the aid of His potential power consisting of the Guṇas (Guṇamayī Māyā); still He is Nirākāra (formless) because He is all-pervading and has no special form. He is described as Sachchidānanda-Nitya-Nirmala (existence, consciousness, bliss, eternity and purity). It is He whom followers of all religions, on the face of the earth, worship with faith and love, in different ways according to the different routine adopted by the different religions. He is the creator, preserver and destroyer of the universe. The act of creation is described as His Līlā (sport) or Svabhāva (nature). But preservation of the universe and subsequent destruction of it (necessary for a fresh evolution) are a Yajña (sacrifice), an act of self-imposed unselfish service of the world, undertaken by the Lord out of unparalleled love for the souls (Jīvātmā) of His own creation.

9. In the Saguṇa Sākāra state God manifests Himself in a concrete form, such as that of an incarnation (Avatāra) in the discharge of His self-imposed mission referred to above; in other words, in furtherance of evolution and more especially to

teach mankind how to achieve spiritual perfection by selfless action for the good of the world and thus arrest the progress of degeneration of mankind. In the *Saguṇa Sākāra* state God mixes with man and gives him lessons in *Niṣkāma Karma* both by example and precept as in the cases of *Śrī Rāma* and *Śrī Kṛṣṇa*.

10. Mother Nature, too, since her manifestation, has been following the path of *Niṣkāma Karma* for the benefit of the world. The sun, moon, stars, sea, rivers, trees and the elements including mother earth serve the world without any return. This selfless service is a great contribution to the Divine *Yajña*. Man owes his existence to God and Nature and he is morally bound to contribute his quota to the said *Yajña* by working in harmony with them and following their example of selfless service. Action done in a selfless spirit cannot but be a contribution to the said *Yajña*, wherein lies the general good of mankind and other sub-human creatures. Action done except as a contribution to the Divine *Yajña* becomes a cause of bondage. Therefore man is recommended to do his duty with faith and love without any selfish motive and attachment. Duty discharged in this spirit is called *Niṣkāma Karma* and brings about *Chittaśuddhi* (purification of the heart) without which there can be neither spiritual perfection nor real happiness. The Lord rewards His devotees for their selfless action with divine wisdom and eternal happiness. Co-operation with God and Nature by

man may be compared to the honest co-operation of the adult members of the family with its head, for the good of the entire family, including servants and even the family pets (animals and birds); where such co-operation is wanting peace is denied to the family and where there is no peace there can be no real happiness, and instead there is sure to be suffering. All suffering in the world can be traced to such non-co-operation on the part of man with God and Nature, based on ignorance. Universal brotherhood of man, rather of all kinds of life, is another justification for selfless service by man.

11. The capacity to engage oneself in unalloyed *Niṣkāma Karma* shows a state of perfection. But it is worth while mentioning that a practicant begins to experience peace and happiness the moment he seriously begins to tread the path of *Niṣkāma Karmayoga*. If he occasionally experiences any sense of suffering it is an indication that his non-attachment and desirelessness for fruit was not sufficiently developed. This, however, is only a passing phase in the life of a persevering *Sādhaka*. When at a later stage he begins to realize the unity of life he rises above all sense of suffering and is firmly installed in the abode of eternal happiness. He, then, does not require to engage himself in action, because in that state of spiritual perfection he enjoys uninterrupted peace. But so long as his body lasts and he is physically and mentally fit, he generally engages himself in *Niṣkāma*

Karma to set an example to ignorant people to enable them to work out their evolution by Karmayoga. Thus under all circumstances Nişkāma Karma is a necessity for unhindered progress of evolution, which results in liberation of the soul from the bondage of rebirth, followed by an unmixed eternal happiness or bliss, which is the goal of human existence. Such is the greatness of the Nişkāma Karmayoga. A follower of this Yoga should not, however, for that reason, unsettle the faith of a Sakāma Karmayogī. He may certainly try to gradually raise the latter up to the heights of the spiritual level to which he himself has risen by patient, persevering and unselfish service.

12. The above lines imply faith in the existence of God and belief

in rebirth of the soul. But there are people who sincerely disbelieve in both, but who believe in the necessity of service of humanity and they cannot be ignored. The doctrine of Nişkāma Karma is sure to appeal to them in pursuance of their self-imposed mission of service of humanity strengthened by the unique example of Mother Nature whose existence cannot be doubted and who is constantly engaged in Nişkāma Karma for the benefit of all living beings.

13. The conclusion is that for reasons given above Nişkāma Karma is a necessity of evolution whose purpose is spiritual perfection of the Jīvātmā (individual soul) and his unification with the Paramātmā (universal soul), who is the fountain of eternal Bliss.

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