

ŚRĪMADBHAGAVADGĪTĀ INTERPRETATION SUMMARY

Chapter 4: Jñāna-Karma-Sannyāsa-Yoga

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Make your action (karma) into inaction (akarma) by detaching from the results

The fourth chapter of Śrīmad Bhagavad Gītā “*Jñāna Karma Sanyāsa Yoga - The Yoga of Knowledge and Disciplines of Action and Knowledge*”.

The session began with prayers to Paramātmā, and Śrī Hanuman Chalisa followed by the lighting of an auspicious lamp of enlightenment.

In the past sessions, there have been discussions on Karma-Yoga, a piece of important knowledge for emancipation from the vagaries in life. During the last few weeks, “Gītā Jayanti” was celebrated with a lot of hard work to spread the message of Bhagavad Gītā to the masses worldwide. This **Granth** is ancient, but its teachings are beyond time and geographical boundaries. This eternal knowledge came from Śrīmukh of Yogeshwar Śrī Krishna as a discourse between Arjuna and HIM, but this is for all human beings. Śrī Krishna could have directed Arjuna to do his Karma but HE chose the more difficult task to impart this eternal knowledge for his transformation and the welfare of all human beings. Like Arjuna, all human beings find themselves in confusion in day-to-day life. One can find a solution in Gītā. Slokas in Gītā are not just syllables but Mantras. “*Mananāt trāyatē iti mantrah*” is the definition of the word mantra in Sanskrit. Sustained repetition (**Mananāt**) protects (**trāyatē**) from all miseries of life, they liberate from the cycle of birth and death.

Śrī Krishna tells about the importance of Karma Yoga and HIS birth “**janma karma cha me divyam evaṁ yo vetti tattvataḥ**”. There is a difference in birth and Karma of common people and of Śrī Krishna. Śrī Krishna's birth and **Karma** are divine, who understand this is liberated from the cycle of death and birth.

In various Slokas Śrī Krishna tells about how to know that supreme **Brahma** to get liberation. Gītā provides a bouquet of solutions to all kinds of people. In Sloka 11 Shri Bhagavān says

“*ye yathā māṁ prapadyante*”

I reciprocate with people the way they surrender to me.

Śrī Krishna sets standards for **Karma Yoga** doing HIS work in a detached manner as HE says people follow the path laid by HIM "**mama vartmānuvartante**".

4.12

kāñkṣantaḥ(kh) karmaṇām(m) siddhiṃ(m), yajanta iha devatāḥ, kṣipraṃ(m) hi mānuṣe loke, siddhirbhavati karmajā. 4.12

In this world of human beings, men seeking the fruition of their activities, worship the gods; for success born of actions follows quickly.

This earth is **Karma Bhumi** for all human beings in Karma Yoni. For running and sustenance of life, one has to work. For success in the activities of life, men worship the celestial Gods "**yajanta iha devatāḥ**" and offer sacrifices to them. The fruits of such **Karma** are quickly attained. When one faces problems in life, a quick solution is desired. When Arjuna was moving to the battlefield he was advised to perform Puja to Ma Durga, the Goddess of valor, to seek HER blessings. When Ravana could not be killed in the battlefield even after many days of fighting, Sage Agastya advised Śrī Rama to seek blessings of HIS Kula Devata - Aditya. For quick resolution of day-to-day problems, one may worship **Devatas**. However, one should not lose focus on the ultimate objective of life to get liberation.

4.13

cāturvarṇyaṃ(m) mayā sṛṣṭaṃ(ñ), guṇakarmavibhāgaśaḥ, tasya kartāRāmapi māṃ(m), viddhyakartāRāmavyayam. 4.13

The four orders of society (viz., the Brāhmana, the Kṣatriya, the Vaiśya and the śūdra) were created by Me, classifying them according to the Guṇas predominant in each and apportioning corresponding duties to them; though the originator of this creation, know Me, the Immortal Lord, to be a non-doer.

For the integrated development of society, all people have to work according to their capacity and strength accordingly people were classified into four classes (**Varna**). The material energy consists of three Gunas- Sattvic, Rajasic, and Tamasic. All creations out of material energy are constituted of these three modes of nature in different proportions. The predominance of any one of these defines the intellect of the person. This intellect is responsible for defining the behavior and inclination to perform Karmas, which is known as the inherent quality of the individual. Such classification of human beings is eternal, irrefutable, and without geographical or ethnic differences. A person is dexterous in the profession according to this division, for illustration-

- **Sattvic** - Tapas, Study, and self control- **Brahmana**
- **Rajasic** - Action, domination, martial and war-**Kṣatriya**
- **Tamasic** - Service, physical labor- **Shudras**
- **Rajasic + Tamasic**- Trade and business- **Vysya**

This distribution was based on attributes and professional skill; it was horizontal with mobility from one to another.

All creation evolves from the energy of Paramātmā, but HE is not responsible for its functions (**akartāram**) though it has been created by HIM (**kartāram**). In an examination system, students perform differently from one another according to their abilities, the examiner creates the system, but remains neutral in the evaluation of students.

4.14

**na māṃ(ñ) karmāṇi limpanti, na me karmaphale sprhā,
iti māṃ(m) yo'bhijānāti, karmabhirna sa badhyate. 4.14**

Since I have no craving for the fruit of actions, actions do not taint Me. Even he who thus knows Me in reality is not bound by actions.

Karmic actions bind those who perform them with the desire to enjoy the fruits. The whole universe is the creation of Paramātmā but HE remains unattached to it and without any desire to enjoy it. Śrī Bhagavān says HE is not tainted nor karma are binding on HIM as HIS actions are not for any desires for fruits or any expectations out of them. Śrī Krishna says there are so many births of HIM, “**bahūni me vyatītāni janmāni**”. HIS births are divine but births of common man are bound by **Prakṛtic** rules.

Punarapi Jananam Punarapi Maranam Punarapi Jananeejathare Shayanam

Iha Samsare Bahudustaare Kripayaa paare Paahi Murare

Śrī Krishna sets an example for all human beings not to attach to Karma or its fruits to break free from the bondage of Karma and to achieve liberation.

4.15

**evaṃ(ñ) jñātvā kṛtaṃ(ñ) karma, pūrvairapi mumukṣubhiḥ,
kuru karmaiva tasmāttvaṃ(m), pūrvaiḥ(ph) pūrvataraṃ(ñ) kṛtam. 4.15**

Having known thus, action was performed even by the ancient seekers for liberation; therefore, do you also perform actions as have been performed by the ancients from antiquity.

In ancient times, seekers of liberation (**mumukṣhubhiḥ**) knew that **Nishkama Karma** is the foundation for liberation. In the Bhagavad Gītā, **Nishkama Karma** is accentuated as the easiest tapa for liberation for worldly people. It is reiterated in this Sloka, to follow the path of ancient sages and perform duties without attachment and for the pleasure of Paramātmā.

4.16

**kiṃ(ñ) karma kimakarmeti, kavayo'pyatra mohitāḥ,
tatte karma praVākṣyāmi, yajñātvā mokṣyase'śubhāt. 4.16**

What is action and what is inaction? Even men of intelligence are puzzled over this question. Therefore, I shall expound to you the truth about action, knowing which you will be freed from its evil effects i.e., the shackles of karma.

It is a riddle to understand what is **Karma, Akarma and Vikarma**. It puzzles even Rishis, Jnanis, and Sadhus to describe what proper action is, and what improper action is. Śrī Bhagavān is about to reveal it, after knowing which one is liberated from inauspicious **Karma**. Inauspicious karmas bind the person (**Karma Bandhana**).

4.17

karmaṇo hyapī boddhavyaṃ(m), boddhavyaṃ(ñ) ca vikarmaṇaḥ, akarmanāśca boddhavyaṃ(ñ), gahanā karmaṇo gatiḥ. 4.17

The truth about action must be known and the truth of inaction also must be known; even so, the truth about prohibited action (Vikarma) must be known. For, mysterious are the ways of action.

Śrī Bhagavān reveals three types of work, which should be known (**boddhavyam**) because the path of Karma is difficult and deep to understand.

- **Karma**: action- performance of duty as prescribed in scriptures
- **Akarma**: inaction- Karmas performed without attachment to them and their results
- **Vikarma**: prohibited karma- such activities which are prohibited by scriptures and are detrimental to the soul. In some interpretations, these actions are categorized as special and to be done with intense attention.

These three categories of Karmas are different from one another, they are not opposites. Performance of prescribed duties is necessary for all creatures for running the Samsara and for their sustenance but one should keep **Karma Yoga** in mind.

4.18

karmaṇyakarma yaḥ(ph) paśyed, akarmani ca karma yaḥ, sa buddhimānmanuṣyeṣu, sa yuktaḥ(kh) kṛtsnakarmakṛt. 4.18

He who sees inaction in action, and action in inaction, is wise among men; he is a Yogī, who has performed all actions.

Paramātmā explains about action and inaction, in this shloka:

- **karmaṇyakarma yaḥ paśyed :-** In karma when one is able to see akarma. The best examples of those who display this trait are our freedom fighters, who just fought for the cause because this was something they brought onto themselves to do (**kartavya**) with detachment to its fruits.
- **akarmani ca karma yaḥ :-** HE asks us to have a vision of seeing **akarma** (inaction) in a state of **karma** (action) viz., The Sun God performs all actions by just being there and doing nothing, just his mere presence is enough for the world to lighten up and go about its respective duties. When a person with authority and position (Principal, Boss, etc) is present it brings about more discipline and order. All that he/she does is just his/her mere presence.
- **sa buddhimānmanuṣyeṣu, sa yuktaḥ kṛtsnakarmakṛt. :-** Before understanding the concept of karma, akarma and vikarma we should understand the importance of understanding this concept. Bhagavān Śrī Krishna says that, 'He who understands it is truly a wise man (**buddhimaan**) and also a yogi (**sayukthaha**) and he is a **kritsnakrit** - one who performs all actions to its perfection.

We will be able to achieve this by consciously monitoring our actions to see if it is the results that drive us or just the mere action of performing that karma. This self reflection does not apply for only one day, but must be a regular practice that we build gradually. Once this is developed our perspective changes and we become wise and perfect. Our actions so performed will cease to have a binding on us, thereby Paramātmā makes us tread the wise path and makes us buddhimaan which also resonates in the name of the chapter **jnanakarmasannyasayoga**, aptly named by Maharishi

4.19

yasya sarve samārambhāḥ(kh), kāmasañkalpavarjitāḥ, jñānāgnidagdhakarmāṇam(n), tamāhuḥ(ph) paṇḍitaṃ(m) budhāḥ. 4.19

Even the wise call him a sage, whose undertakings are all free from desire and Sankalpa (thoughts of the world) and whose actions are burnt up by the fire of wisdom.

- **yasya sarve samārambhāḥ:-** Whatever we undertake/decide to do
- **kāmasañkalpavarjitāḥ :-** When every action is done without any desire (**kama**) or motive (**sankalapa**) and with an understanding that we do not want anything (**varjitah**) and they are done just because it is our duty .
- **jñānāgnidagdhakarmāṇam :-** when the karma done/knowledge so obtained is roasted in fire of wisdom
- **tamāhuḥ paṇḍitaṃ budhāḥ :-** that person is called a Pandit. Pandabuddhi takes us towards **atmajnana**.

Performing karma in the right way leads us to acquire the eternal truth and Yogeshwar Himself calls such people wise men. Hence it is also important to understand the consequences of our knowledge. They can affect us if the desire is biased and they can bring about our downfall. It can take us to a supreme level of knowledge if understood and implemented rightly. Doing karma will yield a result and our perspective should be in a way that we are not aiming for a particular type of result and are attached to it. Gradually, by practice our karma gets converted to akarma and this transition is what Bhagavān wants all of us to achieve so as to reach a higher level of understanding. This is the theoretical approach Paramātmā implores everyone to follow.

4.20

tyaktvā karmaphalāsaṅgam(n), nityatrpto nirāśrayaḥ, karmaṇyabhipravṛtto'pi, naiva kiñcitkaroti saḥ. 4.20

He, who, having totally given up attachment to actions and their fruit, no longer depends on anything in the world, and is ever content, does nothing at all, though fully engaged in action.

Leaving/abandoning (**tyaktvā**) our attachments behind and having no expectation of the rewards or appreciation (**karmaphalāsaṅgam**) should be our only focus. eg., We have embarked on a journey to read and study Bhagavad Gītā because it is a sacred text and not because we would be looked upon highly or that everyone should listen to us.

When one practices detachment to the results of the action performed then automatically he become self contented (**nityatrpta**). A mother brings up the child and takes care of it. If she does not expect the child to return the same caring emotion in her old age and is contented at doing her duty, she is **nityatrpta** even when the child doesn't reciprocate her feelings. **Ishvar** describes such a person as **nirāśraya** (never dependent on anything and staying happy forever). Such a contented person who is not dependent on anything, when engaged in all the actions (**karmaṇyabhipravṛtto'pi**) would appear to be doing nothing (**naiva kiñcitkaroti saḥ**). Gradually the state of akarma comes to us and we find ourselves wise, happy and self contented. Along with these we also imbibe further qualities as discussed in the upcoming shloka.

4.21

nirāśīryatacittātmā, tyaktasarvaparigrahaḥ, śārīraṃ(ñ) kevalaṃ(ñ) karma, kurvannāpnoti kilbiṣam. 4.21

Having subdued his mind and body, and having given up all objects of enjoyment, free from craving, he who performs sheer bodily action, does not incur sin.

Such a person who is self contented (**nirāśīr**) does not have any hopes nor does he expect anything, and his mind is under complete control (**yatacittātmā**). Sometimes we get mentally disturbed when we are not recognized or felicitated but these trivial things do not matter to a true karma yogi because he only focuses on doing his duty and his mind is totally under control and free from desires.

They are free from attachment (**tyaktasarvaparigrahaḥ**) to not only materialistic possessions, but also their **ahankaar** (ego of being a doer). eg., when donating money for charity (which is a good cause) one should not have the feeling that it is his wealth that is being distributed, because it has a subtle hint of arrogance that " I am the doer". A true karma yogi is devoid of feeling of possession and it is only his body that acts an instrument in performing the action (**śārīraṃ kevalaṃ karma**) without any excessive attachment and his mind totally under control. Such people incur no sin (**kurvannāpnoti kilbiṣam**) because they are self contented and happy and do it as part of their duty. The intent in which an action is performed determines whether we incur a sin or not . For eg., A doctor and a murderer both use a knife; but the doctor uses it to save lives whilst the murderer uses it for his own gain. The action performed in both the instances are the same but the intent is different, so the former act cannot be considered a sin but the latter is. Hence our intent should be clean, without expecting anything in return with mind under complete control and when a task is performed under such conditions there is no sin in performing it.

4.22

yadṛcchālābhasantuṣṭo, dvandvātīto vimatsaraḥ, śamaḥ(s) siddhāvasiddhau ca, kṛtvāpi na nibadhyate. 4.22

The Karmayogī, who is contented with whatever is got unsought, is free from jealousy and has transcended all pairs of opposites like joy and grief, and is balanced in success and failure, is not bound by his action.

There is no strong desire(**yadṛcchālābha**) for any thing and they are self contented and happy (**santuṣṭo**) with whatever they have. They consider everything to be **Hari iccha** , the wish of Bhagavān whether they get or do not get what they want they are not worried about it.

If the mind goes beyond the dualities (**dvandvātīto**) like **sukh/dukh, maan/apmaan**, they do not affect the person, and he is free from jealousy (**vimatsaraḥ**). Bhagavān had said the same thing in chapter 12:

"śamaḥ śatrau ca mitre ca, tathā mānāpamānayoḥ"

one who deals with these contradictory feelings with a like mindedness, are dearest to ME.

Irrespective of **siddhi/asiddhi** (desirable/undesirable result), these yogis remain stoic and are not bound (**na nibadhyate**) to the fruits of their labour.

Paramātmā through this shloka makes us aware that the greatest Sādhanā that a person can do by their karma is to achieve internal and external stability even if their actions do not yield any result.

Once Tilak Ji was dictating some notes to his assistant for the next day's article, when he was briefly interrupted by someone who whispered something in his ears. Tilak Ji immediately called for a break, and resumed his duty after some time. Later his assistant came to know that Tilak Ji had lost his Son. He was perplexed to find Tilak Ji back in the office and resuming work despite the huge personal loss. When the assistant suggested that they resume work later Tilak Ji replied that he had done his duty towards his son, and now it was time to concentrate in the next day's work. He had won over his duality of **sukh/dukh** and maintained poise.

We should study the lives of such great men like Tilak Ji, Veer Sawarkar Ji, etc to learn from them. This is the **Sarvotham Sāadhanā** one can perform by one's own karma. As told by Bhagavān, that we have to learn from our **mumukshubhihi** - the wise men living in present times whose lives and examples we can emulate.

4.23

gatasaṅgasya muktasya, jñānāvasthitacetasaḥ, yajñāyācarataḥ(kh) karma, śamagraṃ(m) praviliyate. 4.23

All his actions get dissolved entirely, who is free from attachment and has no identification with the body and free from the feeling of mine, whose mind is established in the knowledge of Self and who works merely for the sake of sacrifice.

When a person is totally free from all attachments (**gatasaṅgasya muktasya**), he will be accomplished in knowledge (**jñānāvasthitacetasaḥ**). We must be steady in the knowledge; and for that our actions should be in an orderly manner as if we are preparing ourselves for a **yajna**.

When a karma is performed (**ācarataḥ**) like a **yajna** then the entire (**śamagra**) karma is completely dissolved (**praviliyate**), just like a spoon of salt dissolves in water. Likewise our karma too gets completely dissolved in the **Paramātmā** and we do not get any result out of it. Hence the actions we perform must be like the one we prepare for **yajna**.

Question & Answers

Suchitra Rau Ji

Q: If Krishna is the Supreme God Head then why our karmas are not moulded by HIM?

A: Sri Krishna has given us mann and buddhi; we also carry our inherent nature from our past births which decides our karma. Based on the punya karma accumulated by the soul we get birth in higher lokas or lower lokas. The human birth is an opportunity for us to right the wrong and that is why Bhagavān cannot be responsible for our karmas because our birth is **prakrit**. HIS birth is superior and our's inferior because we are attached to our actions and do not take ownership of the karmas we perform. We must see all the dualities in their equal state and perform karma in order to escape this cycle of birth and death.

Vijaya Vemprala Ji

Q: Are akarma and *nishkama karma* the same? What is the difference then between them?

A: *Nishkama karma* is a part of akarma, and to reach the level of nishkama we start with akarma. *Akarma* is a state and nishkama is a way of doing the karma to reach that state.

Renu Dhawan Ji

Q: Animals are *bhoga yoni* and we humans are *karma yoni*. Then how is possible for us to get birth in that later if our karmas aren't good enough?

A: All the bhoga doesn't happen in one birth. A part of your karmas has resulted in this birth, depending on how we conduct ourselves here our next birth is decided taking into consideration the carried forward load after this birth.

Kamu Ji

Q: How do we become aware of selfless service? Will Sādhanā, Seva, Satsang sharpen it?

A: While doing all our duties, we can parallelly involve ourselves in Sādhanā, Seva, Satsang. When we perform our karma selflessly that in itself can become our Sādhanā / Seva / Satsang and help us achieve selfless service.



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Jai Shri Krishna!

Compiled by: Geeta Pariwar - Creative Writing Department

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