



## ŚRĪMADBHAGAVADGĪTĀ INTERPRETATION SUMMARY

### Chapter 3: Karma-Yoga

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YouTube Link: <https://youtu.be/MBK6nF4JfzI>

## Karma-Yoga: Karma when sanctified by divinity becomes Yoga and connects to Paramātmā.

The **third chapter** of Srimad Bhagavadgītā is **Karma Yoga - The Yoga of Action**.

The Vivechan session began with the customary lighting of the lamp and prayers offered to Paramātmā and the Gurus.

गुरु ब्रह्मा गुरु विष्णु, गुरु देवो महेश्वरा  
गुरु साक्षात् परब्रह्म, तस्मै श्री गुरुवे नमः

*The Guru is Brahmā (the creator), the Guru is Vishnu (the preserver), the Guru is Maheshwara (Śiva, the destroyer), and the Guru is the embodiment of the Supreme Brahmān."*

ॐ कृष्णाय वासुदेवाय हरये परमात्मने ॥  
प्रणतः क्लेशनाशाय गोविंदाय नमो नमः ॥

*Salutations, again and again, to Krishna (the son of Vasudeva) who removes our sorrows and sufferings, and is the Supreme Soul.*

ॐ पार्थाय प्रतिबोधितां भगवता नारायणेन स्वयम् ।  
व्यासेन ग्रथितां पुराणमुनिना मध्ये महाभारतम् ।  
अद्वैतामृतवर्षिणीं भगवतीम् अष्टादशाध्यायिनीम् ।  
अम्ब त्वामनुसन्दधामि भगवद्गीते भवद्वेषिणीम् ॥ १ ॥

*"O Bhagavad Gītā, by which pārtha (Arjuna) was enlightened by Bhagavān Narayana Himself, and which was composed in the middle of the Mahabharata by the ancient sage Vyasa, O Divine Mother, the showerer of the nectar of Advaita, and consisting of eighteen discourses, I meditate on Thee, O Gītā, O affectionate Mother, the destroyer of rebirth!"*

Karma-Yoga is a very important and critical chapter of Srimad Bhagavad Gītā.

It is important because **Karma or action is the most integral part of all living beings**. All of us are engaged in action in every moment of our lives. It is critical because our actions decide our happiness/unhappiness not only in this birth, but also in our next births. Therefore the dialogues between Sri Krishna and Arjuna depicted in this chapter are relevant to each one of us. The dilemma Arjuna faced is common and is faced by most of us in our struggle to live a righteous, just life.

**Chapter one describes Arjuna's lamentation and his refusal to fight.** He expressed his sorrow passionately and sincerely to Sri Krishna. Arjuna's grief arises from two types of mental conflict-

- The thought of killing his kinsmen, his Guru, and his most beloved Pitamaha.
- The fear that, despite knowing righteousness, participating in the war would accrue colossal sin.

Arjuna was of the understanding that the act of fighting the battle will end up with these consequences. He was so convinced that he was eager to adopt the path of jnana over karma. He unhesitatingly and fearlessly put forth his argument in favour of his decision of running away from the battle field. Despite being a close friend and ardent devotee of Sri Krishna, he could not understand why Bhagavān Himself is instigating him to fight a war. Sri Krishna, the all knower, did not respond immediately, rather allowed Arjuna to express himself. Sri Krishna being who HE is, knew that Arjuna was not talking as a mighty warrior with reasoning, but as an ordinary human being whose mind was turbulent, overwhelmed with emotions and fear.

**Sri Krishna begins HIS great teaching in chapter 2,** when Arjuna, completely confused, requests Him to be his spiritual teacher and guide him in the proper path of action (**shisyas teham śhādhi mām tvām prapannam**). Bhagavān then undertook the arduous task of convincing Arjuna. HE had the task of bringing back the confident mighty warrior from a feeble low state of mind back to his original form. Being Bhagavān, HE knew the war was inevitable. HE had to make Arjuna battle-ready.

Bhagavad Gītā is a continuous conversation between a great teacher Sri Krishna and his very disciplined student Arjuna. HE begins with the immortal nature of the soul which is eternal and imperishable. HE explains how upon death only the physical body extinguishes and the soul continues its journey. Sri Krishna unfolds the wisdom of jnana or knowledge in the Sāṃkhya-Yoga (chapter 2). However, the knowledge confused Arjuna all the more. Thoroughly puzzled, Arjuna asked if knowledge is supreme, why engage in action? Why do I have to fight?

In order to clear this confusion Sri Krishna explains the necessity of blending action with knowledge and thus starts explaining divinity of karma-yoga. Karma yoga is explained, spread over 3 different chapters.

Bhagavad Gītā is a lengthy conversation comprising 700 slokas. It is construed that Sri Krishna delivered the teachings and Ved Vyasa Ji who is also credited with compiling the four Vedas, the 18 Puranas and the Brahmā Sutras, made the divine teachings presentable to humanity. For the ease of understanding of mankind, Veda Vyas Ji segregated these verses into 18 different groups (adhyayas/ chapters), according to the various concepts they erudite. As these groups of verses indicated connection to Param-Tattva, each of these were prefixed as Yoga. Each Adhyaya is a particular yoga.

### 3.1

**arjuna uvāca :**  
**jyāyasī cetkarmaṇaste, matā buddhirjanārdana,**  
**tatkiṃ(ñ) karmaṇi ghore māṃ(n), niyojayasi keśava. 3.1**

Arjuna said :Kṛṣṇa, if You consider Knowledge as superior to Action, why then do You urge me to this dreadful action, Keśava!

Arjuna enquired, if knowledge was superior to action, then why was Sri Krishna instructing him to fight the terrible war? He was totally confused by this ambiguous advice. He had no clarity and was badly in need of candid advice. He requested Sri Krishna to decisively tell him the best path walking through which he would attain highest good.

Arjuna's distress is visible in this sloka, where he addressed Sri Krishna by two names - **janārdana** and **keśhava**. When somebody is in distress and wants to grab immediate attention of the help giver, he appeals to him by different names.

### 3.2

**vyāmiśreṇeva vākyena, buddhiṃ(m) mohayasīva me,  
tadekaṃ(ṁ) vada niścitya, yena śreyo'hamāpnuyām. 3.2**

You are, as it were, puzzling my mind by these seemingly conflicting expressions; therefore, tell me the one definite discipline by which I may obtain the highest good.

Arjuna was seeking clarity again and again. He was already a confused, bewildered and disheartened person with a run-away state of mind. On top of it, it was not clear to him, why to struggle with action which no way is going to bring him any good, if jnana or knowledge was the pivotal thing.

In chapter two, Bhagavān showed the path of knowledge and explained the immortal self. HE then reminded him of his duty as a warrior.

HE said

**“karmaṇy-evādhikāras te mā phaleṣhu kadāchana” (2.47)**

*You have a right to perform your prescribed duties, but you are not entitled to the fruits of your actions.*

**buddhi-yukto jahātīha ubhe sukṛita-duṣhkṛite**

**tasmād yogāya yujyasva yogaḥ karmasu kauśhalam (2.50)**

*One who prudently practices the science of work without attachment can get rid of both good and bad reactions in this life itself. Therefore, strive for Yoga, which is the art of working skillfully in proper consciousness.*

Arjuna failed to comprehend how karma can score over jnana. He needed a detailed and affirmative explanation. He complained to Sri Krishna about his apparently ambiguous statements (**vyāmiśhreṇeva**), and asked him to tell that one way with which he could attain the highest good (**śhreyo 'ham āpnuyām**).

**The highest good for an embodied person is moksha.** Many believe that moksha or liberation can be attained only after death. But as per our Sanatan Dharma, **moksha can be attained during the lifetime by complete surrender to Paramātmā and doing Nishkama Karma.** In a state of moksha one does not get affected by the karma he does. The results of the karma no longer binds him. Bhagavān meant such a type of karma, while elucidating the supremacy of karma over jnana.

### 3.3

**Śrībhagavān uvāca :**  
**loke's mindvividhā niṣṭhā, purā proktā mayānagha,**  
**jñānayogena sāṅkhyānām(ñ), karmayogena yoginām. 3.3**

Śrī Bhagavān said: Arjuna, in this world two courses of Sādhanā (spiritual discipline) have been enunciated by Me in the past. In the case of the Sāṅkhyayogī, the Sādhanā proceeds along the path of Knowledge; whereas in the case of the Karmayogī, it proceeds along the path of Action.

Sri Krishna started answering to Arjuna's queries by saying that HE had earlier explained the two paths that lead to moksha -

- **the path of knowledge, for those inclined towards contemplation**
- **the path of work for those inclined towards action**

In this sloka HE addressed Arjuna as **Anagha**, the sinless. Use of such adjectives for a student has profound meaning. It means Arjuna was devoid of any misconduct, He was pure and free from any malice; and that is precisely the reason why Bhagavān had chosen him for imparting the knowledge. For receiving any type of knowledge, there are basic structural requirements of character. By addressing him as **Anagha**, Sri Krishna reiterated HIS conviction that Arjuna was sinless and hence fit to receive the knowledge which HE would impart.

Arjuna was sincere, and dedicated to his conviction. He had faith (**nishta**) in whatever he did or believed. **Nishta** or belief system is something which is ingrained in a person's character. One can change his opinion but it is difficult to change his faith. Faith is the hallmark of a person's sincerity to a particular subject.

**Examples of people with faith:**

**Vir Savarkar Ji:** When he was taken as a prisoner to Kala-Pani jail of Andaman and Nicobar islands, he was not disturbed by the severity of the punishment or by the unlivable conditions of the jail. He had **nishta** towards his motherland and hence the first thing that occurred to his mind was the physical location of the island and its suitability for India to build a naval base there. Nishta and love for his motherland was uppermost in his mind.

**Valmiki:** The story of Valmiki and his chanting of "mara mara" is a story of his spiritual transformation. The heinous robber Ratnakar lived by robbing and killing travellers to support his family. One day he encountered the great sage Narada who instructed him to chant the name of Prabhu Ram to cleanse his sins. Ratnakar found it impossible to pronounce the holy name "Rama" as he was an extremely sinful person. He could not utter a holy name. Understanding his difficulty Narad Muni advised him to chant "mara" which means death. When Mara chanted repeatedly and quickly, "mara" naturally inverted to sound like "Rama Rama". He sat in deep penance chanting "Mara Mara" for many years. This act of sincere, though imperfect devotion purified him entirely, transforming the robber Ratnakar into the enlightened sage Maharshi Valmiki. This was possible as he had Nishta or ardent faith in what he was doing.

Irrespective of whether one follows the path of knowledge or the path of karma, sincerity and faith is the prime requirement. Both the paths ultimately lead to the same destination-moksha.

**3.4**

### **na karmaṇāmanārambhān, naiṣkarmaṃ(m) puruṣo'snute, na ca sannyasanādeva, siddhiṃ(m) śamadhigacchati. 3.4**

Man does not attain freedom from action (culmination of the discipline of Action) without entering upon action; nor does he reach perfection (culmination of the discipline of Knowledge) merely by ceasing to act.

One cannot attain freedom from action by merely abstaining from action (*karmaṇām anārambhān*), nor can one attain perfection of knowledge by mere physical renunciation (*sannyasa*).

This sloka is very profound in the sense that it mitigates a misconception that one can escape the cycle of karma by simply stopping all physical activities.

Sri Krishna says mere abstinence from work does not result in a state of freedom from karmic reactions. Unless mind control is practised, the mind continues to remain engaged in trivial thoughts even when a person is inactive. Mental work filled with desires is also a type of karma and it binds one to karmic reactions just as physical works do. A true karma-yogi must learn to do karma without any expectation of results. He does everything with detachment. Any amount of karma leaves no impact on him.

#### **This can be better understood with an example:**

A person has gone on an outstation duty. His job involves 8 hours of work which he finishes in 4 hours. The remaining 4 hours is his private time which he can spend as he wishes. He can either spend it by sight seeing or in shopping. Whatever he does during those 4 hours does not affect his official duty which he has already accomplished. In the similar lines a true karma yogi has achieved that state after which further action or no action does not leave any impact.

Sri Krishna thus told Arjuna, that he has to start the work of fighting. Simply renouncing the work does not take him anywhere. A beginning has to be made somewhere. Without a beginning, the end can not be reached. One has to start learning Bhagavad Gītā in order to grow spiritually. Only wishing for spiritual progress without any effort does not take us anywhere.

### **3.5**

### **na hi kaścitkṣaṇamapi, jātu tiṣṭhatyakarmakṛt, kāryate hyavaśaḥ(kh) karma, sarvaḥ(ph) prakṛtijaigunaiḥ. 3.5**

Surely, none can ever remain inactive even for a moment; for, everyone is helplessly driven to action by modes of Prakṛti (nature born qualities).

It is impossible for any living being to remain idle without performing action even for a single moment.

#### **This sloka signifies two things:**

1. **The state of inaction may not be in reality a state in which one is completely withdrawn from action.** The very act of living, breathing, thinking and even the internal functions of the body are all forms of action. Even if a person were to physically sit still, his mind would be racing with thoughts, desires and emotions which are also actions. Therefore complete inactivity is not an option.

2. **A man acts under the influence of three gunas.** These three gunas Sattva (goodness and purity), Rajas (passion and activity) and Tamas (ignorance and inertia) are the fundamental forces that constitute our material nature (*prakṛti-jair guṇaiḥ*)

On the side lines- these days everybody is hooked to their mobiles. In the present days mobiles ensure that every moment we are engaged in work.

### 3.6

#### **karmendriyāṇi saṁyamya, ya āste manasā smaran, indriyārthānvimūḍhātmā, mithyācāraḥ(s) sa ucyate. 3.6**

He who outwardly restraining the organs of sense and action, sits mentally dwelling on the objects of senses, that man of deluded intellect is called a hypocrite.

One who restrains his external sense organs but continues to dwell upon the sense objects in his mind, lives in a state of delusion and is synonymous with being a hypocrite.

**karmendriyāṇi saṁyamya**: restraining the five organs of action- the hands, feet, voice, the organs of pro-creation, and excretion

**ya āste manasā smaran**: one who remains remembering the sense objects in the mind

**indriyārthān**: the sense objects

**vimūḍhātmā**: person of deluded understanding.

It is futile to control one's external senses while the mind remains deeply attached to sense objects.

Sri Krishna highlights the folly of external renunciation. Many keep Ekadashi vrata. Some do it with sincerity while others dwell on delicious food in their mind. The true battle is not with the external objects but within the mind. The senses are mere instruments. It is the mind in which the vichara originates. Such persons are hypocrites who delude themselves as well as others.

### 3.7

#### **yastvindriyāṇi manasā, niyamyārabhate'rjuna, karmendriyaiḥ(kh) karmayogam, asaktaḥ(s) sa viśiṣyate. 3.7**

On the other hand, he who controlling the organs of sense and action by the power of his will, and remaining unattached, undertakes the Yoga of selfless Action through those organs, Arjuna, he excels.

Sri Krishna affirms that the Karma-Yogis who control their senses through their mind while engaging the sense organs in performing their work without attachment are certainly superior.

Mind control is more relevant and desirable than sense control. If all actions are performed with detachment (**asaktaḥ**), then the mind does not hanker after results. When there is no craving for success or results, then automatically the mind is controlled and the senses perform their works.

A karma-yogi is one who performs all action as an agent of Bhagavān, and hence works with no attachment to the fruits of action. Such a karma-yogi is not bound by karma even while performing all kinds of works. What binds one to the law of karma is not the actions, but the fruits of action.

People perform actions for gaining some personal benefits either in the form of wealth or for name and

fame. They even advertise their work or actions. In the present era publicising work through social media posts has become a common trend. People need appreciation. Such people can be called karmis but not karma-yogis.

### 3.8

#### **niyataṃ(ñ) kuru karma tvaṃ(ñ), karma jyāyo hyakarmanāḥ, śarīrayātrāpi ca te, na prasiddhyedakarmanāḥ. 3.8**

Therefore, do you perform your allotted duty; for action is superior to inaction. Desisting from action, you cannot even maintain your body.

One should constantly perform the prescribed duties as action is always superior to inaction. By stopping to do actions, even bodily maintenance (*śharīra-yātrāpi*) will not be possible. **Action is certainly superior to inaction** (*karma jyāyo hyakarmanāḥ*). The journey of a human being while travelling through his life in the vehicle of the physical body would not be possible if one stops working or adopts inaction (*prasiddhyed akarmanāḥ*).

#### **The types of Karmas-**

As per scriptures, karma is classified based on the nature of the action and its obligation.

#### **Nitya Karma** (daily obligatory duties):

These are mandatory actions that must be performed daily throughout a person's life. Eg. daily rituals of Sandhyavandanam, students attending schools and colleges daily, doctors seeing patients daily.

#### **Naimittika Karma** (occasional duties)

These are actions performed on specific or special occasions. They are performed when the time or event arises. Eg., the Shraddha ceremony which is performed annually on a particular day as per the hindu calendar, the Tarpan done on the Pitru-Paksha, Performing Navaratri Puja or Ganesh Puja.

#### **Kamya karma** (Wish fulfilling duties)

These are optional actions performed with the specific intention of achieving a particular result or fulfilling a particular desire. An example is a Yajna performed to have a child or to gain something. There are numerous such examples in our mythology. Some people may think it is not good but per-se there is no harm in performing such karmas.

#### **Nishiddha karma** (Forbidden Action)

These are actions which are strictly prohibited as they result in sin (papa). Eg. lying, stealing, harming others.

#### **Prayaschitta Karma** (Purifying Rites)

These are actions performed to purify oneself from the negative effects of past wrongdoings.

### 3.9

## **yajñārthātkarmaṇo'nyatra, loko'yaṃ(ñ) karmabandhanaḥ, tadarthaṃ(ñ) karma kaunteya, muktasaṅgaḥ(s) samācara. 3.9**

Man is bound by his own action except when it is performed for the sake of sacrifice. Therefore, Arjuna, do you efficiently perform your duty, free from attachment, for the sake of sacrifice alone.

### **Manner in which actions should be performed-**

Karma must be done as a Yajna. Going by the dictionary meaning, Yajna means fire sacrifice and pouring clarified butter (ghee) into it or giving Yajna ahuti. But here Bhagavān has tried to convey a deeper meaning.

All actions must be performed with a sense of sacrifice, otherwise the same work will cause bondage in this world. Prescribed duties should be performed properly without any attachments (**mukta-saṅgaḥsamāchāra**) to the results. Karma is to be done accompanied by the sacrifice of desires. Desires per-se are not bad provided one is competent enough to have a control over such desires.

Normally, desires breed further desires. A person will desire to have a good job so that he can fulfill his family's certain basic requirements. But once basic needs are fulfilled his desires begin to expand. He then wants a house, a car and then a bigger car and so on and so forth. He then aspires for a higher salary, a luxurious life. It becomes an unending process, during which some amount of ethics and morals are also compromised. Building up such desires are harmful for the individual as well as for the society.

Many people aspire for recognition and acknowledgement. For example a house wife cooking delicious food for the family would expect praise from the family members. These types of desires are harmless and invoke no harm in society. But there are people who want to earn name and fame in society. Such desires have no boundaries. They are insatiable desires.

Hence desires should be controlled, before they spread their tentacles. One should know how to bring them under control.

One way to work desirelessly is to work as an agent of Paramātmā, and surrendering all results good or bad at HIS lotus feet. The karma performed with the spirit of offering, becomes a yajna. We should always work with a sense of gratitude. Nothing in this manifested universe belongs to us. We can not create anything out of our free will. There is someone who is providing us and taking care of all our requirements. Food we consume is grown by someone. The safety and security we enjoy is due to the supreme efforts put in by the dedicated armed forces. Even the body which we think is ours is made up of *Pancha Maha-Bhuta* which are again cosmic manifestations.

The material world we enjoy, the society we live in, the environment which makes us exist, all have been mercifully granted to us. The least we can do is to acknowledge it and show gratitude towards the provider. We should aspire to pay back the debt. By working selflessly and for the cause of humanity, we may be able to lessen our burden of debt. Giving back to society is the implied meaning of yajna.

Here is a beautiful prayer with similar meaning.

मैं नहीं, मेरा नहीं,  
यह तन किसी का है दिया ।  
जो भी अपने पास है,  
वह धन किसी का है दिया ॥  
देने वाले ने दिया,  
वह भी दिया किस शान से ।  
मेरा है यह लेने वाला,

कह उठा अभिमान से  
मैं, मेरा यह कहने वाला,  
मन किसी का है दिया ।  
मैं नहीं, मेरा नहीं,  
यह तन किसी का है दिया ।  
जो भी अपने पास है,  
वह धन किसी का है दिया ॥  
जो मिला है वह हमेशा,  
पास रह सकता नहीं ।  
कब बिछुड़ जाये यह कोई,  
राज कह सकता नहीं ।  
जिन्दगानी का खिला,  
मधुवन किसी का है दिया ।  
मैं नहीं, मेरा नहीं,  
यह तन किसी का है दिया ।  
जो भी अपने पास है,  
वह धन किसी का है दिया ॥  
जग की सेवा खोज अपनी,  
प्रीति उनसे कीजिये ।  
जिन्दगी का राज है,  
यह जानकर जी लीजिये ।  
साधना की राह पर,  
यह साधन किसी का है दिया ।  
मैं नहीं, मेरा नहीं,  
यह तन किसी का है दिया ।  
जो भी अपने पास है,  
वह धन किसी का है दिया ॥  
जो भी अपने पास है,  
वह सब किसी का है दिया ।  
मैं नहीं, मेरा नहीं,  
यह तन किसी का है दिया ।  
जो भी अपने पास है,  
वह धन किसी का है दिया ।  
मैं नहीं, मेरा नहीं,  
यह तन किसी का है दिया ।  
जो भी अपने पास है

The session ended with offering the session at the lotus feet of Paramātmā, and our guruji.

### Questions and Answers session

#### Kamala ji

**Q:** Please explain the difference between Niyata karma, Naimittika karma and Nishiddha karma

**A:** Niyat karma or Naimitya karma is the karma which is performed daily.

Naimittika karma are the occasional, obligatory duties performed on specific occasions.

Nishiddha karma are forbidden actions which should not be done.

## Archana ji

**Q:** Is it wrong to have desires?

**A:** It is very much correct to have desires. Without desires one can not progress in life. Particularly when a person is young he should have desires otherwise he can not function. Vivekananda Ji had the desire to spread the wisdom of his Guru throughout the world and he worked towards it. Similarly VirSavarkar Ji, Tilak ji and others had the desire to make mother India free from British rule and therefore they worked towards it.

Having a desire per-se is not bad. But it should be good and Sattvic desires. One should not have desires to harm others. Bhagavān has said “Kama (**desire**) is HIS one form of vibhuti”.

R Kalavar ji

**Q:** Was Varna-Sankara an imaginary thing? What happened after the Mahabharat war? Did Varna-Sankara really destroy society?

**A:** For any country which is at war for a prolonged period, such social imbalances do take place. These are natural fall outs of a war. But it should be examined how the situation was brought under control. In the case of the Mahabharata war, pāṇḍavas were alive after the war. They were always walking in the Path of Dharma. The legacy of pāṇḍavas was carried forward by Parikshit. Right people were at the forefront of power, hence adversities could have been contained. Consequences of war could remain under control.



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### **Thank you-For reading the summary**

You have enjoyed this vivechan writeup! In spite of intense editing and proofreading, errors of grammar, as also of omission and commission may have crept in. We appreciate your forbearance.

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**Jai Shri Krishna!**

Compiled by: Geeta Pariwar - Creative Writing Department

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**Har Ghar Gītā, Har Kar Gītā !**

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**|| OM ŚRĪKṚṢṆĀRPAṆAMASTU ||**