

KARMA YOGA

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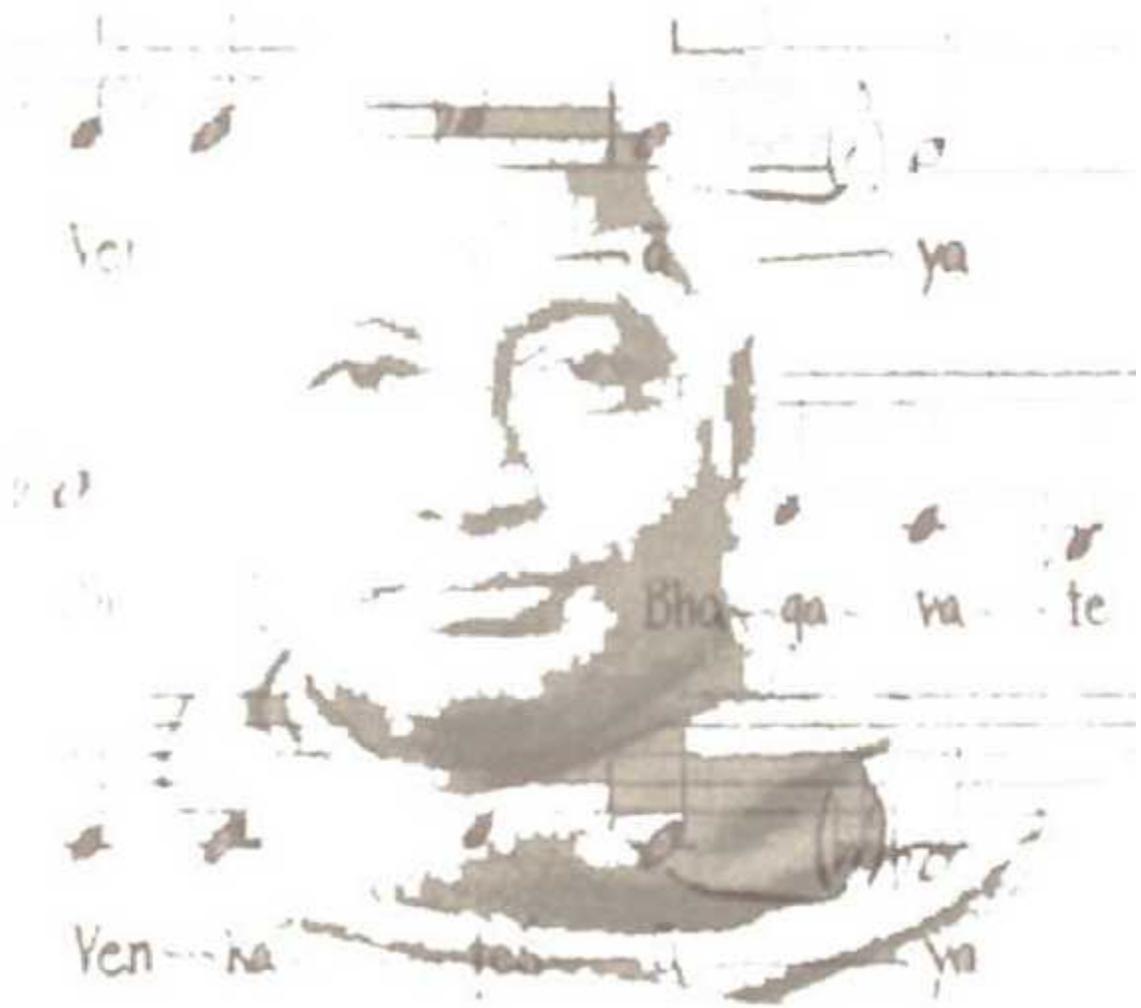
CONTEMPLATIVE DYNAMISM

By

SWAMI VENKATESANANDA

“The amount of hardship which a man undergoes in order to earn his bread is infinitely greater than what is necessary for acquiring religious merit, which can grant him an immunity from such troubles in his births to come.

(Garuda Purana)



Om Namah Venkatesaya
Om Namah Shivaya

Karma Yoga or Contemplative Dynamism

Swami Venkatesananda

Madras, 1965

Karma Yoga

While I was in South Africa, I was invited to give a special course on Indian Philosophy and Religion, which included talks on the different aspects of Yoga. For Karma Yoga I had adopted the 'Categories in Karma Yoga' which my Master Swami Sivananda had given. Some students had preserved notes of the talks. Later I had time and opportunity to enlarge these talks; and this booklet is the result. If it be Gurudev's Will, it will be followed shortly by other booklets in the same series dealing with Bhakti Yoga, Raja Yoga and Jnana Yoga, all of them based on Gurudev's own 'Categories' in the respective subjects.

I offer this Flower in devout worship at the Lotus Feet of Gurudev Sri Swami Sivananda.
Swami Venkatesananda

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Sri Satguru Paramatmane
Om Namah Sivanandaya
Om Namoh Bhagavate Vasudevaya

1. Introduction

I can boldly assert that in India philosophy has never been permitted to degenerate into an intellectual pastime, conjuring up theories and speculations which are too far removed from actual life to be of any practical use. This is perhaps a tall claim in the face of Gaudapada's and Vasistha's theories that there has been no 'Creation' at all and that the Supreme Being alone was, is and will be - but I would humbly submit that even these were meant for people of a certain distinct category, and helped divert man's attention from the material plane and the greed for wealth which flowed from the exaggeration of the world's importance. It is an irony that highly intelligent people should refuse to understand this, and then they should condemn Indian philosophy and its application - religion - as visionary and speculative.

Every system of philosophy which held the goal before man, also took the trouble of laying the Path to it, and paving with extremely practical and practicable lessons.

The path is called yoga, a word which ultimately refers to the attainment of the goal, but is also extended in its significance to refer to the Path. Herein perhaps is a twofold hint: (1) the Path is as important as the goal, and it would not do to ignore its length or steps, and (2) one need not despair at the distance to be traversed, for the path is as important as the goal, and every step forward is the goal of the previous step on the path, and the goal is nothing more than a step forward from the penultimate step on the path!

That, however, is no reason why one should foolishly abandon the joyous attainment of the Ultimate Goal. Every step forward entitles us to the joy of achievement, but every step thus taken reveals the one in front and does not allow us the indulgence to give up the goal, content with the step on the path, however near the goal it may be. This paradox characterises the life of a yogi - one who practises Yoga - ever at peace within himself, happy at the thought that he is on the right path, and ever 'restless' in the realisation that one step below the ultimate goal is still not the goal.

These victims of the wayside who build abodes for themselves on the path, thwart other pilgrims from going farther, and what is even worse, they proclaim their own abode as the veritable goal. As this 'goal' is reached only by a particular path and not by the numerous others which, however, lead man to the ultimate goal, these false prophets proclaim aloud that everyone should walk their path and reach their abode - treated as the goal. However well intentioned and well meaning they are, their preaching sounds like business advertising to a

discerning ear.

This ignorant practice gives rise to different sects, religions, cults, camps of opposing groups, and hells on earth, in which narrow bigotry masquerades in the holy attire of religion. Once the false prophet has sunk to be the centre of this depth of irreligion, he and his followers are forever imprisoned there. And all hope of redemption is renounced by them who actually rejoice in the state of self-imprisonment.

If the path is as important as the goal, it follows that the goal is at least as important as the path. And one who walks the path shall never lose sight of the goal - yoga.

2. Yoga - Its Meaning

In this sense, yoga is not a religion, but just 'religion' in its own original connotation 'that which binds again'. This word has its 'first cousin in the word 'yoke'. And to me, even the Holy Cross of Christianity represents the yogo-ideal.

Yoga has been made to sound mystifying; yet it has nothing whatsoever to do with magic or mystery, psychic powers or astral travel, occultism or other worldliness. It is closer to life than most people imagine. It is the art of living in tune with God, yoked to God.

That is what we mean by 'religion', though this word has lost its original meaning in the welter of isms that the beast-in-man has created. When I once stated that "We urgently need a religious revival in the world," someone questioned me, "Which religion?" Not Hinduism, not Islam, not Judaism, and not Christianity, but, if I may use the word, "Religionism." Religion means binding human soul with God once again, not 'my' God or 'your' God, but God. Yoga or religion - which are thus synonyms - demands that we should yoke our self to God. You have seen horse-drawn vehicles or bullock-carts. Two beasts draw the vehicle, but they are united or tied to a common yoke. This enables them to move apace, in harmony, unison. If they do, then the vehicle reaches its destination. If they do not and one moves faster or slower than the other, or in a different direction, the vehicle is wrecked.

Yoga or religion ought to serve the purpose of the yoke in our life - to ensure that the self lives in harmony with God. If it does, we - and thus the world - will progress to the destination of harmony, happiness and peace. If it does not, we are already too familiar with where irreligion leads us to, to need reiteration here.

That is what the Holy Cross symbolises, represents and reminds us of. God is not only 'above' - transcendent - and 'below' in the depths of our being, but also to our right and to our left - immanent! The horizontal arm of the cross commands us, 'Love thy neighbour as thy self', not only the neighbour on our right - the one who is good to you - but the one to your left too - the one who is not and who might consider himself your enemy. Will that alone do? Then, the social worker is a yogi ! No. The vertical arm reminds us, 'Love thy God with all thy heart, with all thy mind, and with all thy body - with thy entire being'. Where is He? He is above, He is below, He is to your right, and He is to your left - the Holy Cross therefore points in these four directions. Shall I serve humanity now and postpone serving God to a later date? Or, shall I serve God now and think of the neighbour sometime later? That is what the social worker and the priest, respectively, ask. No, that will not do. They must be simultaneous - hence the two arms of the Holy Cross are interlinked. In another version of the Holy Cross, there is a third, smaller, horizontal arm. To me it signifies the 'immediate neighbour' - the members of the family. It sounds a note of warning: do not neglect the family in order to serve society or God, even as it is a sin to sacrifice service of humanity for the service of God, and vice versa. How often has the

world witnessed 'lovers of humanity' turning away from and abandoning their own kith and kin, and people starving children at home and donating to an orphanage. It might also be interpreted to refer to the integration of one's own personality, which is explained in the next paragraph. These three arms of the Holy Cross, thus, signify the three fold integration - subjective, social, and spiritual.

Yoga, therefore means integration. This integration four-fold:

Integration of our personality (a). We shall deal with it in detail in raja yoga and also bhakti yoga. But here it is enough to equate it to truthfulness and sincerity. Our thoughts, words, and deeds, must agree with one another. What we think, we should have the courage to say, and the will to put into action. Then, what we do, we shall learn to love. What we do falls under three categories: (i) labour - task - which becomes work when dislike it, (ii) liability - duty - but in the higher sense, not which we feel compelled to do, and which we do with grumbling and wry-face, and (iii) love - privilege - when we do it lovingly and joyously. The external action remains the same, but a change in the attitude brings the action in harmony with our inner being. The yogi's is the third category: he loves his service and there is thus no disharmony between his thoughts, words, and deeds. Another vital subjective integration is achieved by our Master's Integral Yoga - integration of the head, the heart, and the hand, a synthesis of wisdom, love and service - jnana-bhakti-raja yoga, and karma yoga.

We often hear people complaining that all consoling theories about the power of thought and prayer and the proverb 'God helps those who help themselves' are false, because they do not work in 'their' lives. True. But that is because their being is not integrated! They think one thing, pray for another, their actions have other motives. Perhaps, God is confused which of these to support, strengthen, and fulfil? He who has an integrated personality finds God ever with him, prospering everyone of his undertakings.

Integration of man and society (b). Escapism is not yoga, but true integration is yoga. A close study of the Bhagavad Gita clearly reveals that yoga enables man to find his place in society, rather than leave it. Society is only disturbed by the man who has not learnt the yogic art of integrating his own personality and his personality with society at large.

Integration of man and God (c). With all this, and inspite of all this, if man has not learnt to live in tune with God, the mansion of his life will lack foundation - with the result that every passing wind of change will endanger the structure, and should people follow him, ruin the society. Thus, true integration of the above two categories necessarily involves integration of man and God.

Integration of world and God (d). In other words, it is a paradoxical synthesis of world-and-self-denial and of world-and-self-affirmation. Neither the illusoriness of the world nor the transcendentalness of God is emphasised. God is seen as the

very substratum of the world. The world is, not as a witness to man's delusion, nor as the work of satan to entangle man, but as the Body of God. The world is satisfied if you do good. But, not God ! He is the Indweller and is the witness of your motives. To 'please' Him, therefore, you should be good. One who adopts this favourite motto of our Master, viz., 'Be good, do good', thus achieves his salvation through service of humanity. The two are not contradictory but complementary. Service serves as the touchstone to evaluate the spirit that enlivens it; contemplation on God reveals that He is immanent in all beings and constantly refuels the generator of service.

He who is able to achieve this integration, is able to behold the silver lining of Truth, illumining all sciences and religions. This integration eventually leads him from diversity to Unity, which is God. There is nothing for him to 'reject', except illusion - which does not exist in fact, anyway.

Even the Jewish 'Star of David' - sometimes referred to as the 'Shield of David', which is, significantly, a holy symbol - yantra - of the Indians, but an elaborated Holy Cross. It is symbolic of the descent of spirit into matter, or sublimation of the material into the spiritual - in other words, integration of the material and the spiritual, of the manifest and the Unmanifest, of the immanent and the transcendent. Such integration alone is Perfection, the one substratum of all dualities which It pervades and therefore transcends either of them.

3. Aim of Yoga

In all discussion of yoga, it is highly essential to bear in mind that it is applied philosophy, and where it departs from this principle it commits suicide. Sages have entertained various views about the individual, the world, and God. These views are found in Vedanta: the summit of knowledge - the last-end-section of the Veda or the Book of Knowledge. Yoga is the practical application or realisation of the Truth expounded in the Vedanta. Diverting the method from its true and original purpose is like substituting the body for the electric stove - execution of a scientific law, but with a great difference!

The aim of yoga is self-realisation. In order to achieve this aim, it is most essential to evaluate the self and the world aright, so that they never loom larger in our mental horizon than God, and eclipse Him.

The karma yogi, for instance, takes an intense interest in the welfare of others, and uses all his talents and faculties voluntarily for this purpose. But he is never deluded into over estimating his own value! He never regards himself as indispensable to others' welfare. If this attitude is not adopted, he will get attached to those whom he serves. The greatest anathema of Yoga.

Srimad Bhagavatharn - the Hindu Bible - says that the world has been created for the evolution of the soul. That it exists for the pleasure of man is a common misconception, which has caused great havoc in the world. Here, again, right understanding will - and should - enable us to steer clear of the two extremes of egocentricism - 'I am the centre, the world exists for my sake' - and of self-immolation in mechanical service - 'My evolution consists in serving humanity'. Somewhere in between these two concepts - 'the world has been created to serve me', and 'I have been created to serve the world' - is the secret of yoga.

The world is not God, nor is the world totally different from God. One to whom the world is God is a worldly man! One to whom the world is totally different from God is an ignorant man. The wise yogi sees and serves God in and through the world. He does adopt the Baha'i mottoes - 'Let your vision be world-embracing, rather than confined to your own selves' and, 'That one indeed is a man who, today, dedicateth himself to the service of the entire human race.' But, and here is the vital difference, the human race is not the 'target' of his service, but God in humanity.

Thus you will readily see that yoga is a fine art of subtlest delicateness. It is the dimensionless middle path which the Kathopanishad has compared to the razor's edge - a popular expression, subject to even more popular misconception. It is not the razor's edge, because it will incise your foot. Any good barber will tell you the meaning: the edge of a good razor is invisible, subtle. The path is not sharp, but subtle. Hence, the Upanishad declares that the Self, though all-pervading, is realised only by one who is endowed with an extremely subtle intelligence - kusa-agra-buddhi - or intelligence which is as fine as the invisible tip of a blade of

grass. Hence, the word 'blade' is common to both grass and the razor.

This is Yoga. It promises the greatest prize of eternal bliss, not a holiday in heaven. Eternal includes now. Bliss from this moment! B

4. The Characteristics of Karma Yoga

Now, what class of people can enter the path of dynamic activity? Firstly, the seeker on the path of karma yoga recognises that he has a body which he cannot ignore - he has body-consciousness. Secondly, his conception of the world is that it is real, though not as real as God - a passing relative reality which however cannot be ignored. Thirdly, he is convinced that God is the Reality, immanent in the world and yet transcendent, unlimited by it.

Karma yoga starts with plurality, but leads gradually and eventually to unity. At the start, God and the world are regarded as two distinct factors, the reality and the perceived illusion - similar to the waking state experience and the experience of dream. It is absurd to confuse the two and argue that the illusion or the dream itself is real. This approach leads to materialism, where even God and spiritual values are converted into material advantage, and the holy science of yoga is ridiculed.

The laws that govern the two states - waking and dream - and the two factors - God and world - are distinct, and the karma yogi abides by them. When he lives in 'the world', he serves and strives to be good and to do good, with ever-decreasing egoism and ever-increasing awareness of God-in-the-world. When eventually he lives in God, with God, He will do what He wills through the Yogi. The latter is true Karma Yoga - the former our necessary attempt to practise it. In the Bhagavatham, Sri Krishna makes this rather startling statement that the desireless man can take up jnana yoga, whereas he who is full of desires should enter the path of karma yoga - (XI.20/7). The idea is that the latter is unsuited to jnana yoga, which will not help him. Through karma yoga, he can gradually grow out of his desires. The statement should not be interpreted to mean that desires are compatible with karma yoga. Incidentally, you find a similar method suggested for the practice of bhakti yoga, in the twelfth chapter of the Bhagavad Gita.

Karma means 'activity' and yoga means 'union with God'. Karma yoga, therefore, implies that while I am yet active on earth, I must be yoked by that very action with God.

A big businessman once visited our ashram in Rishikesh and after noticing the various spiritual practices of the seekers there, he remarked: "You people here practice hatha yoga, bhakti yoga or jnana yoga - but we practise karma yoga". Is the business he is engaged in karma yoga? No. Even if the businessman claims to bring happiness, relief, and comfort to people, he is not a karma yogi; even the fisherman may claim to be a generous-hearted benefactor, because he hooks a worm to the tackle and 'out of mercy for the poor hungry fish' throws the worm very near the fish which may be far from the shore! Is not to feed the fish, but to catch it. The businessman interested in your welfare - however much the advertisement may boast of it - but in your money.

Action is karma. If it is characterised by inward God-consciousness, it is yoga, whatever that action be. If it is not so characterised, it is not yoga, however holy it may appear. Hence, Sri Krishna warns us in the Bhagavad Gita: "Inferior is action to buddhi yoga - action done with the intelligence united with God."

This is the reason why doctors and nurses in the hospitals, workers in charge of charitable institutions, priests and mendicants, do not automatically attain the goal of yoga. The necessary inner attitude or God-consciousness is absent. On the other hand, our folklore is replete with instances of common men and women attaining the Goal by doing their simple duties with a lofty spirit. Any sincere seeker can take to the path of karma yoga. And karma yoga will equip him with the right inner attitude, enlarge his inner vision - and enable him to attain cosmic consciousness.

5. The Concept of Duty

Over the millennia, the concept of karma yoga has undergone a tremendous change. In ancient days, the ideal of karma yoga was discharging one's own duties - svadharma - as laid down by the Vedas and the auxiliary smritis - the moral codes. They promised heaven but demanded that even heaven should not be the motive in the discharge of the duties. These duties were exacting and they occupied the entire day of the whole of the life of man.

These were divided into general, duties and particular duties. Particular duties related to the particular castes and orders or stages of life. General duties applied to all. The duties of the four castes are delineated in the Bhagavad Gita (XVIII 42-44) thus:

(a) Serenity, self-restraint, austerity, purity, forgiveness, and also uprightness, knowledge, realisation and belief in God are the duties of the Brahmanas - priests. They were interpreted to include study and teaching of the Vedas, and the performance of the rituals prescribed in them.

(b) Prowess, splendour, firmness, dexterity, not fleeing from battle, generosity and lordliness are the duties of the Kshatriyas - warrior-class. These were interpreted to mean maintenance of law and order, defending and governing the country.

(c) Agriculture, cattle-rearing and the trade are the duties of the merchant-class, Vaisya.

(d) Service is the duty of the servant-class, Sudra.

The Bhagavad Gita gives in a sentence the conviction of the ancient Indian: "Each man devoted to his own duty attains perfection." And, as is obvious, he thus contributed to the welfare and happiness of the entire community.

The duties of man at the four stages of life were

(a) Brahmachari - celibate student: performance of rituals like the sandhyavandana, service of Guru and parents, celibacy, study of the Vedas and other scriptures.

(b) Grihastha - householder: study and teaching of the Vedas, performance of the Five Great Sacrifices - which I shall explain presently - and worship of God Whose manifestations included guests and members of the other three orders of life who did not earn their livelihood.

(c) Vanaprastha - recluse or retired man: retirement from active professional life, semi-renunciation, performance of rituals, study of the Upanishads.

(d) Sanyasa - the monastic order: meditation on the Self which may be supplemented by the study of scriptures which deal solely with Self-knowledge. On Self-realisation, guiding others on the Path.

In ancient India the conviction that one should properly perform one's own duties was so strong that the Bhagavad Gita (XVIII 47) expressly prohibits paradharma - performance of another's duties. "It is better to stick to one's own duties, however imperfect one is in their performance, than to seek to do the

duties of another," says the Gita. As we shall see, the Gita-ideal of karma yoga is very wide, dynamic, and totally non-sectarian. Yet, this prohibition of Paradharma is reiterated in the Gita with a specific purpose. When does one renounce svadharma - one's duties - in quest of another's? A very careful analysis will reveal that with rare exceptions it is when the motive is self-aggrandisement, selfishness, lust for power or prestige, or such other base reward, or at best misguided over zealous helpfulness. This is the anti-thesis of karma yoga and of life itself. Unselfishness is more practicable if one adheres to one's own duties. The duties themselves are neither superior nor inferior, but the inner attitude is the all-important factor. This inner attitude can flavour the performance of one's own duties more than the discharge of another's. This teaching is emphasised by the Christian St. Francois de Sales who says, "God requires a faithful fulfilment of the merest trifle given us to do, rather than the most ardent aspiration to things to which we are not called". Incidentally this sounds like a literal translation of Bhagavad Gita verse quoted above. Thus one is enabled to attain liberation. It is thus explained in Srimad Bhagavatham (VII 11-32): "A man following a vocation determined by his natural disposition and discharging his duties bids fair to attain by degrees the state of a Gunatita - a liberated sage - relinquishing his natural pursuits. Being repeatedly sown, a field will automatically become sterile. It will no more be capable of yielding any crops nay, the seed sown will perish." The innate tendencies are 'worked out'.

6. General Duties of Man

The general duties can again be sub-divided into five categories:

- i. Nitya karma - daily obligatory duties.
- ii. Naimittika karma - occasional obligatory duties.
- iii. Prayaschitta karma - expiatory duties.
- iv. Kamya karma - duties with an end in view.
- v. Nishiddha karma - forbidden actions.

Nitya Karmas were manifold, which kept man very busy, and made him useful to society, free from harm and sin. It is no exaggeration to say that their performance would leave no time for one even to think of unrighteous action! For instance, the ahnikam - daily routine - packs the man's day from 4 a.m. to 10 p.m. with prayers, worship, homa - fire-worship, study, and other rituals. The most vital part of these nitya karmas is what is known as the pancha maha yajnas - five great sacrifices.

They are:

(i) Brahma yajna: everyone should study and teach the scriptures dealing with Brahman or God. This was also called Rishi yajna, as it preserved the knowledge of Brahman and thus propitiated the Rishis or sages who were the original revealers of this knowledge which they had 'seen'.

(ii) Deva yajna: worship of God, prayer, contemplation.

(iii) Pitr yajna: rituals calculated to promote the welfare of the departed souls of one's ancestors. Our culture, prosperity and even this physical body have been their gift, and we reciprocate their kindness by praying for the evolution of their souls. Such prayer reminds us of them and the culture they stood for, strengthening our love for it. Incidentally, nowadays children do not even care for living parents, let alone the ones that have passed away.

The Vedas declare that every man is born with three debts to discharge -the debt to the sages, that to the ancestors and that to the gods. The debt to the sages is discharged by the study and teaching of the scriptures; the debt to the gods by worshipping them; and the debt to the ancestors by begetting children to carry on the family name.

(iv) Athithi yajna or manushya yajna: athithi is guest, manushya is a human being. This yajna is pure and simple charity. It was incumbent on everybody to feed the hungry. In those days a man would not sit down to his meal until he had fed his guest or a hungry man. 'May the guest be thy God' - do not treat him as a beggar or a guest, but as God - that was the commandment of the Upanishad.

(v) Bhuta yajna: sacrifice to the animals. All animals, birds and insects were fed. In course of time, when women became aesthetic, they took a handful of finely broken rice for the ants; and, instead of just rowing the rice out on the ground for the insects to feed on, they spread it in front of their houses in decorative patterns. Even today you will see these in front of houses in Indian villages.

These were the five obligatory duties. The performance of these duties for even one hundred years might not confer an ounce of merit on us. But, if we neglected

them even for a day, we incurred sin!

In Srimad Bhagavatham (V-2618), we have this rather frightening statement: 'He who eats here whatever comes to him, without sharing it and without performing the five sacrifices, has been likened to a crow and falls hereafter into the worst of all hells, called krimibhojana: born as a worm in a pool full of worms, a hundred thousand yojanas in extent, he who ate food a part of which had neither been given to others nor offered as oblation to fire lives there on worms, himself preyed upon by those very worms, unless the sin was already expiated by him during his life-time'. This indicates the high ideal that was held before our ancestors. They insisted on the performance of this five-fold service to God, man and beast, selflessly, without expecting even a reward in heaven. And, they wanted our very nature to be good. Hence they wove these into our daily life.

Even these were often clothed in ritual. Ritual is necessary in order to bind us together and to the religious principles. But they should be used cautiously, so that they do not kill the spirit. This is exactly what you do when you wear your neck-tie. If it is too tight - rigid, your life will go! Lifeless rituals are like lifeless bodies - useless. Again, ritual is like the pot in which food is cooked and served. Often it is indispensable; but, with food in it! The food is the spirit of the ritual. In our lethargy, we often let the food be thrown away and we bring the empty pot to the table. This happens especially where there is evidence of proselytisation. When they know the spirit of the rituals, they are lured away from their native religion by temptations and threats, and compelled to embrace an alien faith. What is left is an empty pot, a caricature of the original religion - often a shameful caricature.

The spirit behind these five great sacrifices is inspiringly presented in Srimad Bhagavatham by the great sage Dadichi in the following words: 'The man who fails to earn by means of his transient body, either religious merit or fame, through kindness to living beings, deserves to be pitied even by immobile creatures. The everlasting virtue practised by men of sacred renown consists merely in this - that a man himself grieves and rejoices in sympathy with the grief and joy of his fellow-beings.' Dadichi himself gave up his very life to serve the gods. Out of his bones, Indra's potent divine thunderbolt was fashioned and with it he killed the demon Vrtra. Indra, it is said, presides over our hands. Now, the symbolism of the story is clear. He who is the strength of our hands, wields a weapon, the greatest of all weapons. And, what is that? It is the symbol of the greatest self-sacrifice. May that God presiding over our hands, ever inspire us to selfless service - the weapon that can conquer the greatest of all diabolical qualities - selfishness. We must recognise the presence of God in all beings everyday in every way, and we must be thankful to our ancestors for giving us this vehicle to ride into the Kingdom of God. Our neighbour is our responsibility. If he is in need of food, it is our duty to give it to him. This is precisely the teaching of Lord Jesus: 'Love thy neighbour as thyself'. A hungry man is our responsibility. Even the little insects on our threshold are our responsibility. Says Sri Jinarajadasa in his 'First Principles of Theosophy': "Loving action is Divine

wisdom at work, and who acts lovingly must inevitably come to the Wisdom".

Second in this category was the naimitthika karma - occasional, but obligatory duties. Celebration of holy days, rituals to be performed on eclipse days, or the anniversaries of departed ancestors fell in this category. These two were not optional, but obligatory. But, there is one and only one exception : and that when one is wholly devoted to self-realisation. Lord Krishna tells Uddhava: "One who is devoted to Me should perform all obligatory and occasional duties, but should forsake all actions prompted by desire. If one is fully engaged in an enquiry into the Self, he need not attend even to his prescribed duties". (Bhag. XI 10.4). Narada reiterates this in his Bhakti Sutras. Sutra 8 defines nirodha - restraint - as 'resignation to the Lord' of worldly and scriptural activities This is qualified by Sutra 11 which permits the performance of worldly and Vedic duties congenial to devotion". Lord Krishna, however, insists that obligatory duties should be performed without attachment and desire, (Gita XVIII, 9) and allow them to drop away when one transcends world-consciousness and Veda-consciousness (Gita 11.46).

The third in this category was called kamya karma - actions or rituals performed with a specific end in view, i.e., with desire. Examples of this were the prayers and homas performed for the birth of a child, success in business, etc. They were optional and not obligatory. And, if we revert to Lord Krishna's instruction quoted above, they are better avoided altogether. A great South Indian saint says in a hymn: "I do not pray for worldly riches nor even for righteousness; let what is ordained by past Karma befall me. I seek only that I may be devoted to Thy feet." Sri Krishna, too, in the Bhagavad Gita defines sanyasa as 'renunciation of kamya karma or desire-prompted action' (XVIII 2).

The fourth in this category is prayaschitta karma. These are expiatory rites - the rituals for 'cleansing' of sin. These could be compared to the Christian practice of confession and atonement. They include (1) prayer and (2) self-punishment and/or charity. Self-punishment implies the resolve never to commit the prohibited action. We have never tried to escape the consequences of our actions. The power of prayer invoked is believed to remove the sinful tendency, the root of evil. Though we do believe that God forgives our sins, especially when prayed to with sincerity and faith, we recognise that if this forgiveness is procured easily, faith might be mistaken for self-deception. Moreover, the mind will not forget the evil deed and may again be tempted to repeat it. (a) To prove our faith to ourselves, (b) to act as a powerful deterrent which would prevent the senses and the mind from committing the evil deed again, and (c) as an immediate and voluntary attempt at working out the karma, we punish ourselves. Prayer and this self-punishment together wipe out the effects of the sinful conduct - the most important of which is the impression left by the act on the mind, which eventually craves for repetition, leading us to to perdition. Self-punishment might take the form of fasting, standing in freezing water, etc. All this is effective only if the repetition is prevented - as emphasised by the command of Lord Jesus, "Go ye and sin no more". The entire process of confession and atonement releases the

tension created by the sense of guilt. God's Grace is earned by charity and prayer; the mind is severely rebuked by the penance. We are once again made pure and holy. The inner purity and harmony are restored. The pure soul realises its at-one-ment with God once again - that is true atonement. This expiatory process is optional and not obligatory as, obviously, the commission of the sinful act is not obligatory.

Our scriptures also give us detailed description of nishiddha karma - forbidden actions - which are never to be indulged in. Human failings have their remedy in the previous category - expiatory rituals do not encourage us or even permit us to indulge in forbidden actions. Their inclusion in our scriptures is an indication of the realistic approach of our sages. They realised that no man was perfect, and that it was human to err, and therefore provided the expiatory rite. Sri Krishna in His characteristically comprehensive manner forbids three types of behaviour: kama - desire, krodha - anger, and lobha - greed. Any action involving these three are to be strictly avoided. He also details some others in the sixteenth chapter of the Gita: hypocrisy, arrogance, self-conceit, anger; and also harshness and ignorance are demoniacal and ought to be avoided. These are later analysed into their components of untruthfulness, lack of faith in God, narrow mindedness and ill-will towards all. The antidotes to these are not so much penance and mortification of the physical type, but a real inner transformation, consisting of cultivating the very opposites of these demoniacal qualities! Sri Krishna was the most ancient psychologist who declared that the best punishment for evil is the cultivation of good qualities.

The ancient sages knew that these daily duties and occasional duties, which were also made obligatory upon us, liberated us from bondage, if performed with the right spirit. They are mis-called 'bounden duties'. This phrase has the odium of slavery. Only that is duty which liberates us - that which binds us is ignorance and sin. In the performance of our duty, we should feel, 'This is my privilege, my soul's education - my duty'. We should feel happy and free to do our duty. If it binds us, we should snap it! The goal is freedom - absolute freedom - and no chain, even if it be of gold, shall be tolerated. Hence Sri Krishna warns us again and again to renounce attachment and expectation of reward - these are the binding elements and we should perform our duties without these. Then they will not bind us to this world-process samsara, which causes repeated birth and death.

This spirit is expressed with incomparable beauty and inimitable precision by that paragon of virtue, Yudhishthira, in the Mahabharata -Vana Parva. Draupadi is haunted by the problem that everyone has faced at some time or other in one's life: 'What is the use of following virtue if it does not promote our happiness, but brings only misery in its train?'

Yudhishthira says: naham dharmaphalakangkshee rajaputree charamyuta dharma eva manah krishne svabhavacchaiva me dhrtam na dharmaphalamapnoti yo dharmam dogdhumicchati.

I do not practise virtue desiring for the promised rewards! Oh Draupadi, I hold on to virtue because it is the nature of my mind. He who wishes to milk virtue to

obtain its fruit - happiness and prosperity - does not get it.

Desire defeats the very purpose of virtue. Desire is vice - virtue based on vice is but vice. Hence we find that hypocritical practice of virtue is worse than open practise of vice! The former does not earn either happiness here, or a reward in heaven.

7. From Beast, to Man, to God

So far we have endeavoured to describe the aim and the practice of karma yoga as it was understood in the vedic - ancient - period. From then to the period of the Bhagavad Gita - about five thousand years ago, the concept of karma yoga has undergone tremendous change. As we noticed in the last paragraph, the performance of religious actions for material or even heavenly enjoyment - prevalent during the vedic-period - became unpopular. Though the Bhagavad Gita does not openly condemn it, it does contain veiled hints that such a misuse of religion is pitiable.

Sri Krishna explicitly points out that the pursuit of happiness in this world is attended with suffering, and the 'wise man does not rejoice in it' (Gita V.22). The wise man will not even be interested in enjoyment in heaven, for, after the exhaustion of the good karma that took one there, one has to return to the world of death (IX. 21). The Lord is unambiguous in declaring that supreme peace - which, in Gita-language, is synonymous with liberation or self-realisation, can be had only by becoming totally desireless, egoless, and mine-less (11.71).

It would perhaps not be far from truth to say that the vedic karma yoga was 'sakamya - desire-motivated karma yoga', and the Bhagavad Gita's is 'nishkamya - desireless - karma yoga'. The former aimed at being good and doing good, going to heaven and returning to a life of being good and doing good. If one stayed on this path long enough without straying from it - and who will deny that the temptations will need super-human strength to resist - one will be liberated at the end of the world-cycle. The latter aimed at instantly transforming man into God, enabling him to realise his oneness with God, and then doing His Will.

It has been pointed out that even nishkamya karma yoga only purifies the heart for the reception of Light - which circumstance is assigned to jnana yoga, but this is splitting hairs. Yoga does not 'create' God or the Atman Who is Eternal. Yoga only dispels the darkness of delusion in which the Self is not experienced as the Reality It is. When we look into a dirty mirror and wipe it, the cleansing of the mirror and perception of our reflection in it are simultaneous. We do not clean the mirror and then go and bring the reflection through a special process. Purification of the heart - chittha-shuddi - and Self-realisation - atma-jnana - are simultaneous.

This dirt called mala has accumulated in our heart, the residue of past - mostly animal - births, and can be identified by its animal nature. The instincts and the animal drives in our personality belong to this inheritance. Psychology is well aware of their formidable strength; but recommends their expression. Yoga, too, recognises their strength, but demands their eradication through sublimation and substitution.

Recently, an anthropologist claimed to have discovered evidence of the origin of the human race - which he declared took place in Central Africa - and

reconstructed the nature of primitive man who was driven by three principal motives : (i) to kill and eat, (ii) to preserve his own property and dominion over the area in, which he and his family lived, and (iii) perpetuation of the species. The anthropologist detected the extension animal instincts into primitive human character.

This did not cease with the primitive man; and inheritance is not only from father to son. These animal instincts operate even today, brought forward from birth to birth. The methods and the instruments used have changed, but the principal drives are seen in human society even today. They constitute the animal in man - the mala or impurity. Its removal - by substitution and sublimation - is the aim of nishkama karma yoga.

The Bhagavad Gita and other scriptures often refer to the unevolved man, 'an asura', a being of darkness, ignorant of the spiritual light that shines in his heart, and which can enable him to realise his own divinity. This identity is symbolised in our scriptures by 'painting' the asuras with horns, canine teeth, claws, etc. The asura is beast in human form. He is full of animal nature.

This instinctual personality with its blind drives is the devil whom we need not look for elsewhere. The devil does not enter us from somewhere. Evil is not outside creation. It is in it, as part of it, like salt in sea-water. Water and salt constitute sea - good and evil constitute the world, of which our own physical and vital being is a part. The analogy has to be changed here, and we should become like the proverbial swan capable of separating milk from water and consuming the former. We should be able to take only the good; and this means not taking the evil in at all - either mentally or materially.

Yet, man can be divine if he wills and makes the necessary effort. Psychologists agree that as a child - whose actions are considered by them largely to be instinctive - grows into maturity, those same instincts are often sublimated by education and training. The will to live need not be given up; but it can be extended to apply to other beings - they should live, too. One's own hunger may be appeased; but the feeling should grow that others similarly feel hungry, too. If altruistic habits are purposefully cultivated, they can become second-nature, almost as powerful as the animal drives.

Between the divine and the devil, there is just this difference. The divine gives - the devil grabs. Everything in God's creation gives - the sun, the clouds, the earth, and the trees. These last are thus gloriously praised by Sri Krishna Himself:

"Look at these highly blessed beings - trees - that live solely for others, enduring storm, showers, sunshine and snow, they ward them off from us. Oh, enviable is the birth - serving as a means of subsistence to all animate beings of these trees, approaching which suppliants never return disappointed any more than those that seek a benevolent man. By means of leaves, flowers, fruits, shade, roots, bark, and wood, as well as with their fragrance, exudation, ashes, coal and tender leaves, they gratify the desires of others. This much is the fruitfulness of the birth

of embodied creates in this world that they should constantly do good alone to other embodied souls through their life, wealth, intellect and speech".
(Bhagavatham X.22/31.35)

This selfishness of bestial man thwarts his very attempts at obtaining all happiness for himself. The selfish man - the devil - feels that he is miserable, and that only his happiness is of supreme importance. He is self-centred, i.e., his attention is centred on himself. He is miserable and, no wonder, that only that misery is in him! He does not become happy at all; for there is no end to his wants and he never takes his eyes off his self which he assumes is miserable! He only succeeds in making those who associate with him miserable too.

The eradication of this diabolical nature, and sublimation of the human nature into the divine is the aim of nishkamyā karma yoga. When selfishness is eradicated, and man rejoices in the happiness of others, living for the well-being of others, he discovers there is no limit to his own joy, and he has not a moment to think of his own unhappiness - even if such existed.

8. The Three Pillars of Karma Yoga

The three main obstacles on this path are selfishness - desire, mine-ness, and I-ness. Sri Krishna shows us the threefold way to overcome them - yajna, dana, and tapas - sacrifice, charity, and austerity, respectively. Through an austere - simple - and contented life, we overcome selfishness - desire. Charity eradicates mine-ness. Sacrifice fells the greatest of all obstacles to Yoga, viz, I-ness.

Selfishness or unceasing desire is effectively counteracted by tapas or austerity. We shall go into the details of tapas in our study of raja yoga. Suffice it to say here that tapas is primarily simple life - simplicity based on a transcendence of animal values and motives. This simplicity 'burns' and thus purifies the animal instincts - hence the significant title 'tapas' - the burning fire. Tapas defeats its purpose if it is foolish, diabolical, self-willed, and self-aggrandising. But it purifies the heart of bestiality if rightly understood and performed. Simple living and high thinking should always go together. Without high thinking, mere simple living is poverty and misery. Without simple living, high thinking is vanity or day-dreaming.

Simple, austere living makes charity possible. Charity, not only covereth a multitude of sins, but eradicates one of the two most powerful chains with which the soul is bound to transmigration: the sense of possession, mine-ness. Charity enables us to see that nothing is really ours. Nothing belongs to us; for we cannot take anything with us when we leave this world. Even the temporary sense of possession is overcome when we discover that (1) the object we call 'mine' today might become 'his' when charity transfers it to him, and (2) whereas if something happened to it while it was 'mine', there is unhappiness, its loss as 'his' is not attended with such a feeling. Thus a sense of possession actually brings about our unhappiness far from promoting happiness!

Love of simple life reveals that many of our so-called necessities are not really such, and love of charity unveils the endless vista of happiness that can be ours if the objects we call ours cease to be so. We do not do charity because we have no faith in God, and feel that our happiness depends on the objects we 'possess', and so cling to them. Vulture, one of the twenty four Gurus of Lord Dattatreya taught Him that so long as one clung to earthly objects of enjoyment, one was surrounded by the enemies of one's happiness who wanted to snatch those objects from him, and that true happiness consisted of renouncing them. Hence, again, Sri Sankaracharya described wealth as the source of all unhappiness, which transformed one's own children into enemies. What one possesses has got to go - letting the possessions go voluntarily, through charity, is the magic wand that converts pain into pleasure, the womb of misery - into the fountain of happiness.'

The human being truly matures into manhood only when he arrives at this understanding. The man who guards his property which is useless to him is no man, but a member of the canine species minus the special faculties with which dogs are endowed. Hence all saints, sages and prophets, and all the ajor religions

of the world extol and insist upon charity.

(a) It is one of the five pillars on which Islam stands - and the Quran reiterates again and again that Zakat is a vital part of one's life. Islam even stipulates: 'the rate is ten percent in respect of agricultural produce, and two and a half percent on commercial capital and profits'.

(b) The Taittiriya Upanishad commands: 'Gift should be given with faith; it should be given plenty, with modesty, with reverence, with sympathy.' The Bhagavad Gita classes that as the best charity which is given to those from whom we do not expect any help in return. This doctrine is expressed by our Master in the words 'spontaneous, overwhelming generosity'. Rig Veda thus extols charity: 'These wonderful rewards verily are for those who give pious donations - for the donors of pious gifts the suns shine in heaven - the givers of pious donations attain immortality - the givers of pious gifts prolong their worldly existence.'

(c) An incomparably brief saying in the Talmud of Judaism is worth inscribing on our heart: 'When a poor man stands at your door, God Himself stands at his right hand'.

(d) Lord Jesus was unequivocal in his glorification of charity. 'Come, ye blessed off my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation the world. For I was hungered and ye gave me food. I was thirsty and ye gave me drink. I was a stranger and ye took me in. I was naked and ye clothed me. I was sick and ye visited me. I was in prison and ye came unto me.' Thus does He actually enumerate the kind acts of charity. And He explains that 'inasmuch as ye have done it to the least among the creatures, ye have done it unto Me'.

(e) The Bodhisattva vow of the Mahayana Buddhist monks exalts charity even above personal salvation: 'Through the merit derived from my good deeds, I wish to appease the suffering of all creatures - to be the medicine, the physician, and the nurse of the sick in mind and soul. Through rains of food and drink I wish to extinguish the fire of hunger and thirst. I wish to be an inexhaustible treasure to the poor, a servant who furnishes them with all they lack. My life and all my rebirths, all my possessions, all the merit that I have acquired or will acquire, all that I abandon without hope of gain for myself, in order that the salvation of all beings may be promoted.' This reminds us of the similar prayer of Rantideva of Hindu mythology.

(f) Zoroastrianism has adopted the Golden Rule which is the governing principle in all religions: 'That nature only is good when it shall not do unto others whatever is not good for its own self.' A beautiful saying is attributed to Zarathustra: "Doing good to others is not a duty - it is a joy, for it increases your own health and happiness'.

The Mahabharata gives us a list of what we should give, to whom, and when: 'To the sick, one must give bed; to the weary, a seat; to the thirsty, drink; to the hungry, food; to the blind, sight. One must give understanding and good counsel. Standing up one must offer a seat. This is the eternal rule'.

This charity begins at home. This popular maxim has, on account of its ambiguity, unfortunately turned man away from charity. It is made to sound as though one should begin to do charity to one's own wife and children - and

include oneself, before thinking of others. I have pointed out, this is one's duty, not so much charity. But the proverb means: 'you' should be charitable first before you can expect others to be; charity should start in your own home which should thus set an example to others. Often, uncharitable people preach charity and of course add that the charity could best be directed towards them!

The third aspect of the three fold way is yajna or sacrifice which removes I-ness itself.

There has not been a word or an idea worse misunderstood than yajna. What signified 'sacrifice of the animal in man' has come to mean 'sacrifice of an animal for or by man'.

Before proceeding to state the karma yogi's point of view, let me here quote from Islamic and Christian texts to show that even here we are not alone! In his book 'Ahmadiyyat or The True Islam", Mr. Amir-ul Momineen says: 'The fifth mode of worship prescribed by Islam is sacrifice. Many people fail to understand the significance of sacrifice in Islam. They imagine that the animal sacrificed is supposed to carry away the sins of the persons making the sacrifice. This is an entirely erroneous conception of the teachings of Islam on the subject. The equivalent in Arabic of the word sacrifice is derived from a root meaning 'nearness'. Sacrifice is a symbol, the failure to understand the significance of which is responsible for the erroneous conception which people entertain concerning it.' The root-meaning 'nearness' is reminiscent of the Sanskrit word 'upasana' - used to denote worship, which too means 'to sit near'.

Even so, in that illuminating work 'The gospel of the Holy Twelve' - the new testament directly translated from the original in Aramaic - Rev. GJR. Ouseley attributes these flaming words to Lord Jesus: 'For they, making a god of their belly, sacrificed unto their god the innocent creatures of the earth, in place of the carnal nature within themselves.'

In one of the Psalms of Judaism, the Lord says to the good man: 'I will not take a bullock out of thy house, nor the goats out of thy folds. For mine are all the beasts of the forest, the cattle upon a thousand mountains. I know all the fowls of the mountains; whatever moveth on the fields is with me. If I were hungry, I would say it to thee; for mine is the world and what fills it. Do I eat the flesh of fatted bulls, or drink the blood of the goats? Offer unto God thanks-giving; and pay unto the Most High thy vows.' What pleases God is not animal sacrifice, but the keeping of His Commandments.

Yajna is also referred to as bali-dana. This word 'bali' has again come to mean sacrificing an animal, not the animal in man. Bali was the name of a king renowned for his boundless generosity. He was proud. The Lord, in order to quell his pride, appeared before him as a dwarf, begged for three paces of earth, measured the heaven and the earth with two and asked, "Where shall I place the third?" Bali replied, "Lord, please Thy foot on my head. I offer myself to You."

That is Bali-dana - self-sacrifice, after giving away everything one has.

Between yajna and dana there is the significant difference. Dana is giving away what does not really belong to one, but towards which one has developed a sense of possession. Yajna is sacrifice of something with which one identifies one's Self - body, mind, and life, or the I.

The Veda declares that yajna is Vishnu, the protector of the universe. It is ridiculous to associate this sacred word with destruction or taking of life.

God is the Parent of the very creatures sacrificed 'to propitiate Him'. It is not difficult to visualise how pleased the Parent will be with one who kills His own children.

But sacrifice is most essential to human life, more so to divine life. God's sacrifice is world. Mother's sacrifice is child. The seed's sacrifice is tree. Animal sacrifice is essential if we are to become divine - but only the animal within. Tapas or austerity demands sacrifice of luxuries. Sacrifice on one's part always promotes the happiness of others - this is the unalterable law. Dana - charity - enables us to sacrifice our possessions, and realise that the less we possess, the more we have. Yajna is sacrifice of pride, egoism, and attachment to body and life, even as was illustrated by the story of Bali's Dana. Then we shall, like Raja Bali, earn His Grace, and He will place His Lotus-Foot on our head.

If we regard yajna to mean rituals involving animal sacrifice, we shall be unable to understand the beautiful utterance of Lord Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita 111/9: 'The world is bound by actions other than those performed for the sake of sacrifice'.

A look at Creation will convince us that the entire Nature is founded on the law of reciprocity or yajna. Life itself should be ruled by this Law, if it is to be lived well and enjoyed. Thus, the ancients regarded all activities incidental to living as yajna - there was nothing vulgar, nothing profane, and nothing unspiritual or undivine. Even the act of breathing is charity or yajna. The air we breathe out is food for plants. If we refuse to perform this charity, by refusing to breathe, we forfeit the privilege of breathing in oxygen and we die. On the contrary, if we give out more freely - i.e., breathe out more thoroughly, we shall inhale more oxygen and enjoy better health! Charity promotes, life, health, and prosperity. The

Bhagavad Gita extols yajna as forming part of a cycle which sustains the world. Lord Krishna says, "Rain falls on account of yajna." This could mean - as in a proverb current in Tamil-Nad in South India - that if people are good and self-sacrificingly charitable, there will be timely rainfall. Even if we regard yajna as a ritual, it can only refer to havan - homa - whose fumes are reputed to have rain-producing potency.

Havan has come in for a lot of criticism from public-spirited men. Noticing that

articles of common utility are offered into fire during havan, these people ask: "Why waste them? Why not give them to the poor? Are we allowed to ask a counter-question? How much of wealth is wasted on rockets and bombs? These very politicians who question havan visit one another's country and hold banquets - public waste! How often do we not hear that food-stuff was burnt or otherwise destroyed to keep the prices up? Is that right? The fumes from the havan promote the health of the performers, free the atmosphere of poisonous insects, besides producing rain. Even if the havan is prohibited, the food-stuffs saved will not reach the hungry, but only fatten the millionaire and promote his indigestion.

But, the principal motive of offering these 'valuable' objects into fire is to cultivate the spirit of absolute renunciation. Akin to this is the superstitious custom - even now prevalent in many parts of India - of throwing coins into sacred rivers and the ocean. All superstitions must be investigated, their roots found - and then, if you can build a more rational substitute, the superstitions may be abandoned. But if you cannot, then to abandon them would be to regress into a state of the pre-superstitious man - the primitive. Let us analyse the modern man's charge that throwing ghee into fire is waste - 'It is valuable, why not give it to the poor?' Where does this lead us?

(a) It is valuable; let the poor work for it. Give, but make the recipient work for it, so that he will realise its value, and the gift will not deprive him of his talents.

(b) It is valuable; let me keep it - if it is a commodity like butter, I will pay the poor man. He - now a wage-earner - can buy for himself, I have already given him money.

(c) It is even more valuable now. It is not only an article of consumption, but a commodity with which we can trade and acquire wealth, on the basis of the law of demand and supply. If the poor people are large in number and the demand is great, then the price chargeable for the commodity also increases. Business ethics permits it. The article for ever remains out of the reach of the really poor man; for now - when the price soars, the value soars - the vast middle class usurps the poor man's place in the buyer's queue!

"Unless the article 'loses' its value, objects will never be given to the poor man; let us never forget this. A necessary training in this regard was throwing coins into the river - deliberately in the knowledge that this is good for no one, or pouring ghee into fire. Incidentally, I would love to see the day when all the currency notes in the world are burnt in a bonfire, so that no one will have money to spend on bombs and guns.

Even charity permits the giver to develop the spirit of self-righteousness. Yajna pulverises pride and reduces one's evaluation of the world and one's own life to zero. Even the body and life are to be offered in self-sacrificing service - renouncing love for them as at the time of one's departure from this world! That is yajna. As our Master always says, "One such act will earn moksha - liberation for you".

Yet, it will not do to ignore the fact that the scriptures of various religions do specifically mention 'animal sacrifice'. Lord Krishna says to Uddhava, in Bhagavatham XI. 21/29-30 - in what is regarded as the last teaching of Sri Krishna: "Not knowing My opinion, which is not quite apparent and which is to the effect that if one has a passion for destruction of life, it should be restricted to sacrificial performances only, and that there is no scriptural ordinance making it obligatory on us - those wicked men indulging in destruction of life as pastime and with their mind set on the pleasures of sense worship the gods as well as the manes and the rulers of evil spirits through sacrificial performances carried on by means of animals slaughtered with the desire of gratifying themselves." This seems to have been the case with the Jewish faith, too, to regulate the passions of people by prescribing occasional indulgence in order to avoid repression and adverse psychological consequences, with the seeds of sublimation hidden. The ancient sage said, in effect: "If you must kill and eat flesh, then do it as an offering to the gods, accompanied by prayer. This will obviously not be done daily. The divine and divinising thoughts associated with such sacrifice will one day grow to prevent it. The sacrifice was allowed instead of indiscriminate killing for the satisfaction of the palate. The tragedy of human nature: it has come to mean an addition to sense-gratification. Let us pray that better sense and wisdom will soon prevail and that not only animal sacrifice, but meat-eating itself will be abandoned by people.

Another aspect of this blood sacrifice is referred to by Aldous Huxley in his 'Perennial Philosophy': "It may be remarked in passing that the shedding of blood, one's own or that of animals or other human beings, seems to be a peculiarly efficacious way of constraining the 'occult' or psychic world to answer petitions and confer supernormal powers. If this is a fact, as from the anthropological and antiquarian evidence it appears to be, it would supply yet another cogent reason for avoiding animal sacrifices, bodily austerities and even, since thought is a form of action, that imaginative gloating over spilled blood which is so common in certain Christian circles." Very valuable and wholesome truth. The bestial man who thus 'constrains' the psychic world, will not hesitate to constrain his fellow-man at the point of the gun, to do his bidding - as is evident today. Karma yoga teaches us that to get what we want, the simple wise way is to live in harmony with our neighbour and with the higher powers of Nature.

Yet another probability is this. Out of compassionate consideration, the scriptures - both Vedic and Biblical - permitted flesh-eating and devout man wished to express his gratitude by offering his food to the Gods and instituted the system of sacrifice which in turn found its place in the later scriptures. Whatever be the origin and significance, I have no doubt that animal sacrifice is the offspring of the human animal; however well-intentioned its conception might have been, it has no place in the Divine Order of the universe.

The true ideal of sacrifice or yajna is brought out in the popular mongoose story in the Mahabharata. The half-golden mongoose narrates the story. A poor man who was starving along with his wife and children and was on the verge of death,

at last got a little food. As he was about to eat it, a holy man appeared and begged for food. He and his family gave the food to the hungry mendicant - and purified by this self-sacrificing charity, they earned His Vision and were transported to heaven. Rolling on the dust on which this divine drama had been enacted, half the body of the mongoose had been made golden by contact with the particles of food that had dropped there. The mongoose which had rolled in vain over the ground on which Yudhishthira had performed a very great sacrifice, thus hinted that true sacrifice consisted in self-sacrifice.

These three, then, are the corner stones of karma yoga: yajna - sacrifice, dana - charity, and tapas - austerity; the fourth corner stone as we have seen, is desirelessness - nishkama.

Together, they erect a mighty fortress for man, living in which he is not affected by karma - action which in association with spiritual ignorance, leads to reaction or effect, and consequent rebirth.

9. The Law of Karma

The nishkamya karma yogi who does his duty without desire - and therefore leads a simple life, without a sense of possession or egoism - which is sacrificed as yajna, is freed from all the three karmas, viz.,

- a. Prarabdha - past action which has crystallised
- b. Sanchita - action waiting to fructify
- c. Agami - fresh deposits of karma or action.

The last - agami or kriyamana which refers to actions that are being performed now - can again be classified into

- a. Satkarma or good action
- b. Dushkarma or dukarma or bad action
- c. Vikarma or perverted action
- d. Mishrita karma or mixed action
- e. Akarma or inaction.

Good actions lead one to heaven. Dushkarma, vikarma and akarma lead one to birth in the lower orders of creation. Mishrita karma enables him to obtain human birth again. But these laws govern only actions done with desire and egoism. Since the nishkamya karma yogi performs his duties without desire or egoism, he is freed from the bondage of agami or kriyamana karma. He achieves this freedom by the spirit of detachment.

If we are completely detached from the actions themselves by substituting the idea of agency with the feeling of being a mere instrument in the hands of God, and if we do not expect any reward for the actions, they do not recoil upon us as reaction. A ball tied to a rubber string with which children play bounces back again and again when the child hits the wall with it; for the string is tied to the child's hand. If this string snaps, the ball will not bounce back. The worldly man links himself with the actions he performs through desire and attachment the karma yogi breaks these two powerful chains.

First there is the feeling, 'I am doing this as a duty but with no desire or selfish motive'. The second stage is reached when we feel that we are powerless to do anything in this world and ask ourselves, "Who does this? Who am I?" We understand that God is the director of this puppet show called the world. When we then realise that His Will is done here and that we are mere instruments, agami or kriyamana karma is made ineffective or inoperative. The karma yogi's agami karma is taken over by the Lord, because he feels that God's Power is doing everything through him. When the bank manager signs a letter, he takes on the responsibility, the clerk's job is over.

With the disappearance of egoism, and with the realisation of God, the wheel of birth, and death stops for the karma yogi, and sanchita karmas disappear. Sanchita karma is not really 'burnt' on our attaining Self-realisation. This concept of burning gives rise to all kinds of philosophical paradoxes: with what do we

burn, how is the whole thing burnt? etc. We can understand the process by the following simile.

There lies a sick man. By his side, is the nurse, feeding him porridge, spoonful by spoonful. The sick man gasps. He dies. What happens to the porridge left behind? It cannot find its way into the sick man's stomach because life is extinct. It lies uncared for, wasted, useless and unused, and ultimately joins the elements. Similarly, the sanchita karma - waiting to materialise into another body after we discard the present one - finds the individuality - born of ignorance - missing when we attain Self-realisation, and is dissolved in the cosmos.

On account of the sense of I, the actions of past births recoil on us as 'equal and opposite' reactions. When 'I' ceases to exist, sanchita is made inoperative. 'I do' leads to 'I suffer'. 'God does' leads to 'God enjoys'.

It would not be out of place here to endeavour to comprehend a puzzling statement by Lord Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita (V.14-15): 'Neither agency nor actions does the Lord create for the world, nor union with the fruits of actions - knowledge is enveloped by ignorance, and thereby people are deluded'. This world-process and all the events that take place in this universe are like the cinematograph film: each frame is distinct from the rest, each event is distinct from the rest. The motion of the motion-picture is an illusion created by the rapid succession of different frames - there is no motion in the film itself. Action and reaction, cause and effect, are thus products of illusion - convention clothes them with reality. The Man of Wisdom, however, perceives them as they really are, and thus goes beyond cause and effect, action and reaction and becomes one with the Lord.

Past Karmas can again be compared to the songs and speeches registered in the grooves of the gramophone records - they are all there - but if the needle and the sound box do not come in contact with them, they are not operative and ineffective. The ego and the mind are like the needle and the sound box. The music of all the broadcasting stations, and the words uttered by Adam and Eve, are all in the ether right now; but unless you have a 'receiving set' tuned in to that particular wavelength, they cannot be heard. The receiving set is the individual soul which is tuned in in every incarnation to particular wave lengths of past karma - sanchita - which then becomes its prarabdha. This explains why, of a whole lot of Karmas, only a select portion becomes operative in each animal or human incarnation. The sage of Self-realisation or the true nishkama karma yogi has smashed his receiving set into pieces and retired into the silent forest of his Innermost Self - no more of the inharmonious notes of action and reaction for him!

But the prarabdha karma governs the span of life here, giving us the so-called success, failure, good fortune, misfortune, poverty, affluence, health and disease. Even in the case of great saints and sages, this bit of karma has to be worked out. It is like a bullet which has left the barrel of the gun and therefore cannot be

arrested. Sanchita is like the bullets in the barrel or magazine of the revolver; if you change your mind, they are made ineffective. But prarabdha is like the bullet which has been fired. It cannot be withdrawn or arrested.

But the yogis have a way of overcoming even this part of karma. A karma yogi's prarabdha is 'cheated' by a change of attitude. What you welcome and accept, ceases to be pain. What you reject or fear, is pain. You love your child. When it comes to you when you want, you are happy. If you want to sleep and the same child comes to you, you are annoyed. The pleasure or annoyance is not in the object, but in the subjective attitude towards the object.

Let us make no mistake about it here - it is as untrue to say that the karma yogi is anxious to suffer, as it is to say that he is anxious to enjoy. To him both are equal. The most wonderful devotee of the Lord, Prahlada, tells schoolmates : "Like suffering, sensual pleasure, too, is obtained by embodied beings in every birth by force of destiny, without any effort through connection with a body". (Bhagavatham VII-6/3). In other words: you do not work for suffering or for being miserable, but you often get it! In the same way, even if you do not strive for pleasure or happiness, it will come to you unsought, by the force of prarabdha karma - no one can prevent it. It should, however, be remembered that here 'suffering' and 'pleasure' are used in the conventional sense, and refer to those conditions of living which the unenlightened associates with those experiences.

The word 'destiny' in the above quotation is English, and it makes the whole quotation sound fatalistic. Basing their judgement on translated scriptural texts, Westerners have often accused Indians of being fatalistic. Far from truth we have no word for 'fate' with its sordid connotation. Three words are commonly used to express the idea.

(i) Daivam, used in the original text of the above quotation, means divine, the ever-seeing Eye which has been a witness of all our actions and which rewards us justly, not to punish, but to teach,

(ii) Karma, which is nothing but the simple sentence 'I did this before' condensed into one word, and

(iii) Adrishta - unseen, i.e., subtle yet powerful reaction of one's own past action.

In the Bhagavad Gita, too, the Lord uses 'daivam' as one of the factors involved in our life (XVIII. 14). Here, again, it is very important, to bear in mind that 'daivam' which generally translated into 'God' does not imply that God is some kind of a hot-headed tyrant who is watching our thoughts, words, and deeds, with the sole intent of seeing we all the time slavishly obey His Laws or not, and Who, intolerant of every slip on our part visits us with severe punishment. This would be a lunatic violation of His own greatest gift bestowed upon Man, the gift of free will, which is unambiguously re-stated in the Bhagavad Gita, XVIII-63: 'Think of these and do as you like'. God is our Father-Mother, and He can do us nothing but good: a pill that the mother gives us to save our life may taste bitter. Recognition of its meaning and value, and the love that administers it will inspire us to swallow with joy.

As we shall presently see, the karma yogi remembers God constantly. He serves God in all - all are the manifestations of God to him; and therefore, whatever is done to him is done by God. Lord Krishna gives this technique in the Bhagavad Gita, in these two words of which our Master is very fond: 'mamanusmara yudhyacha' - think of Me and do your duty.

If at all times you think of God and only God when someone hurts you, you will think only of God and repeat His Name - as Mahatma Gandhi did when he was assassinated. Hence, you will see God in the assailant, as our Master did when he was assaulted on the 8th January 1950. You will not react in such a way as to create new karma. The past karma is worked out, and no new ones created by retaliation, even mentally. If you go on doing your duty, as worship of God, the past momentum of prarabdha will also be worked out, and you will be liberated.

10. The All-important Practice

In this practice, thinking of God most important. It is that which (a) prevents you from even entertaining an undesirable thought towards those who seek to injure you, and (b) neutralises the chemical reactions (eg., secretion of adrenalin) that bring on fear and hostility, and also paralyses the neutral mechanism that gives rise to sensations of pain.

This is not an Indian rope trick! Chung Tzu says: "A drunken man, who falls out of a cart, though he may suffer, does not die. His bones are the same as other people's; but he meets his accident in a different way. His spirit is in a condition of security. He is not conscious of riding in the cart; neither is he conscious of falling out of it. Ideas of life, death, fear and the like cannot penetrate his breast, and so he does not suffer from contact with objective existence. If such security is to be got from wine, how much more is it to be got from God?"

The difference, however, is that whereas the drunken man's consciousness is disconnected from the objective existence, the yogi's consciousness is in a state of 'detached contact' - the famous analogy re-authenticated in the Bhagavad Gita is 'padmapatramivambhasa' - water on lotus leaf. The lotus-leaf lies on water, yet a drop of water on it lies like a pearl, and rolls away without adhering to the surface of the leaf.

Seekers and philosophers alike often rush blindly to conclusions - common failing of the impetuous mind. This detachment is not impotent escapism, nor pessimistic withdrawal, nor again callous indifference, but an active participation in the divine will which involves careful and highly delicate 'dodging' of the all too alert demon of egotism. Hence, Lord Krishna administers a twofold warning to Arjuna in the Bhagavad Gita: (a) "He whose mind is deluded by egoism, thinks I am the doer. (III. 27), and (b) "If filled with egoism, thou thinkest I will not fight, vain is this". (XVIII. 59). Doing or not doing is not the problem - but egotism is the problem. The despotic ruler and the unspeaking naked anchorite might appear to be different; but both of them may inwardly be the victims of virulent egotism.

There is a great and vital difference between 'detachment' and 'indifference'. The latter is camouflaged hatred; the former is born of the union of love and wisdom. Detachment is the piddle path, between the two extremes of attachment - with its possessiveness - and hatred - or indifference.

The Karma Yogi goes on performing his duties, serves humanity egolessly and unselfishly. Whatever these actions result in, he does not relate to the actions themselves, but to the unseen effect of past karma or prarabdha, and remains unconcerned. The seeds shown in ground unfertilised by selfish motive or desire do not germinate.

Let us take a concrete example. This actually happened to our divine Master at

the Ashram in Rishikesh. A destitute blind boy came to the ashram. The Master took him in and lavished love upon him. The boy, however, ran away from the ashram with another sighted person, and a harmonium besides! The Master merely shrugged off the incident. To serve the Lord in the blind boy was his sacred duty and pleasure. The loss of the harmonium was Prarabdha. The service and the loss have no relation whatsoever, except in our ignorant mind. "What I did for the Lord in him has no connection at all with what he did to me," said the Master. "The loss of instrument is the working out of my karma. The boy has in fact not cheated me, but helped me by relieving me of my karma". Our Master calls it 'gupta-dan' - hidden charity. If you give something, it is charity. But if it is taken away without your knowledge, it is hidden hidden charity - you do not even have to take the trouble of giving it. It is a favour done by the cheat.

Everything in life is strictly governed by karma. Past debts are repaid now. We have no choice but to accept. But, accept what? Lord Krishna says in the Gita: karmanyevadhikaraste maa phaleshu kadachanaa, which means :to work is your right, not to the fruits of such action. But it would be the worst ignorance to neglect the privilege granted in this: to work is your right - to do is in your hands - claim that right, and do not forfeit it by inaction. Prarabdha Karma governs what you get in this life - your wisdom governs what you do.

The yogi is content to let prarabdha take its own course, and is totally unmindful of what happens to him. He never blames anyone else for his miseries and misfortunes. His attitude is inimitably described in the Song of the Avanti Brahmin' in the Bhagavatham. Reading it once a day and reflecting on its meaning will make life happier and more peaceful, if not richer, for us.

Blaming others for our karma results in a threefold loss:

- (a) we ignore the lesson that the misfortune teaches us;
- (b) we refuse to turn away from the granite wall against which perhaps we are knocking our head and find the open door to liberation; and
- (c) we incur a fresh debt of karma to be repaid in a subsequent birth!

Misery can be valuable from this point of view. Behind all unhappy experiences is God's hand leading us to happiness, leading us to where it is, from where we are searching for it in vain. I face the wrong man, and he - God in him - slaps me on the cheek, only to turn my face the right direction. Thank you, God.

It is from this standpoint that Kunti prayed to Lord Krishna to give her more and more of adversity: "May calamities befall us at every step through eternity, O Teacher of the world, for it is in adversity alone that we are blessed with Your sight, which eliminates the possibility of our seeing another birth" (Bhagavatam 1.8/25). Even a child in India knows that we cannot suffer except for our own past karma. Kunti's prayer, therefore, is not a prayer for unmerited suffering, but for constant remembrance of God. Kunti demonstrates that the true yogi does not regard adversity as a misfortune, but as a reminder of the nature of the world, and of the possibility of obtaining deliverance from it once for all. The karma yogi

does not seek suffering - he seeks for the lesson hidden in it.

The karma yogi, by refusing to react afresh to karma, has a calm mind in which the law of karma is revealed in all its aspects;

(a) He knows that the law of cause and effect operates inexorably in the physical universe, and he who wishes to liberate himself from it, must rise into the realm of the immortal, immutable Spirit.

(b) He knows that the physical law, that every action as an equal and opposite reaction, applies to human kingdom too, and that the opposite reaction invariably finds, turns to and affects only the motive-source of an action; and he who would free himself from its operation, must react in the full realisation that God's will and not the individual's is the real doer.

(c) He realises that the law of reincarnation is the necessary corollary to the law of action and reaction, that death does not save him from the debts he owes, and that till the ego-sense gets completely dissolved in the Cosmic Being, it will clothe itself in the five elements in different proportions, to enjoy and to suffer, to learn and to purify, and thus evolve towards Perfection.

(d) He discovers that the law of corrective retribution is compassionately modified by merciful providence, through the law of compensation, thus apportioning to each life-span pleasures and pains to compensate each other, making the life neither unbearably painful nor goal-veilingly pleasurable. This law of compensation is something inevitable in Nature - if you are digging a well, you are also piling up earth!

He discerns that there are three distinct planes of karma:

(i) The lowest plane in which the law of cause and effect - or action and reaction - operates. This, as we have seen, is purely physical, and it can be overcome by wisdom.

(ii) The intermediary plane in which the law of grace operates. God's Grace is invoked by prayer and communion with Him. God, being beyond time and space and causation, has the power to alter the cause itself and thus easily to avert the effect.

(iii) The highest is the plane of Self-realisation or Witness-consciousness, in which the law of Absolute Being is the only reality! That Being is naught else. Cause and effect, action and reaction, pain and pleasure, and all the host of factors we have so far discussed, are all in the realm of maya, ignorance or unreality.

Only the Karma Yogi takes particular note of the law of karma and consciously works first to act in accordance with it and then to transcend it. The raja yogi is concerned only with samadhi and kaivalya - realisation of the never-affected purusha or soul; he regards sickness, etc., as obstacles; he does not want to enquire into their why and wherefore - to be removed by various devices. The bhakta or devotee takes birth, fortune, etc., as His Will; and the karma yogi's attitude is unconsciously developed in him as almost a by-product of devotion. The jnani ignores everything as dream or illusion! To the karma yogi, at the beginning, however, the world and his own self are real; and he cannot afford to

neglect the law of karma.

Thus,

(i) Prarabdha has to be worked out, even by a sage of Self-realisation. Even after the petrol-tank is empty, the car goes on through past momentum.

(ii) Some Karma can be mitigated by prayer; as the old Tamil proverb, 'Where the head had to fall, the crown did', the calamity having been averted by prayer. It depends upon the power that our prayer generates and how it compares with the power or force of karma. If the prayer is more powerful, then it will alter the Cause itself; if it is less powerful, it will enable us to endure it.

(iii) Some karmas may be 'dodged' and enjoyed - or suffered - in a detached manner. The pain will not be experienced the painful when situation arises if you regard them as God's gifts and welcome them, or regard them as illusory and ignore them.

(iv) Some others - the 'big' karmas - have to be enjoyed - or suffered. The suffering may even be 'felt' by the yogi, though it will not be as severe as the suffering of others, because the wise yogi does not aggravate it by rejecting and resenting the inevitable.

The methods (iii) and (iv) are adopted by the karma yogi, and he is therefore calm and tranquil in all situations. This is the first and most important qualification prescribed in the Bhagavad Gita, where Lord Krishna refers to this tranquility and unperturbability, itself as Yoga! This is the secret source of inexhaustible inner strength found in all saints and sages. Although they seem to suffer, in fact they do not suffer at all. They are 'happy' - actually indifferent, which in those circumstances is interpreted as happiness - when they are visited by dishonour, pain, etc, as by those symptoms they know that their karmas are being worked out fast and they are nearing final liberation. There will perhaps be only a few years of suffering and then they will enjoy Supreme Bliss with God.

Modern society ridicules the man who constantly lives in the hope of enjoying infinite bliss 'afterwards'; their contention is that he lives constantly in hallucination. Does that matter? By thinking of and dwelling on the future state of infinite happiness, this wise man has already created a happy atmosphere within himself, whatever might be the climate outside. The very same psychologist who ridicules him, prescribes a similar method to keep up morale during war-time by promising the soldiers 'ultimate victory', and often - as in submarines or ships - creating 'home atmosphere' to make soldiers and sailors feel already at home. Looking forward to 'Bliss with God', the yogi actually lives in Bliss right now. Hence, it is asserted by the yogi that he enjoys Eternal Bliss right now !

The yogi is always smiling; he regards, in the words of Kipling, both pleasure and pain as 'impostors' - they are neither pleasure nor pain, but just experiences necessary for the schooling of the soul, in order that it might graduate into Divinity. As a spectator, he enjoys the game of life, irrespective of which 'side' won the game. To him, it is always victory - to have lived his life with eyes and

ears open, and not to have been drawn out by emotion - for external motion, i.e. being drawn out of oneself and subjected to external influences - is itself victory.

He who is thus at peace and tranquil within himself is conscious of God and does His Will. Pain and pleasure - and their like - are passing phantoms, illusions created by the shadows of past actions performed in ignorance. The spirit of detachment lifts him far above the vanities and the miseries of the world, which, of course, includes, envelopes and effects his body. Prarabdha works out - he is unconcerned. To him, whether he got a motor-car or he got typhoid, it is all the same. Ramana Maharshi had sarcoma. Our Master had diabetes. Ramakrishna Paramahansa had cancer of the throat. They are detached from the body of which they are merely witness, as being part of the illusory world-phenomena. Thus they adopt the samatva bhava, the attitude of equanimity.

11. The Inner Yoga-attitude

Bhavas are the all important factors in karma yoga. We have already seen that external actions - however good and humanitarian - do not constitute karma yoga. Lord Krishna specifically commands that the yogi should not pretend to be one by appearing to be different from others or by adopting a strange mannerism! How often this is ignored! In the Bhagavad Gita (III.25), He says, "As the ignorant men act from attachment to action, so should the wise act, without attachment, wishing the welfare of the world". The Bhava or bhavana or the attitude is the difference.

We have seen that the life of a karma yogi is characterised by samatwa-bhava - attitude of equanimity. The next vital bhava is the nimitta bhavana which he adopts in all his activities. This is the opposite of kartritwa bhava - the attitude 'I do this'. It is also known as akarta bhava. - it is not I who does this. Nimitta bhava is the inner feeling 'I am only an instrument in the hands of the Lord, His Will is done here'.

Bhava or bhavana is not imagination, nor thought, nor feeling; and we should carefully avoid all confusion. It is the understanding of one's being, an expression of such understanding. It is even deeper, stronger, and more real than 'unshakeable conviction. It is one's whole being. Hence, it is important to avoid paying lip-service to the bhava, "Oh, I am not attached to anything here". The test is: you are not attached to the wall of the room in which you are; so, if it is demolished, you will not be pained. If you are really not attached to the body, you will not be affected if your hands are cut; if you are not attached to what you do, you will not worry yourself in the least if the whole edifice of your life-work is reduced to naught by an idiot. "I am only an instrument in His hands : His Will be done." That this is not callous indifference will presently be explained.

Nimitta bhava should not be wrongly construed to mean an attitude of passive instrumentality. On the contrary, it is a total, whole-souled, whole-hearted, joyous, eager and dynamic participation in the Divine Will. Egolessness will not lead to imbecility or lethargy : when selfishness is annihilated, self-giving will be spontaneous, intense and continuous, and when ego-resistance is removed, our whole being will participate in cosmic activity. 'Not for a single moment can anyone remain inactive,' says Lord Krishna in the Gita (III.5). Even the egotist is never inactive; but his dynamism is spent in resisting the Divine Will to dynamic service, and in thus helplessly being drawn to do It. The Karma yogi's dynamism, therefore, will be more fruitful.

A death-blow is dealt to the personal ego of man by Sri Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita - the challenging statement is addressed to Arjuna as well as to you and me. 'Even if you do not fight, these people are not going to live! I have already slain them by my Will; be My instrument and win fame and kingdom. (XI.32-33).

Our unwillingness is not going to prevent the sun from rising tomorrow

morning. But our willing participation in that glorious event might confer the invigorating benefit of our bathing in his rays and flooding our room with his light. An intelligent synthesis of the law of karma and karma yoga is vital to the assimilation of the spirit of the latter. John Lewis in his 'Religions of the World made Simple' says: 'The Buddha therefore does not urge social improvement. It is not only unnecessary, but impossible, to change the outer conditions of one's life. That life depends on previous actions; it cannot be significantly improved during its present span.' We should not forget for a single moment, that in all our endeavour to relieve human suffering we are empowered solely by the good karma of the beneficiary, whose instrument we become - not because we are wonderful, but because we are privileged to thus utilise a God-given opportunity to purify our own heart. Karma Yoga is ultimately self-purifying and self-revealing. If one does not accept this view, one is likely to be disappointed at his failure to straighten the dog's tail, and to hate those who thwart him - both of which are the anti-theses of the spirit of yoga. Or, again, in disgust, he might refuse to play his part in this World-Play - which is a vain wrangling with the Cosmic Forces, which would only bulldoze his egotistic pseudo-restraint and with it his peace of mind.

On the other hand, for doing nothing more than merely participating in His Will which shall flow through our being, we reap a rich harvest of happiness: even as a young 'hero' won the hand of the princess with the carcass of a snake killed by someone else. A Himalayan chieftain had proclaimed that his daughter could be won by the hero who killed a cobra by which the village was infested, provided he brought proof. No one dared or cared. The chieftain despaired. A young man rushed into the palace one day with the tail of a cobra; and the anxious and eager chieftain solemnised the wedding without a word. When the bride wanted the head of the cobra, the clever young man revealed that he did not find it at all - he only found the tail of a dead cobra.

As the story in the Kenopanishad brings out clearly, all glory for all that takes place in the universe belongs to God, Whose Will is done here. Yet, we do glorify His Instruments. It is truly a great blessing and glory to be His Instrument. No wonder the instrument is honoured - do we not see that the fountain-pens with which Presidents and Kings sign important documents are honoured as souvenirs? How much more should be the glory of a sentient being who by, the grace of God sheds the veil of the individual ego and lets the light of God shine on to humanity.

The egoless man who serves humanity with this bhava is its greatest benefactor. That is the message of Lord Krishna's Flute - a mere reed worth - nothing materially - yet the supremely blessed agent for the transmission of His Breath. The more completely hollow one is - as the hollow reed, the more entralling will be the Divine Music that flows through it.

Here, again, we should be careful to avoid lip-service to this bhava. Is there real bhava behind the action or mere kalpana - imagination? How can we know? Take

an illustration. The food in the stomach is digested by His Nature, by His Will. Though we say, "I can digest this", we have no real control over digestion. When and how digestion takes place, we are not conscious of - it is automatic. That is His Will. When I write this, however, I am conscious that 'I do this'. This is really 'my will' - not the right bhava. The consciousness of God must be so intense that there is complete oblivion of my will - which is truly non-existent - and that we perform actions as automatically as we digest our food. Even thinking, feeling, and willing, may be made instruments in His hand, by a process which baffles reason and logic.

We often pray: "Lord, Thy will be done", without realising its meaning. If we do not pray thus, is His will not done? Does Its operation depend on our prayer, assertion or affirmation? No. Yet, this prayer is very fruitful, for the simple reason that it puts us in touch with Him, it fills our mind with His thought, and it wipes out selfishness 'self-willing' and egotism. Nothing ever takes place in this universe which is not His Will. The impulsive villain and the restraining hand are both powered by Him. From the human stand-point, action and reaction both spring from His Will, and manifest His Will. To realise this is to be liberated at once from all idea of sin or evil; but this concept should not be used as an 'escape-valve' to slip through "Ah, well, I did nothing but His Will". Someone else will say, "Ah, well, this too is done by His Will", and give us severe punishment. If the realisation of the Omnipotence of the Omnipresent and Omniscient Divine Will - other than which nothing else is, liberates us from the sense of sin and evil, it should also liberate us from pain and grief; the man who inflicts it on us, does nothing but His Will. Fulfilment of prayer is a bye-product of this God-contact, granted only to one who does not seriously wish for it, and is not making such fulfilment his goal. If, however, the bye-product is elevated to the status of the object sought for, and the product used as the means, the ever-weakening contact with the Divine soon puts an end to this hypocrisy called prayer, returning man to where he belongs - the sordid world which teaches him by denying him what he demands and demanding a painful price for every success granted. The true yogi who lives by this bhavana, truly feeling that His Will runs this world-show, will be constantly conscious of God, and the actions that proceed through him will be automatic to the ego, but conscious and purposeful to the Divinity in him. That is: the ego does not act, but the Divine uses even the ego as His instrument.

Does he become a machine who adopts this attitude? No. He becomes one with God. Like Jesus, and the great saints, he knows - not in his head but in his heart - every minute what His Will is. Of course, there is no sense of responsibility. But that is precisely what we want to get over. It is this false sense of responsibility that worries us. Realise your state when you feel that the family, business, and you yourself are all His responsibility. He is the Creator and Preserver. You will be ever happy and ever active. Else, like the fool who carried his suit-case on his own head while he was travelling by train, feeling that it was his responsibility to carry it and not that of the train, you will be weighed down by self-assumed responsibility, and its weight will rob you of both happiness and usefulness.

The foolish man often misappropriates all the credit for good work, to himself, and throws the burden of evil doing upon God: 'It was His Will'. On the contrary, the godly man would give credit for all the good that proceeded from him to God; and if a blameworthy action of his is brought to his notice, he would hesitate to say, "His Will", even if it was beyond his control, He would humbly take the blame upon himself, feeling that God cannot err. Thus, he cuts at once at the root of ego and, therefore, evil. The soul-elevating music belongs to Him and the false note to the defect in the reed!

How am I to know my duty or His Will, so that I may do it, in the spirit of karma yoga? Often this eagerness to know His Will is the worst obstruction to it. The ego wants to assert, "I do His Will" - and it there does not do His Will. The formula : "Thy Will be done" is our only help in this sadhana, coupled with humility and meditation. By prayer and meditation we should be in tune with Him. Any selfish motive or desire should be ruthlessly hewn down with the axe of relaxed vigilance. The duty will be clear and the march along the path of His Will will be effortless.

Another and perhaps even more crucial test will be the motive behind the action; this is an extremely difficult region to explore and analyse. The mainsprings of motive are often in the realm of the unconscious, the chitta, and hence no true karma yogi can afford to neglect meditation or exploration of his own unconsciousness.

Total absence of selfish desire is the next bhavana, and it is known as nishkamyā bhava. The ego often deludes by camouflaging the desires in various ways. People often barter charity with vanity; there are people all over the world who buy a million pounds worth of vanity and call it charity. As Lord Jesus said: "It has its value" - but that is not what charity is intended to do. Similarly, service done with a desire even to be appreciated, or 'recognised', or to win a holiday in heaven, or even to convince oneself that one is truly selfless and desireless - are all selfish and impure desires only! Even desire for God has been regarded as undesirable, on the simple assumption that the ego that desires God might entertain it for impure, motives of self-aggrandisement!

The culmination of nishkamyā karma yoga is reached, however, when along with the above, the yogi cultivates Atma-Bhava - which is also known as narayana bhava or samatva bhava. Atma bhava has been paraphrased into 'Love thy neighbour as thy own self', the only vital alteration in the popular maxim being the capitalisation of the 'S'. Atma-bhava involves, not the recognition of the little self in others, as is popularly misunderstood, but the realisation of the connecting link which is also the Reality within all beings - whether the pronoun I, you, or he is applied to them.

The personalised variation of atma-bhava is narayana bhava, adopted by the devotee who approaches the Reality in its Personal Form as that of Lord Narayana; he is asked to see this God as the Person in all creatures.

Samatva bhava involves being established in samam - a term which is used in the Bhagavad Gita to denote the Supreme Impersonal Being. It is an echo of the Upanishadic description of the Self as Supreme Peace. When all disturbances and disharmony have ceased, when the waves of impure love and hate have subsided in one's own heart, and when the false perception of non-existent duality and multiplicity has been removed, what remains is samam or supreme equanimity. That is Brahman or the Ultimate Truth. Lord Krishna says in the Gita that he who is established in It, is liberated here and now, because It is spotless (V.19).

This is not the peace of the grave nor the equanimity of the idiot. The sage's equanimity is the fruit of fulfilment, not the symptom of psychosis. This peace is the Reality. In an interesting article 'Across the Alps in a Wicker Basket', Phil Walker describes his experience as he was flying over the Alps at a high altitude: "I felt a wonderful sense of ease, of complacency and peace. It is as if we were far out at sea, cut off from the cares of everyday life. Yet, strangely, my feeling was not that we had escaped from reality, but that we had come to it. This was what life should be, what it was meant to be. Here was reality." (National Geographic Magazine, Jan. 1963). This is the peace, the Reality, that the sage experiences directly. The sage is equipped with or has developed that vision which penetrates the external appearances - which are always deceptive - and perceives the central core of Reality. The differentiations which are the different masks of appearance vanish into a kind of shadow - as flesh in x-ray photography - and the undifferentiated essence is directly experienced.

From the heart of the sage or the true nishkama karma yogi, the very first ghosts to be exorcised are raga - deluded and therefore inordinate infatuation - and dvesha - all hate. Raga and dvesha are the brick and mortar with which this mayaic - illusory - mansion has been built - the outside world is nothing but this mayaic mansion. He who is able to transcend raga and dvesha is the real yogi or sage. He perceives unity in diversity.

It does not need an x-ray plant to reveal the bones of a mere skeleton; it is apparent to the naked eye. The powers of the x-ray are made manifest only by the body clothed with flesh, through which it is able to pierce to picture the skeleton. Even so, he who avoids company and resorts to total seclusion may pretend to be calm and tranquil, but it may not be the tranquillity of true wisdom. The tranquillity of true wisdom is experienced and expressed - though not deliberately demonstrated - when the yogi maintains it amidst the strife of the world.

If the yogi lives and works in the world, seeing diversity, but perceiving unity, he has achieved the goal. This is obviously possible only in the field of dynamic activity; hence Sri Krishna's exaltation of this path - "Even great sages like Janaka and others attained Perfection only through dynamic activity".

Thus, through nimitta bhava, the yogi gets rid of the idea of doership; and

through atma-bhava, he transcends appearance. "I do not serve, God does" and, "I do not serve humanity, but the Lord in all." God in me enables me to live and function, and it is the same Being that dwells in all and accepts the service.

'I serve him' - this egoistic feeling returns to us as misery, when he does not reciprocate. A stranger's indifference does not hurt us as much as the indifference of one whom we have helped! For ever afterwards, we insist that he should regard 'me' as something superior in his estimation to all others. 'I serve him' - and I get attached to him. 'Him' - he is something special in my estimation. I love him. I adore him. I am attached to him. I fear his loss. I smother him by my infatuation. I choke him. I kill him. Pain again. A karma yogi cannot afford to develop any kind of attachment in this world; all connections have to be snapped. It is easy to take off the coat which hangs loosely from our shoulders; but, how painful it is when the surgeon pulls off a piece of plaster from a fresh wound. It is attached to you.

The wise man, therefore, entertains the bhava - 'I serve them, not because I expect anything in return, but because they and I are cells in the Body of the One Being - God. Service thus becomes the karma yogi's nature, even as it is perfectly natural for the hand to rush reflexively to the face, stung by a wasp, to drive the insect away - neither to wait to be asked nor to question. "What will be my reward".

This concept of the Cosmic Manifest Being - Virat - is vital in the practice of karma koga. Picturesque descriptions occur in the Purusha Sukta, and in the teachings of several sages in our Upanishads and the Puranas, graphically portraying the whole manifest universe as the Body of God. Noss writes in 'Man's Religion' - 'all things form an inter-related community in which all the vital forces are acutely sensitive to each other. There is a hidden pantheism here, or shall we call it the spiritual conception of things?' Dr. Ernest Hohnes in his 'The Science of Mind' emphatically asserts - 'The entire manifestation of Spirit, both visible and invisible, is the Body of God'.

Imagination? Hallucination? Psychopathic fancy? Recently, 11th Feb. 1963, the 'Life' magazine published a highly interesting article - profusely illustrated - on the Human Body. In it were presented the mouth and the digestive tract - in the form of a factory and a huge landscape respectively. Looking at them, I was reminded of a story in the Bhagavata. Sri Krishna's friends walk into the yawning mouth of a python, thinking it is a mountain-cave, but saying, "Does this not look like a python?" The Life illustration makes us feel - "Really, does not the landscape look like the inside of somebody's body?" Verily, it is! And, that is the Virat, the Cosmic Manifest Being.

This is brahma-bhavana which leads to a unique experience called brahma-karma-samadhi of the Bhagavad Gita : 'Brahman is the oblation, the melted butter, and by Brahman is the oblation poured into the fire, Brahman. Brahman verily is reached by one through this brahma-karma-samadhi'. Brahma-karma-

samadhi is the realisation that all actions, actors, and benefactors, all knowledge, knower and the known, are all Brahman - the Absolute Being - only, not individually, of course, but collectively and essentially.

This bhavana becomes more easily understandable if the concept of a personal God is adopted, instead. The Vaishnava - though superficially averse to the doctrine of Advaita - uses a favourite formula which is called 'satvika tyaga' - renunciation of the highest order, and it means in effect : The Lord Himself, with His One Homogeneous Being in which alone all this creation and preservation take place. With His own instruments, with the sole object of Self-adoration, the Lord does all this action for Himself, for His own satisfaction."

Sir Oliver Lodge said during the course of a Lecture at Bedford College in 1908 - 'So, when we get in an atom a sort of solar system, we begin to question whether there is anything in absolute size at all. It is a question I cannot answer. It has been suggested that solar system may be atoms of a still larger universe. These are questions that are too hard. But, there appears to be no end to the infinity of the universe, and all that we can say is that the probability is that it is infinite in an infinite number of ways.' If the solar system can be visualised as an atom in some other body, what is the size of my body and yours?

Well, then, visualise that Virat - the Cosmic Body of God. The earth is only a cell in it - at the most. All the activity that goes on in the earth is only activity in His Body. Take for example, your own body. Your skin appears to be smooth and 'quiet'. Yet, through a microscope, you can see thousands of cells active. They are not doing anything for their individual satisfaction, but for the sustenance of the whole - you. Similarly, we are all small cells in His Virat Body. As such we shall work not for our selfish interest, but to fulfil His Will. It is thus alone we, sentient beings, can live and work as perfect instruments of God - as the flute of Lord Krishna is.

The Flute is a reed, the pen is inert. They do not think or feel. Thinking and feeling should be 'burnt' - let us never forget that burning purifies - by supreme wisdom of the Truth or brahma-bhavana. It is then that we shall qualify to the status described in IV.19 of the Gita - 'He whose undertakings are all devoid of desires and selfish purposes and whose actions have been burnt by the fire of knowledge - him the wise call a sage.

Brahma bhavana removes raga dvesha. No one claims our special attention, and no one will be neglected. Whether it is the sole of the foot or the superior forehead that itches, the hand is ready to serve without any sense of honourable or menial service. The 'I' has got merged in Him - and it is also realised that the second person is also the first person, who is the Omnipresent third or Supreme Person, one without a second. When these conclusions are reached, we realise God, we come face to face with Truth - the Truth that God appears in all these names and forms - that all these together - not individually, for that will ensnare us in infatuation - constitute His Body which is infinite and therefore not limited

to anything conceivable.

Paradoxically or understandably - depending on your insight, one who is I-less but entertains this brahma-bhavana, is literally consumed by the irresistible and irrepressible 'desire' to promote the happiness of all beings. It is not his desire, but His Will.

What was sadhana - spiritual effort - previously, becomes svabhava - natural. To the seeker, selfless service is spiritual practice. To the sage the same selfless service - only completely genuine - is natural. The sole object of the karma yogi is to break down selfishness, and selflessly serve all humanity, and eventually God in all. This object becomes the subjective urge of the sage who is one with God and, therefore, has realised the omnipresence of His Body!

God has to realise Himself - God alone can have Cosmic Consciousness. God asleep in each one of us has to realise Himself, has to taste His own Bliss. That is what happens when one practises Karma Yoga.

Note: though bhava or bhavana has here been translated into 'attitude', it really means 'being'. It is good to remember therefore that the attitude itself should spring from the very core of our being; the attitude should be our very being, the expression of our being, not a mere fancy or wishful thinking. If our being is egoless, unselfish, etc., our attitude and the motivation of our whole life will naturally be egoless and unselfish. Otherwise our 'attitude', however pious and good, will be artificial, unreal, useless, and fruitless.

12. The Fruits of Karma Yoga

In the field of daily life, the practice of karma yoga yields abundant fruits. "Since I have learnt to promote human happiness and learnt to rejoice in the happiness of others, I am always happy. I radiate happiness, unmindful - or even unaware - of the sufferings of my body; when I rejoice in the happiness of every living creature, I have the key to the Kingdom of Bliss. I swim in the ocean of Bliss."

That brings us to a very important habit we should cultivate deliberately. Compel yourself to smile and radiate cheer to all. In due course, you will forget to weep and, in the midst of physical agony, you will still smile.

Also, if we keep looking for opportunities for selfless service and self-improvement, we shall find we have missed a good lot of miseries which have been by-passed.

Body-consciousness and world-consciousness disappear from the vision of a karma yogi. How? Gradually we break down egotism and realise God is using us as His instruments. Even when the body-idea comes up, we feel that God has given us this precious human body as a result of His Grace, or for excellent work done in a past birth and that such a precious thing bought at such great expense should be made the best use of. Later even the world disappears and only the Supreme Reality exists, clothed and adorned in various ways. Thus, our life becomes fruitful, in the words of the Lord: "Whatever is done by men with life, wealth, organs of action, mind and speech with reference to their body, progeny and others, having an eye to their distinctive character, is futile - that which is done by those very means with an eye to their identity - divine nature - becomes fruitful, and it rebounds to benefit of all even as the watering of the roots tends to nourishment of all its limbs."

The karma yoga sadhana has thus been succinctly given by Lord Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita: "By worshipping the Lord with each one of his actions, man attains perfection". This is the greatest pronouncement in the Bhagavad Gita. It should be our constant endeavour to keep up this bhava, or attitude of worshipfulness. This Bhava should not be abandoned - if it has to be, it will drop away when the ego vanishes. One can never know when one is egoless. Who is to know this state?

Every action can be transformed into karma yoga - it is immaterial whether, it is household duty or spectacular work in the fields of social service, though, if we identify ourselves with the poor and the sick and feel one with them, the process of inner purification is faster. Whatever service God renders through us, His instruments, treat them - because we are still in the grip of the ego - as flowers offered at the feet of the Omnipresent God, Who is, therefore, present in all. Thus man attains perfection.

The fruits of karma yoga are available only to him who does not long for them! A

karma yogi will not even regard himself as one, but will sincerely feel he is an instrument in His hand and a servant of the Lord in humanity. The foremost front is his freedom from all anxiety. He does not 'care' for himself and so the Lord - through all - cares for him.

He is free from 'hope'. He expects nothing, not even 'thanks'. So, he is never disappointed. The Yogi may not say nor expect 'thanks'. Is he rude? No. He says it in action. If you are the unknown benefactor to him, he, in his turn, is ever waiting to serve an unknown beneficiary in the same worshipful spirit.

He is at peace with himself - as he is not subject to the disturbing forces of raga-dvesha, desires, and aversions.

He is afraid of none - all are God to him.

He is deluded or surprised by nothing, for he realises that the world is His Will manifest, and he is ever ready to accept anything He may will.

Equanimity bestows supreme skill on him. Here is an anecdote which Aldous Huxley quotes in his Perennial Philosophy. Ch'ing the chief carpenter, was carving wood into a stand for musical instruments. When finished, the work appeared to those who saw it as though of supernatural-execution, and the Prince of Lu asked him, saying, 'What mystery is there in your art?' 'No mystery, Your Highness,' replied Ch'ing. 'And yet there is something. When I am about to make such a stand, I guard against any diminution of my vital power. I first reduce my mind to absolute quiescence. Three days in this condition, and I become oblivious of any reward to be gained. Five days and I become oblivious of any fame to be acquired. Seven days and I become unconscious of my four limbs and my physical frame. Then, with no thought of the Court present in my mind, my skill becomes concentrated and all disturbing elements from without are gone.'

Secondly, purity of heart strengthens this skill! In Srimad Bhagavatham we have two 'dakshas' - daksha in Sanskrit means 'expert'. The first one was evil-minded, and so, destructive. The second one was pure and, therefore, constructive - he is one of the progenitors of the human race.

Thirdly, when we do everything as an offering unto the omnipresent Lord, there is no limit to the surging of the potentialities latent in us. The purer this spirit of worshipfulness, the more efficient will we be in our actions. Who will ever want to lovingly worship one's Lord with rotten flowers? A slovenly act, half-hearted service, grumbling, only betrays hypocrisy.

Having reached the goal of the realisation of His Omnipresence, 'The yogi regards nothing superior to it, nor is he shaken by the worst calamity that may - in the eyes of others - befall him - and thus the yoga once for all frees him from contact with pain.' (Bhagavad Gita VI-22,23).

The karma yogi is freed from rebirth. There is no ego to be re clothed in body. There is no karma to be worked out, there is no ignorance to dream. The puzzle

posed by Lord Krishna in verse IV.18 of the Bhagavad Gita is solved for him. Krishna classifies karma into three categories: karma - action to be done, akarma - inaction, and vikarma - forbidden or sinful action. The karma yogi has left the third far behind him. Now he has realised that that which he had regarded as dynamic, is truly inactive, and that which he mistook to be idle is ever active? He attains to the exalted state known as naishkarmya siddhi, in which established, he, in the words of the Gita 'sees action in inaction and inaction in action' (IV.18), and he is, therefore, all at once a kritsnakarmakrit - doer of all actions, a krita-kriya - one who has done all that needs to be done. This was the central core of the quietist Taoism of China - though it was wrongly styled as 'the philosophy of inaction', in truth it is 'doing everything without apparently doing anything', which statement is intelligible only to the karma yogi who adopts either of the two views : (a) God does everything, I am only an instrument, or (b) Prakriti or Nature does everything, and I am a silent witness. It is this naishkarmya siddhi - perfection in transcendence of karma - that ensures for the karma yogi freedom from bondage and rebirth and also from immediate pain, for 'he who acts suffers or enjoys - not I'. At this state he is non-different from the greatest jnani or bhakta - devotee.

The karma yogi becomes a Jivanmukta - liberated while alive - here and now. He need not have any external distinguishing marks and he need not 'withdraw' from activity-in-the-world, which, however, will not be worldly, but godly.

He is loved by all, because he loves all and selflessly promotes the welfare of all. He has no enemies at all - he has fulfilled a mystic utterance of Lord Jesus - 'Love thy enemies'. The hidden truth of this statement is often overlooked - you cannot treat someone as an enemy and love him! It means: do not consider anyone as your enemy, even the man who might bear ill-will towards you. To the karma yogi, even the person who assaults him is a benefactor, inasmuch as he works out the yogi's karma! Evil has no meaning for the yogi - for, as Lord Krishna assures in the Gita, 'One who does good, never suffers evil consequences'. Socrates believed, too, that nothing bad could come to a good man.

He is perfectly adjusted in society. He has found his place in it, and does his duty joyously, and the entire society joyously reciprocates, though he does not expect even that.

He is always happy because each action he performs makes him happy in the thought that he is worshipping the Lord. He gets his rewards sooner than the impatient salesman - the action itself is the reward! No one can obtain 'results' sooner than he!

For the same reason, he does not suffer from the 'martyr complex'. Dr. Harold Sherman asks in his book 'The Tey to Happiness' - 'Are you the knowing or unknowing victim of a martyr complex? Do you feel that you have been sacrificing yourself on the altar of someone else's desires? Do you like to pretend that you are carrying burdens which should be borne by others? Do you take a

peculiar joy in magnifying every act you do for loved ones in the hope that they will heap appreciations upon you?' There is one man in the world who can sincerely and boldly and cheerfully answer 'no' to all these questions, and he is the karma yogi. He does what he does, not because of the martyr complex, but because of cosmic love.

He is totally free from all sorts of emotional disturbances, for he has learnt the art of anasakti - detachment - which Mahatma Gandhiji loved and lived. This dynamic detachment or detached dynamism makes available to him the total vital and psychic energy in him for his life and work, without the subtraction of a major share by the worries and emotional disturbances that assail a 'normal' man of the world.

Peace of mind gives him a power that does not corrupt, a power primarily over his own physical, vital and emotional being, and a power - unconscious and hence divine - over all who come into contact with him, into whom he infuses the altruistic ideals of selfless love, and whose welfare he selflessly promotes.

Over and above all else, he is constantly conscious of the Omnipresence of God, in him and around him, in all, as all, and as the all, in all. This Truth frees him from all grief and delusion - and this is the highest prize of yoga.

13. Practical Hints

We shall conclude with a few practical hints.

(i) Remember:

(a) You serve only because God is in you - or else, four people will have to help you into the coffin.

(b) You serve others only because God is in them - you will not feed a dead body.

(c) Love makes you happy - if you love all, you will ever be happy. (d) God, Love, blood, are in your heart. God is Love. Love must be in your blood, vitalising all your organs to serve all.

(e) The only miracle worth performing is the miracle of the transformation of the heart.

(ii) Treat all alike, as manifestations of God. There is a state beyond 'Love your enemies' - it is where you will not regard anyone as an enemy. Forgiveness in such a state is blasphemy - you will not recognise evil to forgive it.

(iii) Desire is insatiable. Have the one desire - to serve the Lord in all, selflessly and egolessly.

(iv) The less you think of your happiness, the more happy will you be. Rejoice in the happiness of others.

(v) By the threefold karma - kayika or physical, vachika or verbal, and manasika or mental - with all your being, worship the Omnipresent God.

(vi) Even as meditation without nishkainya karma yoga may be self-deception, sleep or building castles in the air, karma yoga minus meditation will soon degenerate into social service, which, however glorious it may be in eyes of the world, is not our ultimate goal and therefore little consequence to the yogi. It is meditation that serves as the perennial fountain of inspiration for karma yoga - and karma yoga in its turn serves the touch-stone for meditation.

(vii) The karma yogi should possess an unshakable conviction in the existence of God in himself and in all. Constant repetition of the Lord's Name is invariably emphasised by our Master as a necessary adjunct to karma yoga.

(viii) Bowing with folded palms while meeting people is a potent practice which will keep up the divine current in our heart, and will soon enable us to 'see God in all'. But this namaskara - bowing - should be with inner feeling 'I see the Lord in you', and not an empty pretention. It is this bhava that is the all-important factor in karma yoga, and a karma yogi should, therefore, keep a vigilant watch over it, reviving it and strengthening it every moment. The least lapse in this regard should be rectified at once.

(ix) Cultivate and be filled with divine virtuous qualities like cosmic love, equal

vision, selflessness, compassion, eagerness to serve all, unlimited tolerance, adaptability, balanced mind, indifference to praise and censure, endurance of pain and pleasure, absence of all ideas of high and low, virat-bhava or beholding God in all, humility and total self-effacement, and absence of even a trace of a desire for reward even the form of 'thanks', etc.

(x) Two practical methods will enable one to grow in these virtues :

(i) self analysis - a karma yogi should not sleep before he has spent about half an hour in self-analysis, analysis of the events and activities of the day, realising one's own defects, weaknesses, and shortcomings, and a prayerful resolve to do better the next day, and

(ii) meditation on God, with the bhava that God is the abode of Perfection in the virtue one wants to cultivate and that, therefore, since He has been enthroned in one's heart, the virtue has filled the heart.

(xi) After the completion of each piece of activity, mentally offer it to the Lord, 'brahmarpanamastu' - may this be a flower of worship at the Feet of the Lord. After the self-analysis recommended in the previous sub-paragraph, offer afresh the entire day's activities to Him. This offering should again be with inner bhava. Its test of sincerity is this - you will never be tempted to boast or even talk about your virtues or good actions, to others. It was God Who did all that, and He has accepted the offering too.

(xii) The sign of selflessness and desirelessness is the presence of self-control. If the senses and mind are running riot, they only proclaim that the true spirit of karma yoga has not yet entered the heart.

(xiii) Regularly and systematically study scriptures, particularly those that deal with karma yoga, in order to keep the ideal fresh and luminous before the mind's eye.

(xiv) The karma yogi will neither neglect his physical or material welfare, nor place too great a value on it. The body is an instrument which enables him to serve, and the material possessions are His gifts of which he is merely a trustee, to ensure that they are properly utilised in the service of the Omnipresent Lord.

(xv) The supreme ideal is Self-realisation, the direct experience of the Self which is One without a second - and true karma yoga will lead one to this state. Any action interferes with one's approach to this goal is obviously not karma yoga, and should, therefore, be quickly abandoned.

(xvi) While all service can and should be treated as yoga, join some social service organisation and serve the poor, the sick and the suffering - without getting involved in positions of prestige and power - unless this becomes an absolutely essential part of such service.

(xvii) Grab all opportunities of service - lovingly escort a blind man across the

road, help an old woman with her load, pick up the walking stick an old man might have dropped, pick up a stranger and give him a lift if you are driving past in a car, give food to the hungry - man or beast, visit the hospitals occasionally and find out if there are uncared for patients whom you can 'take charge', visit orphanages, etc., and look for opportunities of serving the children - take the children out to the temple, theatre, parks, or give them a nice, tea-party occasionally.

(xviii) Every morning pray to God to let you see such opportunities that day; every night review the day's activities - think of the opportunities you let slip by, and affirm that you would not let that happen again.

(xix) While the karma yogi may use any prayer in language, the following hymn in Sanskrit and the Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi are given as models

(1)

kayena vacha manasendriyair va
buddhyatmana va prakriter svabhavat
karomi yad vat sakalam parasmai
narayanayeti samarpayami

I offer to the Lord all that I do with my body, mind, and soul.

(2)

Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace.
Where there is hatred, let me bring love.
Where there is injury, let me bring the spirit of forgiveness.
Where there is doubt, grant that I may spread thy faith.
Where there is despair, help me to give hope.
Where there is darkness, may I bring the light.
Where there is sadness, may I give joy.
O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
To be consoled, as to console,
To be understood, as to understand,
To be loved, as to love,
for
It is in giving that we receive,
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
It is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

The Supreme Being Who created the universe in order to taste His own Bliss has fulfilled that divine purpose, when the little self which had perverted and thwarted it is sacrificed at the altar of His Omnipresent Being, and He rejoices in His own Cosmic Conscious Being. The spiritual aspirant who undertook the path with the assumption that the world was a reality apart from God - duality - and his ego was somehow real - pluralism - ultimately ends in a direct realisation of Unity or Oneness - regarding God as the Reality in which the self and the world somehow inexplicably appear. Because the Supreme Reality is transcendental, they who walk the different paths to It, and arrive at It, discover that intellect and language are totally inadequate instruments of expression. Expression belongs to

duality - but yoga and the intuitive realisation leads to reveal Unity. Some say It is One, others say It is dualistic or pluralistic - but it is an undeniable verity that experience of all these sages is the One Supreme Reality.

The end,
but may it be the beginning of a new divine life for you!