

# Introduction to Yoga Philosophy

## 9: *Bhagavad Gita and Yoga (2)*

Prof. K. S. Arjunwadkar

The five Yogas *Bhagavad Gita* has treated at various places can be briefly summarised as follows:

### **Karma Yoga**

*Karma* is action in general, and religious and social duties in particular. Actions, through their invisible power, create worldly bonds which lead to suffering. This raises the question how to get rid of actions and their consequences without which it is not possible to attain *moksha*, liberation, the highest goal of human existence. The problem becomes deeper as no one can, even for a moment, remain without doing an action in its essential sense; for 'qualities' (*gunas*) which constitute the complex of our body and organs that produce actions are by nature constantly changing and thereby leading to movements. Moreover, the character of every man is shaped by invisible impressions of actions in countless past lives; and that in its turn shapes his present actions. It is, therefore, not possible to be action-free in the primary sense of the word action. Even if it is possible not to do a particular action, it does not guarantee freedom from action; for, though blocked at the physical level, the action cannot be blocked at the mental level.

Action takes place first at the mental level, then at the physical level; and it is the mental aspect that involves one in the results of the action. If, then, one succeeds in eliminating mental involvement, mere physical performance cannot make him responsible for the results of the action. This can be illustrated by a common example: a man murders another man and is given death punishment by the judge. Of the two deaths, the first results in punishment, but not the second, because the criminal is involved in the action while the judge is not. *Bhagavad Gita* advises us to do our duties without involvement, i. e. without expecting rewards/gains accruing from them. Cessation of physical action without a corresponding cessation of mental involvement cannot lead to freedom from action; but continuation of physical action without mental involvement leads to freedom from action. This is *karma* as a Yoga, which purifies the practitioner's mind and eventually makes him fit for the rise of the higher knowledge that eventually leads to *moksha*.

### **Jnana Yoga**

*Jnana* is knowledge; in the context of spiritual development, it means the knowledge of the unity of the individual soul with the universal principle, *Brahman*. The first step to this knowledge is naturally getting information from the teacher and the texts. But such a knowledge at the verbal or intellectual level of

the unity of the soul and the *Brahman* is not enough; it has to be translated into experience which is a rare thing, entailing intensive efforts for meditative practices of *Dhyana* Yoga expounded in a nutshell in chapter six of *Bhagavad Gita* and in detail by Patanjali in *Yogasutra*.

Using *Vedantic* terminology in which *Bhagavad Gita* abounds, the root cause of the suffering in this world is the ignorance of the soul of his real nature which is *Brahman* – all-pervading, all-knowing and consisting of pure and perfect happiness/bliss. The soul identifies himself erroneously with the complex of the body, the organs and the mind whose pleasures and pains are considered by him as his. The path of *moksha* is thus the path of self-discovery. Ignorance has no beginning but certainly has an end; and that end is the rise of self-knowledge. This is the reason why, once achieved, *moksha* is never lost again; for it is not something gained through extraneous means, but is the very real nature of the soul.

### ***Dhyana* Yoga**

To translate the knowledge outlined above into experience, it is necessary to devote oneself to it as the sole objective. This knowledge can never be a part time occupation. How to pursue it? It is here that the Yoga of meditation steps in and explains the technique of concentrating the mind on the chosen object. *Bhagavad Gita* gives the basic framework of Yoga, without its established terminology, and discusses the difficult nature of controlling the mind and the situation if the Yogin, perchance, discontinues his practice. In the view of the *Bhagavad Gita*, no one on the right path is ever ruined even if temporarily carried away from it. In a subsequent life he is sure to pick up the thread of his earlier practice from where he left and continues his efforts further which eventually mature into the realisation of his objective.

### ***Bhakti* Yoga**

What the *Yogasutra* has treated cursorily as an aid to mediation, *Bhagavad Gita* considers a major Yoga. This is devotion to God. It can be said safely that the major part of the *Bhagavad Gita* is devoted to the concept of devotion. Devotion as a Yoga is total surrender to God, not for worldly gains but for itself. This ideal devotion is aligned by the *Bhagavad Gita* to the highest knowledge, and a devotee with this knowledge is considered the best. The concept of devotion basically aligned to duality is raised by *Bhagavad Gita* to a higher status in which it aligned to knowledge and non-duality. This, in other words, means that, in its emphasis on devotion in relation to other Yogas, *Bhagavad Gita* does not attempt to bypass the established framework of knowledge leading to *moksha*. Rather it highlights devotion as a smooth path on which God takes upon himself the responsibility of endowing the devotee with the highest knowledge. Of the types of devotees varying with their mentality and deities, the one possessed of the highest knowledge is considered the best. *Bhagavad Gita* thus reconciles

many apparently conflicting doctrines in a skilful way, even by changing established meanings of philosophical terms at times. (For example, *prakriti* and *purusha*.) The most well known coming under this topic is the most poetic description of the form of God active in his function as the destroyer of the world occurring in chapter eleven. The imagery in this description is said to have been cited by Oppenheimer, the noted nuclear physicist, in describing the holocaust following the explosions of atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan at the end of the Second World War.

### **Sanyasa Yoga**

If actions and their consequent bondage are the main obstacles on the path of liberation, the obvious solution would appear to be the non-performance of actions which is applauded frequently in *Upanishads*. This simplistic view is not approved by *Bhagavad Gita* which goes into a detailed analysis of action as briefly stated under *Karma Yoga*. According to *Bhagavad Gita*, to renounce actions physically and continue to indulge in mental involvement is a mockery of renunciation. If therefore, one opts for renunciation, the first thing for him to do is to eliminate mental involvement even while performing actions in normal life, which is *Karma Yoga*. In other words, *Karma Yoga* can prepare ground for real renunciation, both physical and mental. *Bhagavad Gita* has nothing to say against this real renunciation.

© Prof. K. S. Arjunwadkar