

# BHAGWAT GITA AS A YOGA SASTRA FOR COMMON WELL BEING

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## Abstract

The Bhagavad Gita is the most treasured and famous of India's spiritual texts. Composed of 700 verses, the Bhagavad Gita was written in the third or fourth century BCE as part of the epic text the Mahabharata. The Gita, as it's commonly called, is a dialogue between Prince Arjuna and Sri Krishna, Arjuna's charioteer, friend and council. The story opens to the scene of a battlefield just prior to the start of a colossal war with Arjuna asking Krishna for guidance. Knowing that by engaging in this war family members and friends will be lost on both sides of the battle line, Arjuna is faced with a personal and ethical crisis. The resulting conversation between Arjuna and Krishna develops into a discourse on the nature of the soul, the purpose of one's life, and the threefold path of yoga. One of the main reasons the Gita is so cherished is due to its promotion and discussion of the middle path of yoga. Besides the Gita, many of the sacred texts and teachings of yoga advocate a complete renunciation of the world to lead the life of an ascetic or hermit. In the Gita, Krishna tells us that this is both a difficult and unnecessary practice. Krishna recommends the path of Karma Yoga or selfless service as the superior and quickest path to realizing the Divine. Once one is established in Karma Yoga, then one can proceed with the deeper practice of meditation, instructs Krishna. Towards the end of the Gita, Krishna places great importance on the role of devotion and faith in attaining the unitive state. All of these practices that Krishna gives such high praise to are easily practiced and incorporated into a normal everyday life. The Gita also heavily incorporates the yogic philosophies of karma, dharma, reincarnation, atman, brahman, maya and moksha within Krishna's responses to Arjuna's dilemma. Krishna patiently and eloquently teaches Arjuna how to apply these core philosophies to his life to relieve him from his suffering and to attain liberation and eternal happiness. And through hearing Krishna's examples and allegories we too learn how to further understand and apply these teachings within our daily lives. The Bhagavad Gita is a unique scripture in that it is considered both Shruti (divine revelation) and Smriti (ancient stories). The Gita serves as both an ancient story of Krishna leading Arjuna into battle and a spiritual text on the inner struggle for self-mastery and the attainment of happiness through yoga.

## Introduction

Yoga literally means union spiritual union of the individual soul with the universal soul and is used in this sense in the Vedanta. The Gita define Yoga as that state which is nothing higher or worth realizing and firmly noted, in which a person is never shaken even by the greatest pain. That state free from all pains and misery is Yoga. According Patanjali, yoga does not mean union but spiritual effort to attain perfection through the control of the body sense and mind and thought, right discrimination between Purusa and Prakriti.

The Yoga philosophy is closely allied to the Sankhya philosophy . It is the application of the theory of the Sankhya in practical life. The Yoga philosophy mostly accepts the scriptural testimony. It mostly accepts also the metaphysics of the Sankhya with its twenty-five principles but believes in God as Supreme Self distinct from other selves. The special interest of this system is in the practice of Yoga as sure means of attaining Viveka jnana or discriminating knowledge which is held in Sankhya as the essential condition of liberation.

The Patanjali – sutra is divided into four padas or parts. The first is called the Samadhi Pada and treats nature, aims and forms of Yoga, the modifications of Citta (Chitta) or the internal organ and the different methods of attaining Yoga. The second, namely the Sadhana Pada, deals with Kriya Yoga as means of attaining Samadhi, the Kleshas or mental states causing afflictions, the fruits of action (Karmapada) and their painful nature and the four-fold theme of suffering, its cause, its cessation and the means thereof. The third Vibhutipada gives an account of the inwards aspects of the supernormal powers acquired by the practice of Yoga and so forth. The fourth part is called the Kaivalya Pada, it describes the nature and form of liberation the reality of the transcendental self are the other world and so on.

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The Bhagavad Gita is part of the Mahabharata, an ancient Indian epic poem. In the Gita, Arjuna, a great warrior, is faced with a difficult decision: whether or not to fight in a battle between his kinsmen. He is torn between his duty to fight alongside his brothers for a just cause, and his reluctance when he sees those he must fight against include his other relatives and mentors. Krishna takes the place of Arjuna's charioteer and offers Arjuna advice on how to deal with the situation.

Included in this allegory are lessons on how to lead a moral life, which form the foundations of the spiritual practice of yoga.

Although we say that the Bhagavad Gita in an ancient yoga text, it has very little to do with the physical practice of yoga (asana). The Gita follows Arjuna's quest for spiritual guidance, and Krishna's answers to his questions on how to realize his inner spirituality and take responsibility for his life and role in the world. Krishna counsels Arjuna to practice:

**karma yoga**, the yoga of service

**jnana yoga**, the yoga of knowledge, particularly self-knowledge, and

**bhakti yoga**, the yoga of devotion.

The Bhagavad Gita can be taken as a sacred text, an historical document or a philosophical musing, depending on the perspective you bring to it. Although not essential to the practice of asana, the Gita is a wonderful companion, and the best place to start an exploration of the history and philosophy of yoga.

(Ruhela S.P. and Nayak R.K. Pp190-203)

## BHAGAVAD GITA- CHAPTER 3 (PART-1) KARMA YOGAH- (YOGA OF ACTION) FOR WELL BEING

### Introduction to Chapter III KarmaYoga in Bhagvat Gītā

This Chapter analyses from various points of view and establishes that the performance of prescribed duties is obligatory for everyone. Here Lord Krishna categorically and comprehensively explains how it is the duty of each and every member of society to carry out their functions and responsibilities in their respective stage of life according to the rules and regulations of the society in which one lives. Further the Lord explains why such duties must be performed, what benefit is gained by performing them, what harm is caused by not performing them, what actions lead to bondage and what actions lead to salvation. All these points relating to duty have been described in great detail. Hence this chapter is entitled "Karma Yogah: Yoga Of Action". In the previous Chapter Bhagavan advised that Arjuna's duty was to work without pre-occupying himself with its result and at the same time suggested that he should not be attached to inaction. He concluded His advice with the advocacy of the path of attaining the state of steady wisdom and Brahmi state by knowledge and renunciation. Arjuna feels confused by the Lord's praise of righteous war (2.31-38) and the Buddhi Yoga i.e. equanimity of mind (2.49 & 50) as also about the man of steady wisdom in conclusion. These apparently conflicting views seem to have perplexed Arjuna as to which path he has to adopt for his self-development i.e. whether it is knowledge or action or either together or total renunciation of both. The advice of The Lord here is that selfless action performed in a spirit of dedication and surrender and with pure motive is the right path.

### The Text- Part-I

#### WHY THEN WORK AT ALL?

arjuna uvaacha

**jyāyasī cetkarmanaste matā buddhir janārdana |**

**tatkiṁ karmaṇi ghore māṁ niyojayasi keśava // 3.1 //**

Arjuna said

If you think that knowledge is superior to action, O Janardana, why then do you ask me to engage in this terrible action, O Kesava?

**vyāmiśreṇeva vākyena buddhiṁ mohayaśīva me |**

**tadekaṁ vada niścītya yena śreyo'hamāpnuyām // 3.2 //**

With these apparently perplexing words you confuse my understanding, as it were; therefore, tell me definitely that one thing by which I may attain the Highest Goal. Arjuna misunderstands the teaching that work for reward is less excellent than work without attachment and desire and believes that Sri Krishna is of the view that knowledge without action is better than work. If Sankhya method of gaining wisdom is superior, then action is an irrelevance. In this confusion he asks Sri Krishna as to which of the paths he has to follow for his self-development since he still believed that to fight against his people was a terrible action. Hence, Arjuna requests Sri Krishna to teach him for certain either of the two – knowledge or action - in accordance with the state and power of his understanding by which he could attain the highest good i.e. complete eradication of grief and infatuation and attainment of that imperishable.

The confusion is only seeming. It is not the intention of the Lord to confuse Arjuna but yet Arjuna is confused.

### **LIFE IS WORK BUT THE NEED IS UNCONCERN FOR RESULTS**

**sri bhagavaan uvaacha  
loke'smindvidhā niṣṭhā purā proktā mayānagha |  
jñānayogena sāṅkhyānām karmayogena yoginām // 3.3 //**

Sri Bhagavan said

In this world there is a two-fold path, as I said before, O blameless One (Arjuna), the path of knowledge for men of contemplation and the path of work for men of action. The words 'As I said before' indicate the beginning of the created world. Even at the very beginning of the cycle of time, two classes of people, those with contemplative and those with active temperaments, were in existence. Those of contemplative mind are born with a clear knowledge of the Self and the non-Self. They easily renounce the world even at the early age of their lives and concentrate their thoughts on Brahman always. For them the path of knowledge is prescribed so that their ideas can mature and blend with Brahman. The understanding of those who believe in external action as a means of self-unfoldment is still colored by the stain of duality. The performance of unselfish action purifies their souls and enables them to practice knowledge and contemplation. The path of knowledge (Gnana Yoga) was described by The Lord in verses (11-38) and the path of action (Karma Yoga) in verses (40-53) of the Second Chapter which created confusion in the mind of Arjuna although never intended by The Lord. To consider the path of action and the path of knowledge as competitive is to understand neither of them, they being complementary. Selfless activity enables the mind to exhaust many of its existing mental impressions and the mind thus purified prepares the one for the reception of knowledge of the Absolute through meditation or contemplation. There cannot be any knowledge of Brahman unless the mind is pure. The Lord distinguishes two main types of seekers viz., the active and the contemplative. Because temperamentally these two categories are so wide apart that a common technique for spiritual development cannot yield results. So Sri Krishna explains the two-fold path of Self-development.

Viz. Path of knowledge for the introverts whose natural tendency is to explore the inner life of the Spirit and the Path of action for the extroverts who have a natural bias for work in the outer world. Those who are endowed with discrimination, dispassion, six-fold virtues, and longing for liberation and who have a sharp, subtle intellect and bold understanding are fit for Gnana Yoga or the Path of Knowledge. The six-fold virtues are control of the mind, control of the senses, fortitude, turning away from the objects of the world; faith and tranquility. Those who have tendency for work are fit for Karma Yoga or the Path of Action.

But this distinction cannot be the ultimate because all men are in different degrees both introverts and extroverts. For the Gita, the path of action is a means of liberation as efficient as that of knowledge and these are intended for two types of people. The practice of a particular spiritual discipline is determined by the competence of the aspirant. Both the active and the contemplative have one goal viz. the realization of Brahman. The path of action, however, does not directly lead to the realization.

### WHAT IS ACTIONLESSNESS?

**na karmaṇāmanārambhānnaishkarmyaṁ puruṣo'snute |  
na ca sannyasanādeva siddhiṁ samadhigacchati // 3.4 //**

Not by abstention from work does a man reach actionlessness, nor by mere renunciation does he attain to perfection.

Action as it is generally understood is the outcome of want and desire. Actionlessness does not mean mere idling or abandoning of all actions. Although one can while away his time doing nothing, his mind will be full of thoughts scheming, speculating and planning over several matters. Desires generate thoughts at the mental level which when expressed in the outer world become actions. Thus thought is the real action. If one is free from thoughts, wishes, likes and dislikes and has knowledge of the Self he can be said to have reached the state of actionlessness. The one who has reached such a state of actionlessness has neither the necessity nor the desire for action as a means to the end. He has a perfect satisfaction in the Self. Thus actionlessness and perfection are synonymous terms meaning, becoming one with the Infinite and free from all ideas of want and desire. Mere renunciation or abandonment of action or running away from life does not lead to perfection. Through selfless dedicated action, purification of mind is achieved and the purified mind helps in attaining the Knowledge of the Self which is the ultimate Bliss. The natural law is that every action has its reaction and hence the result of the action is a source of bondage preventing the man from his union with the Supreme. What is needed is not renunciation of works but renunciation of selfish desires. This is naishkarmya, a state where one is unaffected by work.

### WHY RENUNCIATION OF ACTION UNACCOMPANIED BY KNOWLEDGE DOES NOT LEAD TO PERFECTION?

**nahikaścitkṣanamapi jātu tiṣṭhatyakarmakṛt |  
kāryate hyavaśaḥ karma sarvaḥ prakṛitjairguṇaiḥ // 3.5 //**

For, no one under any circumstances can remain even for a moment, without undertaking action; everyone is compelled to act, by the modes born of nature (prakṛti).

Man is always under the influence of triple tendencies of inactivity- based on his Sattwic quality, activity- based on Rajasic quality, inactivity- based on Tamasic quality. Even for a single moment nobody can ever remain without any activity; even if one remains inactive physically his mind and intellect will

always be active. Sattwic actions help a man to attain liberation. Rajasic and Tamasic actions bind a man to worldliness. So long as we lead embodied lives we remain under the influence of these three Gunas or mental tendencies and we cannot escape from action. Without work life cannot be sustained. . But these Gunas cannot affect a man who has the knowledge of the Self, for he has gone beyond them. He has become a Gunatita - one who has transcended the qualities of nature and for him the work ceases. The man who has no knowledge of the Self who is called un-illuminated, will be swayed by ignorance and will be driven to action by the Gunas. While life remains, action is inevitable. Thinking is an act. Living is an act. These acts cause many effects. To be free from desire, from the illusion of personal interest, is the true renunciation and not the physical abstention from activity. When it is said that work ceases for a man who is liberated, all that it means is that he has no further personal necessity for work which however does not mean that he goes into masterly inactivity. He works, but without egoism or any binding necessity. Even in performing work he is not involved. When his egoism is removed, his actions are governed by the Supreme Self seated in his heart. Free from desire and attachment, one with all beings, he is released from the bondage of actions. Such actions do not bear fruit in the same way as a roasted or boiled seed loses its potency to sprout.

**karmendriyāṇi saṁnyamya ya āste manasā smaran |  
indriyārthānvimūḍhātmā mithyācāraḥ sa uchyate // 3.6 //**

He who restrains his organs of action, but continues to dwell in his mind on the objects of the senses, deludes himself and is called a hypocrite.

The five organs of action - the Karma Indriyas - are the organs of speech, hands, feet, genitals and anus. They are born of the Rajasic portion of the subtle elements viz. organ of speech is born of ether element, hands of air, feet of fire, genitals of water and anus of earth. Despite restraining these organs if one sits revolving in his mind the thoughts regarding the objects of these sense organs in order to give an impression that he is meditating on God, he is called a self-deluded hypocrite and a man of sinful conduct. True renunciation is not just the control of the organs of action or abstention from physical movement. It is the control of the mind and the organs of perception. It is the absence of longing for the activity. An active mind and an action less body do not indicate the life of sanyasa. We may control outwardly our activities but if we do not restrain the desires which impel them, we have failed to grasp the true meaning of restraint.

**yastvindriyāṇi manasā niyamyārabhate'rjuna |  
karmendriyaiḥ karmayogamasaktaḥ sa viśiṣyate // 3.7 //**

But he who restrains his senses with his mind and directs his organs of action to work, with no feeling of attachment - he, O Arjuna, is indeed superior.

The science of right action and the art of right living are explained in this verse. Mind gets its inputs through five organs of perception which are also called sense-organs or organs of knowledge (Gnana Indriyas) from the outer world of sense objects. These five sense organs are the eye (sense of sight), ear (sense of hearing), nose (sense of smell), skin (sense of touch), and tongue (sense of taste). Mind perceives the sense objects by interacting with the sense organs and if that interaction is absent perception of objects by the mind is not possible even though the objects might be within the range of the sense organs. This verse asks the seeker to control the sense organs by the mind. This implies substitution of sense objects by nobler and diviner alternatives for the mind to dwell upon. When the sense organs are thus controlled, a huge quantity of energy gets stored up which unless properly directed will disturb the inner equilibrium of an individual. This verse says that the pent up energies must be spent by directing the seeker's organs of action

(explained in the previous verse) to the appropriate fields of activities. Even when so acting it is advised not to have attachment arising out of doership and enjoyership so that instead of gathering new mental impressions one may use such activities for exhausting the existing vasanas. Thus the very field of activity becomes a ground for liberation. In the previous verse mere outer renunciation is condemned and in this verse true spirit of inward detachment is commended.

### IMPORTANCE OF PERFORMING ALLOTTED DUTY

**niyataṁ kuru karma tvaṁ karma jyāyo hyakarmanāḥ |  
śarīrayātrāpi ca te na prasiddhyedakarmaṇāḥ // 3.8 //**

Do your allotted work; for action is superior to inaction. Even the bare maintenance of the body would not be possible if you remain inactive. Allotted action is one's own duty as laid down in the scriptures to different persons in accordance with their inherited tendencies, the stage in life and the order in society. Non-performance of such bounden duties would mean inaction. The very fact of living involves several natural and unavoidable actions which have to be performed by all. Even bodily existence in health is just not possible if one has to live in complete inertia and inaction.

### UNSELFISH ACTION DOES NOT CREATE BONDAGE

**yajñārthāt karmaṇo'nyatra loko'yaṁ karmabandhanaḥ |  
tadarthaṁ karma kaunteya muktasaṅgaḥ samācara // 3.9 //**

The world is in bondage to work unless they are performed for the sake of Yajna (sacrifice). Therefore, O Son of Kunti, give up attachment and do your work as a sacrifice. All work is to be done in a spirit of sacrifice, for the sake of the Divine. Yajna here means any unselfish action done with a pure motive. It is a self-sacrificing work undertaken in a spirit of self-dedication for the good of all. Such actions cannot be self-serving but self-liberating and do not bind the performer. An action which is not governed by the spirit of unselfishness binds one to worldliness, however glorious it may be.

### WHAT IS SACRIFICE?

**sahayajñāḥ prajāḥ sṛṣṭvā purovāca prajāpatiḥ |  
anena prasaviṣyadhvameṣa vo'stviṣṭakāmadhuk // 3.10 //**

The creator (Prajapati), having in the beginning created mankind together with Yajna, said 'by this you multiply'; this shall be the milch cow of your desires'. When the Universe was created by the Creator - Prajapati - he simultaneously created Yajna also, the spirit of self-dedicated activities which is seen everywhere, e.g. shining of the sun and the moon, flowing of rivers, tolerance of the Earth etc., All these activities show the spirit of sacrifice without any selfish motives. The second part of the verse means that no achievement is impossible for man if he knows how to act in the spirit of self-effacement and self-sacrifice with the required amount of non-attachment.

**HOW CAN WELFARE BE ACHIEVED BY SACRIFICE?**

**devān bhāvayatānena te devā bhāvayantu vaḥ |  
parasparam bhāvayantaḥ śreyāḥ paramavāpsyatha // 3.11 //**

Cherish the Devas with this and may those Devas cherish you, thus cherishing one another you shall gain the highest good.

**iṣṭānbhogānhi vo devā dāsyante yajñabhāvitāḥ |  
tairdattānapradāyaibhyo yo bhunkte stena eva saḥ // 3.12 //**

Devas, cherished by the sacrifice, will give you the desired objects. Indeed, he who enjoys objects given by the Devas without offering in return to them is verily a thief. By performing actions as Yajna, as dedication to the Self, recognize and express your sense of appreciation and gratitude to all the Devas, the presiding functionaries of natural laws such as wind, fire etc. By worshipping the various Devas in a spirit of sacrifice, by being grateful to all the presiding deities of the unchanging laws of nature, you recognize the Self behind all the Devas, behind all the laws of nature and natural phenomenon in this creation. Thus, through the Yajnam- by propitiating the Devas, you propitiate the Self itself. In any sacrifice or ceremonial ritual we propitiate the Devas by offering oblations to them. It is simply a way of expressing our deep sense of appreciation and gratitude to them for the parts that they play in this creation. Whether one is grateful or not, the sun rises, the rain rains and the wind blows. But by recognizing their functions in this creation, and by expressing one's deep appreciation and gratitude to them, one recognizes the true nature of one's own function in this creation, one becomes an active participant in this creation, and one progressively identifies oneself with the creation and the creator - The Self, Brahman. When we express our appreciation and gratitude to the Devas, what do they do to you? Having been properly propitiated, the Devas will protect you; nourish you by their functions. Thus, may all the laws of nature - by their own natural functions, uplift you by being an asset to you in your endeavors for gaining your overriding goal of life, namely liberation. By doing every work as a work of sacrifice totally dedicated to the Self, everything in this creation becomes an asset to you for your own upliftment in life, for your own true progress in life, for a life of non-binding, everlasting prosperity, success and happiness, leading ultimately to Shreyas, total Fulfillment in life. Therefore, mutually interacting with each other, may you reap the supreme good, may you gain moksha. What about the person who never says a prayer, who has no sense of gratitude, but only wants to enjoy whatever he, can get out of this world? The one who enjoys all the blessings of daily life without even a sincere expression of gratitude to the Self (Devas) who made all such enjoyments possible, is indeed a thief. Thus in the Vedic view, every human being is meant for action as a participant in this creation. Every one's destination is the same, namely shreyas, moksha. One reaches this destination by doing one's Karma with the attitude of Karma Yoga - as an act of sacrifice dedicated to the Self. In this relative world man and Devas are interdependent. They are nourished by one another. Men offer oblations to the gods; gods in return ensure men's welfare by sending rain and other gifts. Thus a chain of mutual obligation binds together all created beings.

**THOSE WHO ACT IN A SPIRIT OF SACRIFICE ARE SUPERIOR PERSONS**

**yajñāśiṣṭāśinaḥ santo muchyante sarvakilbiṣaiḥ |  
bhujjate te tvaghaṁ pāpā ye pachantyātmakāranāt // 3.13 //**

The righteous who eat the remnants of the sacrifice are freed from all sins; but those sinful ones who cook food only for their own sake, verily eat sin. Sins of the past are the cause for the present pains and the

present sins are the cause for future sorrows. All the causes for the sorrows in social life can be removed if the members of the community find happiness in enjoying the results of their efforts performed in true Yajna spirit. As a contrast to this it is pointed out that those who cook for themselves only meaning those who perform actions only with selfish motives are eating nothing but sin. By doing the work in yajna spirit, the selfish life is transformed into an unselfish one and the individual becomes aware of the interdependence of all beings.

### **ACTION SETS THE WHEELS OF THE COSMOS GOING**

**annaad bhavanti bhootani parjanyaad anna sambhavah |  
yajnaad bhavati parjanyo yajnah karma samudbhavah // 3.14 //**

From food all creatures are born; from rain food is produced; from sacrifice comes rain; sacrifice is born of action.

**karma brahmodbhavam viddhi brahmaakshara samudbhavam |  
tasmaat sarvagatam brahma nityam yajne pratishthitam // 3.15 //**

Know that action arises from the Vedas, and the Vedas from the Imperishable. Therefore, the all pervading Vedas ever rest in sacrifice. The cosmic wheel of co-operative action is painted here. The living creatures are born out of food and nourished by food. The mineral wealth of the world becomes assimilable food because of the action of the rain upon it. Rain is the cause for the conversion of mineral raw material into nutritive food in life. Similarly, in all fields of activity profit can be gathered only when the field comes under conditions favorable for it to produce those profits. Self-dedicated activity - Yajna - when performed in any field of endeavor will create conditions-rains- for the field to yield profit - Annam- enjoyable by the society. This wheel of action is connected with and includes the Supreme. The principle of right action has come out of the Creator himself who is none other than the Imperishable Supreme Reality expressed through the Vedas. Therefore, the all pervading Supreme is ever centered in all efforts undertaken with an honest spirit of self-dedication for the common good. He who lives in unison with this wheel of action is contributing to the harmony of life.

**evam pravartitam cakram nanuvartayatīha yaḥ |  
aghāyurindriyārāmo mogham pārtha sa jīvati // 3.16 //**

He who does not follow the wheel thus set-in motion, but takes delight in the senses, he lives in vain, O Arjuna. Every member of the Universe follows the principle of Yajna and contributes to the smooth running of the Universal Wheel of Action. But among all the living creatures only man has been endowed with the option of freedom of action - to contribute to the harmonious working of the cosmic mechanism or strike a discordant note. While a majority of the people live abiding in the Law of Harmony, there are some who do not believe in this Eternal Law and revolt against it. During such dark periods nobody works with the spirit of Yajna without which no favorable circumstances can be created (rain) for the productive potential to manifest. Such seekers of selfish pleasures bring about discordance in the Wheel of Action. They are considered to be living in sin and that too in vain by the Gita. In these verses (10 to 16) the Vedic conception of sacrifice as an inter-link between God and man is set in the larger context of the interdependence of beings in the cosmos. He who works for himself alone lives in vain.

## Karma, Jnana, and Bhakti Yoga : Summary

Yoga literally means to unite, to link with, to connect with God. The physical exercises we commonly associate with yoga help align our body, mind and spirit to achieve a peaceful state of samadhi, complete absorption in our spiritual reality. In this article it is briefly explained three main paths of yoga given by Krishna in Bhagavad-gita. According to the Vedic literature, there are three realms of human endeavor—the realm of karma, that of jnana, and that of bhakti.

**Karma:** Karma refers to action performed for the sake of the body and its senses. The work we do to earn a living is karma. The work we put into having a good time is karma too. When we eat, that's karma. When we sleep, that's karma. When we watch TV, listen to Beethoven, or Ravi Shankar, or Madonna, when we have kids, or drive our car—when we do just about anything—that's karma. Karma can be "extended" too. It's not only what we do directly for ourselves but also what we do for others, in relation to the body and senses. When we help out a friend, give food to the poor, serve in the Army, or show our uncle how to cheat on his tax returns—again, it's all karma. Karma may be "good" or "bad" (or, for that matter, mixed). So karma may bring good or bad results (or, again, mixed). These results are also sometimes called karma. (More precisely, they are karmic reactions.) Sometimes the results of karma are quick and obvious: work hard and get a good grade, overeat and get indigestion. But sometimes the results may take years—or, according to Vedic literature, lifetimes. I may do something this life and get the results in the next—or ten lifetimes from now, or thousands. So karma and its results form an intricate web. If someone's born ugly or poor or sick, that's a sign of bad karma. Or if someone gets in trouble with the police, or gets in legal trouble—bad karma again. And good looks, good money, good health—good karma. We're getting reactions now for what we've done in the past, and creating future reactions by what we're doing now. Gets complicated, doesn't it? The scriptures of the world—the Vedas included—try to warn us away from bad karma and guide us towards good. But we don't always go along. And even when we do, the best that we get are good karmic results. And good or bad, we're still caught in the net, still entangled. Good karma or bad, we're still tied to the wheel of repeated birth and death.

**Jnana:** Jnana (pronounced "gyana") is the pursuit of knowledge. Of course, we may pursue any sort of knowledge—how to hammer a nail, or play the piano, or program a computer. Knowledge of history, or business, or medicine. But that's hardly above karma, and that's not really what's meant. Jnana, more precisely, pertains to the ultimate questions in life: Who am I? Why am I here? Why am I suffering? Where does everything come from? What is the purpose of life? What is everything finally all about? The realm of jnana is that of the philosopher, the intellectual, the thinker. By reflection, by speculation, by logic, intuition, and discourse, by exploring and evaluating ideas, we try to understand what is ultimately what. We may approach those ultimate questions through physics or biology or psychology—or, if we go deep enough, by thinking about almost anything. When somehow or other those questions come upon us, we enter the realm of jnana. But this too is a world we can get stuck in. We can spend lifetimes in speculation, questing and questing, and still be doing hardly more than playing games in our minds. The Vedic literature, therefore, offers guidance on the path of knowledge. It gives us access to the thoughts and realizations of sages who have been through this territory before. It aims, finally, to bring us from speculation to knowledge, from wondering to seeing, from seeking to finding.

**Bhakti:** Early along the path of Vedic knowledge, one comes to understand that he's a spark of pure consciousness, above the body, above even the mind. He sees that he uses the body and mind—when he tells his finger to scratch his head it does so; when he directs his thoughts, they go from one subject or another—yet the body and mind are distinct from his inner identity, his inner being. This understanding is called self-

realization. Yet self-realization is not the end of it. By further introspection—unless one gets stuck—one comes to understand that his own consciousness, his own spiritual existence, is not ultimate. Even in his own essential identity, he himself is not the be-all and end-all of everything. There are other living beings too, and they're not just projections of himself. And there's a material cosmos out there, hard and tangible and unlikely to be something he has merely imagined up. And even if he thinks that in reality such distinctions at last no longer exist, that in truth there is only absolute oneness, and that all else is but an illusion, a dream, he still has to ask himself, "Where does this illusion come from?" In this way his thoughts bring him to realize that there is an Absolute Truth, a source of all energies, all realities, and he sees himself to be a part of that Supreme Absolute. By considering his own identity as a conscious individual—a conscious person—he ultimately realizes the individual personal nature of that Supreme Absolute. He recognizes the eternal relationship between himself and the Absolute. And in this way he enters the realm of bhakti, the realm of personal spiritual dealings between himself and the Absolute. In bhakti, the individual person joyfully devotes himself to serving the absolute Personality of Godhead, who joyfully and unlimitedly reciprocates. This is the postgraduate stage of self-realization.

(Aurobindo, Sri Pp1-5)

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