

## CHAPTER 3

### KARMA-YOGA

#### *Dealing with the confusion: Renunciation vs. working in niskama-karma (3.1-9)*

In the previous chapter, Krsna stressed the importance of *buddhi*, intelligence. He instructed Arjuna to "Keep all abominable activities far distant" by *buddhi-yoga*. Statements like these reinforced Arjuna's misunderstanding that activity is categorically abominable and sinful.

Arjuna proposes that to avoid material bondage one must abandon society and prescribed duties.' This is a common mistake of neophytes in spiritual life. They think that all activity leads to bondage, and that avoiding *karma* is as simple as giving up activity. In this section, Krsna decisively corrects this misconception.

#### Main Theme:

Liberation or bondage is not determined by one's activities, but by one's consciousness in performing those activities. Thus, renunciation is not the giving up of activity, but is the giving up of attachment to the fruit of activity.

#### Sub Points:

- A. Renunciation of activity without the necessary training, knowledge and purification will lead to destruction on the path of spiritual advancement. Without prescribed duties, an unfulfilled desire for activity will lead the premature renunciate to sinful action (3.1,4 & 5).
  1. By giving up prescribed duties, one gives up the means to gradually purify themselves of the enjoying mentality. If a desire for fruitive activity arises in the heart of one who has given up prescribed duties, he has no positive avenue for religiously satisfying the desire and therefore runs a great risk of resorting to irreligious means of satisfaction. This is the danger of immature renunciation (3.4).
  2. Renunciation of activity is not a means of purification; it is the *result of* purification.
  3. The soul is active by nature, so there is no possibility of renunciation of activity. Rather one must act on the pure platform.
  4. Taking to quick renunciation before one is qualified may be an attempt to acquire subtle sense gratification through profit, adoration, and distinction. Krsna mockingly contrasts this pseudo renunciation with the honest attempt at purification through the regulations of *karma yoga*(3.6-7).
  5. Prescribed duties are too important to be capriciously abandoned. Besides the value in purifying the heart, they also maintain a balanced society and even one's physical health (3.8).
- B. The path of inaction (*sankhya-yoga*) and the path of action (*karma-yoga*) are interdependent, not contradictory.
  1. *Sankhya yoga* (philosophical discrimination) indirectly leads one to realize Krsna. It helps one realize the self as spiritual. One can then realize their connection with the Superself, Krsna.
  2. The process of Krsna consciousness (*buddhi-yoga* or *karma-yoga*) is to act on the platform of one's spiritual connection with the Supersoul.
  3. Although they are two parts of the same path, Krsna consciousness is a superior method because it is far more practical. In Krsna consciousness, one fulfills the desire for activity. And that devotional activity is the purifying agent by which one realizes his actual position. There is less provocation for fall down, and one makes advancement quickly and easily (3.3).
- C. Action in Krsna consciousness is "work done for the sake of Vishnu" (*yajna-arthat*). All beings are forced to act by their nature. They should act only for the sake of Vishnu and thus be released from the bondage of fruitive action (3.9).