

Brief summary for Tuesday 23rd August (5.4 - 5.6 session)

We must thank all our teachers for their contribution to what has been written below. These are things we have learned and heard from other gracious souls whose teachings are expressed in our own words/understanding.

If you missed part 68, [check out the notes here.](#)

You can find [all the previous notes here.](#)

We continued to look at Krishna's comparison of karma yoga and jnana yoga. In verse 5.4 Krishna says that those who are learned or wise reject the opinion that contemplative life (sankhya-yoga) and selfless action (karma-yoga) are separate. The ignorant or childish persons think that is the case. Actually, if someone practices either of these paths carefully, they will achieve the same result, that is, liberation from material bondage.

It is worth mentioning that the term sankhya and yoga have different meanings to how they were used in chapter 2. In verse 2.39, Krishna said:

Thus far I have described this knowledge to you through analytical study. Now listen as I explain it in terms of working without fruitive results. O son of Pṛthā, when you act in such knowledge you can free yourself from the bondage of works.

There, sankhya meant "theory" and yoga meant "practice." Here the meaning of yoga is practice associated with action. Sankhya was used again in chapter 3 where in verse 3.3 Krishna used the term to mean contemplation.

The Supreme Personality of Godhead said: O sinless Arjuna, I have already explained that there are two classes of men who try to realize

the self. Some are inclined to understand it by empirical, philosophical speculation, and others by devotional service.

Now the term has become more nuanced and refers to contemplation associated with renunciation. It refers to being fixed in jnana and an anga or limb of that path is sannyasa.

Krishna says that intelligent people, or the wise, do not see any difference between the two paths. Only the foolish or ignorant speak of the difference between sannyasa and karma-yoga. Actually Krishna uses the word bālāh which means childish. That is, they are persons with incomplete knowledge and do not know the entire truth. They don't have true knowledge if they think that karma yoga results in jnana yoga and jnana yoga alone results in the vision of the self. It is ignorant to think the two paths are distinct and have a difference in their fruits. Rather, they both have the vision of the self as the fruit and so someone firmly fixed in one of them will gain that fruit common to both of them. They do not produce separate results.

The sannyasi and karma yogi are one. When the heart becomes purified by properly engaging in niskama-karma-yoga, knowledge appears, and one eventually achieves liberation. This is also the fundamental purpose of renouncing one's prescribed duty. The paths are non-different in terms of the result achieved. Externally they appear to be different, but the wise do not see a difference since the result of both processes is the same. Only the uninformed mistakenly see these two paths as separate yielding divergent results. A person who determinedly follows either path achieves the same result.

If someone performs a sacrifice with the desire for rewards upon its completion, then the sacrifice (yagna) is not sanctified. But the same sacrifice performed without desires but only for appeasing the Supreme Lord is considered to be the highest wisdom for the reasons given. If someone doesn't see this, they aren't conversant with Vedic scriptures and

so their speculations do not need to be considered (hence the use of childish in describing them).

These are not two different paths with two separate goals. Renunciation is involved in both. If I am holding a rock in my hand and I want to pick up an axe, I drop the rock to free my hand. Then I can pick up the axe. Someone with material desires must first drop their material attachment before acquiring a spiritual taste, and this is what happens in the path of jnana. However, the two steps can be performed as one step. By picking up one object (the axe) I will automatically drop the rock. Karma-yoga allows the practitioner to become materially detached and spiritually attached at the the same time. This is also the case in bhakti as we will see later in the Gita.

Srila Prabhupada nicely points out in his purport:

The aim of the analytical study of the material world is to find the soul of existence. The soul of the material world is Vishnu, or the Supersoul. Devotional service to the Lord entails service to the Supersoul. One process is to find the root of the tree, and the other is to water the root. The real student of Sankhya philosophy finds the root of the material world, Vishnu, and then, in perfect knowledge, engages himself in the service of the Lord. Therefore, in essence, there is no difference between the two because the aim of both is Vishnu. Those who do not know the ultimate end say that the purposes of Sankhya and karma-yoga are not the same, but one who is learned knows the unifying aim in these different processes.

In verse 5.5 Krishna repeats His point from text 4 for emphasis. The destination attained by the contemplatives (who renounce action) is also attained by the yogis (who perform selfless action). Contemplative life and karma-yoga are one. One who perceives this sees things as they are, knowing these paths to be one and the same. They are a wise person with

proper vision. That is, through the eyes of wisdom, one can see that these two processes are the same.

Krishna is explaining in what sense the two paths are equal: they deliver the same result (as we have previously discussed). The previous subject is being clarified in this verse. The fruit of both paths attained is the vision of the self or atma tattva (realisation of the soul). This is the result stated in the previous verse. Even if one performs actions, if it is done with spiritual intelligence, one will achieve this goal. Therefore even renunciates with spiritual wisdom can perform activities, and grihastas or householders should cultivate spiritual knowledge (especially of the Supreme Lord).

In this case Ka is understood as action and ma is understood as wisdom when using the term karma in relation to such wise action. Even householders with responsibilities in the world can perform actions in renunciation if they possess wisdom or spiritual intelligence. There is no difference between renunciation and karma yoga if the actions are performed as a matter of duty with no desire for the rewards of the action.

Moksha or liberation is assured for those who perform prescribed activities free from desire for the results, also for those firmly established in renunciation, and of course, those who are cognisant of the eternal Brahman. More than this though, there is even more bliss and satisfaction for those who perform actions to please the Supreme. That is, Krishna or any of His avatar incarnations and expansions.

In speaking about karma-yoga and jnana-yoga specifically, Krishna is not speaking about a variety of paths leading to a variety of destinations. He is describing two paths, one easy and one difficult, leading to the same goal. The verses are applicable whether one is trying to attain Brahman, Paramatma, or Bhagavan realisation. Srila Prabhupada of course translates yoga as "devotional service" because he wants to direct the reader toward Bhagavan realisation which is also Krishna's actual desire and purpose as we will see.

Srila Prabhupada writes:

In the first process, Sankhya, one has to become detached from matter, and in the devotional yoga process one has to attach himself to the work of Krishna consciousness. Factually, both processes are the same, although superficially one process appears to involve detachment and the other process appears to involve attachment. Detachment from matter and attachment to Krishna are one and the same. One who can see this sees things as they are.

The relative superiority of karma-yoga is in terms of its being easier and more expedient. If we renounce activity before our hearts are clean, we will be forced by our unclean hearts to engage in improper activities. The senses will demand engagement, but the jnana-yoga process forbids sense activity. Unless the senses are engaged in good work, it will be difficult to stop improper work or activity. Krishna therefore recommends keeping the senses always engaged while simultaneously purifying the heart by working with detachment. This is the practical and therefore better path and we see Krishna highlight this in the next verse where the comparison between the two paths continue.

In verse 5.6, Krishna stresses that renunciation that does not arise out of karma-yoga should not be embraced. He says, renunciation of action without yoga or selfless action is difficult and is the cause of sorrow or distress. The sage or wise person who is practiced in yoga (selflessly offering the fruits of one's action), however, quickly attains the Absolute or the stage of transcendence. A thoughtful person devoted to the practice of yoga soon achieves the Supreme.

From what has been spoken earlier, the question may come up that if the same results on the path of karma yoga is realised through renunciation of action, why not start with renunciation of action in the beginning. Krishna is advising that it is difficult and perilous to attempt this without performing karma yoga because the mind will not have been purified. Renunciation

and contemplative life needs to be prefaced by detached action that purifies the heart. Without a pure heart, no-one can actually meditate effectively, as we have discussed in earlier sessions. Krishna is also indicating that the karma-yogi will also practice meditation in the due course of time.

If someone prematurely practices Jnana-yoga and takes sannyasa without the required purity of heart, it will just cause them suffering. If they haven't performed karma-yoga which pacifies the disturbance of the heart, they are accepting the position without proper qualification and so they will be disturbed. There is a quote in a Vedic commentary (Varttika) that says:

One even sees the minds of sannyasins or complete renunciates in abnegation agitated by material desires and are externalised with thoughts polluted by contact with material nature, becoming careless, malicious, and quarrelsome.

Similarly in the Srimad Bhagavatam (10.87.39) we see the personified Vedas stating:

Members of the renounced order who fail to uproot the last traces of material desire in their hearts remain impure, and thus You do not allow them to understand You.

A Jnani's acceptance of karma-sannyasa (renunciation of their prescribed duties) before the heart is completely purified leads to misery. When the heart is disturbed by worldly desires, renunciation becomes miserable.

In contrast, someone engaged in selflessly offering the results of their activities to the Supreme (niskama-karma-yoga) experiences happiness and very quickly attains transcendence or brahman. They have peace in their hearts while practicing. It is better to engage in the selfless offering of one's endeavours than to take sannyasa before the heart is pure.

Without first practicing karma yoga, it is impossible to achieve purity of mind and in the absence of a pure mind, it is difficult and even perilous as the chance of disturbance and agitation are prevalent. We see these warnings in the verses we just quoted, and we see a similar statement in the 11th Canto of the Srimad Bhagavatam (11.18.40):

One who has not controlled the six forms of illusion [lust, anger, greed, excitement, false pride and intoxication], whose intelligence, the leader of the senses, is extremely attached to material things, who is bereft of knowledge and detachment, who adopts the sannyasa order of life to make a living, who denies the worshipable demigods, his own self and the Supreme Lord within himself, thus ruining all religious principles, and who is still infected by material contamination, is deviated and lost both in this life and the next.

The purified mind of the elevated sage who has equanimity and practices karma yoga will very soon attain Brahman and achieve atma tattva or realisation of the soul. Their commitment to actions that are devoid of ego will deepen their purification and they will attain that spiritual substratum pervading all existence quickly in the same lifetime. This is why Krishna has made clear in His answer to Arjuna that karma-yoga is superior to renunciation of action because renunciation can't be maintained without first performing karma-yoga.

It is the desire for sense objects and the motivation for rewards that lead to misery. Moksha or liberation is the goal of karma yoga and jnana yoga and other goals are of little importance because they are material and transitory and only come into one's possession for a limited time. There are even statements in the Puranas that say except for the goal of moksha, all other goals are not even worthy of consideration. The primary effect of equanimity in regards to the material world is renunciation and so the word munir is used to mean one who has renounced. They alone are renunciates who are devoid of desire and anger. This equanimity is the means to moksha or liberation.

Of course, it is worth noting that in bhakti in particular, our goal is beyond liberation. We seek Krishna Prema, or pure selfless love of Krishna, and this of course includes liberation or moksha in it as a by-product. So it is not very much a focus of bhakti-yogis. True renunciation is seen to be that which is always offered to Sri Krishna. Other forms of renunciation aren't advised.

Srila Prabhupada nicely summarises the difference between a devotee sannyasi and a Mayavadi sannyasi, which would apply to any type of Jnana oriented Sannyasi:

There are two classes of sannyasis, or persons in the renounced order of life. The Mayavadi sannyasis are engaged in the study of Sankhya philosophy, whereas the Vaishnava sannyasis are engaged in the study of Bhagavatam philosophy, which affords the proper commentary on the Vedanta-sutras. The Mayavadi sannyasis also study the Vedanta-sutras, but use their own commentary, called Sariraka-bhasya, written by Shankaracarya. The students of the Bhagavata school are engaged in the devotional service of the Lord, according to pancaratric regulations, and therefore the Vaishnava sannyasis have multiple engagements in the transcendental service of the Lord. The Vaishnava sannyasis have nothing to do with material activities, and yet they perform various activities in their devotional service to the Lord. But the Mayavadi sannyasis, engaged in the studies of Sankhya and Vedanta and speculation, cannot relish the transcendental service of the Lord. Because their studies become very tedious, they sometimes become tired of Brahman speculation, and thus they take shelter of the Bhagavatam without proper understanding. Consequently their study of the Srimad-Bhagavatam becomes troublesome. Dry speculations and impersonal interpretations by artificial means are all useless for the Mayavadi sannyasis. The Vaishnava sannyasis, who are engaged in devotional service, are happy in the discharge of their transcendental duties, and they have the guarantee of ultimate entrance into the kingdom of God.

The Mayavadi sannyasis sometimes fall down from the path of self-realization and again enter into material activities of a philanthropic and altruistic nature, which are nothing but material engagements. Therefore, the conclusion is that those who are engaged in Krishna conscious activities are better situated than the sannyasis engaged in simple speculation about what is Brahman and what is not Brahman, although they too come to Krishna consciousness, after many births.

This comparison is also true for any devotee, even if not formally a sannyasi. The process of bhakti itself purifies, whereas, as we have seen, renunciation needs prior purification through karma yoga. It is a user friendly process because action is included which is also the nature of the soul: to be active. There is less risk of falling down due to incomplete renunciation as the renunciation is to use everything for Krishna. Rather than just looking for the root of existence (Vishnu), which is what Jnana is about, the bhakti-yogi waters the root of existence. Instead of just trying to detach from matter, material energy is engaged in the process and becomes spiritualised, and one becomes attached to Krishna. This is a path that brings happiness rather than distress as the senses are engaged and there is variety in the activities one can perform. It is hard to only restrict the senses completely which is what is expected of a sannyasi on the path of Jnana. One will achieve transcendence much quicker by karma yoga, and especially bhakti yoga, whereas the perfection of jnana can take many more births comparatively.

Having heard the comparison of karma-yoga to jnana-yoga, we may wonder: how does the karma-yogi embrace the spirit of renunciation? Krishna will describe how to practice niskama-karma-yoga next. We will look at verses 5.7-5.9 in particular next week.