

Brief summary for Tuesday 9th August (5.1 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 66, [check out the notes here.](#)

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

Chapter 3 showed us lust covers knowledge, and ignorance binds us to the material world. Karma yoga or dutiful detached work leads to knowledge arising. Our intelligence strengthened with transcendental knowledge has the strength to overcome lust or selfish desire.

Chapter 4 discussed transcendental knowledge which Krishna says is received by disciplic succession. These truths reveal Krishna's form, His birth and His activities. Knowing these, one is confident to take shelter of Krishna, become purified by doing so, and realises Krishna in pure love.

Krishna responds to everyone according to their desire. Detached actions are performed by applying transcendental knowledge and these become akarma. They do not produce a reaction.

Sacrifices described in the Vedas lead to transcendental knowledge which in turn liberate one. One should receive transcendental knowledge and instructions on how to perform sacrifice from a realized person. One can do their duties fixed in transcendental knowledge. Sacrificing material possessions should lead to knowledge of the self and Bhagavan otherwise it is karma. There is also sacrifice in such knowledge.

This knowledge is of the fundamental principle of the living entity (jiva-tattva), as well as the fundamental principles in regard to the Supreme Lord (Bhagavat-tattva). Both are required for the fullest expression of pure selfless love.

The only useful factor sought after in all kinds of sacrifice is the conscious part: the knowledge of the real nature of the soul. Doubt is an enemy to such knowledge. A faithful person receives instructions of the knowledge from a realized person conversant with tattva. They will be able to dispel all doubts.

Whereas chapter 3 saw Krishna stressing selfless action, chapter 4 glorified knowledge as the fruit of selfless action. Krishna ended the 4th Chapter telling Arjuna to fight with knowledge (karma and jnana). The 5th Chapter is sometimes titled “The Path of Divine Harmony”. It harmonizes the seeming contradiction between action (karma) and knowledge which leads to inaction (jnana). Therefore it is also sometimes titled “Karma Sannyasa Yoga.” It describes in more detail the yoga of renunciation of action which deepens knowledge.

Selfless action prepares the heart for knowledge to manifest by awakening dispassion and the firm resolve to attain wisdom. Renunciation of action involves the direct culture of knowledge. Upon attaining knowledge of the Truth, the practitioner becomes qualified to connect with the Supreme through the renunciation of prescribed duty. Real renunciation means giving up attachment to prescribed action and its fruits. Action that interferes with meditation is renounced as one is eligible for contemplative life and practices that directly awaken wisdom.

Chapters 5 and 6 discuss the contemplative’s renunciation and meditation: Karma-sannyasa yoga and Dhyana-yoga. These chapters elaborate on the concluding section of chapter 2 (B.g. 2.55-72), in which the samadhi of the enlightened soul is described. Five and six are the concluding chapters of the first set of 6 chapters and all that is found in the first 6 chapters can be found in mature realisation of bhakti proper. In the 2nd chapter Krishna

described the ideal person; the perfectly integrated human being (in response to Arjuna asking how such a person walks, talks, and sits). Krishna hints throughout these chapters that the bhakta is this ideal integrated person.

Arjuna wants further clarification from Krishna at the start of this chapter. How can Krishna expect him to fight yet not become implicated in the consequences of fighting?

Arjuna says, O Krishna, on the one hand you advocate renunciation of action and on the other you advocate yoga (which involves selfless action). Tell me with certainty, which of the two is more beneficial. Tell me precisely which of these is superior, most excellent, being more easy to practice, and quicker to obtain the vision of the self.

Chapter 5 points out that action and renunciation are inseparable because renunciation is the very state of mind the karma-yogi must possess. However, the life of a contemplative is outwardly different. Karma yoga is better because it is safer and easier for the beginner. Renunciation develops naturally and is strengthened through its continued practice.

Krishna is speaking ultimately about his devotee and we will see at the end of the chapter Krishna thrust himself, the object of devotion, into the description of the perfect static peace of Brahman, declaring that knowing him, one attains true peace quickly.

Arjuna's question is a response to Krishna's last verses of the previous chapter. Krishna in 4.41 urged Arjuna to attain renunciation and self-composure through karma yoga and said "renounce action" (sannyasta-karmanam). Then in the next verse (4.42), Krishna said to "stand for battle." Arjuna asks for clarification as they seem to be opposites. But Krishna told Arjuna to renounce action through karma-yoga (yoga-sannyasata-karmanam).

It is not possible to perform both renunciation of action and karma yoga at once because there is essential contradiction of the two, as there is contradiction in remaining stationary and moving, simultaneous movement and stillness, or light and darkness. Therefore a person of knowledge should either renounce karma or perform karma yoga.

Krishna has explained niskama-karma-yoga in order to attain knowledge. Upon attaining knowledge of the self, there is no need to engage in prescribed duties (karma) because karma-yoga is included in jnana-yoga. Then Krishna explained that to attain steadiness in transcendental knowledge it is appropriate to engage in niskama-karma-yoga (selflessly offering the fruit of one's work to Bhagavan. Arjuna knows these topics are very difficult to grasp and is inquiring from Krishna as if ignorant so common people may easily understand. Krishna declared jnana-yoga to be superior but is again encouraging and instructing on niskama-karma-yoga.

I like how Madhvacarya describes Arjuna's position:

“Arjuna was a prince of the highest royal order that ruled India and the entire Earth as well. He was raised meticulously and comprehensively in the science of sanatana dharma or the principles of eternal righteousness as well as all matters regarding governance and diplomacy, war and conciliation. Due to this he was an adhikari or very qualified being. If the divine discourse of the Bhagavad-Gita was meant only for Lord Krishna to remove the lamentation of Arjuna then there would have been no need for Vedavyasa to record it in the Mahabharata. But in chapter four, verse two Lord Krishna reveals that although it was transmitted by parampara or disciplic succession it was lost on the Earth over the millenniums. Therefore Lord Krishna caused Arjuna to have lamentation as a pretext to reveal the Bhagavad-Gita to the world again and He made Arjuna the symbol of the individual consciousness of everyone to achieve knowledge of the ultimate reality on their quest of attaining communion with the ultimate consciousness and thereby realising the ultimate supreme personality.”

It is Krishna's plan that Arjuna should remain confused because the dialogue is actually taking place for our benefit. Arjuna's perplexity gives Krishna the chance to further stress that work and renunciation are not opposed to each other; rather, one must learn to work in a renounced spirit. Arjuna thinks that jnana implies renunciation of work. Knowledge and work, like light and darkness, are mutually opposites. Krishna emphasizes, however, that one in knowledge should also work.

In verses 4.16-18, Krishna glorified jnana and spoke of action in inaction and inaction in action. In text 41, Krishna glorified both jnana and renunciation. Then in text 42, He again ordered Arjuna to fight.

Karma yoga is the means to attain the self-composure necessary for renunciation and contemplative life. Such selfless action is not materially binding and so is a dynamic expression of inaction. Krishna was not instructing to overtly renounce action. He did not contradict Himself.

If one engages in righteous work, offering the results to God, and all the while keeping alert to the ultimate goal, then such work becomes worship. For most people it would be premature and detrimental to sever themselves from worldly relationships and duties in pursuance of spiritual perfection. The path of karma-yoga offers a progressive means of spiritual development while simultaneously staying in the world. Just as a lotus leaf is surrounded by water but remains completely dry, one can stay in the world and still remain aloof from its influences.

Krishna wants Arjuna to act inspired by theoretical knowledge and the conviction to attain self-realisation, which he compared to a sword of knowledge that destroys ignorance. This chapter advocates renunciation of action no longer necessary for entering contemplative life while also emphasising that selfless action itself is not binding. We shall see at the end of these next two chapters, the mature yoga Krishna alludes to is bhakti.

To practice yoga is to seek closer union with God. The essential point here is that the attempt to renounce the world will succeed only if we positively attach ourselves to God by acting in the awareness of God's presence. Yoga is more than theory. It is practical action. Action with a certain state of mind.

Krishna points out that even the actions of a soldier in battle, if undertaken with compassion and "for the good of all," can constitute dharma. Krishna again will emphasize his identity as the Supreme Person and assures Arjuna that the path to peace lies not in renouncing a difficult challenge but in remembering him within the heart and acting with devotion. The message is clear: Bhakti-yogis, those who serve others with love, live happily in this world. How do we gain sufficient distance from our own woes to put the well-being of others before our own? The Gita advises that we not judge the trials we face superficially: an eternal reality dwells beneath external appearances.

There is a nice prayer in Madhvacarya's commentary to this verse to conclude with:

"Hari OM! Because the Supreme Lord Krishna performs such wonderfully phenomenal activities known as lilas or pastimes, He attracts all the worlds. Thus He is known as Krishna the all attractive one. The Kurma Purana states: Oh Lord since You attract all the worlds by your extraordinary activities, enlightened beings who have realised the Brahman or the spiritual substratum pervading all existence call you Krishna the all attracting one."

Next time we will read verses 5.2 and 5.3 where Krishna will begin to respond and answer Arjuna's question as to whether karma yoga or jnana yoga is better.