

Karma Yoga

Poornima Parameshwarappa

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Karma yoga (Sanskrit: कर्म योग), also called *Karma marga*, is one of the four classical spiritual paths in Hinduism, one based on the “yoga of action,” the others being *Jhana yoga* (path of knowledge), *Raja yoga* (path of meditation) and *Bhakti yoga* (path of loving devotion to a personal god). To a *Karma yogi*, right action is prayer. Of the classical paths to spiritual liberation in Hinduism, *Karma yoga* is the path of unselfish action. It teaches that a spiritual seeker should act according to dharma, without being attached to the fruits or personal consequences.

According to Lord Krishna in Bhagavad Gita, *Karma yoga* is the spiritual practice of “selfless action performed for the benefit of others.” *Karma yoga* is a path to reach *moksha* (spiritual liberation) through work. It is rightful action without being attached to fruits or being manipulated by what the results might be, a dedication to one’s duty, and trying one’s best while being neutral to rewards or outcomes such as success or failure.

The tendency for a human being to seek the fruits of action is normal, state Hindu texts, but an exclusive attachment to fruits and positive immediate consequences can compromise dharma (ethical, rightful action). Your work is your responsibility, not its result. Never let the fruits of your actions be your motive. Nor give in to inaction, set firmly in yourself, do your work, not attached to anything. Remain even-minded in success, and in failure. Even-mindedness is true yoga.

A *Karma yogi* acts and does his or her duty, whether that be as “a homemaker, mother, nurse, carpenter or garbage collector, with no thought for one’s own fame, privilege or financial reward, but simply as a dedication to the Lord.”

Bhagavad Gita states that avoiding work or not starting work is not the path to become free of bondage, just as renouncing the world and wearing monk’s dress does not automatically make one spiritual. The action can be motivated by body or manipulated

Department of Pediatric and Preventive Dentistry, College of Dental Sciences, Davanagere, Karnataka, India

Corresponding Author: Poornima Parameshwarappa, Department of Pediatric and Preventive Dentistry, College of Dental Sciences, Davanagere, Karnataka, India, Phone: + 8105482841, e-mail: drpoornimas@gmail.com

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by external influences. Alternatively, it can be motivated by one’s inner reflection and true self (soul, *Atman*, *Brahman*). The former creates bondage, the latter empowers freedom. The spiritual path to the liberated state of bliss is to do the best one can while being detached to outcomes, to fruits, to success or failure. A *Karma yogi*, who practices such *nishkama karma*, is following “an inward journey, which is inherently fulfilling and satisfying.”

The more one acts hoping to get rewards, the more one is liable to disappointment, frustration, or self-destructive behavior. According to chapter 5 of the Bhagavad Gita, both *sannyasa* (renunciation, monastic life) and *Karma yoga* are means to liberation. Between the two, it recommends *Karma yoga*, stating that anyone who is a dedicated Karma yogi neither hates nor desires, and therefore such as person is the “eternal renouncer.”

In the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna says: “*tasmad asaktah satatam karyam karma samacara asakto hy acarana karma param apnoti purushah.*”

Therefore, without being attached to the results of activities, one should act as a matter of duty, for by working without attachment, one attains the Supreme.