

The need for activity (karma)

But peace does not mean inactivity, the mere inert life of eating and squatting. You should not spend your time eating and sleeping, saying to yourself that the Lord will come to your help when the need arises. You must arise and work. God helps those who help themselves, and He will help no other. Learn from the life of Prahlada the lesson that the Lord alone is to be loved; learn also the technique of that process. Do the work that has fallen to your lot sincerely and efficiently. Give up everything that is outside the service of the Lord. Follow the footsteps of Prahlada. Through the grace of the Lord, you can win the joy of peace, the thrill of fullness, and the bliss of immortality.

Work has to be undertaken, so that time does not hang heavily on you and is not a burden. Work is your mission. Without it, you will get lost in the darkness of ignorance and be overwhelmed by dullness and sloth (*thamas*). Ignorance will multiply your doubts —and these have to be chopped off with the sword of wisdom.

On one occasion, when such mystic subjects were taught to Arjuna, he got puzzled and asked Krishna, “One time, You say that we should renounce all activities (*karmas*); another time, You say that the discipline of *karma* (*karma-yoga*) has to be adopted. Tell me, which of these two paths is better?”

Krishna answered thus. “Renunciation (*sanyasa*) and the discipline of *karma* both lead to the same goal of liberation, Oh Arjuna! But know this. There is greater joy in doing work than in giving up work. Renunciation and work are not contradictory; they are interdependent, complementary. By giving up work, without the progress derived from activity and the training achieved through it, people will only decline. The real renunciant (*sanyasin*) is one who does not desire one thing or hate another.” The word renunciation can well be applied to work done without regard to success or failure, profit or loss, honour or dishonour, to any activity performed as an offering to the Lord. Mere inactivity announced by the saffron cloth and the shaved head is no renunciation at all. To deserve the name, one must have avoided the duality of joy and grief, of good and bad.

So, better than the giving up of activity is the giving up of its fruits; it also yields greater joy. That is the best path. However, whether renunciation or the discipline of activity is followed, the fruit of the other can also be won. There is bliss in activity, but there is also bliss in renunciation.

Renunciation devoid of the discipline of activity (*karma-yoga*) will lead to grief. How can anyone get away from activity? However much you may avoid action, isn't it necessary at least to engage yourself in the remembrance of the Lord, in meditation or repetition of the name? That too is action. If these are given up, there is no joy in life. Everyone has to do some activity, whatever the form. One who engages in the *yoga* of action, renouncing all fruits of action and following the discipline of silence, can realize *Brahman* within a short time. Action will not stick to such. Action for such a person is akin to breathing. Life is impossible without the activity of breathing; so too, for the aspirant, work is essential. Unrest (*a-santhi*) comes only when the fruit of action is desired. If the fruit is disregarded and joy is derived from the very action itself, then one gets peace. No one thinks of the results and benefits of the action of breathing, do they? So too, when work is done, never worry about its result; that gives real peace.