

Are there four paths to Mokṣa?

There is a popular notion that there are four paths for gaining *mokṣa* – for the extrovert - *karma-yoga*, for the emotional - *bhakti-yoga*, for the intellectual - *jñāna-yoga*, and for the one who does not fit into these - *Hatha-yoga*. How far this is true needs to be examined.

Firstly, there are no four independent paths or ways to gain *mokṣa*. The *siddhānta* is that knowledge alone is the direct means for *mokṣa*, so there is no *mokṣa* without knowledge. However, one needs to gain preparedness to receive and assimilate the knowledge. That preparedness may be gained in different ways. The *śāstra* talks of two committed lifestyles for a person pursuing *mokṣa*. One is an exclusive pursuit of knowledge (to the exclusion of *karma*). This is called *sāṅkhya* or *jñāna-yoga*. A second lifestyle is a pursuit of knowledge along with the duties and roles one has to play as a member of the society, called *karma-yoga*. Both pursuits culminate in *mokṣa* only through a blessing in the form of knowledge. The following article is a based one of Pujya Swamiji's class, clarifying the confusion regarding four paths or four *yogas*.

What does the Bhagavad Gita say regarding this? Kṛṣṇa clearly teaches that there are only two life styles for one committed to gaining freedom, *mokṣa*.

लोकेस्मिन् द्विविधा निष्ठा पुरा प्रोक्ता मया अनघ
ज्ञानयोगेन सांख्यानाम् कर्मयोगेन योगिनाम् (Bhagavad Gita – 3.3)

*lōkēsmin dvividhā niṣṭhā purā proktā mayā anagha
jñānayogēna sām̐khyānām karmayogēna yoginām*

In this world, these two types of committed life styles were taught by me earlier, in the Vedas. This is an answer to Arjuna's question asking the Lord "If knowledge is superior to *karma* then why do you push me into *karma*? I want *mokṣa*, *śrēyas*. Why are you asking me to do *karma* when knowledge alone delivers?"

Bhagavān says "अस्मिन् लोके द्विविधा निष्ठा मया प्रोक्ता ; ज्ञानयोगेन सांख्यानाम् सन्यासिनाम्"

Jñāna -yoga is a lifestyle for those who pursue knowledge exclusively, it is the *yoga* for *sannyasis* – a committed life in the pursuit of knowledge of *ātma*. A second life style is a committed life in terms of *karma-yoga*. *Karma-yoga* was defined by '*samatvam yoga ucyatē*'(2.48) and '*yogaḥ karmasu kauśalam*'(2.50). '*Karmaṇi ēva adhikārah tē mā phalēṣu kadācana*'(2.47) also talked about *karma-yoga*. The choices are either *karma-yoga* or *sannyasa*. *Sannyasa* is a life of renunciation meant for gaining knowledge, for an exclusive pursuit of knowledge. In this lifestyle, one takes to this pursuit, having renounced all other roles and responsibilities.

Doing *svakarma*, means doing what is to be done in a given situation, is *karma-yoga*, done with an attitude as a contribution to *Īśvara*, which is not easy. To understand *karma-yoga* takes the study of the whole Gita. With reference to *karma-phala* there is an attitude, an attitude born of understanding. I have a choice over my actions, I do not have any choice over the result of the actions. The result has a number of factors governing it, therefore the result has to be accepted as it comes - *āgatē svāgatam kuryāt*. There is no question of not accepting it because that is the result. Accept it and you can try to improve it by doing some other actions. You

can correct your action because you know how to go about it and get the result- but first you have to accept it. So it is action all the way. You have a choice over your action not over the result. Choice means you have freedom. But not to produce the result you like. The result comes from whom? It comes from the order, *niyati* - that is what *Īśvara* is. Don't arrogate yourself that you are the *karma-phala-hētu*. The cause of *karma-phala* is *Īśvara*, an order that implies *karma* also. Your previous *karma* unfolding, either enhancing the result or inhibiting the result is also there. Others prayers etc. are involved. So your connection to the contemporary society is very big. And all that is to be taken into account. *Karmaṇi ēva adhikāraḥ tē mā phalēṣu kadācana*.

Karma-yoga is translated and interpreted differently also. But whichever way they interpret, that one should do *karma* with *Īśvarārpaṇa buddhi*, (an attitude of offering to the Lord) is accepted by all. When you do with *Īśvarārpaṇa buddhi*, what comes is *prasāda*. If results are taken as *prasāda*, one can entertain any ambition, to do anything. Having clapped, sound will come. I have no choice. *Karmaṇi ēva adhikāraḥ tē mā phalēṣu kadācana* - result is taken care of by *Īśvara* means *niyati*, *Īśvara* as order. A *karma-yogi* should be aware of *Īśvara* because the next step is *mokṣa* for him. It is *mokṣa* – therefore awareness of *Īśvara* is necessary, because *mokṣa* is recognizing that all that is here is *Īśvara*. That is called *bhakti*, offering all *karmas* to *Īśvara* and accepting the result as *prasada*.

Without *bhakti* there is no *karma-yogi* and there is no *sannyasi*. *Sannyasi* has got his own way of relating to *Īśvara*. The individual is connected to the total. *Jīvēśvara* connection – a *sannyasi* has that, the *karma-yogi* has that. That is called *bhakti*. What is this special *bhakti-yoga*? Will *bhakti-yogi* perform *nitya-naimittika-karma* or not? *Nitya-karma* including prayer, *naimittika-karma* – on a particular day like *śrāddha* day that is *naimittika-karma*. *Nitya-naimittika karma* a *karma-yogi* has to do. Will *bhakti-yogi* do these or not? He has not renounced *karma*, so he too has to do these with *śraddhā bhakti*. That is what *karma-yogi* does. So *bhakti* is for both *Karma-yogi* and a *Sannyasi*. A *bhakta* does *kirtan* – it is *vācīkam karma*. It is *karma*. *Mānasam-karma* (mental action), *vācīkam-karma* (oral-action), *kāyīkam-karma* (actions done through the physical body) - a *karma-yogi* does all three types of *karma*. A *sannyasi* is exclusively in pursuit of knowledge. He too offers prayers. Therefore there is no separate *bhakti-yoga*. *Karma yoga* is *bhakti-yoga*. By being a *karma-yogi*, you are not any less. *Karma-yoga-phalam* will lead to *sannyasa-phalam* also. Being a *karma-yogi*, people attain *moksa*, *jñānam*. A *karma-yogi* pursues knowledge. He has *bhakti*, he has *jñānam*, and he does *karma*.

Hatha-yoga, including the practice of *asana*, *pranayama* etc. can be done by every *sannyasi*, *karma-yogi* also or may be doing. It is common to all. Even a rank materialist does *yoga* for health benefits. *Yoga* was ruled to be religious in a court-case because of chants involved in *yoga*. True, *yoga* is religious. *Namaḥ* means there is a prayer. *Sannyasi* and *karma-yogi* are the two people. “*Yoginaḥ karma kurvanti saṅgam tyaktvā ātmaśuddhayē*” (5.11) - yogis do what is to be done in a given time and place for the sake of *antaḥkaraṇa-śuddhi*. “*Sannyāsaḥ tu mahabāhō dukham āptum ayōgataḥ*” (5.6) - is hard to attain unless you have lived a life of *karma-yoga*. Or as a *sannyasi* you have to do *Guru-seva* – again a kind of *karma yoga*, for gaining *antaḥkaraṇa-śuddhi*. There is *bhajanam*. A *sannyasi* does it. If there is a *bhakti-yogi*, he has to do *karma* and pursue knowledge. If he becomes a *sadhu* (a *sannyasi*), he has to follow *sannyasa dharma*. Otherwise there will be dereliction of duties.

