

Satsang with Swami Viditatmananda Saraswati
Arsha Vidya Gurukulam
More on Action versus Knowledge

Question

People say that *karma* and *jñāna* are separate paths. Please guide us on this.

Answer

The *Bhagavad Gītā* says that there is only one path. It is the path of self-growth, which is the path of freedom. So there is only one path of attaining the freedom. *Karma* and *jñāna* become stages on this path. *Karma* means *karma yoga*. It enables me to acquire freedom from my *rāga-dvesas*, or likes and dislikes. *Jñāna* is the subsequent stage of acquiring freedom from the remainder of obstacles.

Basically, my mind consists of 3 *gunas*, *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. *Rajas* and *tamas* result in the *rāga-dvesas*. As the likes and dislikes get subdued, my mind becomes *sāttvic*. It enjoys poise and equanimity. *Karma yoga* helps me achieve a *sāttvic* mind, a cheerful mind, and a contemplative and thinking mind. It is a mind where there is desire for knowledge. *Jñāna* removes ignorance and enables me to attain my true nature. It thus also gives me the ultimate freedom, freedom from ignorance. So freedom becomes a process. The first step to which is *karma yoga*, and the second step, *jñāna*. So we do not look upon *karma* and *jñāna* as separate paths. We look upon them as one path.

In doing *karma*, it is not so much the actions that count, as the attitude behind the actions. This attitude is also of the nature of knowledge. We have to know what the sense of duty is and how there is harmony between the world and ourselves. We have to be aware of how the universe is supporting us, and thus our actions should become a means of returning this favor. All this requires understanding. In *karma yoga*, there is a progressive growth in our maturity and understanding. When *karma* is performed with the right attitude, it becomes a means of knowledge. So *karma yoga* is not purely the performing of action, or even the right attitude. It is also knowledge; the knowledge that I have progressively grown in my understanding of myself and the realities of life. *Jñāna yoga* is the next stage of this knowledge of the true nature of my self. Each stage serves to bring me closer to my awareness of my true self. *Karma yoga* removes the bigger obstacles in this quest and *jñāna yoga* removes the finer obstacles.

It is like the tuning of a transistor with a big knob and a fine-tuning knob. *Karma yoga* is the big knob, as it were, and you hear the music near your desired frequency, and *jñāna yoga* helps in fine-tuning, so that you can hear it properly. *Karma yoga* makes the mind *sāttvic*, contemplative, so that I can experience my self, which is my happiness. Progressively there is a desire to understand this Self. This is when *jñāna yoga* helps with the fine-tuning, to reveal that the happiness is the very nature of my true self. Therefore, just as the two knobs of the radio serve the same purpose, so also, *karma yoga* and *jñāna yoga* are not two separate paths, but stages along the same path of self-realization.¹

¹Questions and Answers from a satsang with Swamiji at the Arsha Vidya Gurukulam, Spring 2003.
Transcribed and edited by Jayshree Ramakrishnan and KK Davey.