

The Yoga of Action Chapter 3 (1 of 2)

Om Namoh, Bhagavate, Vasudevaya. Welcome.

Today we are entering the third step, the third revelation of the Bhagavad Gita, called the Yoga of Action or karma yoga. The Gita is unique in that it is an integral spiritual path. It includes all aspects of our nature: our mental nature, our emotional nature, and our physical nature. It also integrates these principles of personal and impersonal, universal and individual. So these principles of impersonal and personal, universal and individual are constantly reiterated throughout the Bhagavad Gita. In this chapter we are making a transition and I believe it is important to spend a little time giving an overview.

(1:33) In order for the Gita to be integral it had to have a different yoga for each aspect. It is reflecting the three spiritual paths: the path of knowledge, the path of love or devotion, and the path of action. These are the three spiritual paths. The Bhagavad Gita includes all of them and you will find that we will move between each of these three different paths in each of the different chapters. Basically you can have an insight or revelation that occurs in your awareness. Or you may have a sense of overwhelming gratitude or awe that is a spiritual experience that pulls you towards the devotional, the personal part of your nature. And the knowingness, the recognition, the revelation pulls you towards the more impersonal aspect of your individual nature. Those two start from the personal.

The personal aspect has more the feeling and the impersonal aspect has more the awareness, the knowledge. And they move towards the universal experience. So in the knowledge you move out of just the ability to step back and witness yourself on the path of awareness on an individual level or having a momentary spiritual experience that comes and goes. You move into relationship with a higher and higher expression, a more and more universal expression of those two qualities: personal and impersonal. So from the personal we move toward the impersonal. From the individual we move toward the universal.

(3:45) This chapter is talking about the third path, the path of action. The Gita gives the most emphasis to the path of action. It says that no matter what your understanding is, what your insight is, what your revelation is, no matter what your spiritual experience is or what sense of awe or connection you have, without action they cannot be integrated. They cannot be brought together. They cannot be developed and made part of your reality, and I mean day-to-day reality. The goal of the Gita is not some abstract far away zone of consciousness where only there can you feel bliss, or only there are the revelations. It is something that you live. So the path of action is the most powerful because it is talking about how to live in this collaborative effort or arrangement with the matter and spirit of each of us. It is learning to bring together the part that is human and the part that is aspiring.

In this chapter we begin to look at action. Action is the most powerful tool of the individual self-aware human being. It is the power that has been given to self-awareness. So when awareness became aware of itself, it stepped out of the morass of impulse and reaction, of instinct and conditioning. It stepped out of the programming of nature and stepped into a possibility for choosing. So when we talk of action we are talking about conscious action—not impulsive actions, not instinctual actions, not reactive actions. Those come from the part of our human nature programming that came with each body and from the psychological formation in our childhood where we became conditioned to certain kinds of reactions to ways of preferring or being repulsed by the things in our lives.

(6:24) When we are present and we choose something for good or for ill, for high or for low, we set in motion an impact in the creation that is much greater than any other living being. The human being's ability to effect consciousness, to effect matter, is greater than any other living creature on the planet. And the power of that effectiveness is intelligence and will, this will to act, this ability to choose an action other than what the inclination is or to choose an action that follows the inclination.

On the spiritual path you become oriented to any of these three directions based on your innate nature. So if your mental is very developed, then the path of knowledge or awareness comes naturally to you and you tend to grow more rapidly along that path. If you are inclined more to feelings or emotions, then the path of devotion comes more naturally to you and you tend to be drawn to that feeling nature with whatever the Truth or God is. But if your system is more physical and more rajasic then the path you are inclined to is action.

(8:07) Understanding action is perhaps the most useful technology of the Bhagavad Gita. Understanding, first, that we are actually creating something every time we choose. We are either creating the reality of the existing inclinations or we are creating a new reality, different than the existing inclinations. So if you choose one morning to exercise versus not to exercise, and your inclinations were not to exercise, to choose to exercise means that you take an action other than your inclination and you apply your will. This application of will is your effort. This applying of effort is required because the inclination is to keep itself in the old way, to stay with what it is used to. Therefore to choose to do something like exercise means you are breaking out of the inclination and creating a new way to be in that part of your life. This is the power of action. The more we choose through our intelligent will actions that are aligned with truth and oneness, the more we make those real. The more we take actions that are aligned with our ego, with untruth, with separateness, with fear, with need, with lack, the more we reinforce those things.

Our ability to act is evidence of what we are empowering. You can empower the ego through your actions or you can empower the being, the truth of you through your actions. It is your choice even if you choose a teacher to guide you. It is your choice to choose a teacher to guide you. This choosing is an action. It has ramifications all throughout the creation. Why? Because the nature of action in a field of truth is that we are in this matrix of interconnected beings and any one of those beings who take an action creates a vibration

throughout the entire mesh, throughout the entire web. Like a spider that sits on its web and then a fly comes in. The fly gets caught in the web. The spider knows through the vibration that it has come. So when we take an action we are affecting everyone, and in fact, every thing all around us.

This web of interconnectedness is the field of consciousness which we are all born into and live in. When we take an action it affects this web, which means it affects everyone. Especially it affects those that you are most corded to, the parts of the web that are most intimate or personal. It doesn't have to be just a physical matrix, it is a matrix in consciousness which doesn't have a specific physicality. This is why it is said that a butterfly in the Himalayas can affect the weather off the coast of Mexico. Everything is interconnected.

(11:53) When we take actions there are ripples this effect that happens in the matrix is called consequences. Consequences are for good or ill or neutral. So every time we take or don't take an action it has an effect on the existing matrix in which we are living. Of course it is endlessly changing because there are innumerable beings. We have seven billion people on the planet making choices. But these choices that have the power to affect the matrix are choices that come from our intelligent will, that come from aspiration, that come from that drive to bring forward something that currently isn't here.

This drive is actually what is consciousness itself. It is the motivating principle of all creation and it arises from the original intent. So when we take an action, knowingly or not, we have an intent. The intent is to have more pleasure, or the intent is to be liked at work, or the intent is to get along with people, or the intent is to protect ourselves, or to get what we think we want. We are using this intent, which is the power of self-aware consciousness, to bring something into existence. As soon as we act on that intent it manifests. An action can be something you say, an action can be something you communicate to someone else on the computer, an action can be a movement—all the different modalities of actions, speech, even thought to some extent. But in the domain of what we are addressing, these actions affect how we see the world. The actions that we do based on our choices can create a new way of being in the world just like the actions we are now taking without any change has created a way of being in the world.

(14:20) When we are looking to step out of the way of how we are currently relating to existence all we have to do is look at our actions. Look at what you put attention to. Look at what you do. Look at the actions: the food you eat, the conversations you have, your judgments, what you do when someone calls you on your reactions, especially the ones you get swept away in. All of these are letting you know you are in a paradigm, an existing point of view, a relationship with this entire matrix, but unconsciously, or semi-consciously.

When you enter the spiritual path you now have a possibility of choosing actions consciously. Of course it is true in the material life that if we want to do well at school then we study hard. We apply effort because our inclination is not to study hard but to watch TV, relax, watch cartoons, hang out with our friends, play football or whatever. We study hard because we made studying important because somehow we were trained that would be a

goal to have. And so we start making actions aligned with that purpose. The more we study hard the better we get at studying. Funny how that is. It is the same principle on the spiritual path.

The more you put your attention to the spiritual path the more it gains in power and effectiveness. The more you take actions aligned with that intention the more real the spiritual path becomes for you. It is that simple. We carry within us the power to create realities other than the one that we have been habituated to. If we have an insight or a realization and we don't act on it, if we don't bring it into our lives, then it is just philosophy, just a theory, something you can write a book about. It has very little power to change your reality or to change the reality of other people, other than through the mental plane. If you have a spiritual experience and you are suddenly thrown into a relationship to something greater than yourself but you don't act on it, you don't start aligning your life with what that spiritual experience is pointing to, and how you can prepare yourself to be more receptive to those experiences, then it just remains a memory. It might be an emotional memory, a feeling memory, but it will be just a memory.

(17:35) It is only when we act that we make these things real and we bring them into our life in such a way that the old habitual point of view, the paradigm that we have been living, can start adjusting and changing to include the new directives, the new consciousness that we are bringing to our life. This chapter of the Bhagavad Gita describes the nature of the soul and the quality of being that presence, that eternal, unchanging principle that we all are.

Arjuna has learned that there is a way of bringing this into your life and has pointed to signs of what happens as one brings it into your life—this ability to be less attached or more detached, have greater equanimity, come to a state of samadhi, consciously being in touch with the soul while in the world. And this ability to stand back and witness is knowledge. So in the very first part of the chapter Arjuna says basically, "Why are you teaching me this? What is the use of this knowledge? You are making this knowledge important but you are at the same time waiting for me to go and do this action in the world? How is this relevant? How is it important?" So we will start with a reading from the first part of the chapter.

Chapter 3, Karma Yoga, The Yoga of Action.

Arjuna said:

120. Krishna, if you know that knowledge is superior to action, then why do you urge me to perform this terrible action?

121. Your words are conflicting and confuse my intellect, therefore, please recommend a path for me that will definitely take me to the highest goal.

So again, this is a reflection of Arjuna not being able to grasp the point of the revelation from the second chapter yet. It is still too new to him. The idea of discrimination is still just

an idea. The ability to know the soul is just an idea. The talk of equanimity and samadhi and nirvana are just abstractions. They don't seem relevant to the fact that he is standing on the battlefield and there are about sixteen million people ready to kill each other. So he is impatient but at the same time recognizes that he doesn't know. He is still in a state of humility and is saying, *"Your words are conflicting and confuse my intellect, therefore please recommend a path for me that will definitely take me to the highest good."* He is basically saying "I am impatient, I don't understand this, I know I don't know so what are you telling me, what are you recommending?"

(21:18) This is a point that will be repeated again and again. There is no teaching unless there is listening, unless there is learning. Without receptivity there is no transmission. It just stays. So without humility the Gita could not have been revealed. Without listening there is no Gita. And if you are just listening with the mental then you only get whatever you can through that part of your listening and the other part of you is closed—you don't get it. So listening is actually throughout your whole body. The body listens, the vital listens, the mind listens.

Learning to be in this place of receptivity is what humility points to. Right now it is primarily in Arjuna or the seeker's mind because this is early in the journey. Arjuna was a mental being, his inclination was to know and to act. Each of us is different, but you will see that Arjuna will go through each stage in this journey.

The Blessed Lord said:

122. Arjuna, to reach the highest state I have shown two approaches to people in this world long ago. One is through the technique of knowledge for the followers of Samkhya and the other is through the technique of yogic action for the followers of yoga.

123. Simply by withdrawing from outer activity one cannot reach the state of actionlessness; so also the state of perfection cannot be attained by mere renunciation of outer action.

124. No one can ever remain inactive, even for a moment because all are helplessly driven to action by their innate qualities born of nature.

In this case, Krishna is beginning to reveal two essential paths. There is a third but he hasn't revealed it yet. And those paths are the path of knowledge and the path of action. The path of knowledge is the traditional spiritual path, which is to understand, to be in the revelatory state, to expand your awareness, to transcend; and this tradition of transcending is reflected in Samkhya which basically says to renounce the world. When you renounce the world, who you are—without your attachments, without your ideas, without your habits, without your beliefs—the truth of you, the whatness of you comes more and more to the surface.

So knowledge is the path of taking you into relationship with your soul. And this is what is very prevalent in our culture as the primary purpose of the spiritual path. It is to transcend, to stay transcended, to stay in the witness, to come to the no-self, to abide in the non-dual

state—as in the Buddhist and the advaitic traditions. This is the prevalent teaching that is current in this time, and also at the time of the revelation of the Bhagavad Gita.

But Krishna is saying that knowledge alone, transcendence alone, won't do it. You will not be able to stay in that state when you get engaged in the world again. The only time you can stay in knowledge is if you stay isolated from the world. So it is only when you engage in action that you can strengthen your capacity to be present with what is arising. This ability to be present, to be conscious and not sucked into your reactions and ideas and your beliefs and your opinions and your idea of what you should be doing gives you the ability to be able to choose to take an action or not. It is a place of poise. It is a place of coming to the present moment. As these experiences and your reactions come to you either through your senses or inwardly, you then are able to witness them with a sufficient detachment, a witnessing capacity in which you don't lose yourself. This state of being able to choose, this poise, is called actionlessness. And this is the true result of samadhi.

(26:22) Samadhi is being in that state of the soul where one is present with what is arising without getting sucked into what is arising, which is our normal condition. *"All are helplessly driven to action by their innate qualities born of nature."* We have been programmed right from birth. We have been conditioned both by our body, by our culture, and by the inclinations and trainings that our parents received from our grandparents and our grandparents received from their parents.

We have been born into a conditioned environment where who we are as consciousness has gotten tangled up into a specific structure, a web that has the world appear a certain way to us, either a fear-based paradigm where it is all threatening, or a desire-based paradigm where it is all a fruit basket—every different flavor and taste that comes to you. It is a point of view that we inherited and we are a mix of all of these things. Without realizing it we are being lived by these things rather than living. They run us. They tell us what we like and what we don't like, what we can do and what we can't do. The ideas of what is possible are defined by this matrix that we were born into, these qualities born of nature and nurture. We are helplessly driven by them.

This is the thing that Krishna is pointing out. You are stuck and don't know you are stuck. You are caught up in a web and don't know what it is. You don't even know there is a web. You just think this is how life is. Being able to step out of it is not possible from within the web. You have to find something that stands outside, and that is what the soul is.

125. One who outwardly restrains the organs of action but mentally dwells on the objects of senses is verily deluded and is a hypocrite.

126. Controlling the senses through the mind and remaining unattached, if one can perform action as means to yoga through the instruments only, he can attain perfection.

127. Perform the works that are ordained for you because action is better than inaction. Moreover, even your body cannot be sustained without action.

128. Action becomes a cause of bondage in the world only when it is not performed as a sacrifice; therefore, perform action efficiently as a sacrifice only, without being attached.

The Gita is saying that those who outwardly restrain their actions are like those who live in a monastery or go off into the woods and follow all the scriptures about yoga or mantras or rituals or chanting. Krishna is talking about those who behave as spiritual people but in fact have not brought it into their lives. It is not integrated and therefore not sincere. That lack of integration is hypocrisy. You say something, but you do something else. You pretend you are one way but you are actually another way. It means there is a development in one part of you that hasn't been integrated, hasn't been made real.

Integration can be accomplished by controlling the senses through the mind and remaining unattached. Restraining the senses is restraining the inclination that comes with the nature, which is the way you are programmed to think, and to feel and to want. By restraining it you begin to recover your ability to have choice in that circumstance. Recovering your authority in that particular programming is a means that will take you to perfection, but you have to be detached from the outcome. You have to be willing to go through the process of changing your existence into a new way of being, changing the way you are use to having things to allow a new way for having things. This shift from one to the other is quite difficult. Without detachment it is impossible because you will retreat, you will go back to the familiar.

(31:54) So the Gita says, *"if one can perform action as a means to yoga through the instrument only, he can attain perfection."* In this case, Krishna is saying you can actually live life without it being spiritual or not spiritual, you can be in life, taking the actions that are truly required in the moment, detached from the outcome of those actions, and then life is your yoga. You are bringing your awareness of the truth of who you are into your life by doing whatever it is that is necessary. Being detached—not having any particular benefit or profit from it—will then bring you to this state of actionlessness. The more you are engaged in action, the more perfect your actionlessness becomes.

The Gita is saying to perform the actions that are ordained for you because action is better than inaction. This ordained action is your dharma—the right action for you at this stage of your life, at this time of your life. For some people right action is to work—to be a mother or father and raise children, to have a job and support their family, or to grow and develop as an individual, to become an individual ego. Everybody has a dharma. A child has a dharma, a student has a dharma, an adolescent has a dharma, a young adult has a dharma, a mature adult has a dharma. Each of us are constantly shifting our dharma. When we come to the spiritual path we have one dharma: to go to truth, to go to God. That is the dharma. When we have aligned ourselves through our revelations, through our experiences, through our knowledge, and have taken sufficient action, then the ordained action is that which supports you as a spiritual being manifesting, coming out of your personal nature and developing into this universal impersonal.

(34:27) Those actions are better than inaction because in the process of encountering that which resists, that which opposes, that which is difficult, we become more masterful in the

process. The last read verse says, "*Action becomes a cause of bondage in the world only when it is not performed as a sacrifice.*" This is a very important point. The principle of sacrifice is the entry point because as soon as you change yourself from what you are inclined to do to something that is aligned with your intelligent will, there is a gap. There is what you are inclined to do, and then there is what your intelligent will says you should be doing. To bridge that gap takes effort. That effort is sacrifice. That is the key.

Any time you apply effort, any time you do something that is contrary to your inclination, you are strengthening who you are as intelligent consciousness. You are developing this capacity for determination and persistence. And every time you don't, then you weaken that part of yourself and stay bound by the habitual innate inclinations of your nature. Actions taken aligned with our higher self creates a force. That force comes to us as we pull it out from the attachment to the old way and reclaim it for the purpose of manifesting our intent. In this we recover who we are.

So sacrifice is how we undo our false self. Sacrifice is how we break up the selfish structures of ego. It is not our fault. We were born into it. When we make sacrifices we are not just doing it for ourselves. We are doing it as a piece of the entire matrix. We are one seven billionth of the problem and we are one seven billionth of the solution. When we shift, we shift that whole matrix. So our sacrifice actually ends up to be serving, bringing forward a higher possibility, not only for ourselves but for everyone. But to do this, to apply this effort, is the foundational principle of the Gita, especially in this chapter—this principle of sacrifice or effort or discipline.

(37:32) None of nature's creatures have to sacrifice consciously. They are run by instinct and habit and conditioning. There is nothing in them that says it is time to stop eating, they just stop eating, or it is time to eat, they just eat. Instinct runs like that. Their consciousness is completely simple and in the flow and in the matrix. It is only this curse of self-awareness, this original sin, that makes a problem and says, "Eating feels good so let's keep eating." By being self-aware we create a big mess of things relative to nature. Man is actually moving beyond nature. Man's opportunity is to be nature-awake at a new level—not nature unwittingly creating chaos and destruction, but a new nature that brings a possibility of manifesting the original intent, greater truth, greater consciousness, greater presence, greater love, greater oneness, greater harmony. Sacrifice is the means by which the evolutionary purpose of creation is served.

When we take that little sacrifice, when we control our senses, we are moving ourselves into alignment with the evolutionary purpose. We are stepping out of our existing condition and moving into a new condition. This could be that we are overweight or physically weak and we move into being the proper weight and being physically strong and balanced. We are shifting ourselves into alignment with the evolutionary intent of creation. All effort is positive. Effort can serve the ego or a higher purpose. If effort serves the ego, then the power of that sacrifice goes to the ego. If effort serves a higher purpose, then the power goes to the higher purpose. If the purpose is to manifest the soul in us, then that is what gets empowered. If the purpose is to manifest the ego in us, then that is what gets empowered.

(40:03) When we have come to the place where we are able to take action, meeting the requirement of what arises without a preference, without having one thing more important than the other, simply to handle whatever is coming up, be it difficult or easy, be it good or bad, be it pleasurable or painful—this is equanimity. If it is difficult, we take actions that are required. If it is easy then we don't have to take action. We pull back from action. We take only actions that are required in each moment, not adding to them, or changing them, or making them different, or controlling them.

Therefore this is the key to the Gita: *"perform action efficiently as a sacrifice only, without being attached."* These words point to the symptoms of one who is in the state of equanimity, who is already in conscious samadhi. For them, all action is performed without effort, efficiently, as a sacrifice. They are applying a sacrifice, but without making it into an effort, or a problem, or a difficulty.

Sacrifice evolves into surrender. Sacrifice is the first step when the resistance of the old way is still strong, making it difficult to move into the new way of being. In that transition sacrifice is required, but at some point it becomes our new normal and we do it without effort. Look at exercise as an example. At first when you start exercising and you haven't for a while it is difficult and the only way you continue to do it is through effort. You apply the effort on those days you have to exercise. You begrudge the difficulty but you do it anyway. After time when you keep doing this then there is not as much effort. It is not as difficult to do, and as you continue, you start feeling pretty good as you exercise. And feeling good becomes the motive. The action itself starts becoming satisfying because you feel good and at the same time you are getting stronger and feeling better about yourself and you have more energy. That makes the action effortless and you are surrendered. It is no longer work or sacrifice.

(43:15) This idea of making the sacrifice without being attached is the principle of action for its own fulfillment. Some actions are based on dissatisfaction. And some actions are satisfying in themselves. As an artist, for me, it was effortless, after a point, to continue to draw as I became absorbed in the project. But at first I had to apply effort to get myself into the modality of drawing. And once I got into the modality of drawing then it became effortless. The fruit came naturally. The action brings its own fulfillment. It doesn't need a result. It brings its own joy. It doesn't need an outcome.

129. At the time of creation the creator god created human beings through sacrifice and advised them, "By this you multiply; let this yield you the enjoyments you seek."

130. Satisfy the gods through this and let the gods entertain you; by nourishing each other you both will attain supreme good.

131. Fostered by sacrifice, the gods will surely bestow on you the desired enjoyments. One who enjoys the gifts alone, without offering them to the gods, is indeed a thief.

132. The virtuous do not incur sin because they accept the rewards of sacrifice after offering to the gods, but those who are selfish do not share the results of their work with the gods and therefore reap the consequence of their sinful act.

133. All beings come from food, food comes from rain, rain comes from sacrifice and sacrifice is rooted in action.

134. Actions originate from Brahman, the Imperishable. Therefore, the all-pervading Imperishable is always present in sacrifice.

This is actually a very powerful statement. It is what I was speaking of before. When we take action aligned with original intent we are actually taking divine action. We are taking action that arises from the original place from which all action arises. We are moving into alignment with that which acts, that which can act, that intelligence and will that is there in the seminal possibility of consciousness.

So when we act as a sacrifice we are not acting. The creation is acting through us. That is this expression here. What is that action? It is a self-giving. It is a giving up of ourselves, like the ocean giving up its moisture into the atmosphere, the atmosphere giving up its moisture as rain, saturating the soils, and the soils giving up its moisture to the plants that grow, and the plants sacrifice themselves for the animals that graze on them.

(46: 54) This is the cycle of creation. It is sustained by sacrifice. Even at the physical level it is sustained by sacrifice. When we consciously begin to take action that is self-giving action, giving up of something that we are habituated to into something we do not yet know, we bring forward in that moment the power of truth consciousness, the power of intelligent will—that chit shakti, the original force from which this entire creation emerged. We move more in touch with that which is the truth of us, the soul, the being.

So the path of action is a process of self-giving, of renouncing, of letting go of our preferences and our comforts and our ideas, and giving up ourself to something greater. When we take action that serves our ego, our benefit, our fear, our comfort, our familiarities, our ideas, our beliefs, then we eat the sin of those acts.

We poison ourselves by reinforcing the very principle that separates us from the soul. We separate ourselves every time we indulge ourselves, every time we feed our habits, every time we believe our beliefs, every time we react negatively and allow the negative reaction to occur. Every time we seek something pleasurable we are reinforcing that which separates us from the soul. Those times we eat the sin. That is when karma, which in one sense means action, becomes karma in the other sense, which means the residue, the consequence of those acts. That consequence of those actions coat us like debris. We accumulate these actions that serve the separate self and we strengthen the veil of the separate self. When we take actions that undo the separate self then we reveal the soul. This is the point of these verses. That is all for today.