

What is Karma Yoga? and How Do We Perform It?

Keith R Parker

Ans: Serve the desires of others.

When you serve the desires of others you naturally renounce your own desires to find happiness and contentment in material things. Naturally your mind turns within and you find contentment where it has always been, deep within you. [Proof: hold the door open for someone.] In the equanimity of contentment achieve balance in success and failure. You live free from desires and actions, yet manage them effectively. All this from simply putting others desires first.

Through serving the desires of others we break the bondage of karma ('binding influence of action') and liberate ourselves from the cycle of impression-desire-action, instantly experiencing inner contentment, steady intellect, and a mind balanced in success and failure.

Correct practice of karma yoga requires both intellectual understanding of how the practice works and direct experience of the benefits the practice renders. Understanding and experience enliven and support each other, ratcheting us up to higher levels of spiritual and material wellbeing.

Two Important Definitions: Understanding provides motivation and guidance and is of primary importance. Central to understanding are definitions of *karma* and *yoga*.

Karma means action. In the context of the practice, karma means right action. Right actions uplift us to higher levels of spiritual and material wellbeing, create a positive environment, and support evolution in consciousness. Selfless acts of service to others are right actions and are the very core of practicing karma yoga.

Yoga means union of lower and higher aspects of our personality, often referred to as 'self' and 'Self.' The lower self is finite individuality; the lower self relates to the world and gets things done; the lower self is what other see in our feelings, thoughts and actions — who we are. The higher Self is nonactive and unbounded universality; in its completeness, the higher Self provides freedom for the lower self to do its thing. Contentment achieved through serving others unites the individual aspect of our personality with its universal aspect.

In union, desires and the actions they seed occur on the surface level of the mind (self); deep within (Self) desires no longer occur. In union we

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experience liberation from desires and actions while at the same time manage them effectively.

To understand how we achieve union through the practice of karma yoga — through serving the desires of others — we first need to understand the goal of all action.

Life's Goal: Inner contentment is the goal beyond which no other exists. We constantly seek it through our feelings, thoughts, and actions. Content within, we feel fulfilled in a natural state of equanimity. Fulfilled, we feel at home with the world and ourselves — with everything. We experience completeness and need nothing.

Our proclivity to continually seek contentment is a Law of Nature, as fixed, observable, and irrefutable as gravity and magnetism. All our feelings, thoughts, desires, and actions point towards what we think will increase contentment — no exceptions. We want more of it, we want it now, and we want contentment to last. The only impediment to realizing lasting inner contentment is the binding influence of actions (bondage of karma) to achieve it.

The Bondage of Karma: *'... hear it now in terms of Yoga. Your intellect established through it, you will cast away the bondage of karma [action].'* *Bhagavad Gita*, Ch 2 v 39.

This verse clearly states the purpose of practicing yoga: cast away the bondage of karma' (binding influence of action).

So, what is 'the bondage of karma?'

We become bound to our actions when desire contacts our senses (sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch) with attractive qualities found in objects of sensory experience: a spiffy new Porsche, touch of silk, enchanting music, alluring scent of perfume.... In appealing to the senses, this attractive quality promises happiness and (we think) lasting contentment. In personalizing the object and being drawn towards it, the senses involve the mind into imagining how we'll enjoy the object's attractive quality and into strategizing how to attain it.

Seeing an ad for vacationing in Bora Bora, we imagine running through the surf, cool water splashing our sun-warmed skin, the scent of hibiscus, the

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taste of daiquiri ... fulfilling primitive sex on the beach. The mind's imagined sensory experiences and a feeling of progress towards them through strategizing how to attain them, overshadow our ability to correctly discern what is real and true (intellect) and the experiences we identify with (ego, the finest quality of intellect). The intellect flits about on imagined sensory experiences, temptations overshadow the ego, and we don't know who we really are.

For all intents and purposes, desire through the offices of the senses, hijacks the refined qualities of intellect and ego, and drags them "out there" to where we think we'll find happiness and contentment in the transient/ever-changing world around us. We get all involved (senses, mind, intellect, ego) in actions to attain the object of our desire, thinking it will bring happiness and consequently, lasting contentment. The steady nature of intellect and ego gets lost in the ever-changing. We're left without the means to discern who we really are: inner contentment.

Actions to achieve the desired outcome — a trip to Bora Bora — never deliver lasting contentment because contentment lies within, not out there. In time the acquired object loses its allure. Failing to find contentment in an object of the senses registers an *impression* of dissatisfaction deep within the mind which comes to the surface as a *desire* to once again find contentment, out there in the sensory field of experience. This desire leads to yet another *action* to find contentment in some new and different object of the senses (eg, a new pair of running shoes). Of course, renewed action to find happiness and contentment "out there" also fails to deliver lasting contentment. This failure registers another deep *impression* of dissatisfaction, which again seeds *desire* leading to *action* anew. And on it goes. This "binding influence of action" or "bondage of karma" fixes us to a cycle of

impression-desire-action.

Our attention flows ever outward away from inner contentment, the very goal we seek.

Liberation: *'In this yoga no effort is lost and no obstacle exists. Even a little of this Dharma delivers from great fear. Bhagavad Gita, Ch 2 v 40.*

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No effort is lost because the practice of karma yoga (serving others) takes no effort. Serving others is easy and natural. The desire to serve others is inborn and a natural direction to turn.

By definition, dharma is action which furthers spiritual evolution, for example, acts of service to others. Even a *'little of this Dharma'* (practice of karma yoga / service to others) achieves inner contentment, which of course, delivers from fear.

So, how do acts of selflessly serving the desires of others liberate us from the bondage of karma.

In serving the desires of others, the outcome belongs to those we choose to serve, not us. We did not desire the outcome in the first place; those we serve did. It is *their* desire that sparks our action.

In the moment we act to fulfill *other's* desire to achieve *their* outcome, we break the cycle of *impression-desire-action* at the level of *our desire* to achieve lasting contentment. No desire (to achieve lasting contentment), no action, and no impression of dissatisfaction. Poof: the cycle of *impression-desire-action* instantly breaks down, disappears.

In acting to serve others — in putting their desires first — we naturally renounce our own desires to achieve contentment in material things, liberating us from the binding influence of action. No *desire*, no *action* to seek contentment in objects of the senses, no *impression*, and no cycle of *impression-desire-action*. Liberated.

Our outward flow of attention to seek contentment in objects of the senses, stops dead in its tracks. In our relentless search for contentment we naturally turn within. There is no other direction for the mind to go but inward. Contentment deep within draws us to more refined levels of inner awareness. At these quieter levels, intellect steadies.

Steady intellect achieves its full potential to discern what is real and true: we are inner contentment. We find contentment where it has always been — and frankly, where we always knew it was — deep within.

Union: Contentment and experiencing the higher Self are one and the same. Contentment has no boundaries. Like the Self, it just is, dimensionless and complete, nonactive and unbounded in its nature. The

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experience of contentment is the experience of the nonactive and infinite universality of the higher Self.

To realize the higher Self is to realize union of the lower self with it. The higher Self, in its infinite nature of completeness, necessarily includes the lower self. In contentment — in realizing the Self — the two become one. Individualized feeling, thinking, and acting (self) coexists in union with nonactive infinite universality (Self).

Proof: Hold the door open for someone. Instantly: all your selfish desires, thoughts and action disappear. Deep within you feel desire-less, content, universal, unbounded. Smiles all around.

In the state of union, desires still engage the mind in action but fail to drag refined qualities of intellect and ego out into the ups and downs of activity. This is the experience of union: simultaneously maintaining never-changing inner contentment (Self) while engaged in outer activity (self). Desires occur on the surface level of the mind; deep within desires no longer occur.

In the equanimity of contentment, we achieve balance in success and failure, ups and downs, progress and reversal...all the dualities of life. We naturally and spontaneously perform skillful actions to achieve desires that occur on the surface level of the mind, all in our own way, all through our own unique personality. This is living in union: unique dynamic and skillful action (self) united with universal inner contentment (Self).

Summary: Practicing karma yoga is simple, effortless, and delightful to perform: selflessly serve others. That's all it takes. When we act to selflessly serve the desires of others, we renounce our own selfish desires: we break the cycle of impression-desire-action at the level of our own desire to find contentment in material things.

We break the bondage of karma (binding influence of action), naturally turn within, and find contentment deep within our Selves. In contentment, the individual aspect of our personality (self) unites with its universal aspect (Self). Deep within, we remain content and freed from desires, while on the surface level of the mind we fulfill desires to achieve spiritual and material wellbeing through dynamic actions based on steady intellect and a mind balanced in success and failure. This is the practice of karma yoga:

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serve others. In time, through repeated practice, we 'cast away the bondage of karma' (binding influence of action) and yoga becomes established.

<https://www.understandkarmayoga.com>