



Guided Study Course | Karma Yoga

Description

Karma Yoga is the yoga of action. But what actions, and to what end? One of the three main paths of yoga described in the Indian tradition, the other two being the yoga of knowledge (jnana yoga) and the yoga of devotion (bhakti-yoga). Karma yoga approaches the goal of self-realization or liberation through actions that can transcend the individual ego and merge with the Universal Self.

Learning Objectives

What is Karma Yoga? How is Karma Yoga different from the theory of karma? What actions can lead to liberation? Does “giving up on fruits of labor” lead to a loss of enthusiasm for life and work? What is selfless action, and how can it be achieved? If not, how does Karma Yoga bring about liberation, while being fully engaged in action in this world?

Textbooks and Reference eBooks

1. Karma Yoga by Swami Sivananda is included in the course for download.
2. Selfless Service: The Spirit of Karma Yoga (Essays on the Search for Peace in Daily Life Book 3) by Baba Hari Dass.

https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B015S7RAAM/ref=dbs_a_def_rwt_bibl_vppi_i0

Course Instructions

We will read and reflect on the required readings. These readings are brief and packed with yoga concepts, so the reader will have to augment their reading with research on terminologies. Swami Sivananda’s note is nearly a hundred years old, so his style of language may be harder to engage with. The reader must persist, regardless. Baba Hari Dass was a silent monk, and his essays were transcribed by his western followers. His notes are more suited for the modern audience, but his silence has led to an efficiency with words that eludes writers of thicker books. The reader must consider his brief essays to be *gagar mein saagar* (Hindi for “the ocean in a small vessel”, which is very precise and expansive).

Time Commitment: 2 weeks

Please consider these questions as you read this chapter. Journal your reflections in the study guide. Answer the questions below.



Reading #1: Karma Yoga by Swami Sivananda

1. About Swami Sivananda: Swami Sivananda was jokingly (but only part jokingly) referred to as Swami Give-ananda. He was a noted Karma Yogi, and his contribution continues through the various teachers and their schools that have come out of his ashram. How is Swami Sivananda's passion evident in the first couple of paragraphs of this essay? (The first word in the essay is "Half").
2. Karma and Karma Yoga: How does the concept of "Karma" differ from the idea of "Karma Yoga"? Are they the same thing? How might these be linked?
3. Actions and Desires: Nishkama Karma is "action without *personal* desire". How can the mind be prepared for such a practice?
4. The means of action: *Nimitta* means to be "a means of achieving something". How can you become a means of action for the Universal Self?
5. Menial Jobs: Why does Swami Sivananda emphasize the importance of menial jobs several times? Is he pointing to an exaggerated emphasis on low-end jobs, or is it towards cultivating a sense of service and "non-doership" in every action, however small or large?
6. Foot massage: The word "shampoo" comes from the Hindi word "*champi*", which means to massage. Why is Sri Krishna, Himself the Lord Incarnate to his believers, shown to be massaging the feet of visitors to his home? Why is Jesus portrayed as washing the feet of his disciples?
7. Unstuck: *Nirlipta* means to be un-stuck, like adding grease can make old rusty parts come unstuck. What is this glue-like attraction that is preventing you from becoming *Nirlipta*?
8. Right Action: How should one cultivate the capacity for the right action?

Reading #2: Selfless Service: The Spirit of Karma Yoga by Baba Hari Dass.

1. Transform the self: What actions can transform the ego-self into the Universal Self?
2. I am: Reflect on the make-up of your own personality. How are you able to see your own two ego states? How can you separate the sense of being, "I am", from a sense of doing, "I am the doer" in your own inner personality?
3. Which Actions: Is there an outward difference in actions performed as "Karma Yoga" and everyday actions? Are "spiritual actions" only eligible to be considered Karma Yoga?
4. Enjoy or Discard: Are the fruits of one's actions to be discarded (instead of enjoying them, as *bhoga*)? What is the directive on the path of Karma Yoga; not to desire the fruit, or to actively discard the fruits that one receives?
5. Family Ties: Does someone of the path of Karma Yoga have to leave one's family commitments?
6. Filled with God: "Enthusiasm" literally means "to be filled with God". How might Karma Yoga and enthusiastic action be related?
7. Just Do It (Should We?): Should the path of Karma Yoga be followed exclusively (ignoring knowledge and devotion)?



8. Work for God: How does “offering action to God” make the action the right thing to do? What if you are committing murder? Can wrong actions be offered to God?

Course Quiz

Please take the online quiz to proceed to the next course.