

Karma (Actions) and Gyan (Knowledge)

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There are two fundamental goals of human life. One is to fulfil its needs and the other is to experience happiness and contentment. Fulfilment of needs is accomplished through 'vigyan' and happiness and contentment is experienced through 'Gyan'. 'Gyan' is knowledge of the Self and knowledge related to all other fields can be termed as 'Vigyan'. Thus, there are two aspects of life- one, maintenance of life for which provision has been made in the form of different fields and professions. Two, Realization of the Self that happens through pursuit of Gyan, exercising of wisdom (viveka), and dispassion or non-attachment (*virakti*) from actions (and hence desires that give rise to actions).

Both, actions and knowledge (of self) have their own importance and place in life. The results of one are very different from that of the other. Therefore based on their fruits/ results there are two belief systems – 'karma-Nishtha' and 'Gyan-Nishtha'. If we only focus only on fulfilling the needs of life and put all of our time and energy towards this very cause then life will seem to lack contentment. We will experience some kind of emptiness, meaninglessness in life. And if we ignore taking care of the basic needs of life and only focus only on gaining knowledge (of Self) then we will be rendered incapable of taking appropriate care of the requirements of life. Therefore, both knowledge (of Self) and actions are extremely important. To live, actions are important and for Liberation knowledge of the self is important.

The following verse from *Ishavasya-Upanishad* explains:

Andham tamah pravishanti yevidhamupasate| tato bhuya ev te tamo ya oo vidhayam rataah ||

According to this, those who get totally engrossed and immersed in worldly objects and center all their efforts towards acquiring them, they, as a result of the fruits of their actions, will remain in darkness/ ignorance and continue to be born again and again (as any life form) in the materialistic world. And those who neither perform any actions towards purifying the soul nor perform any actions or duties required to fulfil the needs of life claiming themselves to be wise, enlightened and above all actions are destined to even more grave lives compared to the previous category of people who perform actions with materialistic desires.

'Kurvanneveha Karmani', according to this, actions have always been said to be important. Since actions are important, then one should perform actions such that they result in cleansing the conscience. An adulterated conscience (*antahkaran*) can never experience the pure Self and without experiencing/ realizing the Self one can experience liberation. The *shrutis* also say that, ***Gyanadev hi Kaivalyam***, that is through 'Gyan' / knowledge of the Self only can one attain Liberation. Actions and Sadhana (spiritual practices) are means of cleansing the *chitta* and attaining single-pointed-focus (*ekagrata*) so that the pure conscience can reach a state where it can receive the light of Knowledge (of Self). Therefore until one attains the state of self-realization one must continue to perform deeds that lead to purification of the conscience.

One who pursues only one aspect of life, either actions for maintenance of life or knowledge for realization of the self, will not and cannot have a holistic development. Many people, sometimes even wise ones, have been mistaken in unearthing the real mystery of actions. As a result of these misconceptions such people proclaim actions to be an obstacle in the path of self-realization and give up actions required for fulfilling its basic needs also. But due to this misguided renunciation-of-actions they do not receive the desired fruits – the fruit of dispassion towards actions. Similarly, without understanding the true essence of knowledge (of self), those who consider themselves to be wise, either indulge in actions to have their way proclaiming to be beyond good–bad or they renounce all actions calling them a burden and due to laziness, stupid mistakes, unawareness destroy the invaluable human life. On the other hand those who understand the true essence of actions and knowledge of the self, do not renounce the good deeds (*sat-karma*) but persevere to perform such actions as is fit. As a result not only does their life become joyous and smooth but in the process their conscience also becomes pure and tender and becomes worthy of assimilating the essence of *Gyan*. Then with a Guru's grace, Viveka (wisdom) and Vairagya (dispassion) they attain the state of Self Realization and experience Bliss