

Chant and Perform Rituals with *Karma Yoga*

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2017-09-15

Source: <http://www.shiningworld.com/site/satsang/read/3382>

Mikhail: Hello, Sundari.

Thank you for that. That information is useful. It's nice when science can explain the mysteries of *Isvara*, it helps to quiet the mind in the knowingness. I believe that the mysterious *Isvara* is always offering little signs in the form of synchronicities, both subtle and gross, to help me discern when I am moving in the right direction (i.e. pursuit of *moksa*) or not. Nowadays I try not to engage in this practice too much, that is, reading into signs and synchronicities, as it can be a distraction from the more important practice of discerning *satya* from *mithya*.

Sundari: Good, I am glad it helped. As the *jiva* it is important to be symbolically literate to understand *Isvara*, but also very important not to read too much into symbols, as they are all *mithya*. Discrimination is the name of the game.

Mikhail: I have some other questions in relation to practices. Is the chanting of the *Triyambakam mantra* okay or is it better to choose a *mantra* that's more directly related to Advaita Vedanta? For example, in the Satyananda Ashram they chant *Triyambakam* 108 times every day. Furthermore, is there a point where I would need to let go of meditation and *mantra* chanting?

Sundari: The *Triyambakam mantra* is pure Vedanta. It is an *Upanishad mantra* found in the *Rudrama* that points out the fruit of self-knowledge is complete detachment from the world. There is a difference between chanting *mantras* for experience and for knowledge. Most people chant *mantras* to have an experience of bliss, of the self. Chanting makes people very high, even though they often do not understand the words they are chanting.

As Vedantins, we understand the meaning of the words, and chant *mantras* because we enjoy the bliss of the self, but we know that the bliss is who we are. We do not chant or perform any ritual to gain anything. The purpose of the *mantra* is to deliver knowledge, not to have a blissful experience. That won't remove ignorance or deliver *moksa*. I suggest you write to Christian Leebby about identity *mantras*, as he covers this issue quite extensively in his course, available for free from the ShiningWorld website.

Mikhail: But do we perform ritualistic action such as *karma*, *upasana* and *jnana yogas* to gain a *sattvic* mind in order to assimilate the teaching?

Mikhail: For example, moving from *karma yoga* to *jnana yoga* as the doer becomes subtler? Or is it merely that I continue doing such practices with the awareness that the apparent doer is *Maya* too? Is there a distinct point where you stop *karma yoga* and only do inquiry? It seems to me like it will be a gradual process whereby I will possibly always need both *karma yoga* and inquiry.

Sundari: It is a subtle progression as the doer is gradually negated. *Karma yoga*, as you know, is specifically designed to negate the doer. However, once self-knowledge is firm, there is still an apparent doer, but you are no longer identified with it. There are three main types of doer renouncement: (1) *karma yoga* – surrendering the results of action to *Isvara*, (2) *karma sannyas* – renouncing actions and (3) *karma jnana sannyas*, the knowledge that you may act but you are not the doer.

Once self-knowledge is firm, *karma yoga* and self-inquiry stop as practices. *Karma yoga* is just knowledge. There is no longer a doer to negate, and the seeker is known to be the sought. You know you are the knowledge. You no longer need the means of knowledge anymore. Though it is likely that reading and appreciation of scripture continues because you have a heightened appreciation for the words that describe the self, you.

Mikhail: *Karma sannyas* confuses me a little since, as James mentions, as long as we are alive we are acting in some way. Perhaps it refers to the situation whereby, for example, I decide to move to Chennai to dedicate everything I've got to the pursuit of *moksa*? Put on the robes, so to speak, renouncing all worldly action in the name of *moksa*? Is this what renouncing action is? Or is it handing over one's actions to *Isvara*, but no, because this would be more like *karma jnana sannyas*? Thanks for this. I haven't found this description of doer renunciation before.

Sundari: *Karma sanyass* is the renunciation of gratuitous actions, it is not running off to India to join an *ashram* or put on robes unless that is truly your *svadharma*. If it is not, you are simply reinforcing the doer/ego – the one convinced it must “do” something to get enlightened or to make it “more spiritual,” a tenacious myth in the spiritual world.

Both powers, renunciation and action, exist in everyone. Individuals constantly act and they constantly let go of things they no longer value or desire. The only issue is the nature of that which is to be renounced. If an individual wants freedom, which Vedanta defines as freedom from dependence on objects for happiness, renunciation becomes a problem because individuals value things that conflict with the desire for freedom. What is more important to you is what matters – do you desire freedom from bondage more than the temporary fulfilment of your desire? True renunciation is the renunciation of the doer who wants a particular result.

Renunciation is not denial. It is the understanding that nothing is gained by indulging a *vasana* or an action contrary to *dharma*, so one makes a different choice every time the desire to act arises, by sublimating the it with the *karma yoga* attitude.

Karma yoga is a common-sense attitude we take towards action and its results, based on the fact that we can choose to act, but we cannot choose the result of our actions. Actions performed with this understanding do not produce anxiety, a common component of most desire-based actions.

Karma sanyass is when we relinquish the notion of doership, we forego gratuitous actions and undertake only the actions that are not contrary to *dharma*, that support our *sadhana* – and most importantly, we act knowing we are not the doer and not in control of the results. It is not that we stop action because we cannot or that we stop acting for a particular result. We act with gratitude, consecrating our actions to the Field, which always takes care of the needs of the Total before our own little needs. We trust that *Isvara* is always giving us what we need and taking care of us.

Karma jnana sannyas is when we have fully negated the notion of doership. It is *moksa*, essentially. When we live this way, doing becomes effortless because it is known to us that *Isvara* is the only doer.

Let *Isvara* “do” your life. It is so much easier than going up against *Isvara*!

Mikhail: Also, I am considering doing *yagnas* (fire ceremonies), whereby the whole ceremony is a symbol of the self: the four corners of the *havan* pot as the four limbs, *manas*, *buddhi*, *ahamkara* and *chit*; the flame as consciousness, the *ghee* and the oats as objects offered to the subject of consciousness, and so on. Is this a good idea or at this point would it be better to move away from such ritualistic actions?

Sundari: Any devotional practice is encouraged as part of your *sadhana*. All the elements were worshipped, deified and given great homage in the Vedic tradition. Have you read James’ book *The Yoga of Love*? If not, I encourage you to do so. Chanting, *pujas* and rituals can be relevant for energetic *rajasic* types who need to be occupied with something worthwhile instead of wasting time in gratuitous egoic pursuits – such as an addiction to social media, for instance.

Rituals are an important way to show appreciation for the great gift of life, as an homage to *Isvara*, to the self. They become an obstacle when you think you are a doer doing good deeds for reward, because it makes you more “spiritual” to carry out elaborate rituals or because you see yourself as apart from the ritual. A simple altar in your home with a symbol of the self, a candle, and some incense will do as well as a devotional practice. You do not need to perform such elaborate ceremonies.

Knowing the self, you worship without desire and you can appreciate (and pity) how dualists with an incomplete self-knowledge, full of desire for “heavenly” results, delude themselves into thinking that their sacred and secular rituals will produce lasting happiness.

Mikhail: One more thing: I have a degree in psychology. I was going to do a PhD in clinical psychology, but I realized 18 months ago I couldn’t do it, as I knew something was still missing. Then I found Vedanta. So I’ve been thinking of doing a PhD on the psychology of the Vedanta. I think it could help to consolidate my book knowledge, while making a viable contribution to the field as well. Would you have any advice in relation to such an endeavor?

Sundari: The teaching on the three *gunas* is a powerful tool to use in traditional psychology, as it alone provides a comprehensive understanding of *Isvara*’s psychological order. This is what is missing from traditional psychology, knowledge of *Isvara* and the Field of Existence, the three *gunas*. James has just brought out his book on the *gunas*, *The Yoga of the Three Energies*, and I am busy with my book on the same topic, called *Enlightened Lifestyles*. James’ book gives an in-depth teaching on the doctrine behind the *guna* teaching. This is a must-read for you. Mine is less so, focusing mainly on how the *gunas* play out psychologically in the nitty-gritty of life. We have said for a long time that this teaching is of enormous benefit to the world of psychology.

Mikhail: I haven’t read *The Yoga of Love*, but I’m certainly looking forward to it. I’m just about to

finish the first reading of *The Yoga of the Three Energies*, which is great. I certainly am the *rajasic* type. A fine *vasana* load I have to watch play out, but as I'm refining my lifestyle, and my understanding of the teachings deepen, I'm homing in on how to sublimate the *rajas* into the noble pursuit of *moksa* through potential ideas such as either the writing of a book (an historical fiction framing the ideas of Vedanta in Druid Celtic Ireland entitled *Yet to Be Saint Patrick*) or a PhD. In some ways, I think the book is a better idea, as it is free of the boundaries of academia. Furthermore, if it's *Isvara's* will, the teachings could reach more people through such a book. I'll be looking forward to your book, I'm sure it will be relevant, plus you have a very nice and clear writing style.

Sundari: Either project sounds like a good idea, and a great way to hone your *sadhana*. I will be releasing the first of the four sections to the *guna* books, *Enlightened Lifestyles* and *Enlightened Relationships*, hopefully in the next month.

~ Much love, Sundari