

From Mindfulness to Karma Yoga

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Peterson: How to hold my actions to the greater good or a higher ideal when doing mundane tasks? Does Vedanta also offer techniques to have a tranquil mind and not to be so wrapped up in future worries and fears? And how is that different from practicing “mindfulness”?

Arlindo: Very good questions, Peterson. Vedanta is all about knowledge and understanding, and *karma yoga* also is “knowledge yoga” – the understanding of *Isvara* as the creator, creation and the laws governing the entire universe. Of course within creation we find human *jivas* with apparent free will, the only experiencing entities accountable to the “subjective” psychological and *karmic* laws governing their experiences.

The more one’s *karma yoga* understanding grows, the easier it becomes to do those ordinary tasks of life with the attitude of gratitude, love and appreciation for this great opportunity to experience this apparent creation from the “positive” perspective of “*Isvara*-knowledge” rather than the “negative” perspective of *jiva*’s ignorance of *mithya*’s apparent nature and its precise functions.

We are talking of *karma yoga* (*Isvara*-knowledge), a prerequisite for self-knowledge. And as James points out, “If there is a problem it is only lack of confidence in the knowledge. The solution is to surrender to the knowledge and apply it until you are completely confident in it.”

But if *karma yoga* does not work for you, you could also try different kinds of “action yoga.” An action can be mental, verbal or physical. They may work well as a means to prepare the mind for assimilation and retention of the knowledge.

A mental practice such as “mindfulness” is often suggested as an initial step to create some distance between *jiva*’s subtle intellect and its mind. It is a good initial step to prepare the intellect for Vedanta. Keep in mind that the only reasonable goal for anyone aspiring to *moksa* is the development of a *sattvic* mind, meaning to say that *jiva* has a certain power (responsibility) in the process of purification of its mind, and by whatsoever means necessary.

Peterson: Thank you! This helps for sure. So *karma yoga* can also be performing tasks with an attitude of gratitude and appreciation for “life”? It doesn’t have to be something you truly believe is helping the greater good?

Arlindo: Yes, *karma yoga* is the attitude that transforms our daily ordinary actions into devotional actions dedicated to *Isvara*. It is important to note that such attitude can only be developed through the firm understanding of what a *jiva* is, what *Isvara* as the creator/creation is, the laws by which *Isvara* governs the entire environment, how *jiva* fits into the whole picture, and what is expected from *jiva* in order for it to live a happy and fruitful life. If knowledge is not there we will be dealing with a sort of blind faith, will power or wishful thinking. It may work for some time but it fades

away. Knowledge is the transforming force.

But as you said, *dharma yoga* is fundamental. It is the other side of the coin. I often refer to *karma/dharma yoga* as one single *yoga* because you cannot be a *karma yogi* without knowing and following *dharma*. In the same way, you cannot be a true *dharma yogi* unless you fully understand *karma yoga*. You will not follow *dharma* unless you understand that *Isvara* is the one in control of everything and that it is in *jiva's* own interest to conform its thoughts and actions with the laws by which *Isvara* operates the *dharma* field.