

CHAPTER IV

Jñāna - Karma - Saṁnyāsa Yoga

The Yoga of Knowledge, Action, and Renunciation

Introduction

The title of this chapter is **Jñāna - Karma - Saṁnyāsa Yoga**. The term *jñāna* is for **Jñāna Yoga** (the yoga of knowledge of reality), *karma* stands for **Karma Yoga** (the yoga of selfless action), and *saṁnyāsa* stands for Saṁnyāsa Yoga (the yoga of renunciation). This chapter discusses all three types of yoga. In Chapter III the Lord explained the path of **Karma Yoga** to His disciple Arjuna. To remove his doubt about **Jñāna Yoga** and **Karma Yoga**, Chapter IV explains the perfection of both paths. This chapter also explains the descent of God in man (*avatār*) with the divine powers of omnipotence and omniscience.

Śloka 1

श्री भगवानुवाच

इमं विवस्वते योगः प्रोक्तवानहमव्ययम् ।
विवस्वान्मनवे प्राह मनुरिक्ष्वाकवेऽब्रवीत् ॥ १ ॥

śrī bhagavānuvāca

*imam vivasvate yogaḥ proktavānahamavyayam
vivasvānmanave prāha manurikṣvākave'bravīt*

श्री भगवान् उवाचः	<i>śrī bhagavān uvāca</i>	the Lord said
इमम्	<i>imam</i>	this
विवस्वते	<i>vivasvate</i>	to Vivasvān (sun god)
योगम्	<i>yogam</i>	yoga
प्रोक्तवान्	<i>proktavān</i>	taught
अहम्	<i>aham</i>	I
अव्ययम्	<i>avyayam</i>	imperishable
विवस्वान्	<i>vivasvān</i>	Vivasvān (sun god)
मनवे	<i>manave</i>	to Manu
प्राह	<i>prāha</i>	taught
मनुः	<i>manuḥ</i>	Manu
इक्ष्वाकवे	<i>ikṣvākave</i>	to Ikṣvāku
अब्रवीत्	<i>abravīt</i>	taught

VERSES 1-3

The Lord Was the Original Teacher of Karma Yoga

1

**The Lord said,
I taught this imperishable yoga to Vivasvān. Vivasvān taught it to Manu; Manu taught it to Ikṣvāku.**

In Chapter III the Lord explained the **Karma Yoga** path through which an aspirant attains liberation. In this verse the Lord refers to **Karma Yoga** by saying, **this imperishable yoga**.

The Lord says that at the very beginning of creation He personally passed on the knowledge of **Karma Yoga** to the sun god (**Vivasvān**), who taught this knowledge to his son **Manu** (the ancient lawgiver). Manu gave this knowledge to his son **Ikṣvāku**, who was the ancestor of the solar dynasty.

The sun represents life energy. The entire universe was created by life energy. As such, the sun was the first created object, and naturally it was the first direct recipient of the knowledge of **Karma Yoga** from the Lord.

The sun is also the symbol of higher consciousness. The first evolute of higher consciousness is universal mind (*mahat*). In *mahat* all the laws of creation are present. From universal mind arises the ego of individuality (*ahamkāra*). In all three levels of creation, the spirit of **Karma Yoga** is passed on by the Lord. In this way the tradition was established of passing this supreme knowledge from father to son or master to disciple.

Śloka 2

एवं परम्पराप्राप्तमिमं राजर्षयो विदुः ।
स कालेनेह महता योगो नष्टः परंतप ॥ २ ॥

*evam paramparāprāptamimam rājarṣayo viduḥ
sa kāleneha mahatā yogo naṣṭhaḥ paramtapa*

एवम्	<i>evam</i>	thus
परम्पराप्राप्तम्	<i>paramparāprāptam</i>	handed down in regular succession
इमम्	<i>imam</i>	this
राजर्षयः	<i>rājarṣayaḥ</i>	the royal sages
विदुः	<i>viduḥ</i>	knew
सः	<i>saḥ</i>	this
कालेन	<i>kālena</i>	by lapse of time
इह	<i>iha</i>	here
महता	<i>mahatā</i>	by long
योगः	<i>yogaḥ</i>	yoga
नष्टः	<i>naṣṭhaḥ</i>	destroyed
परंतप	<i>paramtapa</i>	O Paramtapa (Arjuna - the burner of foes)

2

Thus handed down in succession, O Parantapa (Arjuna), this yoga remained known to the royal sages (Rājaṛṣis). It has been lost here by a long lapse of time.

The **royal sages (Rājaṛṣis)** were those rulers who knew the truth of the **Vedas**. The term *veda* is derived from the root *vid* which means “to know.” Hence *veda* means knowledge: knowledge of activity, *pravṛtti*; and knowledge of inactivity, *nivṛtti*. Here *pravṛtti* means following the path of action to attain liberation. *Nivṛtti* means renouncing action in order to attain liberation.

In kingly families the tradition of **Karma Yoga** was continued in succession from generation to generation. It was handed down from the father to the son, who then became the ruler. It was a spiritual discipline for those kings who were seeking liberation. A king’s subjects naturally follow in the footsteps of their ruler. Consequently, not only were the royal sages pursuing the path of **Karma Yoga**, but it was also a common practice among their subjects as a method of spiritual attainment. However, when people started developing attachment to their egocentric desires, their sense of selfishness increased so much that this tradition of selfless service gradually declined, and in due course it died out altogether. In the cycles of human history this knowledge of **Karma Yoga** declines at times and then rises up again for the sake of human redemption.

It has been lost by a long lapse of time. - In the previous verse, **Karma Yoga** is called imperishable. It appears that this verse contradicts this statement. In fact, **Karma Yoga** did not disappear. Instead, the practitioners of **Karma Yoga** developed such qualities as selfishness, attachment, and desire for sensual enjoyment. These qualities increased so much that the spirit of selfless service no longer suited the human mind. Hence it was the practitioners who got lost, not the actual methods of **Karma Yoga**.

Śloka 3

स एवायं मया तेऽद्य योगः प्रोक्तः पुरातनः ।
भक्तोऽसि मे सखा चेति रहस्यं ह्येतदुत्तमम् ॥ ३ ॥

*sa evāyaṁ mayā te'dya yogaḥ proktaḥ purātanaḥ
bhakto'si me sakhā ceti rahasyaṁ hyetaduttamam*

सः	<i>saḥ</i>	that
एव	<i>eva</i>	even
अयम्	<i>ayam</i>	this
मया	<i>mayā</i>	by Me
ते	<i>te</i>	to thee
अद्य	<i>adya</i>	today
योगः	<i>yogaḥ</i>	yoga
प्रोक्तः	<i>proktaḥ</i>	has been taught
पुरातनः	<i>purātanaḥ</i>	ancient
असि	<i>asi</i>	you are
मे	<i>me</i>	My
सखा	<i>sakhā</i>	friend
च	<i>ca</i>	and
इति	<i>iti</i>	thus
रहस्यम्	<i>rahasyam</i>	secret
हि	<i>hi</i>	for
एतद्	<i>etad</i>	this
उत्तमम्	<i>uttamam</i>	best

3

That same ancient Yoga has this day been taught to you by Me, for you are My devotee and My friend; and also because this is a supreme secret.

In this verse the Lord says that the same ancient yoga that He first transmitted to the sun god, and that was passed in succession from generation to generation from the beginning of creation, is now being taught to Arjuna directly by Lord Kṛṣṇa on this battlefield.

The Lord calls this yoga a **supreme secret** because it shatters the shackles of bondage in the form of ignorance, egoism, attachment, aversion, and fear of death. These are the same afflictions delineated in **Yoga Sūtras II: 3**. Practice of **Karma Yoga** brings knowledge of the Self (*brahma vidya*), the eternal changeless principle, extremely subtle and beyond the intellect. Since this knowledge is not available to everyone, it is a supreme secret.

Śloka 4

अर्जुन उवाच ।

अपरं भवतो जन्म परं जन्म विवस्वतः ।

कथमेतद्विजानीयां त्वमादौ प्रोक्तवानिति ॥ ४ ॥

arjuna uvāca

*aparaṁ bhavato janma paraṁ janma vivasvataḥ
kathametadvijānīyāṁ tvamādau proktavāniti*

अपरम्	<i>aparam</i>	later
भवतः	<i>bhavataḥ</i>	Your
जन्म	<i>janma</i>	birth
परम्	<i>param</i>	prior
जन्म	<i>janma</i>	birth
विवस्वतः	<i>vivasvataḥ</i>	of Vivasvān
कथम्	<i>katham</i>	how
एतत्	<i>etat</i>	this
विजानीयाम्	<i>vijānīyām</i>	am I to understand
त्वम्	<i>tvam</i>	You
आदौ	<i>ādau</i>	in the beginning
प्रोक्तवान्	<i>proktavān</i>	taught
इति	<i>iti</i>	thus

VERSE 4

Arjuna Puts the Following Question Regarding Kṛṣṇa's Birth

4

Arjuna said,

Later on was Your birth and earlier was the birth of Vivasvān (sun god). How then am I to understand that You taught this yoga in the beginning?

In verses 1-3 the Lord said that He taught this supreme yoga to the sun god, and the sun god passed on this knowledge to Manu. Manu passed it on to Ikṣvāku, who passed it on to the royal sages.

Arjuna knew of Śrī Kṛṣṇa's recent origin (birth). He also knew that the sun was created even before the rest of creation started. Therefore Arjuna thought that it was not possible for Śrī Kṛṣṇa to teach the sun at a time when Kṛṣṇa Himself was not yet born, and when there was no physical creation.

In this verse Arjuna does not doubt the truth of what Lord Kṛṣṇa has just told him about the yoga that was started by Lord Kṛṣṇa and then passed on to others. He only wants to understand the secret of Kṛṣṇa's divine descent.