

CHAPTER VI  
*Ātma Saṁnyama Yoga*  
**The Yoga of Self-control**

**Introduction**

Arjuna did not want to fight on the battlefield. He wanted to live the life of a *saṁnyāsīn* (renunciate), thinking that by living as a *saṁnyāsīn* he would not collect the sins that are created by performing action which block the path of liberation. Arjuna thought that to be a *saṁnyāsīn* meant that one must renounce all actions. In previous chapters, in order to remove his ignorance, Lord Kṛṣṇa explained that in **Karma Yoga** (the yoga of action) the attachment to the fruit of action is renounced and in **Jñāna Yoga** (the yoga of knowledge) the sense of agency is renounced.

In this chapter, Lord Kṛṣṇa gives the method of Dhyāna Yoga (the yoga of meditation) as an aid to both **Karma Yoga** and **Jñāna Yoga**. In Dhyāna Yoga the mind, intellect, senses, and body are controlled in order to attain equanimity of mind. Without attaining equanimity of mind, one cannot achieve success in **Jñāna Yoga** or **Karma Yoga**.

The body, senses, mind, and intellect are together denoted by the term *Ātma* (Self). This chapter gives techniques to control them. Therefore this chapter is entitled **Ātma Saṁnyama Yoga**, or **The Yoga of Self-Control**.

Śloka 1

श्री भगवानुवाच

अनाश्रितः कर्मफलं कार्यं कर्म करोति यः ।

स संन्यासी च योगी च न निरग्निर्न चाक्रियः ॥ १ ॥

śrī bhagavān uvāca

*anāśritaḥ karmaphalaṁ kāryaṁ karma karoti yaḥ*  
*sa saṁnyāsī ca yogī ca na niragnirna cākriyaḥ*

श्री भगवान् उवाच	śrī bhagavān uvāca	the Lord said
अनाश्रितः	anāśritaḥ	not depending (on)
कर्मफलम्	karmaphalam	fruit of action
कार्यम्	kāryam	bound, obligatory
कर्म	karma	duty
करोति	karoti	performs
यः	yaḥ	who
सः	saḥ	he
संन्यासी	saṁnyāsī	ascetic
च	ca	and
योगी	yogī	yogi
च	ca	and
न	na	not
निरग्निः	niragniḥ	without fire
न	na	not
च	ca	and
अक्रियः	akriyaḥ	without action

## VERSE 1

*Who Is a Saṁnyāsi and a Yogi?*

1

**The Lord said,**

**He who performs obligatory duty without depending on the fruit of action is a saṁnyāsi and a yogi, not he who is without fire and action.**

Arjuna announced, while standing on the battlefield, that he was not going to fight because he felt that action was the cause of bondage and that renunciation of action would bring liberation. In all of the preceding chapters, Lord Kṛṣṇa, who is acting as Arjuna's charioteer, responded to Arjuna's announcement. In order to remove Arjuna's misunderstanding, Lord Kṛṣṇa explained in various ways that **Karma Yoga** is the renunciation of attachment to the fruit of action, and Saṁnyāsa Yoga is the renunciation of the sense of agency of action or the idea that "I am the doer of action."

In this verse the Lord explains that a yogi who has given up dependency on the fruit of action automatically becomes unattached to action, and the yogi's mind becomes free from worldly thoughts. Such a yogi attains true knowledge that is the result of both the path of **Karma Yoga** and the path of Sāṁkhya Yoga. Therefore, a true yogi, who honestly performs obligatory duties without expecting or getting attached to the **fruit of action**, is both a **saṁnyāsi** and a **yogi**.

Merely renouncing the fire, which symbolizes activity, without actually renouncing the sense of doership, attachment, and egocentric desires, is not *saṁnyāsa* in its real sense. A *saṁnyāsi* who only renounces the fire (activity) cannot attain true knowledge because *saṁnyāsa*, by definition, requires renunciation of the sense of agency. Similarly a yogi who gives up all actions in order to achieve a meditative state, but whose mind is still filled with worldly thoughts, desires, and attachments, is not a yogi in a real sense.

Śloka 2

यं संन्यासमिति प्राहुर्योगं तं विद्धि पाण्डव ।  
न ह्यसंन्यस्तसंकल्पो योगी भवति कश्चन ॥ २ ॥

*yam saṁnyāsamiti prāhur---yogaṁ taṁ viddhi pāṇḍava*  
*na hyasaṁnyastasaṁkalpo yogī bhavati kaścana*

यम्	<i>yam</i>	which
संन्यासम्	<i>saṁnyāsam</i>	renunciation
इति	<i>iti</i>	thus
प्राहुः	<i>prāhuḥ</i>	(they) call
योगम्	<i>yogam</i>	yoga
तम्	<i>taṁ</i>	that
विद्धि	<i>viddhi</i>	know
पाण्डव	<i>pāṇḍava</i>	O Pāṇḍava (Arjuna)
न	<i>na</i>	not
हि	<i>hi</i>	verily
असंन्यस्तसंकल्पः	<i>asanyastasaṁkalpaḥ</i>	one who has not renounced thoughts
योगी	<i>yogī</i>	a yogi
भवति	<i>bhavati</i>	becomes
कश्चन	<i>kaścana</i>	anyone

## VERSE 2

*How Saṁnyāsa Itself is Yoga*

2

**O Pāṇḍava (Arjuna), you must know yoga to be that which they call saṁnyāsa. For no one becomes a yogi who has not renounced thoughts (of the world).**

The previous verse said that one who renounces dependency on the fruit of action is both a *saṁnyāsi* and a yogi. This verse says that no one can become established in the path of yoga without renouncing all thoughts (*saṁkalpa*) of the world. The term *saṁkalpa* means thoughts generated by selfish desires. This is the mind's faculty of imagination, which sets up goals, generates plans and ideas, imagines the results of action, and keeps the mind constantly engaged in worldly thoughts. When the mind remains this way, it cannot be free from ego, attachment, and desire, and consequently cannot attain Self-realization, which is the prime aim of a yogi. Therefore it is absolutely necessary to remove all worldly thoughts in order to achieve true knowledge. No one, not even a practitioner of **Karma Yoga** (yoga of selfless action), Sāṁkhya Yoga (yoga of knowledge), **Bhakti Yoga** (yoga of devotion), or Dhyāna Yoga (yoga of meditation), can attain true knowledge without renouncing worldly thoughts.

Śloka 3

आरुरुक्षोर्मुनेर्योगं कर्म कारणमुच्यते ।  
योगारूढस्य तस्यैव शमः कारणमुच्यते ॥ ३ ॥

*ārurukṣor-muneryogaṁ karma kāraṇamucyate*  
*yogārūḍhasya tasyaiva śamaḥ kāraṇamucyate*

आरुरुक्षोः	<i>ārurukṣoḥ</i>	wishing to climb
मुनेः	<i>muneḥ</i>	of a sage
योगम्	<i>yogam</i>	yoga
कर्म	<i>karma</i>	action
कारणम्	<i>kāraṇam</i>	the cause
उच्यते	<i>ucyate</i>	is said
योगारूढस्य	<i>yogārūḍhasya</i>	of one who has attained (to yoga)
तस्य	<i>tasya</i>	of him
एव	<i>eva</i>	even
शमः	<i>śamaḥ</i>	inaction (quiescence)
कारणम्	<i>kāraṇam</i>	the cause
उच्यते	<i>ucyate</i>	is said

## VERSE 3

*Karma Yoga is a Means to Higher Meditation*

3

**For a sage who wishes to attain to yoga, action is said to be the means; for him who has attained yoga, quiescence (inaction) is said to be the means.**

It is human nature to work for one's own self-satisfaction, but that brings discontentment and pain. When a person works in the world without any selfish desire or ego of being a performer, that activity will not create any binding imprint in that person's mind. Such desireless activity performed with a spirit of sacrifice (*yajña*) does not allow ego, attachment, or desire to control the mind. The mind of such a person becomes pure and attains a state conducive to meditation.

When a yogi develops meditation, his or her activities in the outer world are reduced. The deeper a yogi goes into meditation, the less active the yogi's mind is in the outer world. When, by the practice of meditation, a yogi develops control over the mind, that yogi attains tranquillity of mind and all the mental agitations subside. That yogi is said to be established in yoga (*yogārūḍhaḥ*). The term *yogārūḍha* is made up of two words: *yoga* and *arūḍha*. *Arūḍha* means to "ride on" or get complete mastery over the mind. For example, one who rides on a horse and takes complete control of the horse reaches one's destination. Similarly, one who rides on the practice of yoga and gets complete mastery over the mind achieves quiescence. That tranquillity of mind is the means to achieve Self-knowledge.

The essence of this verse is that performing action without egocentric desire is the means to develop meditation. By meditation, tranquility of mind is achieved and this is the means to attain Self-knowledge.

Śloka 4

यदा हि नेन्द्रियार्थेषु न कर्मस्वनुषज्जते ।  
सर्वसंकल्पसंन्यासी योगारूढस्तदोच्यते ॥ ४ ॥

*yadā hi nendriyārtheṣu na karmasva-nuśajjate*  
*sarvasaṁkalpasamnyāsī yogārūḍhastadocyate*

यदा	<i>yadā</i>	when
हि	<i>hi</i>	verily
न	<i>na</i>	not
इन्द्रियार्थेषु	<i>indriyārtheṣu</i>	in sense objects
न	<i>na</i>	not
कर्मसु	<i>karmasu</i>	in action
अनुषज्जते	<i>anuśajjate</i>	is attached
सर्व संकल्प संन्यासी	<i>sarva saṁkalpa saṁnyāsī</i>	renouncer of all thoughts
योगारूढः	<i>yogārūḍhaḥ</i>	one who has attained to yoga
तदा	<i>tadā</i>	then
उच्यते	<i>ucyate</i>	is said



## VERSE 4

*When a Person is Said to Have Attained to Yoga (Yogārūḍha)*

4

**When one does not get attached to sense objects or to action, and has renounced all thoughts, then that one is said to have attained to yoga.**

The previous verse explained that, in the beginning, a yogi seeking truth practices working in the world without any selfish motive or the ego of being a performer. This develops control over the mind and creates a meditative state. When the mind goes deeper into meditation, the outer activities of the yogi begin to withdraw from the yogi's mind and a state of quiescence is attained. This quiescence is the means by which Self-knowledge is attained. This verse explains the exact point at which a yogi reaches that stage of quiescence.

**When one does not get attached to sense objects or to action** - Attachments to sense objects and to action performed in the outer world disturb the mind by creating thoughts of success and failure, likes and dislikes. The first symptom that the yogi has gained control over the mind is when no attachment is felt to any sense objects or to any actions in the outer world.

In the absence of mental disturbances, a yogi channels the mind toward the object of meditation. When the mind is engaged in contemplation of the Self, it is separated from the sense organs and finds joy within. Instead of seeking joy in the world, the senses start following the mind deeply within and completely stop their outer activities.

**and has renounced all thoughts** - *Samkalpa* means thoughts of desire for the objects of the senses. *Sarva samkalpa samnyāsi* refers to the stage when a yogi's mind is completely removed from the sense organs and completely detached from outer activities. This is the second symptom of a yogi's control over the mind.

It is possible that a seeker of truth may detach from sense objects and from actions, but at the same time the mind may remain engaged in desiring worldly objects. Such thoughts of desiring objects (*samkalpa*) can disturb the mind of a yogi more than actually engaging in physical activity. Therefore, in this verse the Lord clearly states that a seeker of the truth attains control over the mind not only by non-attachment to both the objects of the senses and to actions performed in the outer world, but also to *samkalpa*, the thoughts of desiring worldly objects. These thoughts must be removed so that a

seeker may then go more deeply in meditation and attain quiescence of mind.

In **Mahābhārata Shānti Parva** 177: 25, it is said, “Oh desire, I know where your roots lie. You are born of *saṁkalpa* (thoughts). I shall not think of you and you shall cease to exist along with your roots.”