

## Karma Yoga for Dummies

Richard:

Dear Tan,

I found your email-address on the excellent website of James Swartz. I've read his book on enlightenment, and met him some weeks ago, during a weekend retreat. Reading his book again, and texts on his website, a question has cropped up about karma yoga. I know that James, and probably also his wife Sundari, have to answer a lot of mails, so it might take some time before they can answer. Maybe with you this is the case in a lesser degree (?), so that's why I would like to ask this question to you (and also, of course, because James recommends you).

Tan:

Hi Richard,

Yes many thanks for writing to me. Myself and the other endorsed teachers on James website are trying to help as best as we can. On one hand it is to take some of the "workload" off James and Sundari on the other hand it is our practice, our *sadhana*. Usually James/Sundari answer every email that has been sent to them. They are very thorough. Depending on the level of requests it can take just a day or one or two week. In my case since I am an active business man and have a family of two kids it usually takes a week for me to answer a request. I usually do it on the weekends or after work hours during the week.

Richard:

My question is in fact very simple. I've heard and read about karma yoga, which is one of the ways that James (and Advaita) recommend to get insight. But what I'm missing is a very practical explanation about how exactly to DO this? In other words, suppose you had to write a short text about karma yoga in a book called 'Advaita for Dummies' (which, by the way, might be a good idea to write), how would you describe the practice of it? I've read one of your answers in a short text 'how to be free', in which you mention karma yoga briefly. You advise to 'offer the actions and the results expected from those actions to a higher power (God, Ishvara, Life etc.)' and to 'accept the results of the actions as a gift from God'. But this still sounds rather theoretical to me. Does it mean that while doing something (for example, working in the garden, or working in the office) I have to say or think "I know offer the results of these actions to Ishvara"... and if so, do I have to think this now and then, or the whole time... Or is there another approach?

I hope my question doesn't sound too simplistic...  
Anyway, thank you in advance!

P.S. If this is easier for you, you can answer in German. I do understand and read German rather well (but I'm less good in speaking or writing it).

Tan:

Your question is not simplistic. It is a good and honest question. So let me give you a recent practical example. But before we do that let us recap what Karma Yoga entails. Karma Yoga's target is to give the seeker a practice to get an undisturbed and peaceful mind (*antah karana suddhi*). So that the seeker can then inquire into his true nature. If the mind wanders around attached to the results of actions that happened or that are about to happen, this mind will not be able to inquire properly.

Ok. What is Karma Yoga in a nutshell?:

1. You have the right to choose your action. It should be a dharmic one. If you exploit someone or do harm, your mind will never be peaceful. What does dharma mean?: The simplest guideline for that is the golden rule: "Treat others as you would like to be treated yourself. Prepare for the action as good as you can with the skills and time that is at your disposal.
2. You are not the giver of the result of that action: You can do the action , but you are not the one who can control the result. If you had control over the result you would click a button and get the result. But it is not like that. You put your action, your coin in the big slot machine of the universe and you get a result. So you offer the action to the God/Dharma field, because you actually have no other choice 😊.
3. Take the result as a gift  
Here comes the spiritual part of Karma Yoga. You take the result of your action as a gift.. The Dharma Field, God, the Universe is giving the appropriate result to the action depending on skill, effort, timing, environment/circumstance **and the needs of the total**. As something that is the right result for this universe, as an opportunity to learn, to

grow in the appropriate role that has been given to you in this theater play of existence. I know many successful business people who are using 1 and 2 but are not interested in any spirituality. This third point however creates love for this universe. It creates the understanding that this universe transcends the needs of the little ego-person

No let us take some practical recent example:

At the moment in parallel to my work as a management consultant I am studying Sustainability at a University. Last week I had to give a presentation on the topic of sustainability to the teacher who will give me a grade on that presentation. It was an exam. 5 min before the presentation, I recapped the Karma yoga principles:

1. Is this purpose of the presentation a dharmic one?  
Yes it has a good purpose.  
Did I do my best to accomplish a good presentation (the PowerPoint Document) with the skills and time that were at my disposal?  
Yes. I tried to do a good job and I rehearsed a little bit. Ok. Sufficient!
2. Can I control the result? No. The grade is being given by the teacher (...and by the way God/Ishvara created him: meaning his DNA, his environment, the level of coffee he drank, if he had a good night sleep, his mood, whether his wife was nice to him in the morning ....etc. etc.)
3. Offer the result to God. "Dear God I am doing this presentation to you, not for me and not for the teacher. I am doing this for you. And I give this as a gift to you. I do not expect anything except your result." If you want visualization: Take the action and all stressful thoughts that might be attached to expectation of results, put them in a "visual big bag" and give that bag to God. It is his problem now. God will take care of the result. Puff. If you had any stressful thoughts they should be gone by now. The ball is in Gods corner now. 😊
4. Accept that result as the gift of God. Here it is important not to think that you have to become a victim. If you are not happy with the result that is also fine. Accept the result, because you have no choice but to accept it (it happened) and learn from it. You will see that all things always work out.

If you do this continuously it becomes a habit. After a while this happens automatically and in a fraction of a second in the mind. Once you know who you are, Karma Yoga is the way the mind works automatically.

For practical purposes start practicing Karma Yoga with a few actions that are creating a lot of stress in your mind. The target for the seeker is to get a peaceful mind.

Later on you can expand Karma Yoga to all actions if you wish. Then it can become inquiry. You can even offer daily actions such as brushing your teeth, breathing ...and in the end you can offer the person that you think you were. You can offer "Richard "to Ishvara. And he will give the result of Richard's life back to this universe.

Let me know if you need more practical examples.

Karma Yoga is very practical and very simple.

With Love

Tan

Richard:

Dear Tan,

Thank you very much for putting so much time in your answer. This is really excellent, it has become much clearer for me now. I will print this out and read it every morning. It will take some time before this way of thinking and acting becomes a habit, but I'm so glad I now have something very practical to start with.

I have practised zen meditation for many years, but to be honest, it has always been difficult for me to translate it in daily life. The latest years, the zen meditation more or less became a kind of 'hobby' - it did have certain results like a calmer mind etc., but I cannot say the results are satisfying. There has never been a real 'breakthrough'. It was the same with neo-advaita: during years I read many books by neo-advaitins, but I felt something was missing. I didn't even know there was another, more traditional advaita, until I discovered James' website.

By reading James' book I now realise that following a spiritual way is something that has to be done 100%, less won't do. I also realise I can still continue doing

za-zen (the meditation practice in zen), but as a means of purification. And it is the same with karma yoga, for which you have now given me a perfect manual.

I'm really 'into' traditional advaita now, less into the zen doctrine (although both ways overlap in many ways), but I'm becoming increasingly convinced, as James also points out, that knowledge is the way, not experience (although experience can help to a certain degree).

So once again, thank you very much. Maybe you could consider putting your answer on your website (and on that of James?), because I think many people are interested in a very practical manual for advaita...

I will keep following your website too, it's excellent!

Tan:

Dear Richard,

I am happy that the answer helped.

I can resonate with your comments about Zen / Neo-Advaita. I had my own experience with Zen and many years with Neo-Advaita.

I add an Article I wrote about Neo-Advaita a few years ago.

Yes go ahead with ZaZen. Nothing bad about it as a method I presume. I never managed the Lotus and did not bother.

Shikantaza is what I liked the best.

Experience helps in a way since the knowledge "I am awareness" can be extracted by using Vedanta to interpret the experience.

In the end you have yourself, awareness, and experience. There is nothing more than that.

By discriminating yourself (atma) from experience (not-self/ anatma) you will understand without a doubt that you are always free of the experience.

Then you realize through scripture that the experience is awareness as well.

The experience is you, but you are not the experience.

Anyway I think you are on the right track. With 100% dedication and Vedanta there is only one destination for you: Freedom.

With Love

Tan

Richard:

Hi Tan,

Thanks a lot, also for the article (I haven't read it yet, but certainly will).

You've helped me a lot already - maybe we'll meet, in future...

Kind regards,

Richard