

Principles and Applications of Gyan Yoga in context of Bhagavad-Gita

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Abstract

The word **Jñān (Gyan)** literary means knowledge and wisdom, thus it is known as Yoga of Knowledge or wisdom. What is that knowledge? It is understanding or experience of the self. To know the self through knowledge or wisdom is Jñān Yoga.

This path of Yoga deals directly with the highest of all human desires – the desire to know the Truth – and it gives an explanation of what Truth means and shows the practical way of realizing it. Truth is not the subject to change, death, decay and destruction. It never changes at any time; it was never born, and will never die. It is self-existent and does not depend on anything. Gyana Yoga is the science that provides a systematized and organized method of study in order to fulfill this desire to know the Truth.

Key Words: *Jiva, Brahman and Mokṣa.*

Introduction:

The truth or reality is only *Atman* the knowledge of self, which is ultimate. To know that and to know the importance of that *Atman* Lord Kṛṣṇa says in The Gita:

*Na Jāyate Mriyate Vā Kadāçhinnāyam
Bhūtwā Bhavitā Vā Na Bhūyah /
Ajo Nityah Śāśwatoayam Purāno Na
Hanyate Hanyamāne Śarīre //*

Meaning: This is never born, nor does it die. This is unborn, eternal, changeless, ever-Itself. It is not killed when the body dies.¹

When the aspirant becomes aware of this ultimate truth he starts realizing the self and start following the path of JñānYoga and ultimately gets liberated from all worldly bondage of Karma. In this sense lord Kṛṣṇa again says in Gīta that:

*Karmajam Buddhiyuktā Hi Phalam
Tyaktwā Manīṣinah /
Janmabandhavinirmuktāh Padam
Gaççhantyanāmayam //*

Meaning: The aspirant of JñānYoga after knowing the ultimate truth possessed of this evenness of mind and abandoning the fruits of their actions, freed for ever from the fetters of birth and go to that state which is beyond all evil that is *Mokṣa*.²

Hence all the Sadhana in which Intellect or knowledge is used as object is JñānYoga; as The Holy Gita describes JñānYoga with the name of Samkhya Yoga, but basically the sadhana of Vedanta is known as JñānYoga. Since in Vedanta the knowledge is the main path of Yoga; through which the aspirant becomes one with Brahma.

According to the principle of JñānYoga the Atman is *Ananda śwarūpa* (as blissful), *Jñānśwarūpa* (knowledge form), *Sat* (truth), *Nitya* (forever), *Suddha* (pure) and *Buddha* (intellect). In the real sense the Atman is Brahma it self. Only Brahman is the reality, there is no existence except it.

Brahman is self-focused, endless, uninterrupted, unborn, conscious and blissful. As the fire is one and reflects in different form in several places, the same is the case with Brahman, it is one but appears in the form of soul of every creatures and it is beyond all of them.

According to JñānYoga the knowledge of unity of *Jiva* (the individual being) and *Brahman* (the Supreme Being), bring the aspirant to the state of Mokśa, the liberation. In other words the knowledge of Brahman and liberation from all the worries is Mokśa it self. According to this tradition it is possible only when the oneness of Jiva and Brahman has been proved. It has been said that the aspirant of higher level becomes able to know that reality only through listening the *Srutivakya* (the sayings of Brahman). He becomes able to remove the difference between Jiva and Brahman. According to Vedanta this reality is possible only through Knowledge.³

The compound jnana-yoga first appears in the Bhagavad-Gita, where along with bhakti- and karma-yoga, it forms part of a comprehensive threefold spiritual discipline.

The Gita praises jnana or wisdom for being the great purifier which helps us to cross the sea of ignorance that keeps us in bondage (see verses IV. 35-38). This purification takes the form of an evolution of the understanding or intelligence which is variously

influenced by the three gunas (the basic qualities or constituents of prakṛti or nature). In tamasa-jnana the understanding is of the nature of dullness and indifference and clings to a single aspect of the phenomenal world as if it were the whole of reality. In rajasa-jnana the understanding is moved by passion and activity in perceiving a world of multiplicity without a sense of an underlying unity. Finally in sattvik-jnana the understanding is illumined by the knowledge that there is but one immutable Reality. When the understanding or intelligence (buddhi) remains stable in sattvik-jnana, yoga is attained.

*Śrutivipratipannā te yadā sthāsyati
niścalā |
samādhāv acalā buddhis tadā yogam
avāpsyasi ||*

Meaning: When your intelligence stands unshaken and stable in spirit samadhi, then will you attain insight yoga.⁴

*prajahāti yadā kāmān sarvān pārtha
manogatān |
ātmany evātmanā tuśtah sthitapragyas
tadocyate ||*

Meaning: When a man puts away all the desires of his mind, O' Arjuna, and when his spirit is content in itself, then is he called stable in intelligence.⁵

*duhkheśv anudvignamanāh śukheśu
vigataspāhah |
vātarāgabhayakrodhah sthitadhār
munir ucyate ||*

Meaning: He whose mind is untroubled in the midst of sorrows and is free from eager desire amid pleasures, he from whom passion, fear, and rage have passed away, he is called a sage of settled intelligence.⁶

*yah sarvatrānabhisnehas tat tat prāpya
śubhāśubham |*

***nābhinandati na dveṣṭi tasya pragyā
pratiśthitā //***

Meaning: He who is without affection on any side, who does not rejoice or loathe as he obtains good or evil, his intelligence is firmly set in wisdom.⁷

***yadā saśharate cāyaś kārmo 'Ḍgānāva
sarvaśah /
indriyānindriyārthebhyas tasya pragyā
pratiśthitā //***

Meaning: He who draws away the senses from the objects of sense on every side as a tortoise draws in his limbs [into the shell], his intelligence is firmly set in wisdom.⁸

As a spiritual discipline, jnana is also central to the philosophical traditions of Samkhya and Vedanta. Samkhya doctrines can be found in the Bhagavad-Gita, and form the basis of the metaphysics of Patanjali's Yoga-sutras. In both the Samkhya and Yoga darsanas, discrimination between the products of prakṛti (nature) and puruṣa (pure consciousness) leads to liberation (kaivalya).

However where Patanjali recommends practices that advance from dharana (concentration) through dhyana (meditation) to samadhi in order to aid the development of this discrimination, Samkhya relies on the refinement of jnana alone.

Both Sankya and Vedanta argue that what binds us to the cycle of birth, death and rebirth is avidya (ignorance), and they look to knowledge to dispel it. In the Samkhya tradition this is sought through reason because the discriminative intellect (buddhi) is taken to be the first evolute of prakṛti, and so it has precedence over all the other elements of nature. In Vedanta the situation is not so straightforward. Even

though jnana-yoga is generally held to be an important aid to liberation, theistic developments in some schools of Vedanta regard bhakti or devotion to the Lord as the most effective means. However in Advaita Vedanta, which became the dominant philosophical position with the decline of Buddhism in India towards the end of the first millennium CE, jnana-yoga is considered to be sole means to mokṣa.⁹

The practice of JñānYoga is divided into two paths: ***Antaranga*** practice and ***Bahairanga*** practice. ***Bahiranga*** (external) practice includes ***Viveka***, ***Vairagya***, ***Śatśampati*** and ***Mumukṣutva***; whereas the ***Antaranga*** (internal) practice includes ***Sṛavana***, ***Manana*** and ***Nidhidhyasana***.

Viveka (Discrimination): The practitioner has to develop and cultivate the ability to recognize what is impermanent, temporary and fleeting in life as the Sadhaka experiences the fact - what is of everlasting value and pointing to the eternal. The practitioner becomes able to discriminate the superficial and the essential; as well as the illusory reality on the surface and the absolute reality in the inner, deep dimension of existence. In this way the person tries to scrutinize, analyze and evaluate constantly the experiences, inclinations, decisions and actions.

Vairagya (dispassion): In the practice of Vairagya the practitioner has to guard his mind against becoming possessed, infatuated and even slightly disturbed by passions springing from the sensual desires. Later on he has to stop all the disturbances like attachment to things that bring sensual satisfaction. The opposite of Vairagya is ***Raga*** (passion) which means originally coloring, which indicates that passions are, in fact

obstructions of the mind which do not allow clear vision. To achieve the clarity of mind (which is essential for final knowledge and wisdom) attachments and passions must be avoided and abolished.

Satsampati (Six - attainments): This discipline includes a six fold instruction of self - education for success on the path of Yoga which are:

- **Sama:** The cultivation of tranquility of the mind.
- **Dama:** Self control in action
- **Uparati:** Means eradicating the eagerness to possess.
- **Titikṣa:** To have patience
- **Sraddha:** Confidence (in the meaning of faith).
- **Samadhana:** Intentness of the mind.

Mumukṣutva (longing for liberation): This fourth Sadhana of Vedanta is very important. It should be understood as the intense desire to get the higher level of consciousness i.e. Samadhi. The Sadhaka or aspirant should develop a positive desire for liberation. Its development is supported by the previous endeavors as the advanced ability to discriminate the unsatisfactory superficial reality and the safety-promising, spiritual dimension of higher experience. The practice leads towards ultimate reality i.e. **Brahman**.

In JñānYoga in the practice of Antaranga the first one is **Sravana** which means hearing. The practitioner has to go first through an extensive and intensive study, for which one should go to his Guru (the spiritual teacher or master) and should listen to the lesson on (about) Brahman. In ancient time it was done in Ashrams (the traditional school of Vedanta or Yoga), now a days it includes thorough studies of the traditional doctrines of the Vedantic texts or Upaniṣads. This gives

to the mind of the aspirant the right direction and outlook and material for the second stages which is **Manana**.

Manana starts with intellectual analysis of the material gained by studying the texts. The analysis of the material gained by knowledge of the world of sensual and emotional experience and on the level of speculative thinking, final knowledge cannot be found. Absolute truth can lie only beyond them. When the practitioner firmly arrives at this conclusion, he is able to enter the path of meditation which brings him to the following and final stage of training which is **Nidhisyasana**.

This expression can be translated as constant meditation. This stage of training makes it clear to the Sadhaka that the process of opening a new channel to reality over and above the senses and the intellect is not a matter of mental exercises during meditational session only, but that it is also and equally necessary to introduce a kind of meditational attitude towards one's life so that eventually the mind is in a state of meditation even when dealing with the business of everyday life. As this capacity is developed and deepened, the Yogi's intuition and spiritual vision grow until he reaches the final vision of truth, which brings the aspirant at the final achievement of liberation or **Mokṣa**.

The only way to attain absolute liberation is when **jnana is transformed into jnana yoga**. Krishna clarifies this point in the Bhagavad Gita as:

**brahmabhūtaḥ prasannātmā na śocati
na kāṅkṣati |**

**samah sarveṣu bhāteṣu madbhaktih
labhate parām ||**

Meaning: In the state of *atma-jnana* or self realization (called brahm-bhoot) a jnani is impartial to all. He has no material desire and experiences no pain on being separated from any material object or person, yet he has not attained divine knowledge of God (brahm jnana). **Because of this he can still fall from his spiritual height.**¹⁰

Krishna explains the *atma jnani* secures and perfects this knowledge only through *bhakti* (devotion) and grace as:

*bhaktiyā mām abhijānāti yāvān yaś
cāsmi tattvatah |*

*tato mām tattvato gyātvā viśate
tadanantaram ||*

Meaning: Only through *bhakti* to Me and with My Grace does an *atma jnani* know

Me and attain divine realization. He attains the full knowledge of what was only partially understood.¹¹

Conclusion:

Jnana yoga is the path of wisdom, knowledge, and direct experience of *Brahman* as the ultimate reality. The path renounces both desires and actions, and is therefore depicted as being steep and very difficult in the *Bhagavad Gita*. This path is often associated with the non-dualistic Vedantic belief of the identity of the *Ātman* with the *Brahman*. For the followers of this path, the realisation of the identity of *Ātman* and *Brahman* is held as the key to liberation.

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