

WORKING CONSCIOUSLY
(RIGHT SPIRIT IN WORK)

An end-of-course Monograph by
Ritika Goyal

Course: Power of Attitude
at The Gnostic Centre, New Delhi
1998

Facilitator: Ms. Ameeta Mehra

Acknowledgements

I would like to Acknowledge especially The Mother and Sri Aurobindo as the entire monograph is based on their Integral yoga philosophy and it is this philosophy which is the guiding light in my life.

I would also like to add a special word of thanks to the following:

Ameeta Mehra who has guided my study and practice on the path.

Mrs. Neera Goyal, my Mother for her back-up support.

Anuradha for her suggestions on layout and presentation of the monograph.

And my course-mates in this course for their valuable feedback.

CONTENTS

1.	INTRODUCTION	4
2.	DEFINITION	4
3.	SIGNIFICANCE OF WORK	5
4.	ATTITUDE TOWARDS WORK	6
5.	MY TRYST WITH THE HIGHEST IDEALS	8
6.	CONCLUSION	10
7.	REFERENCES	11
8.	BIBLIOGRAPHY	12

WORKING CONSCIOUSLY

(RIGHT SPIRIT IN WORK)

INTRODUCTION

My reason for having chosen this topic is not merely to deliberate on it intellectually but because Work has played an important role in my life. Work as I understand it, is a practise far beyond a means of livelihood. It has proved a good field for me to understand and to exceed myself. It is a field which helps me gauge my own attitudes towards myself and others. And above all as Khalil Gibran says:

*“When you work you fulfil a part of earth’s furthest dream,
assigned to you when that dream was born.....”¹*

Thus I take this opportunity to understand what Work means, its significance, my attitude towards it, and how far have I been able to meet the standards I have set for myself.

DEFINITION

The word Work has various connotations and has been defined in various ways. As per the Collins English dictionary the word Work is defined as:- ‘A job which one is paid to do.’ Or ‘To do a task which ones’ job involves’. This definition is limited to the utilitarian aspect of work alone.

While on the other hand if one were to translate the word Work into Hindi one would substitute it for *KARYA* which means ‘Whatever needs to be done.’ Thus this definition is all encompassing. For at every given moment one does something or the other which needs to be done whether it be eating, sleeping, cooking, feeding a child, playing, talking, thinking and /or doing a task one is paid for.

Needless to say the first definition of work is the definition used in common parlance. No wonder ones profession is usually the expression of the best in ones self while in ones private life one comes down to the level that leaves much to be desired. Under this definition I being a lawyer would be considered a good lawyer(worker) if I won cases for my clients irrespective of how I interacted or dealt with the other aspects of my life professional or personal.

But would I be integrally fulfilling part of the earth’s furthest dream assigned to me? Is not the role of a employer and Daughter as important? Is not eating and sleeping

important? Then why this division in the field of work? In fact in The Bhagavad Gita* it is very clearly stated:

“No one remains without doing any work even for a moment; every one is made to do action helplessly by the modes, gunas**, born of prakriti***.”²

As a logical corollary does it not follow that Work includes every thought, every word, every action transcending into one whole i.e. Karma. Thus Karma is work and work is life.

The word Karma is derived from the Sanskrit root *KRI* *. Is it merely a coincidence that we find the sound of KRI in the English word creation. For every little work in life, however humble like a simple act of breathing is also an act of collaboration with creation. In essence the word work encompasses every thought, every word and every action done consciously, subconsciously or unconsciously.

SIGNIFICANCE OF WORK

At this juncture the question that arises is, what is the significance of Work? If one were to observe oneself we would notice that all that we do is an outer manifestation of our thoughts, motives, feelings, sensations whether consciously or unconsciously. Here I am deliberately using the word unconsciously for very often when one is asked: Why did you do that? The answer often is: I don't know. How is it that one is not aware of why one is doing a particular action. The reason is as Dr. Fedrick Perls** claims that people are often aware of only part of themselves rather than of the whole self. Further Shri A. S. Dalal states “Broadly speaking, there are two divisions in the human being—the outer being, which constitutes the personality (from the Latin word *persona*, “mask”), and the inner being, the true being or the person who uses the outer mask of the personality.”³ Sri Aurobindo based on his yoga sadhana experienced five parts of the being constituting the Human Whole which broadly speaking is divided into: The Outer Being and The Inner Being. The Outer Being is composed of The Physical i.e. our body; The Vital i.e. our emotions and desires; The Mental i.e. our mind. The Inner Being is composed of The Psychic i.e. *The CHAITYA PURUSH* Or *The JIVATMA* and the fifth part being the Spiritual or *THE ATMAN*. Thus if we are composed of many parts and,

* A celebrated Scripture in the form of a dialogue between Lord Krishna and Arjuna spoken on the battle field of Kurukshetra, which occurs as an episode in the Mahabharata an epic.

** The quality, character, property; the three modes of nature are sattwa, rajas & tamas.

*** The outer or executive side of the conscious Force which forms and moves the worlds.

* it is a Sanskrit word whose English equivalent is ‘to do’

** He was a psychoanalyst who followed the Freudian principles and integrated some of the principles and discoveries of gestalt therapy. The word Gestalt is a German word which in English roughly means, an organised whole.

and one claims not to know the reason for doing something i.e. he unconsciously or even mechanically does something it probably is because one is operating from only one part of ones being and not as an integrated whole. It is only through work that one can know and identify the part from which we operate and also to integrate ourselves as one whole, as work is the outer manifestation through which we can observe oneself and thereby work upon ourselves. Thus our work is like a mirror to ourselves. It is a means through which we can confront ourselves. It is a means through which we can become conscious of who we really are. We can gauge ourselves and see our progress. The significance of work is so well encapsulated in the following words of Sri Aurobindo “Action is for self finding, for self fulfilment, for self realisation and not only for its own external and apparent fruits of the moment or the future.”⁴

For me my work especially my profession has been a means to become aware of my limitations and to accept them. It is through work that I have been able to identify my limitation of anger, laziness and self justification at the expense of even lying sometimes.

ATTITUDE TOWARDS WORK

Is “he who works in marble, and finds the shape of his own soul in the stone, nobler than he who ploughs the soil ?”⁵ Can one call a philanthropist whose motivated to work only for self aggrandisement nobler than a businessman whose motivating force is to set up a business to provide employment to a few hundred people? Or would you call Chandraswami (a self professed sannyasi) nobler than J.R.D.Tata (a Businessman)? If not then why? The logical answer would be that, it is not the nature of the work that one undertakes which is important but it is the attitude with which one undertakes ones work that is of utmost importance. We find even in western literature the mention of the importance of ones attitude over the nature of ones work Homer* in Chapter iv of Odyssey** brings forth how even the humblest work like sweeping and washing can be a means of joy and beauty rather than just mundane chores if done with the right attitude.

Once we have come to the finding that it is not the nature of work which is of importance but the attitude with which the work is done we then need to delve into the parameters to gauge what is the right attitude towards work .

The Bhagavad Gita which is a Gospel of karma lays down the ideal attitude towards work and what is of particular interest is that this entire gospel was recited on the Battle field of Kurukshetra. This battle is symbolic of the battle that is constantly

* A Greek poet who wrote the two epic poems of ancient Greece : Odyssey and Iliad.

** One of the two great Epic poems of ancient Greece. The Greeks regarded the great epic something more than work of literature they valued it not only as a symbol of Hellenic unity and heroism but also as an ancient source of moral and even practical instruction.

going on within each one of us. It is the battle between ones highest aspiration and ones basest desire. Herein below I enumerate the principles of the right spirit in work culled out by Ameeta Mehra :-

1. Do the Work that should be done without any desire for fruit, *NISKAMA KARMA*
2. Learn to bear the touches of the world upon you with a quiet endurance and later a calm equality. Do not allow yourself to get carried away by the waves in the storm.(Equality and oneness).
3. Remember and offer; Do all work as an offering, as a sacrifice to the Divine in oneself and in the world. Before you begin anything, take a few moments to remember the divine and offer your thoughts, feeling and actions. This attitude of the mind and heart is not too difficult to initiate, but very difficult to make absolutely sincere and all pervasive.
4. Get rid of the central egoism and even the ego- sense of the worker. Look at ones' self merely as an instrument and not the doer.
5. Have complete Faith and Patience in your aspiration and effort.
6. Despite having no attachment to the result of your work let nothing short of perfection be your ideal in work.

The aforesaid attitudes no doubt are very high ideals. But are they mere ideals or can they be translated into action guiding us in our day to day activity. Here I would like to introduce one person who for me was a striking example of the application of the ideals into his life . He was none other than Shri J. R. D. Tata. It was he who brought into India the gift of Civil aviation in 1932 and later in 1948 he helped the country spread her wings abroad by launching Air India International.. Thirty years later his baby the Air India was snatched away from him unilaterally by the then Government. But he without any remorse stated:

“Despite all the difficulties, all the frustrations, there is a joy in having done something as well as you could.”⁶ This truly was an attitude of *NISKAMA KARMA* .

“The one thing that everyone who knew him remarked upon was the manner in which he prevailed over the setbacks and disappointments that he encountered in the course of the numerous activities and initiatives he concerned himself with. The frustrations and reversals which would have exhausted a lesser man, appeared only to exhilarate him.”⁷

Once when a teacher in Calcutta asked Shri J.R. D. Tata to list his guiding principles in work he summarised them as follows:-

1. One must forever strive towards excellence, or even perfection, in any task, however small, and never be satisfied with the second best
2. No success or achievement in material terms is worthwhile unless it serves the need or interest of the country and its people and is achieved by fair and honest means.”⁸ Thus we have before us in the late 20th Century an example of a very successful man from a purely utilitarian point of view who successfully applied the highest ideal in his life and work.

MY TRYST WITH THE HIGHEST IDEALS

It follows that the ideals set forth in The Bhagavad Gita* are not mere ideals on paper but can become a living experiences.

For me, my journey has been and is from darkness to light from falsehood to truth and from mortality to immortality . Each day when I sit back and go through the day the journey is always undulated. There are times when even in the most adverse circumstances I am able to rise above and see a higher purpose and yet there are moments that one forgets . But in the silence of my soul there is always this lamp enlightening the path of my life.

When ever I encounter a conflict whether it be at home or with a colleague, at the root of it is always this forgetfulness of offering ones work to the highest. This results in asserting myself, and insisting on my personal mental preferences, motives etc. Infact this realisation dawned upon me only recently when the conflict with my mother reached unprecedented heights and mentally I tried every solution but to no avail. It was only when as a practise I started offering my interactions with her to the highest that the conflicts have subsided.

Depression , anxiety, the feeling of having done badly or being a loser in life often bogged me down. Infact I stopped learning new things due to the anxiety of being a failure and as a result stopped growing as a person. Even though I was a lawyer and could give good advice to my clients but every time I was required to appear before a judge despite having studied the case in depth a kind of nervousness would overtake me resulting in a complete blank out. After a long struggle of few years I realised that all this was stemming from the fact that I was attached to the result rather than putting in my best and leaving the result to God. Now often I am able to take this attitude . Just recently in one of the cases where everyone around me told me that the Judge would not give a decision in my favour as in similar matters he had earlier given an adverse finding. Despite these negative suggestions I in the true spirit of NISKAMA KARMA put in my best and left the result to god and really I felt like a master of circumstances rather than a slave of them for there were no strains of anxiety, etc.

Based on self observation during the last five weeks .I have been able to identify the following reasons which prevent me from working in the spirit of The Highest ideal:

1. Excessive self importance
2. Failing to see where I go wrong or rather justifying my action.
3. laziness and thereby always putting off things for another time.
4. An active and perturbed mind : the battle of conflicting thoughts in the hub of activity often result in confusion and in loosing the right perspective. Even though I am aware that just as the wonders of the stars in heaven only reveal itself in the silence of the night , the wonder and strength of oneself is revealed in the silence of ones soul.

The principle of treating each act as an offering to the highest is one method that has helped me overcome some shortcomings in my day to day work. In the midst of activity one tends to forget this, because presently my emotions compel and dictate my speech, thought and action and not the light within. I therefore presently begin my work with the seed thought that I am making an offering to the Divine. Infact each time I have done this it has had a dramatically different effect on my work; the nervousness and anxiety regarding the result fade away and I am able to put in my best without expending my energy into the ifs and buts of the ultimate result.

Another potent method which has helped me is Meditation; specially the one which The Mother has called lighting The Psychic fire. Through this meditation, on identifying the stumbling blocks, I let the fire of aspiration burning within consume these stumbling blocks and steadily over some time one can feel the stumbling blocks dissolving. This in particular has helped me overcome anger .

Above all I know that Faith, Sincerity and perseverance can help me overcome these limitations and there shall be a day when these rusted habits will give way to a conscious binding to the ideals I have set forth for myself. It is faith that has carried me through each battle and I believe there is no power stronger than faith. It is invincible like a rock rising amidst the stormy ever changing sea. From the bottom of the sea, it rears to heaven, its impenetrable stone, as though rising in aspiration. It has the power to look at the most violent waves right in the face as they strike at it and roll past. Even the Bhagavad Gita lays utmost importance on Faith. It states:

“The ignorant who has no faith, the soul of doubt goeth to perdition; neither this world, nor that beyond, nor any happiness is for the soul full of doubts.”⁹

CONCLUSION

Thus in conclusion I would like to state that the power of the right attitude cannot be undermined. Infact merely by having a right attitude towards work one can change difficulties into opportunities and the Mother has very rightly said “The right attitude not only has the power to turn every circumstance to advantage but can change the very circumstance itself.”¹⁰

REFERENCES

- ¹ Khalil Gibran (1959) *The Prophet*, pp.25
- ² Ed:Maheshwar, *The Bhagavad Gita ,In the light of Sri Aurobindo*, pp 48
- ³ S.Dalal(compiler), *Looking from Within*, pp v -vi
- ⁴ Ameeta Mehra, *Karmayoga Perfection in Works*, pp.13
- ⁵ Khalil Gibran, *The Prophet*, pp.25
- ⁶ R. M. Lal, *The Joy Of Achievement , Conversations with J.R.D.Tata*, pp 3
- ⁷ Ibid, pp 5
- ⁸ Ibid, pp 73
- ⁹ *Bhagavad Gita*, ch.4, shloka 40
- ¹⁰ The Mother, *Collected Works of The Mother*, VOL. 3, PP154

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. **Sri Aurobindo**, *The Collected Works of Sri Aurobindo*, Pondicherry, Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust.
2. **The Mother**, *The Collected Works of The Mother* , Pondicherry, Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust.
3. **Gibran Khalil(1959)** *The Prophet*, New York, Alfred A. Knopf
4. **Sinclair John & Hanks Patrick Ed. (1988)**, *Collins Cobuild Dictionary*, Glasgow, William Collins Sons & Co. Ltd
5. Sanskrit Kosh Dictionary.
6. **Ed:Maheshwar, (1992)**, *The Bhagwat Gita ,In the light of Sri Aurobindo*, Pondicherry, Dr. H. Maheshwari
7. **A.S.Dalal(compiler)**, *Looking from Within*, pp v -vi
8. **R. M. Lal (1995)**, *The Joy Of Achievement ,Conversations with J.R D Tata*, Viking Penguin India Ltd.
9. **AMEETA MEHRA (compiler) 1998**, *Karmayoga , Perfection in Works*, New Delhi, The Gnostic Centre.
10. **Muriel James & Dorothy Jongeward, 1971**, *Born to Win*, U.S.A., Nal Penguin INC.
11. **Juan Mascaro (Ed.)**, **1973**, *The Bhagavad Gita*, Middlesex, Penguin Books Ltd.