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# The philosophy of work (A concept based on Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta)

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॥ शास्त्रसंख्यानसम्पर्कैः प्रज्ञामादौ विवर्धयित् ॥

## Introduction

An unavoidable aspect of every being is work. Work ranges from programming, managing, teaching and other tangible work to abstract ones like thinking, meditating, contemplating etc. But do we work consciously? Are we utilizing the benefits of work? Do we know the schema of life and work? Can contemplative work lead to liberation? What is the philosophy of work? These questions have been answered in our scriptures including the Bhagavad gita. However largely we are unaware of the very purpose of work and hence we are floundering in this universe squandering this glorious opportunity: work, given to us to uplift ourselves and live a life of peace and bliss here and yonder. Instead we are being mercilessly rocked between the pinnacles of joys and sorrows.

This paper explains all about work: the schema of life and work, the real purpose of work, how work is to be done in order to achieve the real benefits of work and how to make any work a *karma yoga*, which is the stepping stone on the path of liberation.

Firstly, we present a little background about ourselves and the universe around us. Without knowledge of this we cannot appreciate the philosophy of work.

## Acquiring true identity

A few moments of contemplation reveals that we are not the body that we see. It is just a physical entity controlled by the mind. The mind is commanded by us as we usually say 'we make up our mind'. Therefore we are not the mind and the body that we see. Then who are we? A little contemplation and we realize that we are the ones who Will and command the mind to act accordingly. We are the ones who are conscious<sup>1</sup> of ourselves and our surroundings i.e we are consciousness which is made up of both, self consciousness or substantive consciousness and attributive consciousness- consciousness of all other than self. Our attributive consciousness is constantly varying – we gain or lose knowledge. In deep sleep the consciousness rests. This much is known from contemplation itself. Each one is totally subservient to a higher power. This can be inferred when we experience that we cannot fully control many happenings eg. the time and place of our death, birth etc.

The scriptures reveals: The Supreme self or Lord, who is the inner-controller of all, and is directing all activities of the world viz. creation, sustenance and destruction; there is peace for one who has surrendered to Him<sup>2</sup>. There is no delusion or sorrow for one who sees Him in all<sup>3</sup>. There is no fear for one who is devoted to Him always<sup>4</sup>. It is He and He alone who is worshipped through all actions<sup>5</sup>. He reveals Himself only to those whom He chooses<sup>6</sup>. When the Lord is pleased, He grants us True knowledge of realities<sup>7</sup> and seeing Him - the Compassionate Loving Supreme Self - in all, makes everything agreeable and we are at bliss. Thus, from a combination of contemplation and a guided study of scriptures, we understand our true nature to be that of **the blissful conscious self that is totally subservient to the Supreme Self.**

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1. Atma Sidhdhi – 3
  2. Cha – 3-14-1
  3. Isa-7, Kata 2.12, Kata 2.22
  4. Tait aaranyaka - 7
  5. Sb. 3-1-37
  6. Kata 2-22
  7. Bg 10-10, 10-11

**‘Knowing or *vedana*, extends upto experiential learning that is obtained by proximity with the object of knowledge<sup>8</sup>’.** For example, in order to gain mastery in cooking, one has to cook the dishes several times; sheer knowledge of the recipes will not suffice. It may take years or even several births to gain experiential knowledge of this form about the Lord, therefore the delay in liberation.

### **The three realities**

Scriptures reveal that there are only three realities viz.

1. the conscious-self - *chetana*,
2. matter - *achetana* and
3. the Supreme Self - *ishvara*<sup>9</sup>.

The self is controller, supporter and master of the body, hence it is the soul of the body<sup>10</sup>. Similarly, the Supreme self, is the controller, supporter and master of the self, therefore the soul of self<sup>11</sup>. It follows that Supreme Self is the soul of the self, which is the soul of the body. Additionally, the Supreme self has pervaded all matter<sup>12</sup>.

The self is the enjoyer of matter while the Supreme Self enjoys both and is also the inspirer of the self<sup>13</sup>.

**Upanishads declare that being anchored in the transcendental Supreme Self while indulging in the material world is spiritual intelligence<sup>14</sup>.**

### **What is wrong with the way we do work now?**

When the self gains knowledge about its true identity and experiences itself and is aware of the Supreme self, it overcomes the pairs of opposites – *dvandva* - and remains blissful. The self would strive to remain in this state. But, matter that is all around, by its invincible deluding power, stoutly opposes this effort of the self. A way out of this situation is the practice of Pancakāla Prakriya (See Appendix) – the daily routine for an aspirant and a concept mentioned in Pāncharatra Āgama.

It is well known that, being born in this world, one has to always engage oneself in some action or other<sup>15</sup> – even meditating, thinking and contemplation, introspection etc. are actions. **Success in that action may cause false ego or *viparitha ahankara* –feeling of pride in the body and its accomplishments; as also possessiveness with regard to end products of the action arises in one – called *mamakaara*<sup>16</sup>. These two cause misplaced identity with the body and thus bring on worldly sufferings.**

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8. Sb, 1-1-1 laghu purva paksha

9. Essence of srimad rahasyatrayasaram pg.45

10. Su – 8, Bg 15-16, Ra-yudh-120-26, Vp- 1-22-38,86, Manu-1-8

11. Sb 2-1-15, Bruhad 5-7-22

12. Isa-1

13. Sve 1-5

14. Kata 4-1

15. Bg 3-5

16. Philosophy of sadhana in Visisitadvaita , Pg. 198

## What is spiritual work? How does any work become spiritual work?

When one does all work with spiritual awareness - identifying with the self who is subservient to the Supreme self who being the inner controller<sup>17</sup> is the real doer<sup>18</sup> as also the enjoyer and grantor of fruits<sup>19</sup> of the work, **then he remains unaffected by outcomes of the work done.**

Also, when encountered with obstacles, if one contemplates on his utter helplessness and surrenders to Almighty and then experiences miraculous saves, then his faith in the Lord increases, thus **furthering the internalizing of spiritual awareness.**

Consequently, one would like to engage only in such work that accommodates spiritual contemplation, even if it is at the cost of material gains. For, **‘Material gains are little and evanescent whereas spiritual gains are infinite, and permanent’**– this is the very reason why one becomes an aspirant in the first place<sup>20</sup>. Therefore, an aspirant is discrete and does not get deluded into committing sins or incurring spiritual losses for the sake of material gains. When **one is not directed by material benefits but only spiritual gains from work, that work could be termed spiritual work.**

## What is the real purpose of work?

**All work has to be done in the manner of spiritual work<sup>21</sup> and that is the purpose of doing work<sup>22</sup>.** Only such work enhances spiritual intelligence. **The very purpose of life is this.** We have been endowed by this precious human body only so that we can gain the knowledge of scriptures and perform spiritual work and gain spiritual intelligence. We can also observe this truth in the phases prescribed in a lifetime. Initial years are for study, **the next phase is for consolidating knowledge through performance of spiritual work**, and the next two largely meditative phases are for actually obtaining liberation<sup>23</sup>.

In the *Brahmasutras*, the *Kartru-Adhikarana* declares doer-ship for the individual self. However, it is known that Lord is the inspirer<sup>24</sup> of all selves. Being inspired, the self wills to do certain work; therefore the doer-ship is of the form of ‘granted doer-ship’, the *Paraayatta-adhikarana* clarifies. At the first instance of the work, the self is given full freedom to choose what path to take<sup>25</sup>. However completion of the work is dependent on the *karma* – accumulated merits and demerits - of the self. Lord dispenses the fruits of *karma*<sup>26</sup>. Therefore successful execution of work is under Lord’s control. The *Gita*<sup>27</sup> says that five factors cause successful completion of work and the Lord is the fifth factor – *daivum tu atra pancamam*. For example, meditation or devotional service may be interrupted due to impediments caused by some prior sinful acts<sup>28</sup>. Performing ones prescribed duties as a worship of the Lord who is the inner controller of all, is prescribed to circumvent this<sup>29</sup>.

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17. Tait-aran-3-11-2

18. Tait-aran-3-11-2

19. Bs 3-2-37, bg 9-24 , cha 2-7-4

20. Sb – laghu purva paksha

21. Bg 3-30

22. Bg 3-31, 18-46

23. Bs 3-4-26, Bg 3-8

24. Sve 1-12

25. Bs 2-3-41

26. Kau 3-9, Bg 10-8

27. Bg 18-14

28. Bs 3-4-50, 3-4-51

29. Sb 3-4-26

With all this in mind, Pāncaratra Āgama enjoins a set of thought processes with each unit of work done. Each work is a means of worshipping the Lord. Work should be preceded by thoughts of Lord's sovereign doer-ship and enjoyer-ship and ended with disowning individual doer-ship and enjoyer-ship: this process is called *sātvika tyaga*.

### Commencing work with Noble Resolution

भगवान्-एव स्वनियाम्य-स्वरूप-स्थिति-प्रवृत्ति-स्वशेषतैक-रसेन अनेन आत्मना स्वकीयैश्च उपकरणैः स्वाराधनैक-प्रयोजनाय परमपुरुषः सर्वशेषी श्रियःपतिः स्वशेषभूतमिद.. स्वस्मै स्वप्रीतये स्वयमेव कारयति।<sup>30</sup>

**Lord alone, who is the Supreme Person, Master of all and consort of Shri, for His own sake, is getting this work which is subordinate to Him, performed for His pleasure, by means of this soul (myself) who delights only in His subservience and whose existence, sustenance and functioning is under His control, and for whom the work's sole purpose is His worship, thru His Own instruments (the body and other material resources).**

The Lord having a unique appellation *satya*, is the only One who has an existence independent of all else - space, time and state<sup>31</sup>. Therefore, existence of all the rest depends on Him. He being the creator<sup>32</sup>, controls the state and activities of all. The self exists only for the pleasure of the Lord – He being the soul of the self<sup>33</sup>. Lord is worshipped by all actions, and grants the fruits of actions<sup>34</sup>.

One's body and sense organs that are instruments of work are controlled by various demi-gods, one for each sense organ including the mind<sup>35</sup>. Lord is the inner controller of these demi-gods. Therefore, the self does not have absolute control over his body. It is limited by the Lord.

The self is free only to make a resolution at the first instance of the work, to do the work in a righteous manner or to take the pleasure route. Thereon, the work progresses according to the dictates of the Lord who being the inner-controller dispenses the fruits of *karmas* – fruits of merits and demerits of the past. Being self-aware, the aspirant chooses to do the work in a righteous manner and does it in the service of the Lord. These thoughts should precede work.

### Winding up work with Noble detachment

भगवान्-एव स्वनियाम्य-स्वरूप-स्थिति-प्रवृत्ति-स्वशेषतैक-रसेन अनेन आत्मना स्वकीयैश्च उपकरणैः स्वाराधनैक-प्रयोजनाय परमपुरुषः सर्वशेषी श्रियःपतिः स्वशेषभूतमिद.. स्वस्मै स्वप्रीतये स्वयमेव कारितवान्।<sup>36</sup>

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30. Nitya grantha of bhagavad ramanuja
  31. Sb -1-1-1 MahaSidhdhanta
  32. Bs 1-1-2
  33. Sb 2-1-8
  34. Sb 2-2-3, Tait – na, Bg 18-46
  35. Ait – 1-2-4, Bs 2-1-5
  36. Nitya grantha of bhagavad ramanuja , bg 9-27
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**Lord alone, who is the Supreme Person, Master of all and consort of Shri, for His own sake, has got this work which is subordinate to Him, done for His pleasure, by means of this soul (myself) who delights only in His subservience and whose existence, sustenance and functioning is under His control, and for whom the work's sole purpose is His worship, thru His Own instruments (the body and other material resources).**

Disowning doer-ship does not grant one freedom to unrighteousness; for the sake of one's own good one has to be righteous. Because one has to bear the consequences of one's actions, there is no escape<sup>37</sup>. Disowning ownership is in view of not being *attached* to the fruits of the acts and not being egoistic or possessive about them<sup>38</sup>.

### **Overcoming obstacles amidst work by performing Surrender to the Lord**

During the performance of the task many obstacles are bound to come. To get over these obstacles, **surrender or *sharanagathi*** has to be performed to the Lord. This act of surrender has six aspects<sup>39</sup>

1. willing to be agreeable to the Lord – as dictated by shastras,
2. abstaining from prohibited acts that displease the Lord,
3. feeling of utter helplessness,
4. having complete faith in the saving grace of the Lord,
5. choosing to surrender to the Lord and
6. performing surrender to the Lord.

### **What are the benefits of performing spiritual work?**

By successfully performing surrender to the Lord for overcoming various obstacles while doing work, **one's true nature of utter helplessness is understood well**. When the work is successfully completed after surrender, **faith in the All-powerful yet compassionate protective Lord grows. This is the benefit of indulging in spiritual work**. All work has to be done in this manner. A seemingly insurmountable situation is a divine opportunity for the aspirant to experience the saving grace of His Lord<sup>40</sup>. An aspirant gradually imbibes this point of view.

Thus, when work is done in this manner – with awareness of the Supreme as the actual doer of the work and resorting to Him for overcoming obstacles and meditating on Him for smooth completion of work, one truly understands and imbibes the nature of Lord and His relationship with us. Spiritual knowledge is ingrained in us only through repeated performance of spiritual work for a very long time, could be even many births. In fact, **the compassionate Lord embarks on creation - granting us a body and enjoining us with certain duties, only so that we may gain spiritual intelligence by repeated performances of spiritual work**<sup>41</sup>.

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37. Bs 4-1-19

38. Philosophy of sadhana in Visistadvaita , Pg. 198

39. Philosophy of sadhana in Visistadvaita , Pg. 388

40. Kunti stuti - mahabharata

41. Sb 2-1-33

## **Why is it important to keep some time for contemplation in the work-process?**

Therefore, work has to be done enmeshed with contemplation. Sufficient time has to be accorded for contemplation on the role of Lord in the work we do. Before commencing the work and at the end of work, the nature of Lord vis-a-vis ourselves has to be contemplated and the thought that Lord will be using us as an instrument to accomplish the task should be contemplated upon. In between when obstacles arise, instead of abandoning the job, one has to perform surrender to the Lord and make efforts to complete the work successfully. Thus **when quality time is set apart for contemplation during work, the true purpose of work viz. enhancement of spiritual intelligence, is achieved.**

**Therefore it is the process of doing work that is important and not the products of work.** A work process that accommodates contemplation on realities ensures spiritual gains from work. This is a method of keeping the mind alert – ever-reminded of the realities. This is a manner of ingraining spirituality. **This is the path for ensuring enduring bliss. This is the true purpose of all work. This is the philosophy of work.**

## **Righteous work and unrighteous work**

Work that is prescribed or recommended by the *Shastras* and which is not prohibited by the *shastras* is righteous work. Duties according to one's station in life - *Nitya-naimittika karmas* - are prescribed work and they have to be performed in the prescribed manner<sup>42</sup>. Scriptures also recommends optional works that would bring upon fulfillment of desires – *kaamyas karmas*, like eg. Soma-yaga. However, although righteous, these bind one to the material world.

One has to make up one's mind to perform the aforesaid work and start the work. However the completion of the work requires the Lord's grace. Therefore, even performance of daily duties is at Lord's mercy. One should be ever grateful to the Lord for helping us to complete our duties and not accrue sin.

## **Devotional service**

After having performed spiritual work continually for a long time, and having thus realized one's true identity and consequently tasting long periods of bliss, in contrast with the prior life of ups and downs, one develops feeling of great gratitude towards the guru, Lord and His aspirants, who were responsible for the oncoming of this bliss. This results naturally in loving devotion towards them. Gradually, this **deep devotion culminates in divine experience and consequently loving devotional service**<sup>43</sup>. This service then slowly extends to all - especially guru and other aspirants. Affection towards aspirants is natural fallout of the deep affection for the Lord.

It is advisable to be wary of **the ego that is raised due to successful service; this works against the feeling of helplessness and utter dependence on the Lord and it erodes the very devotion that causes devotional service.** Then, the aspirant takes the Lord and His aspirants for granted, thereby losing the Lord's grace and experiences suffering. Here also spiritual work helps.

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42. Bs – 3-4-26, Bg 3-35

43. Eleven rahasya granthas, 2009, Dr.N.S. Anantharangacharya, pg 64

**By reminding oneself of the Lord's important role in all activities, the false ego is kept away, thus keeping sins at bay and leaves blissful state undisturbed.**

## Conclusion

Spiritual work enhances spiritual intelligence - it strengthens identification with blissful self that is ever subservient to the Lord and increases faith in the Supreme Self who is the inner controller of all. By enhancing spiritual intelligence one can remain blissful for longer periods of time. If disturbed due to external stimuli or internal unrest, one can regain bliss by using spiritual intelligence to bring on spiritual introspection. **This fact has been proven by the various testimonials that the author has collected after teaching this to aspirants.** An easy method for remaining steadfast in our true identity, the Pancakāla Prakriyā which is described in the Pāncarātra Āgama is enjoined. Spiritual work is a basic concept of the *Pancakāla Prakriyā*. It involves performing all work for spiritual gains rather than material gains.

Our take-away from spiritual work is noble impressions on our attributive consciousness. Each act is for improving the quality of our self. **Therefore, all work is done along with contemplation.** Sufficient time is accorded for understanding and enjoying the indispensable role of Lord in all work. All the other material gains like fame, money etc. are given up for spiritual gains. Performance of one's duties as spiritual work begets true identity and that leads to deep devotion in the Lord which culminates in devotional service to god and the godly.

More research is to be done in understanding the workings of the mind and how mere knowledge gets internalized by means of repeated work experiences, and forms a part of the attributive consciousness. A rational understanding of the tenets of Panchakāla prakriyā would help in imbibing it and gaining Spiritual Intelligence.

## Appendix

### Pancakāla Prakriyā<sup>44</sup>

Schema of activities for a day, recommended for an aspirant, one for each of the five parts of a day.

1. Dawn to morning – *abhigamana* : Time for ablutions, chanting, meditation and prayers for service through out the day. Physical and mental purification by approaching the Lord.
2. Forenoon – *upaadaana* : Collecting resources in order to perform worship. Could be work for money, shopping, cooking etc.
3. Noon – *ijjya* : Perform the rituals of worship as loving devotional service. Feel blissful.
4. Afternoon to dusk – *svaadhyaya* : self-study : after partaking food offered to Lord during above worship rituals, take a nap. Then, guided study of scriptures , chanting,

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44. Vyasa smriti, Pancaratra Agamam, Sri Narasimhan Krishnamachari, sadagopan.org, Pg 67, Agamas and south indian vaishnavism, Dr.V.Varadachary, Rangacharya memorial trust, Pg. 156



meditation etc. to ingrain the blissful state just obtained as spiritual intelligence ; this keeps up the blissful continuum until it is fully energised again next noon.

5. Night – *yogam* : After a light dinner, retire for a meditative sleep with thoughts of the Lord.

This scheme is recommended for the practice of all spiritual aspirants. Notice that collecting resources for performance of worship - earning money etc., and scriptural studies have equal time and importance. Today there is an imbalance, with the former taking away bulk of our time. This could be the root cause for disturbances in personal life and consequently societal blasphemies.

## **Bibliography and Abbreviation**

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- Tait-aran : Taitireeya Aranyaka
- Isa – isavasyopnishad, kata – katopnishad, sve – svetassetaropanaishad, mun – mundakopnishad, Ait - Aitareyopanishad , Cha – Chandogya Upanishad, Bruhad – Bruhadaranyaka Upanishad, found in Dr.N.S.AnanthaRangacharya, 2004, Dr.N.S.AnanthaRangacharya , Principal Upanishads, Vol -1, Vol-2, Vol-3
- Sb – Shri Bhashya, Bhagavad Ramanujacharya, 1987, Srirangam srimad andavan ashramam, Shri Bhashya
- Bs – bramhasutras, Bhagavan Veda Vyasa, Poundarikapuram Ashramam publications
- Bg – Srimad Bhagavadgita, Bhagavad Ramanuja , Dr. N.S.AnanthaRangacharya, Gita bhasya
- Vp – Sri vishnu puranam , gita press ,1990, Vishnu Puran
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