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# Sahaj Marg Study Group

## *Karma Yoga or Work and its Reward*

Set 3, Handout 1 (From Principles of Sahaj Marg, Set 1. Pages 190-195).

Those who work expect to be rewarded for it. In simple human terms this is a universal expectation, and much work goes into computing the reward, or remuneration as it is nowadays called, both by those awarding it and by those receiving it. Most current disputes centre around this problem, and the definition of what is fair compensation for a specified input of labour.

There is a beautiful parable attributed to Jesus Christ. A farmer, or husbandman, as he is called, is recruiting labourers to work in his fields. From the morning people come to him for employment, and he fixes their wage for the day at one talent. He goes on recruiting workers, almost up to the closing time, fixing the same wage for all, which fact, however, the workers do not know. At the end of the day, when they are paid off, they are shocked and upset to find that those who were employed early in the morning are paid exactly the same as those who joined the workforce just before close of work. Naturally they protest to the landlord that this is grossly unfair and against all concept of rewarding work. He merely replies that he had fixed the wage for each worker when he was employed, and the worker had agreed to it. That was all, as far as he was concerned. It may be concluded that if he chose to pay the same rate irrespective of how long a person worked, that was his own affair.

In this parable we see one concept of reward. The generosity of the husbandman is to be emphasized. He rewards a person for **agreeing to work**, without being bothered about the **quantity** of work put in. In other words, the employer is rewarding the workers' **willingness** rather than the ability or quantum of service rendered to him. This may be considered to illustrate the problem of work and reward at one level.

In the Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna teaches that man has the right to work, but has no right over the fruits of such work. He teaches the correct approach as being one of renunciation of the fruits of labour and calls this karma yoga. It is of course a very difficult idea to accept. It is not merely an idea, it is an ideal. But if we think deeply over this, what is the conclusion that we can draw? Surely Shri Krishna does not deny us the right to exist, which is what his teaching would imply if man were to **receive no reward** for his work. It is implicit in one's existence that the means for such existence will be provided but one has to leave this to the Provider, and not waste time on calculating the reward that one should receive. The Provider knows what to give, and if man applies himself to the calculation of what he should get he is, by implication, questioning the knowledge, and more so the generosity, of the giver. So the proper attitude for human beings is to work without thinking of the reward they will or should receive. This puts the question of work and reward at a higher level of human endeavour, by making man work in the confidence that his needs will be met fully and completely. The mercenary attitude is done away with, and if this teaching is universally adopted, it will at one stroke do away with all meanness and corruption attendant on this problem.

Master, while discussing the benefits accruing out of Sahaj Marg sadhana, once told some abhyasis that there was indeed a minimum benefit in that no one practising this sadhana would ever suffer for lack of food or clothing!

But what is it that work really gives us? Is it merely a reward to be received slavishly from another person? Or is it something higher than this? To my mind, if Shri Krishna's teaching is correctly interpreted, what it really means is that one thinks in terms of reward only so long as one thinks that he is working for another person, and therefore the other should pay or reward the work done. Karma yoga teaching, properly understood, should mean that one should not think he is working for another but for one's own self! If this idea comes, then who is to reward the worker? From where is the reward, if any, to come? Surely the Self is the one to reward its self!

When we study the results of work, divorced from any concept of reward, an illuminating knowledge dawns upon us. We find that what work really confers on us is the ability and power to undertake bigger, higher work. Whether it be in the physical or mental/intellectual fields of human aspiration and endeavour, this fact is absolutely true. Every piece of work, undertaken and successfully completed, endows us with the ability and power to go up to the next higher level of work. Is this not a reward? Why then are we universally blind to this? It is because we have conditioned ourselves to thinking that reward must come from outside ourselves.

Let us examine this a little further. What happens to a physical worker who neglects his work? He loses the capacity to do his work efficiently and correctly. His muscles become flaccid, and continued idleness makes them ultimately atrophy. So a stage comes when **the work has to be withheld from him**. This is the ultimate punishment, that work has to be denied to him. Who has punished him? The logical answer can only be that by non-performance of the duty entrusted to him, **he has punished himself**. The same conclusion attends non-performance of duty at other levels too. In all cases the worker loses his ability and power to work, and work is withheld.

If, however, the worker works correctly and efficiently, increased capacities and power develop within him, the consequent reward being that **he is given higher and progressively higher work** and so is enabled to develop himself to the limit of possible growth. The conclusion is that as we develop ourselves more and more by active and efficient conduct of the duty entrusted to us, our employer, or Master, gives us higher and yet higher work to do, thus affording us the opportunity of developing ourselves to higher and higher levels of human attainment until we finally arrive at a stage of perfection in work, approaching the divine capacity for work.

Master has, for the first time in the annals of human thought, introduced the concept of power grossness which results from power given **not being used**. This idea of power grossness is powerfully illustrated in Shri Krishna's statement that even He, the Ultimate Being, the Purshottama Himself, cannot remain idle for one moment. The explanation he offers is that such idleness on his part, even for one moment, would lead to the destruction and collapse of the manifested universe. Looking at this from the Sahaj Marg point of view of power grossness

taught to us by my Master, we see why the Divine Himself cannot remain idle without work. As Master jokingly explained creation to me, God **had** to create the universe and keep it going, so as to utilize his powers, as otherwise He himself would lose his powers! Thus we see that work is inevitable for growth. It is only by work that a person can grow. The reward of work is higher work. The reward of correct performance of higher work is the highest work. And what Master does to help us grow is to give us the first work he bestows upon us. Here begins, to my humble thinking, the real sadhana. How we perform the very first duty allotted to us by Master governs our future development. If we do it well, conscientiously and with dedication, higher work is given to us, having within itself the possibility of further growth that is put before us. If we fail, we punish ourselves. The reward, to my thinking, that Master can give us is thus tied up in the work that he gives us. And this reward we earn by proper performance and nothing more. The punishment can only be denial of future work, thus closing upon us the door of self-development.

A great truth of the spiritual dimension is that power is given simultaneously when work is given. In support of this statement I relate the case of a newly created preceptor, upon whom Master bestowed some work. The preceptor did the work. His senior preceptor, who was in charge of the centre to which he was attached, wrote to Master, praising the work done and recommending that the person should be rewarded. Master's reply was illuminating. He wrote that on the day the new preceptor commenced the work entrusted to him, at the very moment he commenced it, he was put in a particular region of spiritual existence! This analysis reveals that work alone can be the reward of work well done. By doing our work well, all that we can aspire to is for more, higher work and nothing more. But 'nothing more' is misleading, for, as I have shown here, work alone makes growth possible and therefore when work is given to us, it is not merely work that is given to us, but the possibility of infinite growth that is opened up to us.

The Bhagavad Gita once again gives us a clue to this important and universal truth, when yoga is defined as 'skill in action' or in other words, skilful performance of one's work. The true yoga, or sadhana as I have called it earlier, is therefore nothing but the right performance of work bestowed upon us. This is true yoga, or yogic sadhana at the highest level. This implies that there can be no yoga where such 'skill in action' is not developed. Master once told me that all who participate in His work are really performing the work of Nature, that is, they are participating in Divine work.

Here it is important to bear in mind that physical rewards, in material form, are things of which we can be deprived by men or circumstances. Power and abilities developed by us by right performance of our work are 'within' us, are non-material, and therefore remain ours forever. We can never be deprived of them **as long as we continue with the right performance of our duties**. Such are the indestructible, undiminishable fruits of work properly done.

May my Divine Master make it possible for each and every one of us to work for Him, and thus enable us to grow to the ultimate limit of growth offered to us by the Sahaj Marg system of yogic sadhana.