

ACTION FOR ITS OWN SAKE

Karma, Play, and Artistic Expression



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Lama Marut's book "A Spiritual Renegade's Guide to the Good Life" is out now, available at Beyond Words and Amazon.com

I. Do What Needs to Be Done

नियतं कुरु कर्म त्वं कर्म ज्यायो ह्यकर्मणः ।

niyataṁ kuru karma tvaṁ karma jyāyo hyakarmaṇaḥ ।

शरीरयात्रापि च ते न प्रसिद्धयेदकर्मणः । ।

śarīrayātrāpi ca te na prasiddhyedakarmaṇaḥ । ।

Do what is necessary to do, for action is superior to inaction. Inaction would not even keep your own body sustained! (3.8)

स्वे स्वे कर्मण्यभिरतः संसिद्धिं लभते नरः ।

sve sve karmaṇyabhirataḥ saṁsiddhim labhate naraḥ ।

स्वकर्मनिरतः सिद्धिं यथा विन्दति तच्चृणु ॥

svakarmanirataḥ siddhim yathā vindati tacchr̥ṇu ॥

Each person obtains perfection through remaining content with his or her own actions. Listen to how one finds success through being satisfied with one's own actions. (18.45)

II. Understanding the Laws of Karma: Every Action Has a Reaction

नेहाभिक्रमनाशोऽस्ति प्रत्यवायो न विद्यते ।

nehābhikramanāśo'sti pratyavāyo na vidyate ।

स्वल्पमप्यस्य धर्मस्य त्रायते महतो भयात् ॥

svalpamapyasya dharmasya trāyate mahato bhayāt ॥

No action in this world goes for nought or brings about a contrary result. Even the smallest religious practice protects against great fear. (2.40)

III. Wrong Action

अर्जुन उवाच

arjuna uvāca

अथ केन प्रयुक्तोऽयं पापं चरति पूरुषः ।

atha kena prayukto'yam pāpaṁ carati pūruṣaḥ।

अनिच्छन्नपि वाष्णेय बलादिव नियोजितः ॥

anicchannapi vārṣṇeya balādiva niyojitaḥ॥

Arjuna said:

What makes a person do wrong things, Krishna – even when they don't want to, as if compelled by force? (3.36)

श्रीभगवानुवाच

śrībhagavānuvāca

काम एष क्रोध एष रजोगुणसमुद्भवः ।

kāma eṣa krodha eṣa rajoguṇasamudbhavaḥ।

महाशनो महापाप्मा विद्ध्येनमिह वैरिणं ॥

mahāśano mahāpāpmā viddhyenamihā vairiṇam॥

The Lord replied:

Know it is desire and anger, which arise from the quality of activity, that is the real enemy here, voracious and very evil. (3.37)

IV. Right Action

कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्ते मा फलेषु कदाचन ।

karmaṇyevādhikāraṣte mā phaleṣu kadācana ।

मा कर्मफलहेतुर्भूर्मा ते सङ्गोऽस्त्वकर्मणि ॥

mā karmaphalaheturbhūrmā te saṅgo'stvakarmani ॥

Your prerogative is over your actions, not over any of the results. Do not let the results be the motivation of action, but do not be attached to inaction either. (2.47)

युक्तः कर्मफलं त्यक्त्वा शान्तिमाप्नोति नैष्ठिकीम् ।

yuktaḥ karmaphalaṁ tyaktvā śāntimāpnoti naiṣṭhikīm ।

अयुक्तः कामकारेण फले सक्तो निबध्यते ॥५-१२ ॥

ayuktaḥ kāmakāreṇa phale sakto nibadhyate ॥5-12॥

The disciplined one, letting go of the obsession with the future results of action, obtains perfect peace. The undisciplined is bound by attachment to the outcome of actions done out of desire. (5.12)

यं संन्यासमिति प्राहुर्योगं तं विद्धि पाण्डव ।

yaṁ sannyāsamiti prāhuryogaṁ taṁ viddhi pāṇḍava ।

न ह्यसंन्यस्तसङ्कल्पो योगी भवति कश्चन ॥

na hyasannyastasaṅkalpo yogī bhavati kaścana ॥

You should know, Arjuna, that yoga is what they call renunciation. No one becomes a yogi who has not renounced expectation of selfish advantage.

(6.2)

नियतं सङ्गरहितमरागद्वेषतः कृतं ।

niyataṁ saṅgarahitamaraḡadveṣataḥ kṛtaṁ ।

अफलप्रेप्सुना कर्म यत्तत्सात्त्विकमुच्यते ॥

aphalaprepsunā karma yattatsāttvikamucyate ॥

A pure action is known to be one which is done out necessity, without attachment and without desire or aversion, by someone who is doing it without seeking for results. (18.23)

V. Action Done for Its Own Sake, or Virtue is Its Own Reward

त्यक्ता कर्मफलासंगं नित्यतृप्तो निराञ्जयः ।

tyaktvā karmaphalāsaṅgaṁ nityatr̥pto nirāñjayaḥ ।

कर्मण्यभिप्रवृत्तोऽपि नैव किञ्चत्करोति सः ॥

karmaṇyabhivṛtto'pi naiva kiñcatkaroti saḥ ॥

The one who abandons attachment to the results of action, who is always satisfied and independent, does nothing at all even when he is engaged in action. (4.20)

निराञ्जीर्यतचित्तात्मा त्यक्तसर्वपरिग्रहः ।

nirāñjīryatacittātmā tyaktasarvaparigrahaḥ ।

ञ्जारीरं केवलं कर्म कुर्वन्नाप्नोति किल्बिषम् ॥

ñjarīraṁ kevalaṁ karma kurvannāpnoti kilbiṣam ॥

Without wishing for something else, restraining himself and his mind, abandoning all grasping, the one who performs action only with his body incurs no fault. (4.21)

यदृच्छालाभसन्तुष्टो द्वन्द्वतीतो विमत्सरः ।

yadṛcchālābhasantuṣṭo dvandvātīto vimatsarah ।

समः सिद्धावसिद्धौ च कृत्वापि न निबध्यते ॥

samaḥ siddhāvasiddhau ca kṛtvāpi na nibadhyate ।।

Content with whatever comes his way, transcending all dualities, free from envy, impartial in success and failure, he is not bound even though he acts.

(4.22)

नैव किम् चित्करोमीति युक्तो मन्येत तत्त्ववित् ।

naiva kim citkaromīti yukto manyeta tattvavit ।

पश्यञ्शृण्वन्स्पृशञ्जिघ्रन्नाश्नन्गच्छन्स्वपञ्श्वसन् ॥५॥८॥

paśyañśṛṇvanspṛśañjighrannaśnangacchansvapañśvasan ॥5॥8॥

Whether he is seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, eating, walking, sleeping or breathing, the disciplined one who knows how things really are would think, “I’m not doing anything at all.” (5.8).