Youth Conference 2005

Karma Yoga: The Science of Action

MassBay Community College
50 Oakland St. Wellesley Hills, MA. 02481
Saturday, October 1, 2005, 9:00 AM – 5:00 PM

Session Topic Descriptions

by Youth Committee

Public and Private Faces
By Tanmayi Gupta (Grade 11)

Generally, people tend to have two different faces: a public face and a private face; one that we wear in public while the other we keep to ourselves. Our private "face" is our real self, a reflection of our true emotions, opinions and beliefs. The public "face" is like a mask we wear sometimes with fake emotions, opinions and beliefs. When our actions do not match our words, it gives rise to this gap between who we really are and who we pretend to be. The reason for this private face is because we do not want other to see the real me. We fear what the others think and are not confident in what we do. It takes courage to have the same face in private and in public. When we realize that all are "One," then the fear of the other vanishes and we become confident and natural in both our speech and action.

Living Fearlessly
By Shiva Kaul (Grade 10)

One must fear the fear itself. It is a corrosive emotion that paralyzes the ability to think and act in a responsible manner, leading to degradation and misdeeds. It breeds aggression and invites misery. The cause of fear is ignorance of our real nature. When we realize that there is no "Other," and all persons are really One, then the fear vanishes. A fearless person lives in harmony with all. The idea of living fearlessly is to relentlessly and courageously pursue the Truth, and in that journey, perform the right actions (karma). The word "ahimsa" is often understood to mean non-killing. Non-violence does not mean that one should allow injustice or permit oppression. According to the Rig Veda, defense of oneself when attacked is the right conduct. According to Mahatma Gandhi, one must resist all oppression, yet one must not hold any ill will towards the oppressor.

Action vs. Consequence
By Pooja Nagda (Grade 12)

Associated with every action is a consequence. It could be a good action, bad action or no action at all. Law of Karma speaks of a cause and effect relationship in the universe. Each action whether gross or subtle, internal or external, voluntary or involuntary in origin, has a definite consequence. The consequence may be borne immediately such as a stomach ache after a heavy meal or may wait for a future birth for fruition or effect. In the gross physical plane, this is evident as "To every action there is an equal and opposite reaction." However, in the subtler planes, it takes subtle instruments of awareness to prove it. The ancient Hindu seers not only explained and proved this Law using meditation techniques but formulated a comprehensive theory of karma and rebirth based on this natural universal principle. The law of Karma says that we and we alone are responsible for the consequences of our actions.

Social Good vs. Individual Good
By Bhaskar Garg (Grade 12)

Absorbed in his quest for happiness, the individual can sometimes lose sight of his obligation to society as a whole. It is true that first and foremost an individual must learn, grow and sustain himself. But, this individual growth must be balanced with a view to the world outside. When individual good is aligned with social good, it is relatively easy to make right choices in undertaking an action. It is when the two interests collide that presents a conflict in the mind. A knowledgeable individual considers all of humanity the same as oneself and shares his wisdom to better the world, giving all the same level of compassion and care.

Desire - Root cause of rebirth
By Jaishri Atri (Grade 9)

Without desire there is no action. Attachment of sense organs with the objects of senses creates a desire in the mind to possess the objects. The desire turns into a resolve to get the objects, which takes the form of actions. The actions, whether good or bad, have consequences or effects that are mostly visible in the present life. On the other hand, if the desire is left unfulfilled due to life circumstances, a person must take a suitable birth to experience them. Hence, unfulfilled as well as fulfilled desires are a root cause of rebirths; thus, could one not argue that desire is the root cause, the first pebble that starts an avalanche?

Karma and Dharma
By Raagini Jawa (Grade 11)

Everything (living and non living) in this universe is governed by the natural law of Karma - an endless cycle of evolutionary transformations (creation and dissolution, births and deaths), until one reaches the final state of Oneness with the Truth. Karma in simple terms means actions whether gross or subtle (such as thoughts), internal or external, voluntary or involuntary. Dharma is the ordering principle of the universe and literally means "that which holds, integrates and sustains." Simply put, Dharma is the appropriate standard of behavior or actions for any particular age (yuga). It changes with each age. Living by it not only makes us a better person but, more importantly, enhances and uplifts the environment around us: our families, our community, our nation. Dharma nurtures the spiritual bonds between my self, the society, and Ishwar (God.) Dharma upholds man, and man in turn upholds dharma by his actions.

Destiny and Free Will
By Bhaskar Garg (Grade 12)

When any adverse or seemingly uncontrollable events occur in our lives, we often blame "fate" or God's will for them. Vice-versa, when something good happens, we believe that we are the sole doers or accomplishers. But neither destiny nor free will fully control our actions – it is really a mixture of the two. Swami Ram Tirtha draws an apt comparison to a train which is both free and bound in its movement. Its freedom lies in the fact that it can travel anywhere on the railway lines but it is limited to those lines only. Similarly, the lines of fate exist, but it is ultimately our actions that form them. Destiny depends on the intensity of actions that we pursue and one is free to make it, mar it or

change it. By proper action (Karma Yoga), we become freer from the binding effects of past actions (fate).

Disciplined Living
By Aparna Singh (Grade 10)

Disciplined living' means that one's life is structured in a productive, focused way, and that one generally does things in an orderly fashion. It is about exercising self-control in our actions. It is a relative term and is unique to each individual. Contrary to perception, it does not require a person to become regimented but allows full freedom of creative but responsible thought, speech, and action. Is there a correlation between disciplined living and success? Does freedom of thought also imply that our behavior can be totally unconstrained, without regards to others? Disciplined living provides us the steadfastness, the fortitude, the single-minded focus needed to bring the creativity in our thoughts to successful fruition!

Good vs. Bad Actions
By Ashwini Javlekar (Grade 9)

What is action? An action is something done or accomplished; a deed. In life, you are constantly faced with the decision of taking an action. Some actions are good (helping you grow) and are beneficial to yourself as well as others. Other actions are bad, creating problems and hurting yourself and others.. Karma Yoga is “efficient action”. It should be remembered that actions are not only performed through the sense organs (e.g. arms, legs, etc), but are also performed through speech and through thoughts. Actions determine the events of your life and thus it is important to take the right course of action.

Hard Evidence for Transmigration
By Niraj Mohanka (Adult)

Too often, Dharma is treated as a touchy-feely topic that requires blind belief. This is an incorrect approach since Dharma is NOT the same as religion. Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam) do require blind belief, but Dharma is based on logic, spiritual science and experience. There is no need to "believe in reincarnation" when there is a mountain of evidence collected by both spiritualists and scientists. I am an engineer by training - analytical and skeptical; I do not "believe" in anything. In my brief paper for this Karma Yoga seminar, I will provide evidence and links to additional data for people to study and come to the realization themselves that the atman (soul) , its sojourn in the spiritual plane, its general journey back to this physical plane, its recurring transmigration are not matters of belief, but are in fact backed by irrefutable evidence. The spiritual cause and effect process (metaphysics) exactly mirrors the physical laws of cause and effect (physics). Armed with this data, you should be able to dispel the calumny of those who treat these topics disrespectfully.

Goal of Life
By Priya Nagda (Grade 12)

Why are we here? Did we take birth to achieve something that we couldn't in our past life? What is our role/purpose in this world? These are some of the difficult questions that our Rishis have provided answers to. Part of the answer to this question is that we are born again and again without ever realizing that this is not the first time we were born but were born many times before this. We have come into this world to continue our journey towards Truth, carrying the burden or asset of our past actions from previous births. We will not attain the state of liberation until and unless the sack of our actions is empty. Is there ever going to be an end to this vicious cycle of being born again and again? Yes, through proper actions that will lead us to our ultimate goal.

Disciplined Living
By Vishal Atri (Grade 8)

When was the last time you heard your mother or father say, "Wake up and get in the shower!" or "Clean your room or no television!" All of these things are part of DISCIPLINED LIVING. Disciplined living helps us organize and regulate our lives. It brings an order in how we see and respond to events around us, so we are not completely lost, not knowing what to do or what is next in our life's plan. But could discipline constrain our enjoyment, creativity and growth? Aren't there times when you want to let loose and have some fun? Is doing the same thing over and over again boring? Rishis (Hindu Sages) say that "There are things that are good for you, and then there are things that are fun." Our Hindu tradition shows us how we can achieve both: do the things that are good for us (and the world) and at the same time enjoy it, and have fun.

Sva-Dharma
By Sadhna Gupta (Grade 9)

The best literal definition of sva-dharma is "my duty". The word dharma comes from the Sanskrit root dhri meaning to sustain or uphold. Dharma can be best described as righteousness, duties, or responsibilities. Every human has their own duties or purpose of life, which is one hundred percent unique to them. In part, a person's sva-dharma is determined by their past karmas. Social and cosmic harmony in society is dependent on every individual following their sva-dharma. In a more modern viewpoint, sva-dharma can be interpreted as a human's personal understanding of the goal of life and the best course for that individual to follow in order to achieve the final goal. Hindus are strongly encouraged to follow their own path rather than the path of others. Following sva-dharma is the key to recognizing oneself.

Nishkama Karma-Yoga: Scientific Efficient Action
By Prof. Mona Khaitan

A fundamental truth is that no object belongs to any person and longing for any sense object produces only fear and misery in its wake trapping man in a vicious cycle of rebirths. Clinging to the results of actions is the cause of rebirth. Man has to take a body to enjoy them. How can man protect himself from fear and free himself? The answer is found in the Upanisadic principle that God fills and envelops the universe and sense objects can be enjoyed only by giving up all feelings of ownership in them (Isa 1). Hence, karma-yoga entails performance of all actions with due diligence, without a sense of doership, without expectation of any reward, and dedication of all actions to God or Self. Practice of this skillful efficient action (*karma-yoga*) frees man from fear and eventually from the unending cycle of rebirths.