

Work is Not Averse to Spiritual Pursuit

Swami Suryadevananda

The Yoga Vasistha is a mighty but lesser known scripture. It starts with the background of the son of a sage who had turned away from his duties or work – seeing them as averse to his pursuit of truth. His father the sage seeing this, instructed him as such, “Just as birds are able to fly with their two wings, even so, both work and knowledge (*spiritual pursuit*) together lead to the supreme goal of liberation”.

Even if one is independently wealthy or has few needs – we are compelled to action. Mostly, we have other reasons to work that are tied to our sense of being or personality. A personal approach to work is precisely the reason for outer and inner conflict that often results. Often, things don't go the way intended and sometimes, this rift of expectation and result seems intolerable.

But why see what has to be done as work? We have to do something, many things – why not do what we feel needs to be done as duty? There is a big difference between seeing things as work (a means to a livelihood, job satisfaction, career or whatever) and duty.

When we see action as work, a lot of factors interfere like doubt, a feeling of not being appreciated enough or the result we expect. None of these factors are part of ‘what needs to be done’ and hence, not part of the action. Seeing work as duty is the only way to keep the mind and heart clear so the very best effort can be made in all that we do. Duty is something quite different as it does not allow any personal agenda: *‘something needs to be done – do it with all your heart, mind and body – because it needs to be done’*. The spirit of work binds one in many ways and the spirit of duty liberates one in all ways. Let us examine this further.

This spirit of work, starts, progresses and ends with the feeling of ‘I or mine’. Here, our sense of satisfaction is rooted in what comes or should come. Since results are shaped by many other factors, our expectations will drive us to adjust our efforts and sometimes, even second guess our involvement.

The spirit of duty is connected with ‘what has to be done’ and satisfaction is derived from one's effort only. Doing one's best is the satisfaction one seeks. You will be quite surprised at how things just come or fall into place when you don't run after them. First, you do away with the pursuit of result and this frees the mind to give even more to the task on hand. Second, since satisfaction is anchored to one's own effort rather than result – one is fully satisfied while doing.

Ask yourself, “When have I been fully satisfied while doing something?” Even when you do something for your loved ones, you are fully satisfied when thinking of them which is a roundabout way of not thinking about yourself first. The less you bring yourself into the equation

of action – the better you feel while doing it and the better things get done. The problem with limiting this to effort for ‘our people’ is the strong attachments and other concomitant factors that result from self-centeredness.

This spirit of duty is not limited to our career but to all work – to everything that has to be done however mundane. The mundane is a way of seeing things and not in anything that needs to be done. If you do everything, even those things you consider mundane as duty – you will find satisfaction during that action and once done as this spirit of duty is ‘how you do things’.



To properly understand this spirit of duty, we have to be alert to first see what needs to be done without the sense of ‘I and mine’ interfering at all. Second, do what needs to be done with all your heart, mind and body as if this action would be proud to have your signature on it. Third, once done, let it go completely and do not let the mind go back to ruminate in any way as the ego will fatten from glancing rearwards. This should be easy if again you are alert and awake as something else may come by for a response.

We are not talking about being continually busy as a sort of escapism as being alert and awake is the inner intelligence on watch to see all that happens and ring a silent bell if something needs to be done and the best course of action. You then get roused into action, doing your very best and let go not only once done but while doing. This takes great skill to be fully engaged in something without attachment to it. As a matter of fact – you can only be fully engaged in something if you are not attached to it. If you are attached to or in some part of the action – some part of you is not in the work and perhaps, considering other things.

Work becomes a means to purify the mind of its sense of 'I or mine' and this helps one along the way of knowledge or pursuit of truth. And, in the language of Sage Vasistha, "Work and knowledge together lead to the supreme goal of liberation".

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