

Yoga — An Integrated Science
Addendum

Karma Siddhanta

Prashant S. Iyengar

*Interviewed by Jean-Marie Perre**

What is “karma siddhanta”?

“*Karma siddhanta*” literally means “law of *karma*.” We are here on earth, and especially the spiritual seeker, to know “Why am I like this? Why was I born in particular conditions and situation, whether in a poor family, a rich family, a healthy or unhealthy family, a wicked or virtuous family? The life span is another element to consider. During our life span, we are going to perform the *karmas* and our life is a blend of experience of pain and pleasure and commitment to virtue and vice.

The law of *karma* gives you some understanding about having pain and pleasure. If you commit *karmas*, when do you do good *karmas*? When do you do bad *karmas*, and why? Which are good *karmas* or bad *karmas*? Which are seemingly good *karmas* but are bad *karmas*? Which are seemingly bad *karmas* but are good *karmas*? All this vision comes through the study of *karma siddhanta*, through understanding *karma siddhanta*. A situation might not be what it seems. For example, I can do something for you, from which you benefit, and you think I have done a good thing whereas my intention was to do something good for you so that I can catch you in my net and then be harming you. So I can be doing a good thing with a bad intention or I might be doing a bad thing with a good intention.

All those complications of life are an enigma which starts to become clear once you read, study and understand *karma siddhanta*. The key word is “why:” why are you having pleasure, why are you having pain? If you get the answers to the question “why,” then most of your problems are solved. Once you know the cause of the suffering, then you can take the proper course of action. If you know the cause of a disease, you can take the proper medicine. If you know the cause of pleasure: “Is it a right pleasure or a wrong pleasure, and why are we getting it,” answers will come. *Karma siddhanta* basically tells you that the pain and pleasure which are experienced in life are on account of *kleshas* — afflictions. According to *Patanjali*, because of *kleshas* — *avidya*, *asmita*, *raga*, *dvesa*, *abhinivesa* — you get pain and pleasure. Your life is like being on a bumpy road, you go up and down. The practice of yoga is meant to attenuate *kleshas*, so that pain and pleasure are lessened and your life

*The interview took place at the Ramamani Iyengar Memorial Yoga Institute in Pune (India) in February 2000 as a complement of “Our True nature” in “Yoga — An Integrated Science”. Transcribed by J.M. Perre. Corrected by Tessa Thiery. Copyright © 2001 by Prashant S. Iyengar. The interview may be printed for personal use but may not be commercially distributed.

smoother. To experience pain and pleasure, you have to be born, lead a conscious life (for if you are unconscious you will not experience much), and have a life span. If you are born and the next second you are dead, you will only have a second's worth of experience. If you live for some time, you will get some experience. So these three things are required: birth, experience through a conscious life and life span.

Karma siddhanta tells you: "Why are you born? Where are you born? When are you born?" and, concerning the cause of a particular lifestyle, it will also tell you prospectively what to observe if you want a good life hereafter. If you do observe these things, you will have a good life; if you observe those things, you will have a bad life. So you know you can mould your next life, create your next life, if you know *karma siddhanta*. If you like something and go after it, the effects will be various. Children like sweets; they enjoy them while eating them, but ultimately if they go on, if they do not know that eating a lot of sugar leads to diabetes, if parents let them do what they want, they will get sick. *Karma siddhanta* tells you that if you go on doing certain *karmas*, you will get mental diabetes, and you will suffer. So, "Do this, don't do that" or "Don't do this and do this" should be directed by *karma siddhanta*.

Karma siddhanta says that present life and all the future lives are ran by *kleshas*: you are existing today because you have *kleshas*. You continue to exist hereafter, after this life, because you have *kleshas*. *Karma siddhanta* helps you to analyse your *karmas*. That is why I use the word "*karmascopy*". If you have a disease, you make investigations, have clinical tests, you have a radiology. *Karma siddhanta* gives you an analyser: that is "*karmascopy*". It will say "this act seems to be good, but it is not good; this act seems to be bad, but it is not bad, it is good." It gives you a picture of *karmas*, and similarly to a medical scan, you can know whether *karmas* are good or bad, so that you do not act by appearance only.

There are various classes of *karmas*. Basically, there are good deeds and bad deeds, but a classification gives us much more information, which will increase through the maturation of time. Think of pathological or investigatory tests in medical science thirty or forty years back, and what they are now. Today you get so many details. Similarly *karmascopy* gives you that detail analysis. Even non-doing is an action, which is quite complex, as complex as today's clinical or chemical pathology, and similarly *karmascopy* is a complex subject. Action comprises various things like non-action, inaction and action. You have come here to learn yoga, and you have come by non-doing at your place. You have interrupted your classes, your business, your profession. Without stopping what you are doing you cannot come here. So you cannot just say "I am learning yoga." You have to say "I have stopped my profession, I have stopped my teaching, my work and I have come here." This has to be evaluated. What is the effect of the fact that you have stopped all these things. You just cannot say "I am gaining by learning yoga." And since being a yoga teacher is a "good" profession, you are doing further good. But because you stopped performing your job to come here, you are doing some sin also. If you were to stay here for three years, what would happen to your family?

So action comprises non-action also. Sometimes action is of the nature of undoing. To open a rope, you have to undo the knot. So somewhere you are to not do, somewhere you are to do, and this all becomes very complicated. Nothing is devoid of action. The *karma siddhanta* says that even a single moment will not pass without action. Every moment you will be doing some action. Even in the state of sleep, you will be doing some action. Some action is going on. You can't stop your action while you are sleeping — the metabolism is active, the heart is active. Even if you are unconscious, something is going on, some *karmas* are going on. Even if you are dead, actions are continuing.

Actions do not stop, even at the point of death. After death, action is of the nature of emigration. You want to leave this body and go get the next body. After death, you have to travel somewhere, enter some womb, and then take birth for the next life. So after emigration comes a different movement

which is called “transmigration.” A transmigration movement is a movement after death. So even after death actions do not stop, as you can read in the *Bhagavad Gita* : “Not even a moment will pass without action.”¹

Awake, sleepy, dormant, unconscious, conscious, semi-conscious, dead, in any state action won't cease. Action will only end when you are liberated. Until then, action will be there in some form or the other, and going on at every moment. You have to take care; at no moment will action stop, so constant investigation becomes almost compulsory. When you get ill, you go for an investigation. You must have the same attitude for *karmas*. The only difference is that *karmas* never stop, so at every moment investigation has to be there. You must analyse *karmas*, you must investigate *karmas*. In short, *karmascopy* is that much important.

Is there a set way of doing this?

It is a conscience, it is a consciousness. Once you have got this consciousness, you will be all the time watchful of your actions. As I said before, *karmas* have different clothings. A person might wear many clothes, and from outside might look strong, but from inside might feel dissipation. *Karmas* seem to be good, but they may not be good. *Karmas* seem to be bad, but they may not be bad. So *karma siddhanta* is utterly vital, and *karma* is a very important aspect of *Patanjali's* science of yoga. *Karma siddhanta* makes you alert. It develops a consciousness in you, a *karmic* consciousness, so that you are alert in performing *karmas*. You will not make wrong or wicked commitments, you will be watchful. The consciousness will come, you will become more conscientious. And to become more conscientious, you must have the influence of *karma siddhanta* on your mind. If you do not bother about it, then you will not get this conscience. *Karma siddhanta* cultures the mind. Basically, it tells you why you are in a particular condition, and if you want new conditions, what can you do now — for the future, what should you do now.

¹Bhagavad Gita, III, 5.