

Working Your Way to Contentment¹

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In today's scheme of things there is a particular approach to the "work" we do. When we set out on doing some work, what precedes it is an unambiguous reason for our doing the work. A person going and practicing every day in the playground has some expectations behind it. He/she wants to get represented in the college team or state team. At least he/she wants to exercise the body with the hope of maintaining a good health. A person going to the temple has a number of reasons (to pray) – childrens' education matters, daughter's wedding, impending transfer of job, wife's health, obtaining the much awaited promotion etc. The list can indeed be very long. A student regularly studying has the expectation of passing the examination with good grades. If you ask a student if he/she is studying for gaining knowledge many may not be able to answer in the affirmative spontaneously. A person working in an office works with many expectations – good pay, incentives, faster promotion, name and fame, power and recognition.

Current model pertaining to work

It is therefore not surprising that a number of us will have, on an average, such an orientation to work. The current dominant model pertaining to work has four interconnected steps as follows: Develop some unambiguous expectations arising out of work – Set out to work with this clarity and motivation – Get the results that you aimed for – Get rewarded for the efforts. By implication what it means is that if there is a possibility of this chain of logic breaking somewhere, simply disengage from work. Disengaging from work happens in many ways – lose interest in the work, work for the sake of work, merely offer the physical body for the work but switch off the brain and all its marvelous analytical capability that can add very well to the work that one is doing, abstain from working, exhibit indiscipline in work related behavior. The list goes on...

In fact before dis-engaging from work in several ways described above one makes multiple efforts to somehow ensure that the chain of logic indeed does not break. This includes finding ways to twist and tweak the reward system pertaining to the outcome into one's favour, influencing the power center so that even if the logic breaks the expected rewards accrue, engage in a variety of unethical means and immoral ways to short change the system so that the rewards accrue independent of the quality of work and the output etc. Due to such attempts to protect the chain of logic of work and rewards or to eventually disengage from work, it leaves a bad taste in the hands of every individual in the work place. Further the working atmosphere is vitiated, the goodness of the work and the results are often compromised. Most importantly, every one of us engaged in this way of working are "bounded by or tied to" the vagaries of outcomes and rewards.

This model and the behavioural patterns of actors in this game do not make an impressive reading at all. Therefore it remains to be understood as to why people pursue such work.

¹ **Mahadevan, B.** (2012). "Working your way to contentment", *Sadguru's Blessings*, Vol. 10 (2), October, 2012, pp 21 – 22.

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Further, it will also be interesting to know what else could we have aimed for when we do some work. Lord Krishna provides has answers to these important issues that we face in our daily life in *Bhagavad Gitā*. We shall focus on one aspect in this writing.

An alternative paradigm to work and results

The above description of the current approach to work forces us to revisit the basic question “Why do we work? Or What are we to gain from work?” All the problems listed above stems from an implicit assumption that we all hold that work is primarily meant to improve our material wellbeing and social status among our peers. It does not need any debate to accept that good work leading to rewards can indeed fulfill these objectives. However what needs to be debated is that is this all we set as objectives or do we set other lofty objectives and by achieving them we will have a greater propensity to achieve these as well. This is where *Bhagavad Gitā* critically differs from our popular understanding of work and rewards.

What we need in life are indeed happiness, peace of mind, freedom and joy in doing our work and a sense of contentment. In fact the material progress and the improved social status that we are all aiming for today could at best be a surrogate to achieve these core objectives in life. Lord Krishna impresses upon us that by engaging in work in a certain way we may indeed end up getting closer to these core objectives.

कर्मजं बुद्धियुक्ताहि फलं त्यक्त्वा मनीषिणः ।
जन्मबन्धविनिर्मुक्ताः पदं गच्छन्त्यनामयम् ॥ 2.51

*karmajam buddhiyuktā hi phalam tyaktvā manīṣiṇaḥ
janma-bandha-vinirmuktāḥ padam gacchanti-anāmayam*

The top of the list recommendation he has for us is to give up the “vice like” grip or fixation that we have on the fruits of action (*phalam tyaktvā*) and engage in work. Lord Krishna says that if we take such an approach to work we will indeed be free of several layers of bondage (*janma-bandha-vinirmuktāḥ*) that we ourselves have inflicted on us. He further assures that such an approach to work will take us to the pinnacle of what we need to achieve in life. It essentially means that the peace of mind and happiness for which we are struggling hard will indeed be ours.

Work – Contentment Linkage

This alternative model to work cuts at the very root the link between work and reward expectations. In the process, it may indeed increase the propensity of getting the rewards because the frame of mind with which we engage in work will be qualitatively superior to the other model. We do not have to waste time to short change the system. Nor do we need to develop excess mental stress and visit a healthcare specialist to seek advice on how to modify the life style to combat the new stress oriented diseases that we may contract in the process. Our brain and analytical faculty will be free from needless restrictions. We may be able to focus well in the job and in the process increase the chances of our succeeding in

it. It may help us develop a positive attitude and perspective towards several work place related matters. This can further improve our inter-personal skills and communication skills and groom us into a better person in the society and the family. Are these not valuable enough in our day to day living? Above all people will slowly begin to experience *firsthand what joy of work means*. What a pleasure would it be to also study for the joy of knowledge and to exercise the body also for the joy of knowing how well it responds to the stimuli.

The most important change that one will get if we follow these prescriptions is our approach to work in the long run. We will stop thinking that work is primarily for materialistic and ego satisfying aspects. Instead we will internally realize that the goal of working is to evolve ourselves into an integrated personality with larger perspectives in life, spiritual evolution and a balanced approach to many things in life. It is worth taking these prescriptions seriously and implement in our own way to reap these invaluable benefits that Lord Krishna promises us.