

Transcend action addiction

Are you a jack in the box, who jumps up to act at the drop of a hat? Compulsive action may not be the virtue it is considered to be, says **Bhaavin Shah**



Photo: Thinkstock

In spirituality, we have a term, karma, and by extension we have another term - karma bandhana. Mostly, we interpret karma to mean a deed, a deed that is bound to the law of cause and effect. Bandhana means bondage. So karma bandhana implies being bound to the consequences of one's deeds, negative as well as positive.

However, another meaning of karma is to act. In this context karma bandhana would imply bondage to action.

Bound to act

Each of us is conditioned to act. We cannot not act. It's actually evolutionary. It comes from the survival instincts that are a carry-over of the hunter-gatherer age. As primitive tribals, we had to be on guard all the time. The reptilian brain was always at work. The moment it would sense a predator or spot any type of trouble, we would leap into action. How else would we have survived?

But we have moved on from the Nomadic age to the Agricultural age to the Industrial Age and now the Information Age. And the

rules ought to change as well. There is no longer life-threatening danger around us all the time. So there is no need to stay vigilant 24x7, or jump into action at the stir of a leaf.

The business of busyness

This proclivity to act causes us much trouble. One big trouble is that it keeps us busy all the time. One of my favourite philosophers, Lin Yutang, has famously said: A wise man is never too busy; a busy man is never too wise. Busyness is not a virtue as many of us are given to believe. Leisure is a greater virtue. All culture is a product of leisure."

The Calvinist virtue of hard work does not automatically imply that being busy is good. That's a fallacy. One can be effective even while one is going slow. Through the credo, 'work is worship', our culture has indirectly lauded workaholism. Many workaholics choose to call themselves karma yogis, whereas they could not be further off from its actual meaning. Krishna defined karma yoga as *yogastha kuru karmani* – take your actions from a space of yoga, from a space of ease. Workaholism is the polar opposite of ease.

The virtue of inaction

With this background, I want to propose to you a rad-

ical concept – inaction is higher than action. In the alpha culture that we live, the word inaction has gotten a bad rap. Because in a certain context, it means laziness. Some people choose to use the word non-action rather than inaction to distinguish it from laziness but that's a matter of semantics. Besides, I don't wish to denigrate laziness, either.

In the Ashtavakra Gita, Ashtavakra says a very important statement – aalasi shiromani – the lazy person is the king amongst men. This is very profound. Counterintuitive but true. Particularly if you understand the pitfalls of action. As Osho says, no lazy person has ever waged a war in this world. How can he? That would make him unnecessarily active.

Whether or not we wish to subscribe to laziness, we should always remember that idlers can often be as effective as the hustlers, if not better. Andrew Carnegie used to say that whenever he had a complex problem, he would call upon the laziest person on his team to solve it, knowing well that this person, being prone to inaction, is hardwired to come up with the easiest solution, and also quickly enough to enable him to return to his carefree space as soon as possible.

The perpetual time deficit

Being bound to act, as we have seen, is one half of what we call karma bandhana or the bondage of action. Being bound by action, is the other half.

Have you observed that no matter what you do, work keeps adding up? Simple arithmetic suggests that the more you do, the less will be left on the plate for you to do. But it doesn't work that way. The arithmetic of action is different. The more you do, the more is created for you to do. Paradoxical but true. Suppose you take up a new project to increase your income. This singular action will lead to many actions in order to do this project enough justice. Most of us don't get this point, and get caught up in more and more action. Work can go up ad infinitum.

This is the bondage that action begets. A wise man sees this dynamic deeply enough and refrains every once in a while from initiating fresh action. One of the names of Krishna is anaarambhi, meaning one who doesn't start. How wise!

This is also one of the reasons why time management trainings thrive. Time management tools help you create time – time to do so many other important things that your business or profession requires. Now even if you create time, you are going to end up using it in activities that are going to create further work for you, leading to a fresh time deficit. (This way you will never be able to escape the race against time, which is possibly one of the best ideals one should aspire for.)

The trick here is to use time management concepts to consciously use the freshly opened up time for leisure rather than for further important work. This small flip can help you go beyond your otherwise perpetual race against time.

The gift of gratitude

There is another problem connected to action addiction. It induces thanklessness. Madame Curie once said something to this effect: “We never see what we have done; we are always focussed upon what we are yet to do.”

In such deep action-orientation, there is no leeway for gratitude – for all that we have already accomplished, or for all that God has bestowed upon us. We are too busy asking of life rather than thanking life; asking of the universe rather than thanking the universe; asking of ourselves rather than thanking ourselves. Besides our appreciation and gratitude for everything, many more areas of life would benefit if we went slow on action.

Gifts in daily life

On the professional front, it gives us greater time for planning and enough perspective for big-picture thinking. It helps us focus on quality vis-a-vis quantity. It helps us build rapport with all at work. These are huge advantages.

Going slow on action gives us enough opportunity for work-life balance. It helps us deepen our immediate relationships to make them more intimate and meaningful. Our family and friends would be much happier if we become less addicted to work.

A busy person is generally so preoccupied with the various agendas driven by his mind that his body and his spirit suffer. Lesser action-addiction also translates into greater time availability to consciously work on the body and spirit, leading to improved health and accelerated inner transformation.

And most importantly, with tempered action-orientation, there will be time for all the simpler pleasures of life, like putting your baby to sleep, or chatting over coffee with an old school friend. These are pleasures that you could include in your life, if you would create time for them. After all, nothing is more important than living life fully.



Bhaavin Shah is a devoted disciple and a modern-day yogi. He is a Mumbai-based trainer, healer, life and business coach. More about him on www.bhaavinshah.co.in

To read these articles online and post your comments, go to <http://www.lifepositive.com/Magazine/May2016>. We welcome your comments and suggestions on this article. Mail us at editor@lifepositive.net