Sloka 28  (Chapter 4)

DRAVYA YAJNAS TAPOYAJNA YOGA YAJNAS TATHAPARE’
SWADHYAYA YAJNA-JNANAYAJNASCHA YATAYAHA SAMSHITA VRATAHA.

Others offer wealth, austerity and yoga as sacrifice. Some others, the ascetics of self-control and rigid vows, offer study of knowledge as sacrifice.

Dravya yajna:

It is the sacrifice by using the wealth as oblations in the fire of knowledge. The scriptures advocate acquiring the wealth only after learning all about “Dharma”. The Purushartha for a Hindu is “Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha.” “Artha” refers to the wealth one has to acquire in life. Acquiring wealth by righteous means and making use of it to conduct the five “Nitya karmas” is true “Dravya Yajna.” (Refer to Karma yoga slokas 8 and 13)

Dana/alms giving is a form of Dravya yajna. The scriptures do give detailed advice/instructions about this type of yajna. Charity comes from giving with love what one has to others who need it. Of course it goes without saying that charity has to be only that which has been acquired lawfully and not in the form of robbing the poor to give the rich. We will find in the latter chapters of the Gita detailed instructions on the subject of “Danam.”

Tapo yajna:

This is the sacrifice wherein the body and the senses are subjected to austerities (tapas) with the sole intention of purification.

We see pictures of sages and those wishing to acquire boons from gods standing in the extreme heat or cold, withstanding the extremes of weather and concentrating on the deity of choice. The word “Tapas” for an average brings to mind the above picture. Really speaking “Tapas” is an effort at purification.

A true student working hard in University and coming out with a degree is said to have conducted “Tapas” and purified his brain to get the degree. He did not let his mind wander about and become a tool for the play of the senses. He managed to get control over his senses and concentrated on the final goal.

To achieve something higher, one needs to let go of the lower. This is possible by control of the wandering mind and the senses. Any such act conducted to achieve the higher spiritual goal by constant restraint becomes “Tapas.”

In chapter 17, slokas 14, 15 and 16 the Lord gives us tapas of the body, speech and mind and that is “Tapas” in the truest sense.

Yoga yajna:

Control of the wandering mind is “Yoga Yajna” and in Sanskrit we say “Chitta Vritti Nirodha”. “Vritti” means “diversions” and “Chitta Vritti” is diversions of the wandering mind. “Nirodha” means “Control.”

Constant practice of Raja yoga or Ashtanga yoga constitutes “Yoga Yajna.” Breathe control, using the technique of Patanjali’s Ashtanga yoga is said to be the way of conducting “Yoga Yajna.” (Refer to the last Sloka).
Swadhyaya yajna:

“Swa” means “self.”
“Adhyaya” means “study.”

Learning the scriptures with self effort or with the help of the guru is “Swadhyaya.” “Swadhyaya” also means “self-analysis”. Analysing the events that happen in the lives and learning lessons from the same is true Swadhyaya. Study of the sacred texts requires a great deal of self-preparation and this also constitutes Swadhyaya.

When such sacred acts are conducted with a spirit of sacrifice, it is known as “Swadhyaya Yajna.”

Jnana yajna:

Pursuit of the spiritual knowledge with total purity of the mind, speech and body is true Jnana yajna. This needs the critical analysis of that which is “eternal” and which is “transitory.” Adiguru Shankaracharya calls it as “Nitya Anitya Viveka Vicharana.” (Analytical knowledge and understanding of Self which is Eternal and the physical world which is transient.)

The Jnana yajna is offered as sacrifice by ascetics of rigid vows. (samshrita vrataha) “Sadhana” is spiritual practice and “Sadhya” is the attainment of the end result.

To become an Olympic runner needs a great amount of discipline and not everybody who undertakes such discipline will win the gold medal. Similarly not all the seekers succeed in attaining the “Moksha” in this life. It needs constant practice of all the above forms of yajnas. Once all the vasanas are cleared, which might take several births into this world; the seeker will be blessed with “Moksha.”

With the ultimate aim of achieving salvation, several vows are taken by the different seekers. True Jnana is to make sure that the vows do not become acts of blind rituals.

The Lord used the word “Yatayaha” to describe such seekers. Yati’s are those who live the life of asceticism by constantly working to burn their existing vasanas and not acquiring any more new vasanas by their actions.