



Bhakti Yoga: The Motion of Devotion

From an upcoming book currently in process

By Mas Vidal

Bhakti is the yoga of love. Love for God or the Divine. This branch of yoga is called bhakti because it provides various paths or possibilities for experiencing the Divine by cultivating greater compassion for all living beings. Those that are drawn to such a path are usually individuals that are naturally more empathetic or sensitive towards life circumstances. Bhakti is the vibration or *bhav* of the body house in our heart and reflects the nature of each person. Bhakti is the motion of our devotion and is revealed primarily in the spiritual heart.

Bhakti yoga is a sure path to self-realization through one pointed devotion. This requires having a present mind or a present state of awareness that can be focused at one person, task or thing. Such a level of being is in itself intoxicating as the mind becomes fully merged into the heart. In Vedantic thought, the way to heal the mind is by merging it into the heart. This requires creating space in the heart through patience, surrender and compassion. If pureness of the heart is absent, likewise the “I” ness of the mind will perpetuate separateness, from life, people, animals and nature. Bhakti in a broader sense is about connection, a form of communication with all aspects of life as Divine.

If bhakti yoga is devotion, well, one might ask, devoted to what? Bhakti as devotion is about directing our faith towards God. In creating a lifestyle that allows us to express devotion to our loved ones, friends, communities, food and any aspect of life we cultivate greater capacity for love and gratitude. The Bhagavad Gita explains that one must have certain qualities that are attractive to God, thus making space in the heart by removing the conditions of the mind. These are important to cultivating devotion and having faith towards God. One must be devoid of hatred, “I”ness and possessiveness, be even-minded during ups and downs, forgiving, have contentment and continuity (abhyasa) of yoga practice to develop determination and the discrimination (jnana) to hear the Divine speaking to us during both subtle and obvious experiences.

Ayurveda teaches us to how to live with nature in such a way that we feel devoted to her process. Ayurveda teaches us the way to the Divine by creating harmony between our mind and body. In many ways nature is speaking to us, sometimes softly and other times more strongly, reminding us to slow down, take care and learn to behave. Krishna says, “*A person who does not disturb the*

world and who cannot be disturbed by the world is dear to Me.”¹ This reflects a balanced inner-outer life by connecting to the Divine through prayer and meditation and attaining an outer attitude towards life that supports living as an observer of earths show in contrast to a reactive mentality that produces war and conflict. There is a difference between reacting and responding to life’s circumstances. When we respond to something or someone its because we have taken the time to observe and understand and can now approach things with insight and compassion.

Devotion is lost any time we kill one another and I mean this literally and figuratively. Love is absent when the ego is present. On the most basic level, the energy of love has to begin with our self and awareness of our own body. Self-care is the best healthcare, better than any government can provide. In this regard postural (hatha) yoga is most effective. However it should not end there as it may leave a person trapped in their body like a prison. The vast array of yoga postures can be considered as types of vehicles for connecting the mind and body and thus transporting the mind into heart. Postures can be practiced in a devotional and transformative manner to purify us from I, me, and mine consciousness and move us in the direction of Divine awareness.

Serving others or seva is another form of bhakti yoga that exists to purify us from self-centeredness. Bhakti can also be ignited through prayer and chanting sacred songs of the heart known as bhajans. In Vedic astrology (jyotish) the twelve houses of the zodiac are called bhavas and are used to understand the vibrational quality of a person according to that aspect of their life as indicated by the each house. In other words each house indicates the type of devotion a person has through the sign and the planet(s) that occupies that house.

The great Vedic culture is in renaissance as a result of bhakti yoga. For millennia the great region of India has become the land of devotion and has attracted aspirants through out the world to discover the gem of the East, life’s highest purpose; enlightenment, referred to in yoga as *moksha dharma*. The attraction with India today is founded on the potential one has to feel something, a chance to connect to our lost inner nature and perhaps experience transcendence within our self as opposed to seeking solutions outside our self. In America we crave financial stability with greed as our motive, both patients and doctors are abusing prescription medications blindly seeking health and family bonds has become divided and destroyed. The path of bhakti is a return to the heart. What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us.”²

Interestingly enough, all United States currency has the words “In God We Trust” printed on the backside of every bill; a very bold reminder isn’t it? Do we really trust? If we truly trust, then faith is not required. Bhakti yoga is our hearts flow towards the Divine. Love is the currency of life and money is a form of currency just as yoga postures are vehicles to transport the mind beyond the body. We feel peaceful after our yoga practices not because we have settled in our body but because we have transcended it. Both love and currency can help us get somewhere as long as we do not get attached to them as objects. Unfortunately, this reflects humanities struggle with duality as viewed from the Vedantic concept of maya that all things of this world are illusory and only appear real as a result of the five senses and the ego.

Seeking God can either be formless or through a preferred object or *istha*. This is why prayers and rituals are performed around pictures and statues of the many personifications of God and great Gurus of the yoga tradition. They serve as windows or vehicles that can carry the motion of our love and devotion to freedom from pain and suffering. Regardless of your experience in yoga,

¹ God Talks with Arjuna: The Bhagavad Gita, Chapter twelve, verse 15.

² Ralph Waldo Emerson

the journey into bhakti begins with yourself and the relationship you share with nature. Be happy, live simply, study yourself, take time to breath, cook and read, sing more, serve others and follow the motion of your devotion to living liberation right here on earth.