

Bhakti Yoga

The word 'Bhakti' comes from the Sanskrit word '*Bhaj*', which means 'to be attached to God' and can be expressed as 'devotion'. Bhakti is where the devotee develops a love for God and a genuine search after the Lord with a desire for God only, without any selfish expectation. It is also considered to be the easiest way to reach the divine.

Chapter Twelve of the Srimad Bhagavad Gita begins with an important question from Arjuna to Lord Sri Krishna which opens up to a series of explanations from Lord Sri Krishna in relation to the path that is considered by the Supreme Lord to be to the most superior path – that of pure devotion.

Lord Sri Krishna provides that although the path Jnana (Knowledge), can also lead to God, the path of bhakti is considered by the Lord to be the higher but also a simpler path of realising Him, through a personal God, than that of Jnana which involves realisation through spiritual knowledge of the formless non-manifest nature of Brahman. Lord Sri Krishna explains that those that follow the path of bhakti are swiftly delivered by Him from the ocean of birth and death.

"Fix your mind upon Me alone, and engage all your intelligence in Me. You then will live in Me always, there is no doubt."

Chapter 12, Verse 8

Lord Sri Krishna then begins to explain that process by which one is able to become a true devotee. In essence, this verse advises the devotee to be in a state of mind such that they are in constant thought of the Lord where every thought, word and action is in association with the Lord. An example of this would be those few great devotees that are already self realised beings but continue to do the Lord's work through his direction with full absolute surrender to his lotus feet for the benefit of mankind.

Earlier in the Srimad Bhagavad Gita, we hear Lord Sri Krishna explain "Whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever you offer or give away do as an offering to me". Note here, that the Lord uses "whatever" which can be understood to mean anything and everything. Therefore if every act is offered to the Lord, if every consumption is offered to the Lord and if every service to another is done as an offering to the Lord then the devotee only has the Lord on his mind. This would only be possible where the devotee is always fixed on the Lord.

This would be in line with the meaning of meditation without reference to any particular practise of a yoga system, where meditation is the constant remembrance of that which is being meditated upon. Beyond this would be a

state of Samadhi, where one would enter into a state of union with the all mighty beyond any thought.

As in chapter 8 verse 7 which says “you should always think of me and at the same time carry out your prescribed duty of fighting. With your activities dedicated to me and your mind and intelligence fixed on Me, you will attain me without a doubt”.

In essence, rather than engaging in thoughts about the body, or some form of attachment, the senses, and the desires to satisfy lust and false ego, Lord Sri Krishna is saying, think about me only. And this is the highest devotee.

This is also confirmed by Lord Sri Krishna where he says “Those who are constantly attached to Me and worship me with love – I give them that direction to their will by which they come to Me.”

In the following verse, Lord Sri Krishna provides that regulated practise of yoga be done to develop this constant remembrance of him where fixing of the mind is not easily possible.

“If you cannot fix your mind steadily upon Me, then you should seek to attain me by regulated practice of Yoga, Oh Dhananjaya.”

Chapter 12, Verse 9

Given that the mind is very fickle, it may be necessary to engage the mind by conscious effort to focus it on one particular point and to train the mind before one can fix the mind on God.

As it may be near impossible for most people due to the mind’s constant wandering, Lord Sri Krishna is recommending that one should engage in regulated practice of yoga to help an individual reach him. The benefits of yoga practise are well known regardless of whether the system is raja yoga, hatha yoga, kriya yoga or any other prescribed form of yoga. By the regulated practise apart from many physical benefits one may acquire, it will ultimately lead one to steady fix the mind, eradicate negative tendencies and develop a love for God.

Here we can also mentioned that there are many different levels of bhakti in any individual and this level of bhakti may fluctuate within an individual depending on the internally and externally circumstances and also due to each individual’s past actions and reactions. Here the law of karma can be said to play a key role with the level of bhakti one may have acquired based on past karmic action and reactions.

Lord Sri Krishna himself states “out of many thousands among men, one may endeavour for perfection, and of those who have reached perfection, hardly one knows Me in truth.” (Chapter 7 Verse 3)

For those that cannot steady the mind through regulated yoga practice, Lord Sri Krishna has provided yet a further method by which he can be reached – and that is through working for Him.

"If you unable to practice this regulated yoga, then be intent on doing work for My sake, because by working for Me you will reach perfection."

Chapter 12, Verse 10

Here we see further an entwining with karma yoga whereby perfection can be reached through doing works or action for the sake of God. And this can be understood to be in a variety of ways. For example, serving humanity with the idea that you are serving God is also considered to be working for the sake of the Lord.

Again, this may not be easy particularly when many are engaged in various forms of work which can potentially lead them astray or keep them away from engaging in that particular work for the sake of the Lord.

A more direct approach to this would be where the actual work involves doing something directly connected with God for example, through temple service or spreading the teachings of the Lord or any other activity which connects one to the service of God through the performance of their duty. By engaging in work that is directly associated with the Lord, there is a greater chance of that particular work being done selflessly, whereas although this may be possible through any form of work it may not be as easy to detach oneself from the fruits of such activities (discussed in verse below).

Also not specifically mentioned in the Bhagavad Gita *per se*, we see in the Srimad-Bhagavatam that by the practice of the prescribed nine modes of the bhagavat dharma, namely, *Sravana* (hearing of God's Lila and stories), *Kirtana* (singing of His glories), *Smarana* (remembrance of His name and presence), *Padasevana* (service of His feet), *Archana* (worship of God), *Vandana* (prostration to Lord), *Dasya* (cultivating the Bhava of a servant with God), *Sakhya* (cultivation of the friend-Bhava) and *Atmanivedana* (complete surrender of the self), one is able to develop a path towards perfection. Here we find that one can engage in various activities or actions which enable one to do work for His sake.

We should also mention here that although many forms and ceremonies are done as a way to cultivate devotion and are necessary for the progressive soul, they have no other value than to take one to the state in which one feels the

most intense love to God – a love that is completely selfless and beyond any kind of love that can exist between a worldly human relationship - true bhakti.

"If, however, you are unable to work in this consciousness of Me, then try to act with self control and renounce the fruits of all actions."

Chapter 12, Verse 11

In this verse Lord Krishna yet provides a further method for those who are unable to work for the sake of Krishna. Here Sri Bhagavan says that if compelled to do actions for personal desires, then do them but renounce them to Me and abandon the fruits of those actions.

One may be fully engaged in a particular occupation or profession based on a desire to achieve success and wholly engrossed in such works. Such engagement may be for any number of self motivated reasons including material prosperities or for the satisfaction of other desires such as name and fame.

Rather than giving up ones duties, Lord Sri Krishna is saying that if one should engage in any activities without God consciousness, then they should continue do so but without any attachment to the outcome. Here we can relate back to the principles of karma yoga and in particular Niskam karma, where the action is selfless and without any expectation of the fruits or results, where working without attachment becomes dedicating this work to Sri Krishna.

There is also the type of bhakti where one is inclined towards practising specifically to bear the fruits of their actions. This is where devotion is performed with a desire for material gains, known as *Sakamya* bhakti as oppose to *Niskamya* bhakti. In *Sakamya* bhakti, the motives for practicing bhakti are such as wealth, freedom from diseases, name, fame or a high ranking position in society. The Lord is kind and will provide these desires depending on the level of intensity and sincerity of that bhakti, however one cannot get supreme satisfaction nor liberation through *sakamya* bhakti.

"Knowledge is better than regulated practice. Better than knowledge, however, is meditation, and better than meditation is renunciation of the fruits of action, for peace immediately follows renunciation."

Chapter 12, Verse 12

Finally in this collection of verses Lord Sri Krishna provides that theoretical knowledge or indirect knowledge of Brahman gained from scriptures is better than the practise of restraining the changing mind or worship of idols or self

motification for the purpose of control as the mind and the senses accompanied with ignorance cannot allow for steady fixing of the mind. To enable one to meditate correctly knowledge is required. With correct knowledge one is able to practise steady meditation. Meditation is better than knowledge, as knowledge will develop to the point of meditation. By meditation one can begin to understand the supreme lord and thereby become detached from the bondage of material nature. And it is this detachment that leads to renunciation of fruits of action. Ultimately, renunciation is better than meditation as renunciation, especially of the fruits of one's action removes desire and eventually leads one to realisation, and if meditation is practised with self gain or self preservation and without renunciation, it will lead to passion or ignorance which in turn prevents one from achieving correct meditation because of the opposing force of desire, which causes misery, sorrow, troubles and restlessness of the mind, which then in turn reverts back to ignorance, and hence lack of knowledge. So it can be understood that in order to find peace, one must first practise whilst acquiring knowledge on which to meditate and thereby achieve detachment which will lead to renunciation therefore self realisation - and peace.

We have seen that there are various means of devotion that are possible depending on the nature and qualities of the individual which can vary depending on an individual's past actions and reactions.

However, the types of devotion described in these verses are not ring fenced methods but can be used in combination and to varying degrees to reach the desired goal. The methods provided by Sri Krishna are all such that enable an individual to develop their bhakti and though considered to be the highest form of yoga, bhakti can be performed by all.

We see at the conclusion of the Srimad Bhagvad Gita that Lord Sri Krishna summarises in Chapter 18 verses 65 and 66 that bhakti is the ultimate tool to by which to reach him.