
Bhakti-Yoga : Devotional Service to Lord Krishna

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There are 8,400,000 species of living entities within the material world, according to the Vedic literature. The living entities move within these 8,400,000 species, life after life, and suffer the agonies in ignorance Liberation means getting out of this cycle of births and deaths forever and reaching the Spiritual planet, which is the abode of the Supreme Lord Krishna, from where one does not fall back into this material world again. (*Gita 8-16*). The human form of life is the only gateway to the liberation through the process of *Bhakti yoga*.

Although there are several types of Yoga described in the Vedic literature, like Yoga of meditation, Yoga of action, Yoga of knowledge and Yoga of devotion, yet they all converge finally to the Yoga of devotion, i.e., Bhakti yoga, which is the common pathway. The effects of all other yogas are exhausted during ones' lifetime, but the effects of Bhakti yoga are cumulative and advance life after life (*Gita 7-45*). Lord Krishna has very clearly, in unequivocal terms, elaborated this statement in the *Gita* and in *Shrimad Bhagavatam*. In the *Gita* (Chapter 6-46), Lord Krishna says, "O Arjuna, a yogi is superior to an ascetic, superior to a learned person and even superior to a performer of action (as enjoined in the Vedas). Therefore, in all circumstances become a yogi."

Then in the next verse (*Gita 6-47*) the Lord emphasizes, "Of all yogis, one who always abides in Me with great faith, worshipping Me with transcendental loving service, is the most intimately united with Me in yoga and is the highest of all yogis."

In the 11th Chapter of the *Gita* the Lord, out of His mercy, shows to Arjuna His universal form and then the four-armed (*Chaturbhuj*) form. Then in verses 48, 53 and 54, emphasizes, "O Arjuna, My form that you have seen now cannot be seen by virtue of undergoing severe penances, study of Vedas, severe austerities, acts of charity or even by worship. But through the undivided devotional services alone can I be seen as I am standing before you, and can be understood factually. Only in that way can you enter into the mysteries of My understanding."

Then in chapter 18, verse 55 of the *Gita*, the Lord reiterates,

भक्त्या मामभिजानाति यावान्यश्चास्मि तत्त्वतः ।
त्तो मां तत्त्वतो ज्ञात्वा विशते तदनन्तरम् ॥

"It is only by the devotional services that one can understand Me (Krishna) factually and when one is in full consciousness of Me then one can enter into My abode, the kingdom of God."

One should understand that nowhere has Krishna ever said such a thing about the other yogic processes. Through Bhakti one can get other corollaries like knowledge, etc In the *Bhagavatam* 1-2-7 it has been said,

वासुदेवे भगवति भक्तियोगः प्रयोजितः
जनयति अशु चैराग्यं ज्ञानं च यद् अहैतिकम् ॥

"When one engages oneself in the devotional services of the Lord, then within him automatically and very soon develops all the transcendental knowledge and the material detachment."

However the reverse is not true.

बहूनां जन्मनामन्ते ज्ञानान्वात्मनां प्रपद्यते
वासुदेवः सर्वमिति स महात्मा सुदुर्लभः ॥

"After many cycles of births and deaths, he who is factually in knowledge of Me (Krishna), surrenders unto Me, knowing Me as the cause of all causes and all that is. Such a great soul is very rare." (*Gita 7-19*).

It is simple to understand that other yogic processes have to be over-coated with a sense of devotion, i.e., Bhakti in order to be able to achieve liberation. In the last Chapter (*Gita 18—64*), Lord Krishna finally speaks to Arjuna about the most confidential knowledge as,

सर्वगुह्यतमं भूयः शृणु मे परमं वचः ।

“Listen to My top secret and confidential part of the knowledge once again.”

And that is:

मन्मना भव मद्रक्तो मद्याजी मां नमस्कुरु ।
मामेवैष्यसि सत्यं ते प्रतिजाने प्रियोऽसि मे ॥

“Always think of Me and become My devotee, and then as devotional service, worship Me and offer your homage unto Me. Then you will come to Me without fail. I promise this to you because you are my dear friend.” (Gita 18-65)

Further, Lord Krishna is above any religious process (वासुदेव परो धर्मः). So for the religious and pious people He says,

सर्वं धर्मान्परित्यज्य मामेकं शरणं ब्रज ।
अहं त्वा सर्वपापेभ्यो मोक्षयिष्यामि मा शुचः ॥

“Abandon all varieties of religion and simply surrender unto Me (Krishna). I shall deliver you from all sinful reactions. Do not fear.” (Gita.18-66).

So the Gita or the Bhagavadgita ends with the final instruction that surrender to the Lord. Or Bhakti yoga alone is the factual process to overcome the sinful reactions and thus attain His kingdom. Those who follow the yoga of knowledge or other yogas, without the help of Bhakti yoga, suffer miserably. This is emphasized by Lord *Brahma* in his prayer to Lord Krishna in the *Bhagvatam* (10-2-32),

येऽन्येऽरिन्दाक्ष विमुक्तमानिनस्त्वय्यस्त भावादविशुद्धेषु द्वयः ।
अरुह्य कृच्छ्रेण परं पदं ततः पतन्ति अधो नाद्रत युष्मादंग्रयः ॥

“O lotus-eyed Lord, although non devotees who accept severe austerities and penances to achieve the highest

position, i.e, liberation, may rise to impersonal Brahman, yet they fall down again into the material world, because they have neglected the service to your lotus feet.”

Then again, in the 11th *Canto* of the *Bhagavatam*, Chapter 14, verses 19-20, Lord Krishna speaks directly to Uddhava,

यथाग्निः सुसमृद्धार्चिः करोति एद्भांसि भस्मसात् ।
तथामद्विषया भक्तिः उद्धवैनांसि कृत्स्नसः ॥
स साधयति मां योगो न सांख्यं धर्म उद्धव ।
न स्वाध्याय तपः त्यागो यथा भक्तिः ममोर्जिता ॥

“My dear Uddhava, just as the blazing fire turns a heap of firewood into ashes, so does devotion unto Me (Lord Krishna) burn away the piles of sins committed by My devotees. Similarly, the unalloyed devotional services rendered to Me by My devotees brings Me under their control. Whereas I cannot be so controlled by those engaged in mystic yoga, Sankhya yoga, pious works, study of the Vedas, austerities or renunciation.”

Stronger than this is another statement given by the Lord Himself:

भक्त्याऽहं एकया ग्राह्यः श्रद्धयात्माप्रियः सताम् ।
भक्तिः पुनाति मननिष्ठा श्वपाकान् अपि संभवात् ॥

“Only by practicing unalloyed devotional service with full faith in Me can one obtain Me (Lord Krishna). I am inclined as ever towards My devotees, whose only desire in life is to attain Me through My devotional services. By such devotional services, even the dog eaters can purify themselves from the contamination of their low birth (where people are naturally inclined to commit sins).”

Thus devotional service to the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Lord Krishna, is the highest stage of perfection. Human beings should live their lives for that purpose alone. Rest of their activities are mere waste of their time.

पितासि लोकस्य चराचरस्य त्वमस्य पूज्यश्च गुरुर्गरीयान् ।
न त्वत्समोऽस्त्यभ्यधिकः कुतोऽन्यो लोकत्रयेऽप्यप्रतिमप्रभाव ॥

O Lord You are the father of the world of the moving and the non-moving. Greater than the greatest, You are the one object of worship. There is none equal to You in all the worlds. Who, then, can excel You, O You incomparable power? (*Bhagavad Gita*, XI, 43)