

CONVERSATIONS ON THE SCIENCE OF YOGA

Bhakti Yoga Book 1

EXPERIENCE OF THE HEART

*From the teachings of
two great luminaries of the 20th century*

Sri Swami Sivananda Saraswati
Sri Swami Satyananda Saraswati



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India



Bhakti Yoga Book 1
Experience of the Heart

With kind regards, ॐ and prem

Swami Niranjan

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*Including answers from the satsangs of
Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*



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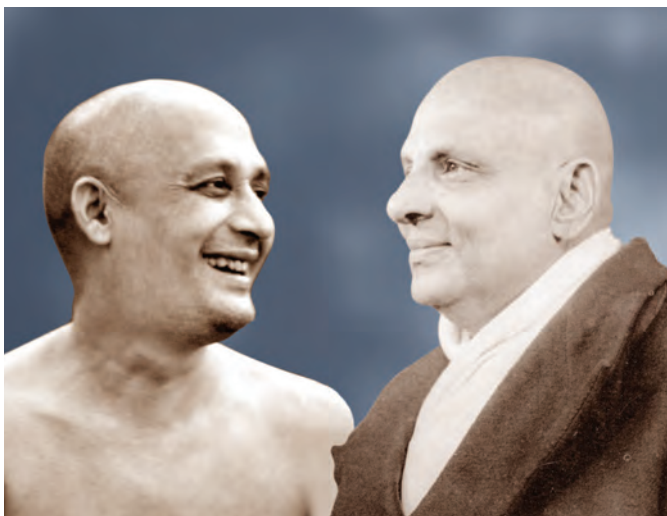
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Dedication

*In humility we offer this dedication to
Swami Sivananda Saraswati, who initiated
Swami Satyananda Saraswati into the secrets of yoga
and to our guru Sri Swami Satyananda Saraswati
who continues to inspire and guide us
on our spiritual journey.*

Swami Niranjan

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Preface

CONVERSATIONS ON THE SCIENCE OF YOGA

Conversations on the Science of Yoga is an encyclopaedic series which brings together the collected teachings of two generations of masters – Swami Sivananda Saraswati of Rishikesh, Swami Satyananda Saraswati of Munger. Satsangs given by Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati on his numerous national and international tours also provide the answers to many questions on this vast subject. These luminaries represent a living tradition in which the eternal knowledge and wisdom of yoga vidya has been passed from guru to disciple in a dynamic continuum from the early twentieth century to the first decades of the twenty-first century.

The series consists of sets of books which present the vast, timeless culture of yoga topic by topic, in question and answer format. In this way, complex and profound subjects such as karma yoga, hatha yoga and bhakti yoga, are presented in clear, simple language. These conversations on yoga reflect an ancient and enduring approach to the transmission of wisdom, in which spiritual aspirants seek answers to their questions at the feet of the guru.

Many of the answers also include verses from the various relevant scriptures, connecting the modern experience with the classical tradition. It is through the lives and teachings of the masters that the scriptures are correctly and intuitively

interpreted for each generation, ensuring that the light of these revelations continues to illumine and inspire the hearts and minds of all who aspire for spiritual upliftment.

Conversations on the Science of Yoga has been compiled from the rich archive of satsangs and writings, both published and unpublished, which is held at the Bihar School of Yoga, Munger. The organization of this material into the major branches of yoga and related topics creates a unique interpretation of the classical yogic sciences for the benefit of humanity in the modern era. Deeply founded in tradition, the teachings are both systematic and practical, addressing the needs of individuals and society at a time when adjustment to constant change is placing unprecedented pressure on people all over the world.

The Bihar Yoga tradition

Bihar School of Yoga is ideally placed to produce this major contribution to yogic literature. Founded in 1963 by Swami Satyananda Saraswati, the system known in India as Bihar Yoga and internationally as Satyananda Yoga, seamlessly integrates all facets of the yogic tradition, including the various branches of yoga, the philosophies which are fundamental to the yogic culture and the dynamism of

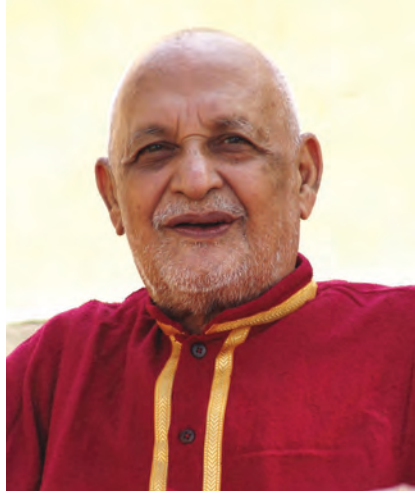


self-realized preceptors which ensures that the yoga vidya remains fresh and relevant in any age. This all-inclusive approach means that yogic practices are available as tools for holistic life management, while other *vidyas*, spiritual sciences, such as Tantra, Vedanta and Samkhya provide a broad philosophical base. Emerging from this living tradition, *Conversations on the Science of Yoga* is a unique and precious offering to humanity.



Swami Sivananda Saraswati (1887–1963)

Swami Sivananda was a towering spiritual force in the yogic renaissance which developed in India in the first half of the twentieth century. After serving as a doctor in Malaya, he returned to India to pursue his spiritual aspirations, and in 1924 was initiated into Dashnami sannyasa in Rishikesh. He founded the Divine Life Society, toured India extensively, wrote hundreds of books and inspired thousands around the world to practise yoga and lead a divine life. Swami Sivananda's eightfold path of yoga – serve, love, give, purify, do good, be good, meditate, realize – expresses his philosophy of service to humanity and continues to guide the work of the Bihar School of Yoga.



Swami Satyananda Saraswati (1923–2009)

Swami Satyananda was initiated into Dashnami sannyasa by his guru Swami Sivananda, in 1947. After serving his guru's mission in Rishikesh for twelve years, he founded the International Yoga Fellowship in 1956 and the Bihar School of Yoga in 1963. From that base he took the teachings to the rest of the world, fulfilling the mandate of his guru to 'spread yoga from door to door and shore to shore.'

Through his genius and compassion, many ancient, complex and esoteric practices were systematized, simplified and made available to people of all ages, cultures and creeds. Swami Satyananda's blend of charisma and pragmatism attracted multitudes of devotees wherever he went, giving rise to a global movement and creating a far-reaching network of ashrams, yoga centres and teachers. Meanwhile, the headquarters in Bihar continued to expand its many programs, including the publishing division, producing numerous books that both preserve and disseminate the incredibly rich seam of practical wisdom which flows through this lineage.

In 1988 Swami Satyananda renounced his mission in order to live as a paramahansa sannyasin, performing higher

spiritual and vedic sadhanas in an isolated location. During this chapter of his life, he also realized his guru's teaching of 'serve, love, give', by establishing Sivananda Math, an organization dedicated to raising the living standards of the weaker and underprivileged sectors of society.

At midnight on 5 December 2009, Sri Swami Satyananda Saraswati attained mahasamadhi.



Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati (1960)

A yogi from earliest childhood, Swami Niranjanananda joined the Bihar School of Yoga in 1964 and was initiated into Dashnami sannyasa in 1971. At the age of eleven he was sent to live abroad by his guru Swami Satyananda, giving him direct experience and understanding of people from a vast array of cultures and walks of life. These years instilled in him a rare, cross-cultural insight into human nature, enabling him to communicate and interact with the international community with familiarity, ease and humour.

Combined with his depth of spiritual and yogic knowledge, this background equipped Swami Niranjanananda to guide the Bihar School of Yoga and the international yoga movement from 1983 until 2008, when he began handing

over the administration to the next generation. During this time he also authored many classic books on yoga, tantra and the upanishads and founded Bihar Yoga Bharati, the world's first yoga university, while continuing extensive national and international touring.

In 2010, Swami Niranjana established Sannyasa Peeth to enable seekers to experience the spiritual and cultural traditions of India in their essence. The year marked his entry into a phase of higher sadhana and tirtha yatra.

In 2013, he conducted the World Yoga Convention in Munger to celebrate the golden jubilee of the Bihar School of Yoga, and launched a new era of yogic renaissance. Since then, Swami Niranjana has been working to develop the next stage of yogic training and teaching, and has initiated several programs to help people deepen their experience of yoga and imbibe the traditional wisdom of yoga vidya.



Yoga is not a philosophy, it is a practical science. Philosophy gives you knowledge, yoga gives you experience. This is the beauty of yoga. That experience is a manifestation of your inner being.

—Swami Satyananda Saraswati

Introduction

Our present age is known as the 'Age of Bhakti', when the qualities of the heart need to be developed, and made positive and pure. The masters of ancient times foresaw that, in the future, individuals would not have the physical or mental capacity to attain wellbeing, happiness and peace through austerity, intense sadhana, prolonged meditation, and other disciplines which were common in their day. The only means to reach these goals would be bhakti yoga, the yoga which transforms sentiments, feelings and emotions.

Today, there is general recognition of the importance of emotional management for the individual and society. Research by sociologists, psychologists and neuroscientists suggests that emotions are a far greater force than the mind, intellect or reason. As Sri Swami Satyananda says, "It is difficult, if not impossible, to achieve mental and physical stability if the emotions are rampant. It is like trying to tame a wild tiger by pulling its tail. It cannot be done!"

In bhakti yoga, these rampant emotions are tamed through inner purification and by evolving from self-centredness towards selfless participation in life. As one directs and channels the emotions, the transformation that comes about ultimately leads to bhakti, the connection with the inner self and the Divine.

Bhakti, bhakti yoga and bhakti marga

To understand the process of bhakti yoga, the concepts of bhakti, bhakti yoga, bhakti marga and bhakta need to be defined. Bhakti yoga is a process, a discipline, a yoga sadhana for the purification of one's emotions. Bhakti yoga is also known as *jnanakanda*, the process of knowing oneself. In this first of five books dedicated to the attainment of bhakti, bhakti yoga is seen in this context and as part of the whole science, or *vidya*, of yoga. *Bhakti marga*, or *karmakanda*, is the path of rituals, worship, pilgrimages and festivals that help the aspirant in the search for the divine. The outcome, the result of both bhakti yoga and bhakti marga, is bhakti.

Bhakti is a state of being. In the *Narada Bhakti Sutras*, Sage Narada defines bhakti as the highest form of love (sutra 2):

Saa tvasmin paramapremaroopaa.

That (devotion) verily is of the nature of supreme love of God.

Bhakti is an experience of the whole being, beyond the mind and mundane emotions. A bhakta is a person who is able to have this experience, not just once but as a daily reality of life. A bhakta expresses this experience of connection with the divine through thought, word and deed. A bhakta lives bhakti.

The state of bhakti is indescribable, and bhaktas of all ages and traditions have said that they are unable to put 'it' into words. Their songs and sublime poetry are an attempt to share the experience and inspire others, yet the essence of 'it' will remain known only to them and the Divine. Ultimately, to talk about bhakti is impossible. Thought and speech belong to the domain of the mind, not of the heart. As Blaise Pascal (1623–1662), the French mathematician and philosopher, so aptly said, 'The heart has reasons that reason does not know'.

This explains the many seeming contradictions that arise in talking or writing about bhakti. The division between bhakti, bhakti yoga and bhakti marga is a mental, rational attempt to impose order, whereas the heart ignores

classifications, systems and consistency of thought or language. The heart is only concerned with purity and sincerity of feeling, *bhava*. Therefore, the same master may describe bhakti in a certain way, then claim the opposite to be true, then even suggest a third variant. The words love, devotion, compassion, surrender and bhakti may be used as synonyms by some; for others the words denote different stages and expressions of emotion. No other yoga, no other system exemplifies in a more carefree manner 'the beauty of paradox'.

Inconsistencies and contradictions are inevitable in the attempt to express the inexpressible. Bhaktas want to explore every possibility to say the impossible. The only accord among bhaktas, other than an experience of indescribable bliss, is a need to cultivate purity.

In Chapter 12 of the *Bhagavad Gita* (12:13–20), Sri Krishna describes the spiritual seeker who is dear to him. His list of qualities is clear, unambiguous and a roadmap to the aspiring bhakta. To be a bhakta one has to be free from malice towards all beings, friendly, compassionate, ever content, pure, wise and forgiving. A bhakta is balanced and even-minded in success and failure, when faced with gain and loss, praise and criticism. The person who lives life with equanimity and mental balance is dear to Sri Krishna. To become a bhakta one has to be without attachment, without the feeling of 'I' and 'mine', without the sense of doership and ownership. Ultimately, there is nothing but devotion, surrender and the experience of bhakti.

Bhakti yoga offers methods, tools and inspiration to develop and cultivate these qualities and thus become dear to God. One may not be able to explain the state of bhakti, yet the process of bhakti yoga, the discipline of purifying, transforming and redirecting one's emotions, can be described.

In *Bhakti Yoga: Experience of the Heart*, bhakti yoga is viewed not in isolation but in the company of hatha yoga, raja yoga, kriya yoga, karma yoga and jnana yoga. These six branches of yoga, united and propagated by Swami Sivananda as part of 'integral yoga', share the central aim of uplifting human

consciousness from the mundane to the transcendental. By balancing the 'head, heart and hands' as appropriate to each individual, integral yoga addresses all the tendencies and aspects of the personality. In the process, bhakti yoga eventually manifests as unconditional love and the bhakta's effort to live for the happiness and elevation of others.

Traditions and scriptures

Bhakti Yoga: Experience of the Heart looks at bhakti in Indian traditions of thought and belief, and those of other faiths. The experience of bhakti has variously been described as losing the ego, seeking total consummation and divine metamorphosis, or as 'bliss beyond the wildest flights of the imagination'. This experience was and is known to mystics, bhaktas and seekers over the ages.

Bhakti yoga is not a religion. As Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati explains, "Religion adopted bhakti in the form of worship of the Divine, and yoga adopted bhakti in the form of emotional purification." The practice of bhakti yoga causes changes in a person's thoughts, behaviour and lifestyle. Great bhaktas from every philosophy, school and religion have lived the same principles: peace, tolerance, understanding and love of fellow human beings.

Swami Sivananda emphasizes the consistency among the lives and teachings of saints, everywhere and in every age: "Read the teachings of Buddha, Jesus, Mohammed, Confucius, Shinto, Chaitanya, or Shankaracharya and others. Remove selfishness. Calm the passions. Remove egoism. Purify the heart. Analyze your thoughts, scrutinize your motives, cleanse the dross of impurity. Realize God. This has been the essence of the preaching of all prophets, seers and sages of all times."

Unlike the other series of *Conversations on the Science of Yoga*, the *Bhakti Yoga* series opens with experiences rather than definitions. This reflects the nature of bhakti yoga, which cannot be understood through the rational mind. The teachings offer glimpses into how three generations in

a lineage of masters – Swami Sivananda Saraswati, Swami Satyananda Saraswati and Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati – and the saints that walked the earth before them have experienced the Divine. The dialogue of these masters is filled with expressions of love for nature, God and humanity. In the sequence of the three masters, an evolution of interpretation becomes evident. Swami Sivananda retains the classical language of scriptures and teachings, intended for his disciples who would have been able to grasp its meaning. Swami Satyananda refers directly to the practical application of the teaching. Swami Niranjanananda gives a fresh idiom and interpretation, without changing the content. In his language, each step is understood as relevant and applicable to the aspirants of today.

The reader is invited to come with an open heart and become immersed in the stream of lived experiences, stories and references to the core bhakti scriptures – the *Narada Bhakti Sutras*, the *Shiva Purana*, the *Srimad Bhagavatam*, the *Bhagavad Gita*, Valmiki's *Ramayana* and the *Ramacharitamanas* of Tulsidas. The spirit in which these teachings are given is to help the reader gain perception of that which is beyond description.

Humans alone are capable of thinking about and seeking a connection with the higher reality. The potential to evolve and ultimately realize the cosmic or universal nature of the Self is therefore, according to the masters, human destiny and the ultimate purpose of human life. The comprehensive bhakti yoga teachings presented in the six books of *Bhakti Yoga* provide a starting point for those seeking to begin the journey of inner transformation and establish a personal connection to the Divine.

The first five books of *Bhakti Yoga* deal with experiences and the understanding of bhakti yoga; ways to redirect emotions; the many ninefold paths that have been set out by sages and seers, with practical instructions for being good and doing good; and the disciplines, joys and the way of life of a bhakta. They offer a vision of bhakti yoga as a key theme

for the 21st century. Book 6 in this series discusses the bhakti yoga sadhana.

It has been said that all yogas lead to bhakti yoga and the experience of bhakti. The reason may be that the experience of bhakti – the feeling of peace, *shanti*, balance in all of life’s situations, *samatvam*, the connection with one’s inner self, one’s fellow beings, with nature and the Divine – is what we human beings all long for, in the depths of our hearts.

Sri Swami Satyananda says, “Yoga can lead one to a certain point, but beyond that one will need bhakti yoga. The culmination of all paths – tantra, raja yoga, karma yoga and even jnana yoga, is bhakti. The totality of man’s consciousness, his psyche, subconscious and conscious mind all meet at one point – bhakti! Once bhakti is realized, there is nothing beyond that.”



1

Understanding Bhakti Yoga

In my opinion, the greatest achievement of a man in his life is bhakti.

—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*

THE EXPERIENCE OF BHAKTI

When did bhakti yoga first become recognized?

Swami Satyananda: In India, the bhakti yoga movement started with great force in the ninth century, and continues unabated. It continued to such an extent that, during the period of Mirabai, during the period of Chaitanya, during the period of Sant Hari Das and Tukaram, Namdev and many other people, it attained such enormous proportions that people used to become mad. Mirabai used to sing the name of Krishna to such an extent that she would completely forget all the norms of society.

What is the best way to experience the bhakti path?

Swami Satyananda: It should be remembered when reading about this topic that it is only words. Words, no matter how cleverly woven and constructed, can never convey the meaning of bhakti. Bhakti is an experience that must be known for oneself. If one tries to understand bhakti through words and concepts, then one will miss its essence

and merely become lost in a whirlpool of verbal ideas. One will delude oneself. This discussion can only indicate the direction of the path. One must walk along the path and discover the destination for oneself. Bhakti comes from the heart, not the mouth or the head.

Bhakti does not only depend on outer expression. It depends on inner feeling. A person who quietly does his daily work can just as easily be a bhakta as a person who sings devotional songs throughout the night and day. Only a bhakta can know that he is a bhakta.

What is the simplest path to God?

Swami Satyananda: There are many spiritual paths and many different approaches, but the destination is the same. Some paths are circuitous and others are straight. Some paths are like the inroads of ants and others are aerial shortcuts, like the flight paths of birds. However, one path is the simplest and that is the path of bhakti. Bhakti is directing the mind to the Creator, to God, to the Absolute Self – this is the simplest explanation. This is the basic definition.

How does bhakti manifest?

Swami Niranjanananda: According to bhakti yoga, hearing, seeing and contemplation are the three main foundations through which one lives in this world and accomplishes all one needs to. When the mind, attracted by hearing and thinking about God, begins to flow in the direction of God, then that flow is called bhakti. As long as the mental vritti is not flowing towards God, there is no bhakti. When all the vrittis of the mind connect with God through seeing, hearing and contemplation, then the bhakti bhavana manifests.

How does bhakti yoga help one manage emotions?

Swami Satyananda: Bhakti yoga is a way to divert the emotions from the mundane to the supreme. Just as there is love and attachment for the things of the world, for one's

children and family, in the same way one must love God and attach oneself to God. That is bhakti yoga. In bhakti yoga one must dedicate oneself to remembrance of God.

People have so much emotion, so much love in them, so much of a certain kind of energy. They give that energy to their children, their family members, to various works in the world, but still it remains unexhausted. Then what happens? It creates an explosion in the personality. It is like a water tank being filled up by a stream of water and then overflowing. The energy fills the mind and the mind is unable to contain that energy, so it overflows. When it overflows, it manifests in the form of erratic behaviour, in the form of so many things that can be seen in the world, such as murder and crime. This is nothing but misguided emotion.

This energy, of which one has so much and cannot control, must be properly directed. How can this be done? If the whole of this emotional energy is given to family members, that is not sufficient. In fact, each person has enough energy to love the whole world, but does not know how to do this. Therefore, it was ultimately decided by the ancient rishis and seers that the devotee must find a cosmic being, the Supreme Being, and give whatever love he has to Him. In this way, the infinite treasure of love, which has been misused so far in so many ways, can be properly channelled to Him, since He is infinite and can consume all the love given to Him.

He can understand all the forms of love which are given to Him. Love can be given to Him in the form of prayer, in the form of service to humanity, in the form of calm and quiet meditation, in the form of self-purification, or in the form of chanting His name day in and day out. One's love can be given to Him in any manner and He is able to consume it, because He is eternal and infinite. This is the concept of bhakti yoga, which is one of the most wonderful methods of bringing man to normal behaviour.

How does one focus the mental and emotional energies in bhakti yoga?

Swami Satyananda: When God is seen in the birds, trees and flowers, that is bhakti. Bhakti is dissolving the mind in something without ego, without attachment. When the mind is merged in the beauty of nature and one no longer exists, that is bhakti. Losing the ego in music is bhakti. However, it must be remembered that bhakti does not proceed from concentration. Bhakti starts with intense attachment.

When the mind is completely engrossed in a higher being, that is bhakti yoga. Bhakti yoga helps to integrate the tendencies of the mind. Just as the dissipated and scattered rays of the sun are integrated and focused through a magnifying glass, in the same way, the scattered tendencies of the mind are focused by bhakti yoga. Bhakti is a great force. It does not have to be developed; it is one's nature. That nature is in everyone, but this tendency is being misused. Devotion is being channelled to the lower, mundane things of life. Reversing this process is bhakti yoga. When the emotions flow towards the mundane things of life, one should try to bring them back and direct them to the higher being. That is bhakti yoga.

When does emotion become devotion?

Swami Satyananda: Emotional experience at a lower level is passion. Emotional experience at a higher level is devotion. Passion and devotion are manifestations of the same raw material.

In classical Indian philosophy, bhakti is supposed to be the quickest means for sense withdrawal. Bhakti is devotion, not emotion. Sensory withdrawal takes place through devotion, not through emotion. Emotions always disturb the mental structure and as a result withdrawal of the senses becomes difficult. Therefore, the emotions must be properly channelled and then they are called bhakti. When bhakti is practised, withdrawal of the senses takes place automatically. According to the Indian way of thinking, attachment to

things which are not eternal is emotion, and attachment to things which are eternal is devotion.

Emotions arise from *avidya*, which is ignorance or primitive instinct. From *avidya* comes *vasana*, attachment. Emotions have a great influence on the individual and society. They are responsible for psychological breakdowns and depression. Emotion is the lower expression of human sentiment. One can help others much better without expressing emotion for them, because the emotional personality of man is unbalanced. In order to balance the emotions, one must develop devotion.

How does bhakti take one beyond mundane awareness?

Swami Niranjanananda: Bhakti is not kirtan, bhajan, repeating a mantra with a mala, thinking about God and being obsessed with an idea of being pure. Bhakti is a quality of mind which has to be nurtured.

Everyone has bhakti in one way or another. Believers have bhakti and non-believers have bhakti. Bhakti may not necessarily be devotion. Bhakti is translated as devotion in English, yet that is because there is no adequate word in English to describe it, and devotion comes closest. The word devotion has been understood in relation to a belief or idea, believing in what one chooses to believe in. That might describe the word devotion, yet bhakti is something different.

Bhakti is a quality or attitude of the mind in the same way as *lobha*, greed; *asakti*, attachment; *krodha*, anger; and *swartha*, self-interest, are attitudes of the mind. Bhakti has nothing to do with compartmentalized beliefs of whether one is a Hindu, Christian or Muslim. Through the process of bhakti yoga the aspirant learns to develop and channel that aspect of the mind, which is known as bhakti, towards the experience of transcendental reality. In order to experience transcendental reality, one needs the help of a form upon which to focus one's attention. It can be the form of a saint, a deity, a guru, or an incarnation of God.

Normally, the mental energies, attention, inner wisdom and knowledge are directed to those things which help give a boost to one's personality, lifestyle, image and nature. When one thinks of a person considered to be an enemy, one experiences animosity. When one thinks of a person who has disturbed one's harmony, one experiences anger. When one thinks of sensual enjoyment, passion is experienced. When one thinks of one's lover, one experiences love. Depending on where the mind is attached, a corresponding feeling arises. The process of channelling these energies toward the experience of transcendental reality via a medium, form or symbol is known as bhakti.

What is the process of bhakti?

Swami Satyananda: When bhakti overpowers the devotee, this physical body is converted into another material. In the beginning, bhakti transforms emotions, then it transforms the mind, then it transforms one's attitudes, then it transforms one's perception; and maybe it transforms the physical body. The body can be disintegrated into the form of light. The body can be transformed into the form of flowers. The power of bhakti is great. It is not only going to a sanctum sanctorum. Of course one can go, it is good; it is better than going to a pub, but it is not the ultimate.

This body is the temple. Krishna, or God, resides within. The devotees start from outside first, then go inside, then develop love. They go on developing it more and more. First they forget all their difficulties, then they forget all their relationships, then they forget past, present and future, and finally, they forget themselves. This is how the divine metamorphosis takes place.

What has to be done first to experience bhakti?

Swami Niranjanananda: A long time ago, in the 1970s, I asked Sri Swami Satyananda, "What is the role of bhakti?" He said, "Don't ask me now because I have not experienced it. You will get the answer in the future." Now I have that answer,

for when I see Sri Swami Satyananda I feel that bhakti is something which cannot be explained intellectually; it has to be lived and experienced. People cannot experience bhakti in their lives. They still have too many samskaras, desires, ambitions and karmas that they need to fulfil. If they think of bhakti along with their samskaras and karmas, ambitions and desires, likes and dislikes, then the pure concept of bhakti cannot be understood.

Can one trust one's own instincts in the expression of bhakti?

Swami Satyananda: Bhakti yoga is not religion. It is an individual process of awareness where one is seeking total consummation. Once a great and reputed swami named Totapuri came to Ramakrishna Paramahansa. He wanted to instruct Ramakrishna and told him to meditate on the formless God, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, the Almighty. Ramakrishna said, "God is so great. How can my lover be greater than me? The person whom I love is just like me. How can I love a god who is so great? I cannot believe it. I can only love a person who is just like me. He is so great, the Almighty. My god is Almighty. I cannot love the Almighty." In bhakti yoga it is important that the relationship between both is equal. Ramakrishna said, "I cannot do it." He did sit for meditation for a long time, but while he was meditating he began to sleep. He said, "I don't see anything. It is *shoonya*, void." Totapuri became angry and said, "You are not a good person," and just dashed Ramakrishna's forehead to the ground. Ramakrishna cried out, "Ma Kali", and entered into meditation in one second. Love has that effect.

What are some of the stages that one will experience on the bhakti path?

Swami Sivananda: Satsang, studying the scriptures, admiration, faith, devotion, devoutness, taste, intense attachment, steadiness and *mahabhava* or *prem maya* are stages in bhakti.

Through satsang and studying devotional books comes admiration for God; from admiration comes faith; from faith comes devotion to God. Then the devotee practises bhakti sadhana – japa, remembrance and chanting. This practice burns the sins and obstacles to devotion. From bhakti sadhana, bhakti devoutness develops; from devoutness comes the taste for hearing and chanting the names and glories of God.

Then comes intense attachment, which brings steadiness or the permanent form of bhakti rasa. When this is intensified it is called mahabhava or prema maya. Now the devotee drinks the essence of God-love and lives in God. Such a devotee is dead to the world and its attractions. He remains like one unconcerned even with the activities of his body. He reaches the state of *jivanmukti*, liberation while living.

Where is bhakti supposed to take you?

Swami Satyananda: To consume the mind, to forget the ego, to transcend oneself, to obtain the inner experience. Therefore, the path of bhakti is very difficult. It is very easy to go to one's sanctum sanctorum. One can go every Sunday or every Monday. It is easy to pray, it is easy to read the *Ramayana*, *Bhagavad Gita*, Koran or Bible. That is different. It is good, but nothing beyond good. If one wants something to happen in one's life, one has to think in terms of true bhakti.

What is the experience of total absorption in bhakti?

Swami Satyananda: The secret of mental control is bhakti yoga. Bhakti yoga is not practising religious rites. Bhakti yoga is channelling one's devotion towards a higher being. One's relationship with God is bhakti yoga. The following parable is an example.

Once, a Muslim devotee was praying. Muslims pray five times a day, and when the time comes for prayer, they just spread out their mat anywhere and start praying. This devotee happened to be in the middle of the road. He

spread his mat out and started practising vajrasana and padahastāsana; the namaz, prayer sequence, resembles some of the yoga postures. He was doing his namaz when a young girl of twenty-one passed by on her way to meet her boyfriend. She walked over his mat, and this devotee lost his temper when he saw the girl trampling his mat. He shouted, “Hey!” but she did not hear him. When he saw that she was not heeding him, he got up from his prayers and ran after her.

He accosted her and said, “Why did you walk on my mat?” She did not understand and asked, “What were you doing?” He replied, “I was praying with devotion to the Supreme God.” She said, “I see. I was going to meet my boyfriend and I was so engrossed in thinking of him that I did not see you or your mat! But what kind of devotion are you practising to your beloved that you knew I was passing by?”

In bhakti yoga one has to lose oneself. It is not prayer; it is not a process of thinking; it is exactly the same process by which one falls in love with another person with absolute passion. One can conceive any relationship with Him. He can be father, mother, brother, sister, wife, boyfriend or girlfriend.

What happens to one’s individual identity in bhakti?

Swami Niranjanananda: Bhakti yoga will cultivate *dharana*, concentration, one-pointedness of the mind. Through the practice of bhakti yoga, one can raise oneself above the understanding of duality and begin to experience the transcendental nature in each and every thing. Sage Vasishtha defines bhakti in two forms: *bheda bhakti*, where the worshipper and the object of worship, the *ishta devata*, are two different entities; and *abheda bhakti*, where differences do not exist between the worshipper and the *ishta devata* and one becomes one with that.

To illustrate this principle, Sri Swami Satyananda told this story of two dolls – one made of cloth and the other

made of sugar. These two dolls were living in a house. A child who wanted to play brought them beside a well and put them on the rim of the well. Both dolls looked into the depths of the well and saw that there was water down there. They had never experienced water, so they decided to take a dive to experience water. The wind became their friend and with its help, the dolls pushed themselves into the well and fell into the water. One became wet and sank to the bottom. The other became wet and simply dissolved.

Both dolls experienced water, but the doll made of cloth, despite being submerged in water, maintained its own form, shape, identity and colour. Although it was immersed in water it had its own identity. The other doll made of sugar simply dissolved. It lost its identity. It became one with the water. It was different in the beginning, but when it fell in the water it simply merged and dissolved.

This is the example of *abheda bhakti*. In *bheda bhakti*, dualism is experienced: me and my master. One can immerse oneself in the master, but maintain one's individuality. In *abheda bhakti*, one simply dissolves into the master, God, and that is the end, the completeness. The bhakta's nature becomes the nature of the container, the water. The bhaktas are contained in the water, and their nature, character, traits become that. They become that.

WHAT IS BHAKTI AND WHAT IS BHAKTI YOGA?

How does bhakti yoga fit into the overall system of yoga?

Swami Satyananda: Asana and pranayama remove disease. Pratyahara is hypnotism. These are temporary aids, not permanent solutions. The permanent solution is to engage the whole mind in God, not half the mind. Engaging the whole mind in God is *bhakti*, engaging the whole mind in the world is *asakti*, attachment. Prayer and worship is also *bhakti*, ringing bells and applying sandalwood paste is also *bhakti*, wearing a tuft and the sacred thread is also *bhakti*, but these are inferior forms of *bhakti*. Superior *bhakti* is

immersing the mind in God. If the mind is immersed in God, one will not ask such questions. One whose mind is absorbed in God experiences such bliss that he does not care about lack of money or bodily illness. Such a mind cannot be restless.

Are there various types of bhakti?

Swami Satyananda: According to yoga, there are two types of bhakti: one is the form of rituals and prayers and the other is non-ritualistic. Ritualistic bhakti is performed in temples and churches according to one's religious and cultural background. Ritualistic bhakti differs from country to country, from religion to religion. One may go to a church or temple, worship God on an altar, have a nine-day ceremony, or worship towards the east, west, north or south. That is the ritualistic path of devotion. Listening to God's name, doing japa and reading the scriptures are all ritualistic bhakti. Ultimately, that type of bhakti will not help.

The other form of bhakti is a dynamic one, and it is called the supreme bhakti. Here the self, that is my self, wants to become one with you. That is the first process and gradually the mind is fused to such an extent that I lose awareness of myself, and I see only you. Bhakti is the nature of the heart, the feeling for God in which one has not been trained and about which one knows nothing. The strong feeling, impulse and attraction towards the Supreme Being is known as bhakti. My concept of bhakti yoga is a method and a process of adjustment of selfless emotion.

What is the meaning of the word bhakti?

Swami Satyananda: The word *bhakti* comes from the root *bhaja*, which means 'to adore, serve, love; to be devoted'. This is exactly what bhakti yoga is all about. It is the path of devotion. The word *bhakta* comes from the same root and means 'a person who practises bhakti yoga, who feels devotion'.

What is bhakti?

Swami Sivananda: Bhakti is resting in God. Bhakti is a flow of devotion like the flow of a river. Bhakti is continuity of devotion, just as there is continuity in the flow of oil from one vessel to another. Bhakti is the attraction of the *jiva*, the individual soul, to God, just as a needle is attracted to a magnet. Bhakti is love for love's sake; the devotee wants God and God alone. Bhakti transmutes the individual into divinity. It intoxicates the devotee with divine *prem*, love, gives eternal satisfaction and makes him perfect. It weans the mind away from sensual objects. It makes one rejoice in God. It is supreme love of God and ultimately blossoms into *jnana*, wisdom. It leads to immortality or God-realization. Bhakti is the direct approach to the ideal through the heart, as love is natural to everybody. Rishi Narada defines bhakti in the *Narada Bhakti Sutras* (sutras 2–3):

*Saa tvasmin paramapremaropaa.
Amritasvaroopaa cha.*

That (devotion) verily is of the nature of supreme love of God. And it is of the nature of nectar. (2–3)

Why does bhakti arise spontaneously in the mind?

Swami Niranjanananda: In Sanatana culture, bhakti or devotion, contemplation, prayer and meditation have not been given a separate identity. Sanatana culture believes that bhakti is an inherent part of every individual. Bhakti – devotion, faith or the ability to surrender – is the result of being open in mind and spirit. If the mind is closed and one does not have a spiritual aim, there is no bhakti, there is no faith, there is no surrender. This tradition believes that bhakti is an integral part of the human personality. The ability to let go and to open oneself up is inherent in each one of us. It is only through developing wisdom and virtue and dissociating the mind from the objects of attachment that one can experience bhakti in its full glory.

How did the rishis define bhakti?

Swami Sivananda: In the *Narada Bhakti Sutras*, Rishi Narada gives definitions by saints and sages, including his own (sutras 16–19):

Poojaadishvanuraaga iti paaraasharyah.

Kathaadishviti gargah.

Aatmaratyavirodhene'ti shaandilya.

Naaradastu tadarpitaakhilaachaarataa tadvismarane paramavyaakulateti.

Vyasa, the son of Parasara, is of the opinion that bhakti consists in attachment to worship of God and other similar acts. (16)

Sage Gargah thinks that bhakti consists of talks of His glory and greatness and the stories of His various sports and the like. (17)

Sage Sandilya thinks that it must be without hindrance to the enjoyment of bliss in the atman. (18)

Narada is of the opinion that the essential characteristics of bhakti are the consecration of all observances and activities through complete self-surrender to God, and extreme anguish in the event of forgetting Him. (19)

How does love transform into bhakti?

Swami Satyananda: Bhakti means love, but this love contains an important element called *shraddha*, faith. Love with *shraddha* is bhakti. One may love one's guru, one may love one's disciples or children, or one's brother, sister or wife, anyone – it can just be pure love or it can be love with *shraddha*. When the love is mixed and synthesized with *shraddha*, it becomes bhakti.

Real love and bhakti are one. Sufi saints call it *ishq haqiqi*. Real love and bhakti are the inner path, which everyone can think of. Worries are a constant bother. Just as one is constantly surrounded by sorrow, love, hate, likes and

dislikes, similarly, the thought of God should be constantly with one, as much as possible. This is the only truth, the rest is nothing!

In bhakti yoga, the most important thing is to be able to love God and if one can do this, one should follow the bhakti path. The intensity of love for God has to be such that the total energy, the total awareness and the total mind are consumed. The moment there is awareness of the beloved, all one's energies are consumed and one forgets one's surroundings. That is bhakti yoga, the yoga in which the mind is given to awareness of the Supreme Being.

How can bhakti be defined in a simple way?

Swami Satyananda: Bhakti is just attaching the mind to God. When the mind is attached to a man or woman it is *kama*, passion; when it is attached to money it is *lobha*, greed; but when the mind is attached to God it is bhakti. Bhakti is indigenous to India, deep-rooted in the soil. It has not been imported, but is home-made, made in India. This is India's original face, its primordial nature.

Can one lose oneself in God?

Swami Satyananda: *Bhakti* means devotion, *bhava* means attitude and *prem* means love. In the fundamental analysis they are the same expressions. However, bhakti is total surrender; it is complete fusion of individual awareness into supreme awareness. When one loves someone and loses oneself in that person, not only on the physical or the emotional plane, but totally, even the ego becomes fused and completely lost – that is called bhakti.

Just as one pines for and fights for life when thrown into the sea, in the same way, when the totality of one's being becomes aware of the higher self, it pines for fusion with that. This higher state of being is known as bhakti. At that time there is no notion that I want to become you. There is no 'I' so there is no question of becoming – there is only you. Where there is a notion that I want to become you, there is

duality. I am aware of myself, therefore I want to become you. However, in bhakti the 'I' is lost and there is only you. That state, where there is only self-awareness, is known as bhakti.

Bhakti yoga is the yoga of devotion, faith, love and surrender to the Almighty, so that the mind becomes one-pointed, surrendered to that supreme power so that one's very existence is due only to the grace of the object of devotion, God.

How is bhakti related to chitta vritti and the activity of the senses?

Swami Satyananda: Bhakti yoga is a process in which the emotions are involved and the awareness is directed and dedicated to a higher being. This higher being may be the ishta devata or one's guru, a saint, *atman* or self, or the formlessness of time and space. Whenever the tendencies of the mind are directed towards the subtle spheres of existence with complete dedication, it is known as bhakti. When the same tendencies flow to the outside through the *indriyas*, senses, either with *shuddha* or *ashuddha*, positive or negative aspects, that is not bhakti but *chitta vritti*, modifications of the mind.

If one loves the Divine Being, or God the Almighty, that love is consumed in totality; it is not subject to reaction. Therefore, bhakti yoga is the redirection of love from matter to spirit. One sings the name of the Supreme Being, repeats His name, thinks of His glories and greatness and tries to keep Him in the heart and mind all the time, as is generally done with the ordinary things of life. When the heart and mind are given in attachment to the things of the world, pain, agony and disappointment are felt as there is always separation. When the mind is dedicated to God or a divine being one finds total satisfaction, and at the same time, an experience of fulfilment.

Bhakti yoga is the highest culmination in man's life and if bhakti happens to manifest by itself, even without listening

to or reading the *Bhagavad Gita* or *Ramayana*, if it comes naturally, one has reached the summum bonum of earthly life, the climax of human evolution.

How can one practise bhakti yoga?

Swami Satyananda: The *pandas*, temple worshippers, perform pooja in the temples, but their heart and feeling is not in it. On the other hand, although a mother does not chant the names of her family while she is cooking their food, she is always conscious of them. She feels that she is cooking for her child or husband, and that they will like it in a certain way. That remembrance is constantly at the back of her mind. This has to be the attitude towards God while performing all one's worldly duties and actions.

Bhakti is a feeling. It is not the religious act performed in a church or temple. That is a ritual, a physical action which may be necessary for one reason or another, but that is not the definition of bhakti. It is the feeling the mother has for the child. It is the feeling the lover has for the beloved. It is the feeling of one enemy for another, where the hate becomes an obsession, and even while eating or sleeping, one can't forget!

Bhakti yoga is not a practice; nothing has to be done. With kriya yoga the external practices have to be done. In bhakti there is just love for God. It is not even necessary to sing His name. Bhakti is true love, divine love, and for that there are no practices, neither asana, nor pranayama, nor mudras, nor bandhas, nothing. It is a feeling, an awareness, like passion, hatred, anger and attachment. What does one do? One feels it.

Bhakti yoga is the easiest path because here one operates with emotions, with faith and belief. It is not the path of pranayama, or kundalini, or hatha yoga, karma yoga or jnana yoga. It is the path of 'self yoga' – everything is within me. I mobilize my willpower and the God within me is awakened.

How does one make the leap from faith to higher awareness?

Swami Satyananda: Bhakti is both the means to and the expression of higher awareness. It is both the practice and the spontaneous expression of higher knowledge. One leads to the other. Until a certain point on the path of bhakti yoga, there is more faith than experience, but once one has had a definite experience then the whole situation changes. One comes to know that there is indeed a direction to one's aspirations and practices. Bhakti becomes an experience. From then onwards, one knows that one is not chasing a mirage like a person in the desert.

This bhakti increases, increases and goes on increasing. This bhakti spans the infinite chasm between mere faith and divine realization, and it covers the period when the bhakta attempts to live and express this realization in everyday life. Bhakti bridges the abyss between lack of divine knowledge backed by faith, and the personal experience and knowledge of divinity.

Bhakti is not a subject for discussion; it must be felt, known and experienced. Real bhakti arises spontaneously through higher awareness and knowledge due to realization of something not known before. Bhakti is the expression and experience of joy at realizing the impossible, at being confronted with direct perception of that which is beyond words. Real bhakti cannot be created artificially, for it is an expression of bliss, of something beyond the wildest flights of the imagination.

What traits indicate progress in bhakti yoga?

Swami Niranjanananda: To become a bhakta or a sattwic being, the first condition is to overcome the dual mentality. When one is able to see oneness in everything, when one is able to see the inner nature of all beings, that is the first attainment of bhakti yoga. The second and third attainments are friendliness and compassion for all. The fourth is overcoming the selfish nature, the arrogance and rigidity of the ego, and developing the selfless nature.

Why bhakti?

Swami Sivananda: When the water flows, it washes away the mud. So also when the water of bhakti flows, the mud of ignorance is washed away.

HOW TO AWAKEN BHAKTI

How can bhakti be cultivated?

Swami Sivananda: Bhakti can be acquired and cultivated. Constant satsang with devotees, repetition of His name (Sri Ram, Sita Ram, Hari Om, etc.), constant remembrance of God, prayer, studying religious books such as *Ramayana* and *Srimad Bhagavatam*, chanting His name, or serving bhaktas can infuse bhakti into the heart. One should never waste a single minute. Wasting time is the highest sin.

One should combine all the love for cherished worldly objects – wife, husband, son, daughter, wealth, property, relatives and friends – and then apply this combined love towards God. One will realize this very second. Repeating the name of God constantly will lead quite easily to control of mind, but it must be done with absolute faith and intense affection, with love from the bottom of the heart. One must intensely feel the long, painful separation from Him, and tears must flow profusely.

Is it more accurate to say that bhakti is ‘awakened’?

Swami Satyananda: Yes, and to awaken bhakti it is necessary to attend satsang, work hard, find a genuine guru to surrender to and serve. One must be hospitable to people and do japa of God’s name.

If one loves the Divine Being or God the Almighty, one’s love is consumed totally; it is not subject to reaction. Therefore, bhakti yoga is redirecting love from matter to spirit. One should sing the name of the Supreme Being, repeat His name, think of His glories and greatness, and try to keep Him in the heart and mind all the time, just as is generally done with the ordinary things of life.

Bhakti yoga cannot be taught. Bhakti is a type of kinship with the Divine, an elective affinity with God. Love, reverence and surrender form the core of bhakti. I believe that one only becomes a bhakta by God's grace.

How can bhakti be awakened?

Swami Satyananda: Bhakti is inborn; it cannot be created. It is not the subject of a guru or a preacher. A person who preaches bhakti yoga does not know it himself. If I have love within myself, I won't know how to express it. Love is expressed in the language of feeling, of experience. If one can explain the emotions and reactions that one feels in worldly love, then one can also explain divine love. However, one can't describe how worldly love feels, even that is too difficult.

Bhakti does not need to be cultivated or defined; it is present in everyone. Bhakti is an all-pervading essence in all living beings, not only human beings.

Love is not done, it happens.

This fire is not blown up in flames,
It blows itself up abruptly.

Bhakti has to do with feeling. The feeling for God is bhakti. The feeling for an enemy is revenge, the feeling for a girlfriend or boyfriend is passion, the feeling for money is greed. When one's feeling goes towards God, it is called bhakti. The same feeling which emanates from a mother towards a child is affection, *sneha*. When it is directed towards a friend, it is friendship. Whether paternal, maternal or fraternal, they all are feelings.

Bhakti is extremely difficult. It is not as easy or as ordinary as most people have been led to believe. Bhakti cannot be taught, it has to be inborn. One cannot become an intellectual bhakta, and that is where most aspirants fail. Everything in this world can be learned, and nirvikalpa samadhi can be attained without much difficulty, but it is hard to develop a speck of bhakti. It is an experience that

will completely transport one from this plane to that other plane of experience within a trice. It does not take years or months, but just a few seconds.

How can bhakti be developed? Ramakrishna Paramahansa has said, “One will have to re-channel one’s total experience, only then will it happen. Just as one loves one’s wife or husband, child or mother, or one’s wealth and property, oneself and one’s life, that total love will have to be directed to God. Then He will be here and now.”

For a *jnani*, one who lives by wisdom, God is nowhere, but for a bhakta, God is here and He is everywhere. The concept of bhakti completely transforms every speck of existence and then one is not a mere man anymore.

What are the eleven forms of bhakti according to Rishi Narada?

Swami Sivananda: In the *Narada Bhakti Sutras* it is said (sutra 82):

Gunamaahaatmyaasaktiroopaasakti-poojaasakti-smaranaasakti-daasyaasakti-sakhyaasakti-vaatsalyaasakti-kaantaasakti-aatmanivedanaasakti-tanmayaasakti-par-amavirahaasakti-roopaikadhaapyekaadashadhaa bhavati.

Bhakti or divine love, though in itself one only, manifests itself in the following eleven forms:

1. Love of the glorification of God’s blessed qualities
2. Love of his enchanting beauty
3. Love of worship
4. Love of constant remembrance
5. Love of service
6. Love of Him as a friend
7. Love of Him as a son or child
8. Love of Him as that of a wife for her husband
9. Love of self-surrender to Him
10. Love of complete absorption in Him
11. Love of the pain of separation from Him.

First of all the devotee serves God as a servant serves his master. Then he approaches Him nearer and behaves towards Him as a friend does towards a friend. The relationship is then felt to be more closely personal. Therefore, the devotee rises higher and manifests parental affection for the loved one, as a father for his son. Lastly, the little remaining remoteness between them disappears altogether. The two become one in spirit. The devotee develops all marks of a beloved wife's love for her beloved husband. In *atmanivedana* or complete self-surrender, there is complete self-absorption. He feels the living presence of God anywhere and everywhere and permanently loses himself in the Divine.

The bhakta can know he loves God when he feels he cannot live without Him. The purpose of the life of a devotee is to lose all sense of distinctive personality and be dissolved in God like camphor in the fire.

All these eleven forms of bhakti are possible for the same bhaktas during different moods. *Virahara*, separation, is the highest manifestation of love. It is a common characteristic of all devotees because it is in the very nature of intense love that it cannot bear separation. If all these forms of attachment cannot be developed together, the devotee can select one or two sentiments and cultivate love for God accordingly. Love is fundamentally one.

What is the experience of bhakti when one is involved in mundane life?

Swami Niranjanananda: Bhakti will lead the devotee to develop the connection of feelings, thoughts and ideas with what is divine and transcendental. One person may think of Shiva, another may think of Christ, others of Krishna, Devi, Buddha or Mahavira. Somebody may think of light, another of darkness. The connection with that idea, belief or philosophy will give the individual inner support to survive the struggles of life. When everything else fails in life, the final resort is always God; 'Please help me. I have no one'.

From that feeling one derives strength, courage and peace. Therefore, bhakti yoga in mundane life is identification with the object of one's contemplation.

It is possibly this aspect of bhakti that is confused with worship. Everybody is free to worship in their own way, whether by giving flowers, water or light, kneeling, prostrating or standing. Whatever the outer expression may be, the inner need is to experience identification and connection with that object, symbol or idea which gives strength when it is most needed.

How can bhakti be expressed in everyday life?

Swami Niranjanananda: There is the image of an electrical plug. To change and transform the dualities of the mind, emotions and lifestyle, one must plug into the socket of yoga. When one has left the socket of maya and the new life-plug is in the socket of yoga, then bhakti yoga becomes the real yoga in all respects. As long as one is connected to the socket of maya, the senses, the body, the mind, conditioning, samskaras, ideologies and cultural inputs are all there.

If the modern lifestyle of this civilization is the material lifestyle from which one has disconnected, what kind of lifestyle will one live now? Once the life-plug is connected to the socket of yoga, it will have to be a yogic lifestyle, not the common modern lifestyle. The new lifestyle will still have to be lived through action, in thought, behaviour, the expressions of the senses and the mental and emotional faculties.

In the yogic socket one develops a unified vision, so there is an automatic dissociation from and rejection of what is negative and detrimental to the development of one's creative abilities. If a plate of freshly-made sweet kheer, milk rice, and a plate of one-month-old kheer are placed in front, one will automatically choose the freshly-made kheer and reject what is detrimental without having to think about it. Many people worry about what they will need to leave or renounce, but it happens in a spontaneous, natural way. Therefore, the first step of spiritual bhakti yoga, as presented by Sri Rama

10,000 years ago and Sri Krishna 5,000 years ago, is keeping company with the pious and avoiding the crooked.

In modern times, there are the examples of Swami Sivananda and Swami Satyananda, who say that when a person is sick, God in that person is sick. When a person is hungry, God in that person is hungry. When a person is happy, God in that person is happy. What does this mean? Vedanta says that there is one sun, yet the reflection of the sun on different lakes will be different. In the same manner, God is one, yet the reflection of God in each being is different. In ten people there will be ten different reflections of the same great spirit.

In bhakti yoga one develops the ability to see the existence of that spirit in everyone. When one looks at a person, one can see either beauty or ugliness, perhaps not just physically; one person may have a gentle, peaceful, vibrant, attractive nature and another may seem disturbed and dissipated, not centred or balanced. However, when one is able to see the spark of divinity in each person, the focus is no longer on the body, colour, age, gender, mind, culture or religion. If one is identifying these different items then one is back in the worldly socket. In the yoga or spiritual socket, what is perceived is the spark of the Divine Spirit.

What is the transformation brought about by bhakti?

Swami Satyananda: Bhakti is a science that brings about a transformation in awareness, like a chemical change. Bhakti causes a metamorphosis in a person's thoughts, actions and mind, as well as in their reactions, responses and lifestyle. These changes can be seen and experienced. All those who have reached the ultimate stage of bhakti, like Mirabai, Kabirdas and Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, have told us one common truth: bhakti is divine energy, transcendental love. It is not the ordinary emotion of love, it is supreme love. When the mind is fully and unconditionally merged in something, it becomes one with that object of love. When one's love is turned towards God, the mind begins to

lose itself. It slowly becomes one with God and the chasm between the devotee and God begins to narrow down.

Real bhakti starts when one has seen Him. It is also said in the *Ramayana*, “How can one have devotion for God without having seen Him?” How can there be love for someone one has never met? At least one must have had a glimpse. I love someone because I saw that person once passing by on the train, but without having had that glimpse, how could I do it? One must love God in the same manner. Real devotion comes once one has had a glimpse of Him. The eleventh chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita* talks about a glimpse of the cosmic *purusha*, the cosmic being, in which all the rivers, all the stars and everything that the universe contains are seen by the person within himself. Then devotion begins to grow. The experience is so awe-inspiring that one cannot help but become a bhakta.

What are the practical steps one can take to develop bhakti?

Swami Sivananda: In the *Narada Bhakti Sutras* it has been said (sutras 34–38):

*Tasyaa saadhanaani gaayanti aachaaryaah.
Tattu vishayatyagaat sangatyagaachcha.
Avyaavrita bhajanaat.
Loke’pi bhagavat gunashravanakeertanaat.
Mukhyatastu mahatkripayaiva bhagavatkripaaleshadvaa.*

Teachers have sung the way of attaining bhakti. (34)

Devotion to God is achieved by abandoning all sensual pleasures and attachment to sensual objects. (35)

By uninterrupted worship, success is attained in the practice of devotion. (36)

Bhakti develops from listening to and singing of the attributes and glories of God, even while engaged in the ordinary activities of life in the world. (37)

But devotion is obtained chiefly by the grace of great men or through a slight measure of divine grace. (38)

How does bhakti increase the sattwic and creative nature?

Swami Niranjanananda: Ten thousand years ago, Sri Rama described nine forms of bhakti. The first form is keeping company with positive, pious, good people and shunning the company of those who are negative and a bad influence: *Prathama bhagati santanha kara sangaa (Ramacharitamanas, Aranyakanda, after doha 34, chau 4)*. Rama also clarified the difference between a good and a bad person: *Bicchurata eka praana hari lehi, milata eka dukha daaruna dehi (Ramacharitamanas, Balakanda, after doha 4, chau 2)*. The pious are those who ‘take away your heart and mind upon separation’. It means there is so much identification and oneness with them that one feels, ‘we are two bodies but with one mind and one spirit’.

The crooked, by contrast, are those who bring suffering and pain, who can influence and make one weak due to negative thinking, behaviour and attitudes. Is this devotion, or is it taking charge of one’s life? Does the devotee keep company with people who uplift and inspire him to reach greater heights, or does he enjoy the company of those who are critical and negative? What is experienced through the negative intellect is selfishness, not friendliness or compassion. Unless one can see the one spirit in everyone, one cannot fulfil the first conditions of bhakti. Therefore, one has to redefine the understanding of bhakti yoga.

Bhakti yoga means to improve the quality of life, the behaviour and thinking patterns, to enhance the sattwic and creative abilities. Therefore, bhakti yoga is the yoga of inner transformation. It is not the yoga of chanting God’s name in a foreign language, which is how many people who do not understand bhakti yoga define it. Bhakti is definitely not the yoga of devotion in the sense that it is usually understood. It is the yoga of sublimating the gross nature and attaining the harmonious sattwic nature.

What is the role of the guru in awakening bhakti?

Swami Satyananda: The bhakti aspect of life has been mis-directed, it has been squandered. Bhakti has gone to the pictures, to television, from one person to another person, from one type of dress to another type of dress. People have been squandering this great, priceless gem, this gift of eternal reality which every animal, every vegetable, every human being possesses, which everything has.

This bhakti has to be developed. Therefore, the one who ignites the dormant bhakti in one's personality, the guru, comes first in spiritual life. Once bhakti is accomplished, dhyana yoga becomes spontaneous. One closes the eyes and things start happening. For the awakening of this bhakti, guru comes first, second is kirtan, and third is satsang.

How does bhakti bring about transcendence?

Swami Satyananda: Bhakti completely releases the mind from material attachments and associations. One can only imagine it. When one loves someone in this world intensely, maybe one's child, maybe one's boyfriend or girlfriend, what happens? One overcomes many things and many ideas. Even by loving these mortal people, the child or friend, one is able to overcome, to transcend. If one has any idea about how to love the eternal self, transcendence will be a joking matter.

Ramakrishna Paramahansa, the mad saint of India who lived in the twentieth century, used to say, "If you can turn your attachment from your parents, if you can transform your attachment to your male or female friend, if you can transform and turn your attachment from your property, wealth and all things and redirect it to the one Self, the one being, you can find Him here and now." That is what he used to say: here and now!

Why doesn't everyone have this experience with bhakti?

Swami Satyananda: Most people's bhakti is lukewarm and with lukewarm devotion nothing happens. There is neither satisfaction nor does the experience take place. There is

always a 'but'. What will happen to my car if that supreme devotion takes place? What will happen to my television? Who will pay the bills? Because of this 'but' there is a stopper. If there is attachment, how can bhakti yoga be practised?

In bhakti yoga all one's attachments have to be withdrawn and directed towards some being – not just fifty percent or sixty percent or ninety percent of the attachment, not even ninety-nine percent. All the attachment which one has for anyone has to be withdrawn and directed towards one being. That is called bhakti.



2

The Journey Begins

At night, before going to bed, offer the activities of the day to God. That is bhakti yoga.

—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*

THE JOURNEY

What is the journey of bhakti?

Swami Sivananda: It would be a gross mistake to consider bhakti merely as a state of emotionalism. It is actually a thorough discipline and training of one's will and mind. It is a means to apprehend the true knowledge of reality. Bhakti may begin with ordinary idol worship but culminates in the highest form of realization – the individual soul's oneness with the Supreme Spirit.

What should be the goal or purpose of bhakti yoga?

Swami Satyananda: The purpose is to be aware of God all the time without strain or difficulty, just as one is aware of oneself all the time; one knows that one is. Similarly, the divine awareness should be constant, no matter if it comes by imposing equality with Him or by imposing any other relationship.

When love for God becomes so deep and intense, God can be seen everywhere, just as a lover sees the beloved

everywhere. The glory of God is visible everywhere, in everyone. Experiencing That, I also become That. Wherever you look, you see Rama. To experience that is the purpose of life. All the other activities like studying, serving, fulfilling desires, rearing children or keeping accounts have to be done, but all that is maya.

The method and purpose of bhakti yoga is to take one away from identification with the little 'I', the body-mind. The aim is to reduce personal whims, conflicts, disharmony, and so on, which tend to imprison and severely limit awareness. The aim is to make the mind a perfect reflector, a perfect mirror of experience. It is under these circumstances that one can know higher awareness and bliss.

What happens in the initial stages of bhakti?

Swami Niranjanananda: There is a Hindi word, *ghamand*, which describes a combination of three negative ego experiences: vanity, pride and arrogance. Ghamand is when the concept of 'I' and 'me' negates everything and everyone else. It is self-centredness in a very tamasic sense; aggressiveness, megalomania. The absence of this egomania is bhakti. In the first stage of bhakti it is not necessary to start thinking about God, Krishna and Christ. No, that identification with either the manifest form, *sakara*, or the unmanifest form, *nirakara*, happens much later, when the merging of consciousness takes place. In the initial stages there is the dropping of egomania, which in turn leads to bhakti.

What is the ultimate goal of bhakti yoga?

Swami Niranjanananda: Swami Sivananda always insisted upon bhakti yoga. He used to say that during kirtan one has to come out of the conditioned mind-space and be free. "Don't think that you can't sing or you have a bad voice or a cracked throat. Don't be self-conscious because you are the one who has to build that connection with your inner self." Building the inner connection is known as bhakti

yoga. The quality of unconditional love, sympathy and oneness develops. Harmony between the extreme poles of pleasure and pain develops. Humility and awareness of the transcendental nature of life develops. This is the culmination of bhakti yoga.

How would you describe the journey of bhakti?

Swami Satyananda: There is only one path that is beautiful and sweet, like pure water which passes through beautiful valleys laden with flowers. That is the path of bhakti. The pleasure one obtains from the world is no pleasure at all. In bhakti there is only *ananda*, bliss. One does not even feel like sleeping because if one sleeps, one loses many hours and cannot enjoy that ananda.

Drink, drink the cup of God's name. Be intoxicated by drinking and making others drink. One pours scotch and champagne into a glass and after drinking it one becomes intoxicated. One drinks and gives it to others to drink so that they may also become intoxicated. When they are intoxicated, they will think only pleasant things. Just as drinking alcohol breaks down the barriers, in the same way drinking the cup of God's name removes all limitations and depressions.

How can one experience something which is unmanifest?

Swami Niranjanananda: How does one experience the unmanifest? To climb up on the roof one needs to use a ladder, for one can't simply jump from the ground floor to the roof with the strength in the legs. One needs to climb the ladder, step by step. This is where the three aspects of bhakti – *jnanakanda*, *upasana* and *karmakanda*, become important. *Jnanakanda* is knowing what is required in order to live bhakti, the spirit of yoga, the spirit of union, where the aspirant is in harmony with the world and connected with the transcendental power. *Upasana*, worship, is a more meditative practice of attaining this internal connection by fine-tuning the personality and behaviour, whereas

karmakanda, ritual, is the outer method, using nature as the ladder to access the divine.

What are the three aspects of the bhakti yoga path?

Swami Niranjanananda: There are three aspects or perspectives of bhakti yoga which can be found in every treatise on bhakti yoga.

Jnanakanda is the aspect of knowledge, knowing the aim, theory and scope of bhakti yoga, and understanding how it can be applied in day-to-day life. The nine stages or limbs of bhakti yoga form a part of *jnanakanda*, by helping the devotee to understand bhakti yoga and what it aspires to, which is a perfectly innocent and pure personality, untainted and untroubled by the *tamas* of the world. The *Ramayana* and the *Bhagavad Gita*, two scriptures which predate all structured systems of belief, represent the ancient idea of bhakti yoga as a process of inner purification, acquiring purity of mind, purity of emotion, purity of belief and purity in performance and interactions.

Purity is the main theme of bhakti. It is implied that natural devotion evolves as one becomes more and more pure, focused and one-pointed. Bhakti yoga says to deal with the personality and remove the rough edges. One plants the seeds of *sattwa* in the ground of *tamas*. *Tamas* is the soil of one's personality in which one has to plant and nurture the seed of *sattwa*. The theory of bhakti yoga needs to be understood before going into the actual *sadhanas* and practices, which is why *jnanakanda* comes first. Incorporating bhakti yoga in daily life is part of *upasana* and *karmakanda*.

The second aspect of bhakti yoga is *upasana*, the method of incorporating bhakti in one's life. *Asana* means 'seat' or 'place' and the prefix *up* means 'to come closer', so *upasana* means 'sitting near'. The bhakta takes a seat closer to himself, which means he internalizes himself. *Upasana* is involving oneself in a process of redirecting the flow of energy of the emotions and sentiments. This happens through a meditative process, through mantra, through

concentration, through kirtan, through *anushthana*, an extended period of mantra sadhana. Upasana means coming closer to oneself and becoming stable, being involved in a process of transformation, in a practice which deepens one's awareness.

Upasana is an internal practice. There are two kinds of practices: external and ritualistic, and internal and subtle. Practices which are internal, subtle and meditative are upasana. External rituals which use nature as the medium to commune with the divine are part of *karmakanda*, the aspect of ritual.

Karmakanda is the third aspect of bhakti yoga. It is an external process, involving external ritual to connect oneself with nature and the transcendental reality. Karmakanda connects *jiva*, the individual consciousness; *maya* or *prakriti*, nature; and the transcendental consciousness. Karmakanda is represented by *havan*, fire ritual, which celebrates the awakening of consciousness, the moment when humankind discovered fire. All of nature can be used as a means to worship and adore the transcendental and the divine.

Prakriti is the force of creation through which the jiva comes to the divine. In this sequence, external rituals are involved such as poojas, small ceremonies that people can do in their home to create a centre of positive vibration, where they feel uplifted and at peace. Here the individual is trying to understand his role in life, his connection with the cosmos.

What makes living the path of bhakti yoga a superior way of life?

Swami Satyananda: Just as food without salt has no taste, in the same way, life without bhakti is tasteless. A person without bhakti is like a naked person bedecked in beautiful jewellery. Where is the beauty? Life without bhakti is like halwa without sugar, or upma without salt. Life without bhakti is incomplete. Nothing is more precious in the world than bhakti; it is more precious than gold, diamonds or pearls. Moreover, it is very rare.

Where there is bhakti, there is peace of mind. There is no factory which manufactures peace of mind. Bhakti is a state in which there are no worries, likes, dislikes, love, hatred, anger or lust. When there is equanimity, the mind is indifferent to money coming in or going out, to praise or criticism. Whether one's child is obedient or not, one is at peace. Peace means acceptance of life. The attitude of bhakti is: I have left everything in Your hands and it is up to You to take me towards success or ruin.

How did Tulsidas become a great bhakta?

Swami Satyananda: There was a boy in the sixteenth century in India who was unfortunate. When he was born, his parents died and he used to loaf about like a vagabond. He was picked up by a swami. He was educated by the swami, and he was married. He began to love his wife very much. He would not even go to another room and always stayed with her. Whether she went to the kitchen, or to bath, or to the market, he always followed her. He was mad after her. One day when he came home, he noticed that she had left and gone to her parents' home. He became mad and started crying out her name, "Ratna, Ratna, Ratna." The neighbours said that she had gone with her baggage to her parents. He straightaway went to his in-laws.

In India, it is not the custom that the son-in-law will go to the in-laws without being invited. He can't just go and knock on the door, unless of course the son-in-law is a shameless son-in-law. However, he was shameless, for he had so much passion and attachment and amour for her. He went and Ratna was standing there. Ratna asked, "Why have you come?" He said, "I can't live without you." Ratna said, "What type of man are you? So much attachment and love you have for this body, which is nothing but skin and bone, mucus, faeces and urine! After all, whom are you loving, the bone, the flesh, the fat and the mucus? All that smells and fouls in the body? If you had the same love for God, you would have been liberated!" This opened his eyes, because I think that a wife, if she is strict with her husband, can open his eyes.

He left immediately. He left the home and came to Chitrakoot in Central India and started practising bhakti. Now he had no wife on whom to practise bhakti. So, where to give that bhakti? The attachment, the love and passion which he was pouring out on his wife he began to pour towards God. His ishta deva was Sri Rama. This man was ultimately known as Tulsidas, the author of the *Ramacharitamanas*, the Life of Rama. Today, this man is known, is read, is sung in every home in India every day. Tulsidas, for an Indian, means a symbol of bhakti and prem.

This is how the whole fund of emotion, attachment, passion, lower love, whatever one might call it, has got to be diverted to somebody who is a higher, spiritual ideal.

How can one change selfish love to bhakti?

Swami Niranjanananda: In the course of one's life, love is experienced in many ways. Of course, the love one experiences is conditioned and self-oriented. If motivations and aspirations are fulfilled by loving somebody, only then will one love that person. If nothing can be attained by liking that person, then that person has no meaning in one's life. That is one's natural human condition. Love, trust, faith and belief are only for those people or areas of interaction where one is totally involved with all one's faculties. Where there is no involvement, these feelings don't exist. However, where one is involved in the objective world, the quality of love becomes conditional. The type of love is conditional, it is not unconditional and pure; rather, it is self-oriented and conditioned.

In order to develop bhakti, it is unconditional love that has to be activated. Most of the religions, philosophies, ideas and spiritual traditions speak on this subject. How to increase love? By recognizing that the suffering of another person is one's own, by being a Good Samaritan as it is said in the Bible, by being a person who can understand the difficulties of another being and help them overcome the difficulties in finding happiness and contentment in life.

That is the expansion of love, which eventually transforms into compassion. Love and compassion are two synonymous terms: pure love is compassion and impure love is just self-oriented desire. Therefore, it is the movement from self-oriented desire to this unconditional expression of compassion and love which is the journey of bhakti. The worship, chanting, adoration and prayer are the means to awaken this dormant love. They are only the means to overcome, alter and transform the conditioning in which one is living, and to develop a broader perception and vision of God's existence in one's life and in the world.

Development of bhakti is developing the component of love and making it unconditional, which in turn is transformed into compassion and gives rise to the experience of faith and belief. When these are attained, it is the culmination of bhakti: love, compassion, faith and belief. That is the highest attainment of bhakti.

How can the journey of bhakti be described?

Swami Satyananda: The simple truth is that the path of catching God, of experiencing, remembering and submerging oneself in God, of melting the mind in God is the one and only path. Therefore, one should take the easiest and simplest path and not bother about the hard one, the path of the razor's edge. The claim that the easy and simple path is very long is correct. Sometimes it will also take one over mountainous terrain. The other path may be short while the easy path makes one walk on and on. It is the path of the ant and, like the ant, one goes on walking slowly but steadily.

Bhakti is very difficult, but worship is easy. Going to the temple and church is the easiest thing one can do. Ringing bells, doing arati, singing hymns and kirtan is simple. It is ritualistic devotion. But the other bhakti, the highest, supreme devotion or *parabhakti*, cannot be practised through the senses, the mind or books. It is just an explosion, when one's divinity is at the point of maturity.

Why is bhakti yoga sometimes described as a dangerous path?

Swami Satyananda: It is not dangerous in the sense that one will be lost somewhere or something bad will happen. Once one is on the path, there is no thinking of anybody. The past is left behind as the links, connections, associations and relationships are finished. They are lost to the aspirant and he is lost to them. There is no looking back, no looking to the right and looking to the left. It is just the awareness of one, and after some time this bhakti culminates in a sort of illumination.

What makes bhakti yoga an experience as well as a journey?

Swami Satyananda: Bhakti yoga implies two things: both the path and the experience. A person can be on the path of bhakti yoga and yet have no positive experience of intense bhakti. At the same time, a person can experience intense bhakti and yet not profess to be on the path of bhakti yoga. Here are two examples to illustrate this point:

1. If one is devotionally inclined, one can follow the path of bhakti yoga. This involves intense concentration of one's entire being on an object of devotion. This method of bhakti yoga can eventually lead to a transcendental experience of overwhelming bhakti. Associated with this bhakti is transcendental knowledge. This bhakti will become stronger and stronger with time and more experience.
2. If one is not devotionally inclined, the other paths of yoga can be followed instead. These other paths will eventually lead to spiritual experience. This in turn will automatically lead to bhakti, for one will realize something one did not know before. Whichever method is adopted, the result is the same. The paths of the devotional and the non-devotional individuals will eventually join.

Surely effort is an important part of bhakti yoga?

Swami Satyananda: Yes. Therefore, bhakti yoga needs to be practised every day. People remember God's name, do a little japa, go to the temple or church, kneel down and pray, read the scriptures in which divine stories are given; for they know there is no harm in doing it. Effort must be made, and every effort that is made becomes successful. If it does not succeed, if there is no change in the mind, it does not matter. It is no one's fault. When we consider that everything in the world is divine, everything is a manifestation of the divine shakti, then whatever we love is love for God.

Why did great yogis become bhaktas?

Swami Satyananda: Many of the great yogis, if not all, expressed bhakti. This was either their path or bhakti came as a result of other paths. Some of these great yogis could not stop talking about bhakti. Were they misguided? This is most unlikely, since these were the very people who were regarded by others as wise men. If wisdom can lead to bhakti, or if bhakti can lead to wisdom, there must be something behind the path of bhakti yoga that is not immediately obvious. Furthermore, these great yogis were clear indicators and examples of what the path of bhakti yoga brings: tolerance, peace, understanding, love of fellow men and many other attributes. It is to these people that one should look if one wants to see clear proof of the benefits of bhakti yoga, not those who become bigots and fanatics.

How does bhakti become a natural expression in life?

Swami Satyananda: The heart is purified by the practices one has done in different lives. In this way, *avidya* or ignorance, atheism, faithlessness, intellectual interference and so many other obstacles to spiritual life finally withdraw, either in this life or in the next life, when the heart is completely purified. Then bhakti shines like a light. Love for God is not something that can be had from outside; it is the spontaneous expression of one's own heart.

HOW TO START BHAKTI SADHANA

How do we turn the mind away from worldly thoughts and focus on God instead?

Swami Satyananda: Bhakti means the desire to unite with the higher being and for that purpose the mind has to be absorbed in bhakti all the time. While discharging one's day-to-day work one should always think about the real intention. Why are we born? What is the purpose of life? One has a house, a family, a job or a shop. People marry and have children or enjoy themselves. Are they born for this or is there some other purpose? That is the first question one has to answer. Unless it is discovered, one cannot know the way. First one needs to find out which road goes to the airport, only then can one fly.

How does the selection of companions impact the spiritual aspirant?

Swami Sivananda: The effects of bad company are highly disastrous and should be shunned by the aspirant. The mind becomes filled with bad ideas by contact with evil companions. The little faith in God and the scriptures also vanishes. One is known by the company one keeps. Birds of a feather flock together. These proverbs or wise maxims are quite true. Just as a plant nursery is to be well fenced in the beginning for protection from cows, so also a neophyte should protect himself carefully from bad influences, otherwise he is ruined totally. The company of those who speak lies, commit adultery, theft, cheating and double-dealing, are greedy; indulge in idle talk, backbiting and tale-bearing, and have no faith in God and in the scriptures should be strictly avoided. Bad surroundings, obscene pictures and songs, romantic novels, cinemas, theatres, the sight of animals mating, words which give rise to bad ideas in the mind – in short anything that causes evil thoughts in the mind constitutes evil company.

Aspirants generally complain that they have been doing sadhana for the last fifteen years and have not made any

solid spiritual progress. The obvious answer is that they have not totally shunned bad company. Newspapers deal with all sorts of worldly topics. Aspirants should give up reading newspapers entirely as they kindle worldly thoughts, cause sensational excitement in the mind, make the mind outgoing, produce an impression that the world is a solid reality and make one forget the Truth that lies underneath these names and forms.

What quality of association is true satsang?

Swami Niranjanananda: In the course of my life I have met many people, both good and bad, but I have not identified with them because ultimately they have no meaning in my life. My association with people is for a day, a week, a month or maybe even a lifetime. However, my association with my guru is eternal, not confined to one life. Life is short, eternity is not. That is the association I have to cultivate. That association is called satsang.

Sri Rama says in the *Ramayana*, “There is no virtue like benevolence and no meanness like oppressing others. This I declare to be the verdict of the Vedas and the wise. Those who inflict pain on others even after attaining the human body suffer the terrible pangs of birth and death. Dominated by infatuation and devoted to selfish interest, people commit various sins and therefore ruin their prospects for a better life.” These are the characteristics of good people and bad people.

All merits and demerits are products of maya. This is the final statement. The greatest merit is that they should cease to exist in one’s eye. To discern them is ignorance. The merits and demerits in life are the product of maya, involvement, expectations and associations in the material dimension with the material mentality. The mind is not spiritual. Therefore, the first component of yoga or the spirit of yoga is to reassess one’s associations.

What should be the aspirations of one wanting to begin a bhakti sadhana?

Swami Sivananda: The qualifications for the attainment of bhakti are a pure loving heart, faith, innocence, simplicity, truthfulness, straightforwardness, dispassion and restraint.

A devotee of Sri Krishna is always meek and humble. The name of God is always on his lips. He sheds profuse tears when he is alone and he is pious. He has equal vision and is friendly towards all. He never hurts the feelings of others. He has a spotless character and he never covets the property of others. He sees God in all beings.

A devotee should become an embodiment of goodness. He must be ever ready to do good to all living beings. That devotee who is intent upon the welfare of all beings obtains the peace of the Eternal. He who rejoices in the welfare of all obtains the darshan of God. He develops *advaitic*, non-dual, consciousness eventually.

How does the experience of bhakti progress?

Swami Nirvanjanananda: Sri Rama questions his guru, “After stilling my mind with pranayama, how do I connect with a higher purpose?” Sage Vasishtha then describes another yoga to Sri Rama: the process of bhakti. He defines bhakti in two aspects: bheda bhakti and abheda bhakti. *Bheda bhakti* is the bhakti of dualism; *abheda bhakti* is the bhakti of total union.

Bhakti is an awareness of the higher nature. When the process of bhakti starts, the object of adoration and the person who adores are two different entities. That is known as bheda bhakti, the bhakti of duality. As long as the bhakti of duality is there, there is separation between the devotee and his maker. The devotee becomes the supplicant and He becomes the giver.

Sage Vasishtha says, “Rama, use the process of bhakti to move from the dual experience of life to a singular experience of life, from being separate from everything else, to a unified and comprehensive experience of life where you

become one with everything.” Sri Swami Satyananda also spoke of this type of attitude and awareness, when he told us to cultivate *atmabhava*, to see yourself in everybody else.

What is the best sadhana for Kali Yuga?

Swami Satyananda: This present age is *Kali Yuga*, the age of darkness. The four ages or *yugas* have four goals for humankind: artha, kama, dharma and moksha. Two of these goals are predominant in Kali Yuga: artha and kama. *Artha* means material wealth: money, property and land. *Kama* means desire. In this age, only these two goals are important and sadhana should be based on these two goals, not on any others. Today, even if one does something good, its goal will be artha and kama. One can perform the highest penance, do kundalini sadhana, say prayers, do tantra sadhana or do Vaishnava sadhana; the goal will be artha and kama. Even if one wishes to see God, the goal will remain the same.

In this age of artha and kama, one can perform only two sadhanas: helping others and chanting God’s name. These are practical ways; not everything is practical. In Kali Yuga, one should not even talk of ideas like liberation. It will remain purely theoretical, like a lecture on water in a desert. One should chant God’s name, whether with a mala or with the breath, spoken or written, whether it is Rama’s name or *Om Namah Shivaya*; it can be any name. In Kali Yuga that is all a person can do. More than this is not possible.

How long does a man live in this age? By the time he approaches forty years his hair begins to grey. A lot of people visit doctors right from childhood, for they are prone to sicknesses. People’s genetic makeup has become weak. Earlier, people used to live for one hundred to two hundred years. Until the age of fifty, they would fulfil their desires. Now, even the enjoyment is not complete. Therefore, during these times it is necessary to do only what is possible and practical, and the only practical thing is to chant God’s name in the morning, afternoon, evening and night for half an hour or fifteen minutes, and do something good for

others. This does not mean securing a benefit for a relative. Helping those in need and those who are suffering is called being altruistic. Apart from these two things, there is nothing else. If one has the time, one can read the *Bhagavad Gita*, the *Ramayana* and the *Srimad Bhagavatam*.

How important is right conduct in bhakti sadhana?

Swami Sivananda: Development of divine love or bhakti is not possible without right conduct. Just as a disease can be cured by medicine as well as by adjusting the diet, so also realization of God can be had by devotion and right conduct. Bhakti is the medicine; right conduct represents dietetic adjustment.

Right conduct is speaking the truth, practising non-violence, *ahimsa*, not hurting the feelings of others in thought, word and deed, not speaking harsh words to anyone, not showing any anger towards anybody, not abusing others or speaking ill of others and seeing God in all living beings. Abusing anyone, hurting the feelings of others, is really only abusing oneself and hurting the feelings of God. Injuring others, *himsa*, is a deadly enemy of bhakti and *jnana*, wisdom. It separates and divides. It stands in the way of realizing unity or oneness of Self.

Will right conduct alone bring realization?

Swami Sivananda: Mere right conduct is not in itself sufficient to bring about salvation. It must be leavened with faith and bhakti. Right conduct and right living prepare the mind to receive God. The ground is well prepared through right conduct. The seed of bhakti can be sown well in the hearts of those who are of right conduct. Pray from the bottom of the heart. Repeat His verses and hymns and control the senses. Eat simple food, wear simple clothing and lead a simple, natural life. Combine all the love you cherish towards all worldly objects – family, wealth, property, relatives, friends, and then apply this combined love towards God. He will be realized this very second.

Why is it important to understand the mind when practising bhakti?

Swami Niranjanananda: First, one needs to be free of the negative, destructive and tamasic conditions in life that cause one to experience lust, anger, aversion, jealousy, hostility and other such emotions, giving birth to cravings and desires. Upon liberation from these tamasic states, one may begin to adopt some positive, sattwic traits and qualities. This is the personal effort to improve oneself, and to move from tamas to sattwa. Kirtan, bhajan, prayer, worship, ritual or mantra japa will not change everything automatically. This does not happen. One can place a plate of food on the table in front of you. You stare at it, touch it and smell it all day long, however, this will not fill the stomach. Until one eats the food, chews it and swallows it, the stomach will not be filled. Similarly, no matter how many mantras one chants, there will be no transformation as one still has to deal with the mind.

When doing mantra japa, where does the mind run away to after the fifth bead? One cannot hold the concentration for ten beads during mantra japa, yet one wants transformation in life. That is why one needs to know the internal enemies, understand them and bring about a spiritual transformation in the worldly tendency of the mind.

What sadhana can help awaken bhakti?

Swami Satyananda: Meeting great yogis and saints is an important way of intensifying bhakti. It is implied if one serves a guru in the mode called *padasevanam*. Also important is constant reflection on one's nature and study of the scriptures. This is called *swadhyaya*. It is part of jnana yoga, though it is also included in Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*.

There are many sadhanas for awakening bhakti. The sadhana of the great bhakta Ramdas was called *mantra upasana*, worship through mantra. It includes the following four practices:

1. Continuous mental and verbal chanting of a mantra. In his case it was *Sri Ram Jaya Ram Jaya Jaya Ram*.

2. Visualization of the form of the guru in one's heart.
3. Identification of every object on which the mind dwells with divinity. Whatever one thinks of, one remembers that it is the form of the supreme.
4. Observation of the mind with the attitude of watching the processes of the mind. This is awareness.

Another great help is to study and think about the infinite events occurring in nature. The sun rises and sets, the moon waxes and wanes, the flowers bloom – each variety almost simultaneously – the birds sing, the clouds float across the sky, babies are born. An infinite number of magical events are occurring around us. A million pages could be written on this subject. Each event is a miracle. How do they happen? What is the force, the intelligence behind these multitudinous occurrences?

Everything is a marvellous miracle. Let these things be continual reminders of the wonder of existence. Let these things remind you of the supreme. Let every action be as worship of the supreme. Let every thought be an expression of devotion. Offer the actions and thoughts to the guru or to the incarnation of the supreme that stirs the heart. This is the way to perfection.

Why is it necessary to prepare oneself for bhakti?

Swami Niranjanananda: Bhakti is the last stage of yoga. Yoga is generally defined as union, and the highest form of union is between the individual being and the higher being. Can this union between the individual and the higher being take place without one's life being transformed? The answer is, "No." Can the union between the individual being and the higher being remain only a meditative process? No, for that to happen one has to go through the different layers of one's personality.

In the Bible, Ezekiel had a vision of seven veils and he removed them one at a time. These seven veils are the curtains of the chakras. Each chakra has a curtain, a covering that does not allow the divine light to shine through.

That light is definitely shining, yet it is behind the seven curtains: mooladhara curtain – sensuality and insecurities, swadhisthana curtain – fears and inhibitions, manipura curtain – aggression and conditioned feelings in relation to family and friends. These different curtains have to be opened, and the way to do this is through the process of yoga, starting with the pains, diseases and imbalances of the body. After harmonizing the body, one has to work on the mental plane to remove the imbalances and diseases of the mind, intellect, emotions, intuitive awareness, and even the psyche. They all represent levels which, when attained, will open the curtain of a chakra.

Therefore, in order to experience the final state of bhakti, one has to go through the process of yoga. Sri Swami Satyananda has said clearly for the benefit of everyone, “For those who want to identify with my mission, with what I am trying to give to people, the point of identification is yoga.” Not jnana yoga, not even bhakti yoga. Jnana becomes a head-trip and bhakti becomes a fluctuating, flirtatious experience. Between the flirtation of bhakti and the heart, and the head-trips of jnana and power, where does the individual stand?

Sri Swami Satyananda has made it clear that unless one has gone through the various stages of yoga, one should not attempt to experience higher bhakti. It will not work out, and it is also possible to lose one’s mind. If one tries to inflate a bicycle tyre with the same amount of air required for a car tyre, what will happen? It will burst. In order to put 26 pounds of air pressure in a tyre, it is necessary to have the appropriate tyre, and 26 pounds of air pressure in a bicycle tyre is not going to work out.

Once Sri Swami Satyananda was asked, “Is it possible to become realized in one lifetime?” He replied, “No, it is not possible.” He was again asked, “But we come to yoga, or we follow a religion or other mystical systems in the hope that we will become enlightened.” Sri Swamiji answered, “Yes, what you are saying is correct, but you have to understand one thing. The body has limitations, the

mind has limitations, and enlightenment is a transcendental experience. This transcendental experience cannot be had with a non-transcendental mind and body.” Therefore, what must be done? One has to change the quality of the body and mind and make them transcendental before that experience can manifest.

The purpose of yoga or other mystical systems – tantra, Vedanta, Samkhya or whatever – is to prepare the body and mind of an individual by helping to change the quality of their nature. Therefore, the aim of yoga is preparation. The final result is natural and spontaneous. People suffer from a disease and start doing some practices. They start following a discipline to overcome the disease and continue to practise regularly. When the disease is eradicated they stop the treatment. The mind, environment and feelings are diseased and have to be treated. One should not think of health without undergoing treatment; one should not think of bhakti without undergoing the treatment of yoga; and one should not think of God until one can handle one’s own mind.

With what sentiment should one offer items to God?

Swami Satyananda: If one really loves God and then gives a little present of flowers, it is pure bhakti, but if one does not really love God and just goes on giving a few sweets and flowers, it is not bhakti. There are many stories about this type of bhakti. The path of devotion is the path of sublimated emotion. It is full of inner strength. The person who does not have worldly emotions cannot have divine emotions. It is impossible. A person who is dry cannot cry for God.

BECOMING A BHAKTA

What qualities are required to become a bhakta?

Swami Satyananda: There are two types of bhakti: ritualistic and divine. Ritualistic bhakti will not help ultimately. One can only be a bhakta if one has faith, and faith is always blind; it is never backed by intellectual convictions. If one wants

faith and intellectual conviction to co-exist, both will go on fighting like co-wives and neither of them will help. If one has faith, one has bhakti; if one has no faith, one has no bhakti.

Bhakti is the path of love and therefore of remembrance. The path of remembrance is only possible when one loves someone, and when one remembers him or her, that is the only person who exists. It is not actually what is called a vision. If one has never seen God, how can one believe in him? How can one love him? If one has seen God, one can love him. Those who have got inborn faith and love for God should always go through the path of bhakti yoga. They will easily reach the point where there is no mental derangement, no stomach upset and no heat, nothing of the sort in their spiritual practice.

Can one become a true bhakta through books or a guru?

Swami Satyananda: It is very difficult to become a true bhakta. One can practise any other yoga through willpower. One can read a few books and keep thinking about the reality of Brahman. Any great author can impress one about the mystic practices, and then one will do them. If one reads some of the books on karma yoga, one can practise that also, but even if one reads the Bible and *Ramayana* a hundred times, one cannot become a bhakta.

Only one who has devotion from birth, in one's original nature, should practise bhakti yoga. It comes on its own spontaneously. A bhakta is not as serious as a raja yogi. A bhakta has surplus emotions, and a person with surplus emotions does not know how to adjust them except with God. If one does not have surplus emotions, or if one does but is adjusting them in other places, one cannot be a bhakta. This is the secret of bhakti yoga.

What makes one a bhakta?

Swami Niranjanananda: A *bhakta* is one who is devoted, who follows the path of bhakti. Bhakti is a practice, not an emotion, state of mind, idea or philosophy. It is a process. In

bhakti, nine different stages have been defined, one evolving into the next, much in the same way as the raja yoga system.

The first form is being in the company of saints. Saints are rare these days. It is not an easy thing to find a true saint standing on the corner of the street. Being in the company of a saint can also mean that one has to be aware of spirituality and of other identities. One has to become aware of one's own spirit. When one is able to change the environment within and around, one can be termed a first-degree saint. Being in the company of saints is the aspect of bhakti which evolves the awareness of the inner nature.

The second form of bhakti is listening to something inspiring about the lives of saints, which can create an urge within to raise one's consciousness. It can enable one to find something more positive and constructive in life. The devotee can actually control the manifestation of each and every state of mind, emotion and intellect.

Bhakti does not mean blind devotion; rather, it is a process of consciousness related to a feeling or an emotion. Once one is able to alter this state of consciousness which is related to an emotion, then one can also transform the selfish emotions into selfless ones.

A bhakta is a person who follows the path of bhakti yoga, not someone who sits starry-eyed in front of the guru and keeps on staring without blinking, and saying how pure and beautiful everything is. That represents an unreceptive state of mind, where the real essence is not being captured; rather, it is ignored because of the conditioning of the mind and emotions. Even the search for transcendence is ignored for life remains external; it does not become internal.

How can one continue to become a more devout bhakta and attain the love of God?

Swami Satyananda: When the dal is too thin, how can it be thickened? By mixing a little refined flour into it or mixing in curd? If it is left to cook longer, the excess water is boiled away and the dal becomes thick. Similarly, to become a

devout bhakta, one keeps on putting more devotion into one's life by regular practice. There is no other remedy. The goal is difficult but practice is easy. With regular practice one will see the difference, and the goal will be achieved. Doesn't a school child eventually obtain an MA degree by first going to primary school, then high school, then college, then university?

In spiritual life the course is also graded. Everybody wishes to attain the love of God in this lifetime, in this body, but it does not happen like that because it is not that easy. How interesting it would be if all students graduated from university at the same time with an MSc degree, a PhD and a DLitt, but this cannot happen because they are all studying at different levels. Similarly, everyone wants to attain God in one lifetime, but if all people were to leave Ayodhya, the place would be desolate and forlorn. This is not the law of creation. There must be someone ahead and someone lagging behind. In spiritual life only one thing is essential: to refine the quality of bhakti, just as one tries to improve the quality of the dal.

What interferes with one's expression of love for the Divine?

Swami Satyananda: It is difficult to express this love because there is so much covering, so much interference. People love their children, money, property, and so on, but they are unable to love God due to many disturbances and diversions. As a result, the divine love for God in the heart is unable to express itself, or it cannot be felt. The moment one is purified, everything is all right, and bhakti evolves like a light in the darkness.

Is a true human being a bhakta?

Swami Niranjanananda: There is a whole discussion in Chapter 12 of the *Bhagavad Gita* which is about bhakti yoga. Bhakti is a state of being where the ego has been totally surrendered, allowing the inherent creative qualities of life to

manifest spontaneously and naturally. Being without pride, without ego, being balanced in pleasure and pain, having a forgiving nature and being content is like being an eternal yogi with firm determination.

In this way, many different qualities have been enumerated, and the attainment of these qualities makes one a bhakta, where the ego does not stand in the way for it has been surrendered to the will of God. When that ability has been attained one becomes a human being. Intellect and knowledge are not the only means through which one becomes a human being; they are only a part of this process of bhakti.

BHAKTI YOGA FOR EVERYONE

How can bhakti yoga benefit people not interested in spiritual life?

Swami Satyananda: Bhakti yoga is one's personal yoga, something which one can understand for oneself but will find difficult to explain to others. It is my experience, not part of my intellect. I have studied karma yoga, kriya yoga, jnana and raja yoga in books, but bhakti yoga is a personal spiritual practice to which I have been clinging from the beginning of my spiritual career. It is not that I disagree with any other form of yoga because I know that people have different temperaments. Swami Sivananda said, "Bhakti yoga is the easiest, quickest, safest and best method, not only for self-realization, but for any kind of accomplishments in this material world." Even if one is not interested in spiritual realization but seeking some personal idea of truth, it can help. For a person with ambitions and accomplishments pertaining to this external life and this materialistic society, bhakti yoga can definitely help.

How can bhakti yoga improve the life of a householder?

Swami Satyananda: It can be understood why bhakti is such an overwhelming topic of life, especially in today's world where millions and millions of people question the exis-

tence of God. Philosophers and other great thinkers write about God in a manner most people can never understand. They write about God, they fight about him, but they don't realize how simple God really is. He is without complications and any need for intellectual attainments. It is not through the intellect, affluence, reading scriptures or through countless prayers that one will reach God. Even the most illiterate person, knowing nothing of this modern world, can have the vision of God and perceive the miraculous from him.

Once this path is open, one's whole life will become clear. It is like a green signal. One goes to work in the morning, brings home some money for the family, drives the car, eats food and participates in the other daily activities of a normal working person. Any problem that arises, may it come, and one knows that it will not be a trouble because God will help one through all life's situations. It is not necessary to say prayers, at least not those which are worded by poets. Prayer is internal; it is not in the words, but in the feeling. How is love expressed? In feelings or words? It is a feeling and that feeling is prayer.

How can bhakti be applied in life to purify the senses?

Swami Niranjanananda: The first attainment of bhakti is purification of the senses. This means that whatever one sees, hears, touches, smells or tastes, one accepts all as given by God. One does not try to fulfil one's own wishes and desires through the senses. This body, mind and emotions are God's gifts, people still misuse them. A knife has been given with the feeling that it be used to chop vegetables, to help cook, however, one misuses the knife by employing it to hurt someone. The fault is not that of the knife, but the mind that uses it.

As long as the intellect is stuck in and directed by selfishness, it will be negative and tamasic. The selfish intellect can never be sattvic, disciplined and balanced. For this reason purification of the senses is necessary. One must experience

the *param tattwa*, the supreme element, in all that one smells, sees, touches and tastes. The senses should not be used merely to gratify oneself. If one sees something beautiful, one should perceive the supreme element in it. When one listens to a speech, the supreme element is heard in it. When smelling a fragrance, the supreme element is smelt in it. While touching, the supreme element is felt in that experience.

Swami Sivananda used his spectacles and pen carefully. In his lifetime, not a thing slipped out of his hands, fell and broke. How expanded his awareness was! He was extremely alert and aware towards the things others treat with negligence and carelessness. He was aware of where he was keeping his dhoti, how he was folding it; he did not just throw the dhoti on a chair. No, he honoured the dhoti, the pen, the spectacles and the paper. He must have experienced some element or energy in those things. He was able to see the element of God in the inanimate, in everything: "You are the ray of awareness in the inanimate." This is the nature and quality of God. The senses, mind, thoughts, emotions and the soul are all purified through bhakti.

What kind of attitude helps to overcome the distractions to bhakti?

Swami Satyananda: There are many distractions on the spiritual path: children, household chores, job, money, but these are not the aim of life. They are the means, but not the end. Life is the means to achieve the end. Wife, husband, children, money, joy and sorrow, success and failure, loss and gain are all the means but not the end. There is only one ultimate aim, which people have forgotten. Everyone is self-centred. People have cheated the Being who has given them this body. Such self-centeredness! A saint has said, "I proved so disloyal that I forgot Him who created me."

Most of the time is spent in making money, but bhakti is like the desire of a man for a woman. He thinks about her in the office, in the toilet, while sleeping, all the time. Kabirdas says the same in another way:

One should always remember the Lord,
As water bearers are aware of their water pot.
Kabir says, after giving thought to it,
That water bearers may talk and walk,
But their attention never leaves the pot.
One should always remember the Lord
As the cow recalls her calf.
Kabir says that even while grazing,
The cow never forgets her calf.
One should always remember the Lord
As a passionate man imagines the object of passion.
Kabir declares it openly to all alike
That then and only then will Rama be pleased.

How does a bhakta reconcile love of God and love of family?

Swami Satyananda: God is the centre of life. Bhakti and love are the main duty of every human being. Animals only eat, sleep, procreate and seek security. Humans alone can think of God, investigate God and dedicate his whole life to God. An elephant or a donkey, a snake, a peacock or a monkey can't do it. Only man can practise bhakti. If that is the truth and if that is the law of nature, then the prime duty of everyone is divine bhakti. Bhakti is the first duty. Family is the next duty.

This is what the gopis told Krishna. Sri Krishna tried to discourage them by saying, "Go home. Look after your children. Look after your husbands." But they said, "No, no, no! Those are secondary duties!" Vedic dharma also says the same thing. Even Christianity and Islam say the same thing: God first, everything else second, if at all necessary.

What else can a householder do to cultivate devotion?

Swami Sivananda: Every act must be done that awakens the emotion of bhakti. Keep the pooja room clean, decorate the room, burn incense, light a lamp, keep the seat clean.

Bathe and wear clean clothes. Apply vibhooti or bhasma and kumkum on the forehead. Wear a rudraksha or tulsi mala. These produce a benign influence on the mind and elevate the mind. They generate piety and help to create the necessary *bhava* or feeling to invoke the deity that one wants to worship. The mind will be easily concentrated.

Practising right conduct, satsang, japa, smaran, kirtan, prayer, worship, serving saints, residing in pilgrimage places, serving the poor and the sick with divine bhava, observing varna ashrama duties, seeing the presence of God in all beings, prostrating before the image and saints, renouncing earthly enjoyments and wealth, charity, austerities and vows, practising ahimsa, satyam and brahmacharya; all these will help you develop bhakti.

How can a worldly mind be elevated to develop bhakti more fully?

Swami Satyananda: There is a story which is told about Ramakrishna Paramahansa. One day a disciple came to him and asked, "How can I see God?" Ramakrishna said, "It is easy. Do you love your wife, your son, your bank balance? Do you remember them often?" The man replied, "Yes, I remember them practically every moment of the day." So Ramakrishna said, "Okay, now take that love for your wife, son and bank balance, and give it all to God. If you can love only God with that same intensity, He will come to you soon." That man went away and started loving God. When he came back to Ramakrishna he said, "I love God so much that I do not remember my wife, my son and my money. However, you said that I would meet Him soon, but fifteen days have passed and I have not yet met Him."

Later, Ramakrishna took the same disciple across the Ganga in a small boat. When they reached the middle of the river, Ramakrishna tossed the man into the water and told the boatman to row on. The disciple was struggling in the water, gasping for breath and fighting for life with every ounce of his strength. Finally, Ramakrishna went back

and picked him up. After some time, when the man had recovered from his dunking, Ramakrishna asked, "How did you find the experience?" The disciple replied, "Only one thing was in my mind – how to survive, how to live, I may die."

This is the way one should think and feel when sitting for meditation. There should be nothing in one's mind but guru, nothing but the deity. However, this feeling is not there for one has been practising dhyana yoga without developing one's love to the fullest extent.

What role does maya play and how can it be overcome?

Swami Niranjanananda: Bhakti should not be seen as a mystical or spiritual expression of oneself; rather, it should be seen as a means to come closer to the divine nature that exists within. God has two powers. One power is known as *maya*, the force of illusion which takes one away from God. The other power is known as *bhakti*, the force of devotion which brings one closer to God. Maya and bhakti are two diametrically opposed forces of God's divinity. Therefore, just as one is involved in the world and the experience of maya, one has to make an effort to become involved in the experience of bhakti.

Those who live in the world of maya condition themselves according to the laws of nature, of maya, according to self-made laws. The laws of nature and maya become *bhagya*, or destiny. The laws that are created in one's own minds become karma. Therefore, destiny and karma belong to the realm of maya.

It can definitely be said that in the world of maya one is completely dominated by the senses, mental expressions, egos and attachments. The expression of the human personality is not of bhakti, and bhakti is definitely not thinking about God. Bhakti is not an imposed discipline; it is the process of unravelling the personality from the bondage of maya.

In order to experience bhakti, the power that can bring one closer to one's divine nature, there are certain conditions

that one must fulfil. One condition is learning to be simple. Simplicity does not mean that one reduces the external needs, becomes a beggar and tries to lead a natural life. No, simplicity refers to mental states – acquiring the ability to be innocent despite a high intellect, despite having a keen and sharp mind. Simplicity is a natural expression of a mind at rest. Thus, one has to make an effort to be at rest. Not R.I.P (rest in peace), but R.I.H (rest in harmony). Harmony is the quality of mind which needs to be developed in order to experience simplicity in life. Harmony and simplicity are the two important keys to bhakti. Bhakti represents a state of being where there is no conflict of ego and self, or with the external environment. It also implies acceptance, understanding, wisdom, knowledge and awareness. The moment one stops fighting with oneself and accepts situations, one attains harmony.

This harmony leads to the experience of simplicity – the spontaneous, unconditioned expression of the inner forces and energies. This is an important aspect of bhakti. Struggling against the current of life is maya. Flowing with the current of life is bhakti. Of course, the definition and concept of bhakti changes from person to person. Whatever form of bhakti one chooses, the ultimate aim is the attainment of purity, of unconditioned consciousness. For this, one must work hard on oneself.

What is the ultimate aim of kirtan, bhajan and mantra practice in bhakti yoga?

Swami Niranjanananda: When the word ‘yoga’ is added to the word bhakti it implies that each and every aspect of one’s personality – the body, including the goose pimples, the mind, the feelings and emotions – must all vibrate at one frequency. Can the whole being vibrate at one frequency? According to yogis it can. The process is bhakti yoga. In order to nurture, develop and perfect bhakti, different methods have been described: kirtan and bhajan being some of them, the repetition of mantra being another.

In the Vaishnava tradition, nine forms of bhakti have been defined. Three of these are thinking about God, chanting the name of God and listening to stories about God. Each of these emphasizes the merger between the physical, mental and spiritual feelings. When the body, including the voice, becomes tuned the external frequency leads to an experience of the internal frequency, the feeling, emotion and transformation of a thought that comes with it. All this leads to the development of a spiritual feeling which is not confined to one individual, but which is universal.

Who is best suited to practise devotion?

Swami Sivananda: Devotion has absolutely nothing to do with age, caste, position or rank or sex. Generally people of the world say they will practise meditation and devotion when they retire, but this is a serious mistake. How can one do serious spiritual sadhana after all one's energy has been squeezed out in service? One can hardly sit even for fifteen minutes. There is not enough strength to discipline the senses. The spiritual seed of devotion must be sown in the heart when one is young, when the heart is tender and untainted. Only then will it strike a deep root, blossom and bear fruit when one becomes old and retires from service. Only then will one have no fear of Yama, the God of death and meet him with a smile.

Rishi Sandilya starts his aphorisms on bhakti with an enquiry into the nature of devotion (sutra 1):

Athaato bhaktijjnaasaa.

Now, then, an enquiry into the doctrine of devotion.

Anybody can become a devotee. Bhakti yoga is open to all. The desire for liberation alone makes one fit to develop devotion and take up the path of bhakti yoga. Merits acquired in previous births generate devotion in the heart in the following birth. Liberation comes to one who is devoted to God.

How can a householder practise bhakti yoga?

Swami Satyananda: If one feels needed by the family and has an obligation to maintain them and look after their comfort, then from today onwards stop crying. There should be no unhappiness in life. On the one hand, if there is unhappiness because the children do not study, or one's wife does not listen and there are quarrels daily, or the cost of living has gone up, or the business is failing, it means one does not want to leave this materialistic world.

Ramakrishna Paramahansa once asked a person who was clinging onto a tree to let go of it. The person replied that it was not his attachment, but the tree itself was clinging onto him. People are clinging onto this materialistic world and that is why it is holding onto them. Therefore, for a person who wants to follow a path leading to God, there cannot be a better path than bhakti. The happiness and pleasure which one had expected but did not receive from one's wife, son, parents and wealth, will definitely come through devotion to God. Tulsidas has said:

Is there any greater benefit than the bhakti of the Lord
Of whom the Vedas, saints and Puranas sing?
Is there any adversity in this world
Equal to not singing praises of Rama,
After getting the body of a human being?

What are the first three limbs of bhakti yoga?

Swami Niranjanananda: Just as raja yoga is a system of mind management, bhakti yoga is a system of emotion management. Bhakti yoga has been a misunderstood yoga. It is often considered the yoga of devotion, a yoga in which one becomes God-oriented, thinking about God and one's relationship with God. As a result, bhakti yoga has been treated as a part of religious behaviour. These ideas of bhakti are wrong because bhakti yoga is a subject that is as deep and as intense as raja yoga. In raja yoga there are eight limbs and in bhakti yoga there are nine limbs. It is *navanga yoga*, nine-

limbed yoga, not *ashtanga yoga*, eight-limbed yoga. It is an entire process of gradually working with the human nature – transforming it, cultivating it and seeing it flower.

The first limb of bhakti yoga relates to associations, being in the company of those who are uplifting and positive. During the day, one associates with people who are caught up in the vortex of the world, who are moving forward in life to fulfil their ambitions, whose entire consciousness and awareness is channelled outwards. When one tries to develop optimism and positivity, one has to associate with people who express those qualities to allow one to develop and nurture a higher way of thinking and expressing.

What kind of people should one associate with and what kind should one avoid? One usually aspires to be with friends and avoids adversaries. Bhakti yoga has gone one step further in defining what kind of a friend one should associate with – a saintly friend, not a sinner friend. Friends can be both saintly and sinners. There are friends who can encourage one to walk the proper path and there are friends who can encourage one to walk the wrong path. There is a beautiful passage in the *Ramayana* explaining the kind of a friend one should associate with: “The one who takes your heart when he goes away from you. Upon separation, your friend takes your heart away with him.” It is a poetic description of course, yet this association has to be observed as its outcome is the unmasking of one’s face.

Therefore, the first step of bhakti yoga is auspicious, pious associations, for it will give a new perspective and support for one’s aspirations. There will be help and guidance to achieve one’s aspirations. Through discussions it will be possible to clear away confusions and doubts. The positive and qualitative nature will develop with the right associations and an optimistic outlook will be retained for life.

The second component of bhakti yoga is understanding what is right, cultivating the appropriate relationship with nature and with the divine. It is identification with the beauty

and quality of spirit. It is important to cultivate balanced emotions, for then the inputs to one's consciousness and mind are always positive, leading to better understanding and growth, changes in attitude and perception.

The third form of bhakti is to become egoless, to be free from the influences of the ego while performing actions and interacting with other people. It is cultivating humility in life. When one becomes free of the arrogant expressions of the self, the inner qualities of the heart manifest, such as compassion, sensitivity, love, humility and so on. The positive that is within everyone develops.

The first three steps of bhakti yoga help to build up positive emotions within. When positive emotions are built up, the conditioned nature can be changed. In this way, the nine stages of bhakti yoga purify the emotions, the heart expression. When one follows the system of bhakti yoga, one becomes truthful to oneself. In life, all the time, every day, every moment one puts on different masks. People are different when they meet their friends; they are different when they meet their clients, their students, their peers. They change their hats so many times during the day that they don't even know which is their real nature.

They put on the mask of falseness, the mask of arrogance, the mask of strength although they are weak and may be breaking inside. They like to project themselves in a way that is appreciated by others. The whole drive in life is appreciation, recognition, friendship and love. This is what society has given to each person and that is what they look for in society. People look for friendship, recognition and love in society.

For love they find a husband or wife, for friendship they develop a circle of equals and peers, and for recognition they try to excel in what they do. Therefore, recognition comes from work, love from home and friendship from society. These are the three things people crave all their life. However, this search is outside and they are projecting themselves outside. They are putting on many masks, they

are presenting a different self each time, to each person, to each group.

Why is bhakti yoga suitable for people who are fully immersed in the world?

Swami Satyananda: Philosophers cannot be devotees and those who are renunciates cannot be devotees. To become a devotee it is necessary to first become engrossed in the world. One must love the world so much that one sticks to it like a leech and does not let go. One must love the things of the world with so much intensity that one feels as if one cannot live without them. The same intensity of emotion is just topsy-turvy in bhakti yoga.

When one thinks about someone one hates and considers to be the enemy, the feeling is intense. Even though one continues to do one's daily work, that person is constantly on one's mind, the thought is always there, embedded in one's consciousness. Similarly, while living a material life, one should be constantly aware of God.

One may do pooja if there is time, otherwise it is not important. Bhakti is above pooja. I am not saying that one should stop one's daily pooja, but the bhakti which I am talking about begins when there is an end to pooja.



3

Bhakti Yoga and Other Yogas

Yoga is not something that is completely divorced from daily life. On the contrary, yoga and daily life must be made to merge into each other.

—*Swami Sivananda Saraswati*

SYNTHESIS OF YOGA

Why is it essential to combine the branches of yoga?

Swami Satyananda: It is the duty of those who know that yoga produces an integrated personality to acquaint themselves with all aspects of yoga. It is no use saying that bhakti yoga alone is enough. If it were, why are religious people lying ill in hospitals and taking so many pills? Why are they unable to sleep in their cosy beds? What is needed is an integrated approach to life. Just adding salt to the vegetables does not make a tasty dish. It must be combined with many spices. Life is too complex for one aspect of yoga to suffice. With a comprehensive approach, life becomes rich.

What are the main branches of yoga and who formulated them?

Swami Satyananda: A great rishi known as Sage Patanjali formulated the science of raja yoga. Another rishi known as Vyasa formulated the philosophy of karma yoga in the form

of the *Bhagavad Gita*. Two other sages known as Narada and Sandilya formulated the science of bhakti yoga, and rishi Vyasa formulated the science of jnana yoga. These remain to this day the four main branches of yoga.

How do the different branches of yoga relate to each other?

Swami Satyananda: Some people say yoga is too complicated for them to understand. They find it easier to practise bhakti, but that too is yoga. Saints have laid down that bhakti, karma and jnana are all yoga. Raja yoga of course is common to these three yogas, as salt is to food preparations. Ultimately, the above three yogas become one with raja yoga. Without raja yoga one cannot control the dissipations of the mind. Karma yoga is difficult because one has to act 'treating alike pleasure and pain, gain and loss, victory and defeat' in daily life. Jnana yoga is easier, and bhakti yoga is the easiest to practise.

Thus it will be seen how all-embracing our scriptural concept of yoga is. Whatever may be the divergence of the approaches, the fact remains that the aim of man is liberation by whatever name it is indicated: *moksha* of Vedanta, *vairagya* of the yogi, and Vaikuntha of the bhakta. Sage Patanjali neither disputes Vedanta nor underrates bhakti.

In yoga, there are many methods for various kinds of tensions which are enumerated briefly. For the exhaustion and sublimation of emotional complexes there is bhakti yoga. In order to develop the personality, to bring about a reintegration in the system there is karma yoga, to bring about mental discipline there is raja yoga, and in order to understand one's personality for self-analysis, for self-realization, there is jnana yoga.

What are the five traditional branches of yoga?

Swami Niranjanananda: The yogic tradition and our guru, Sri Swami Satyananda, have stated that there are five principle systems of yoga. The first is hatha yoga, for the body, to

explore the potential inherent in the body and bring it to an optimum state of health and wellbeing. The second is raja yoga, for the mind, to explore the potential of the mind and to go beyond the mental limitations. The third is bhakti yoga, for the emotions, to explore emotions and channel them towards a positive, spiritual direction for uplifting and purifying the consciousness. The fourth is karma yoga, in which one tries to improve oneself through one's behaviour and actions, to interact in an effective, efficient and creative manner with the environment and oneself. In the same way, to harness and properly use the potential of human intelligence they devised the system of jnana yoga.

What is the yoga chakra?

Swami Niranjanananda: The system of yoga taught at the Bihar School of Yoga distinguishes between *bahiranga*, outer, and *antaranga*, inner yoga. They are like two halves of the wheel of yoga, the *yoga chakra*.

Bahiranga yoga – hatha yoga, raja yoga and kriya yoga – allows one to attain *sanyam*, control. One becomes an observer and master of one's actions, behaviours, thoughts and speech. Hatha yoga caters to the needs of annamaya and pranamaya kosha, the dimensions of matter energy. Raja yoga caters to the dimension of the mind, manomaya kosha. With the raja yoga sadhana, there is an opportunity to transform every aspect of one's personality and evolve into a beautiful human being, able to cope with all that comes one's way in a positive, peaceful and creative manner. Kriya yoga caters to the dimension of consciousness, to sensitize one to experience consciousness, going deep into the realization of what it is, and to realize the state of pure bliss in consciousness, which is the spirit. Kriya yoga takes you to the vijnanamaya and anandamaya kosha levels. These three yogas create the environment of sanyam: total awareness, dominance, control, harmony, balance and equilibrium.

When that fine point of balance is attained then the inner transformation begins, the perceptions change, the

attitudes change, the behaviours change, the expressions of life change and yoga becomes a culture, a natural expression of human life. With this, a different experience of the self emerges. In antaranga yoga, the three yogas – karma yoga, bhakti yoga and jnana yoga – are identified as internal, since they help to manage the behaviour patterns and traits of one's personality, aspirations and ambitions, the tamasic and sattwic nature, by managing the subtle influences that make up what one is.

Looking at the whole structure of yoga, one discovers a sequence of progression. The two components that it is made up of, bahiranga yoga and antaranga yoga, have a definite purpose. Both halves together form the complete vision of yoga as seen by Swami Sivananda and Swami Satyananda.

What is the basis of the various approaches to yoga and do they have the same goal?

Swami Satyananda: The aim and the end of human life is to attain liberation from bondage, or self-realization. Many and varied are the ways by which the goal of self-realization can be attained. The main streams of thought divide themselves into three branches: the first, that the self could be realized only through *jnana* or real knowledge; the second, pointing to the path of selfless action for the same goal; and the third, maintaining that devotion to God is the only way to attain the reality. It is all in the mind.

Apparently these three different approaches to the same goal look distinct from each other, but in reality they ultimately converge on one focal point. In any of these three ways, the mind must be centred on one objective. Thus, the crux of the problem centres on the mind. How the mind can be controlled around a fixed objective is the prime question, which has to be resolved before the journey towards the goal of self-realization can begin.

Adi Shankaracharya, in expounding his tenets of the Vedanta philosophy in various texts, has attempted to show that the world is unreal and that the reality, Brahman,

alone is real and immanent. Due to the influence of maya, the individual soul out of ignorance binds itself to the world. His main teaching was to know the self by a process of elimination of all that was non-self; all that was not permanent, unchangeable, blissful and true. Therefore, the mind had to be brought to a state of evenness by a steady practice of self-denial, whereby it could, as a matter of course, turn away from the senses and dwell on the self.

The exponents of the bhakti school of thought emphasized the aspect of surrender and devotion to the supreme God with self-effacement. This also covered the ideal of selfless service, where the concept of devotion was secondary and the seeker took no responsibility as the doer of deeds, but behaved only as an agent of a divine power which he called God or Divinity. Thus he did not attach any importance to the world as nothing belonged to him.

Through karma yoga, the *chitta*, the mind, must be purified; through bhakti yoga, the *vikshepa*, the mental dissipation, must be removed; through raja yoga one must train one's awareness; and through jnana yoga one must know what the reality and truth are. One should be able to analyze the nature of reality, experience and consciousness. Through mantra yoga proper training is given to the mind so that it is liberated from *vishaya vasana*, desire for sense gratification. By the practice of laya yoga one should be able to dissolve the mind for the time being.

What are the basic beliefs underpinning each of the approaches to yoga?

Swami Satyananda: In jnana yoga the aspirant believes that he is supreme consciousness. In karma yoga he feels that the whole world is a manifestation of God, and in raja yoga he thinks that supreme consciousness is God. In bhakti yoga, however, a personal concept of God is essential. The God of a bhakta is not an abstract, metaphysical or philosophical God. For the bhakta, God is as real as himself and it is said by the great saints and sages of India that God is father, mother,

friend, relative or anything at all in life. For a devotee, God can come in the form of a voice or a man, such as a guru.

In India there are thousands of stories depicting this personal concept of the supreme. There are many experiences of God appearing in a manifested state in order to help his devotee. A raja yogi might interpret it as the manifestation of the creative will but a bhakta neither questions nor analyzes where God has come from.

How should one choose a yogic path in order to resolve a physical or mental condition?

Swami Satyananda: In my opinion, the various branches of yoga are the oriental classifications. It is not necessary even to know everything about them. First of all one has to understand what one's problem is. There are so many medicines in the shop; which medicine is one going to take? Definitely according to doctor's prescription. In the same way, if one is physically unwell one must take to asana and pranayama. If one is suffering from depression, hypertension or insomnia one must practise meditation. If one is mentally challenged, one should take to the practice of pranayama. If one is suffering from insecurity, doubt and suspicion one should practise mantra. If one is a disbeliever and has no faith in anything, neither in God nor this law nor that law and one wants to commit suicide, when one does not want to live, one should take to jnana yoga. If one has an unchecked, uncontrolled emotional personality, a lot of passions, anger or greed, one must practise bhakti yoga through kirtan, bhajan or pooja. However, if one does not want to do any of these things, but wants to occupy the mind and improve one's personality and get rid of the evil traits of the personality, one must practise karma yoga. Of course, for this a guru is needed. A teacher is necessary. An inspirer is necessary who will say which particular yoga one should do.

Yoga is a whole science: hatha yoga, raja yoga, bhakti yoga, jnana yoga, kundalini yoga, kriya yoga, karma yoga. By themselves they do not represent the whole of yoga.

They represent the various faculties which yoga embodies. Therefore, is it not the right time for all yoga teachers to be well versed in every branch, in every faculty of yoga? Many times the spiritual yoga is taught to pupils but the therapeutic aspects of yoga are discouraged. How illogical is it? How can one realize the higher consciousness without cleansing the mind, emotions and body? Therefore, the preliminary base of every form of yoga is therapeutic. The practice of bhakti yoga treats the schizophrenic tendencies of the mind. The practice of karma yoga treats suppressions and inhibitions. The practice of jnana yoga treats the wrong notions of an individual. The practices of hatha yoga treat the diseases of nadis, prana and the body. The practice of kundalini yoga and kriya yoga treat the psychic symptoms.

Every form of yoga has a therapeutic quality at the base. Not only high blood pressure and diabetes are diseases. Not only rheumatism, arthritis and lumbago are diseases. Nervous depression is also a disease. Jealousy is a disease. Anger and excitement are diseases. Dissatisfaction is a disease. Restlessness of mind is a disease. The inability to concentrate the mind on the point on which one wants to concentrate is also a disease. Therefore, the area of therapy is not a limited area.

Some people practise hatha yoga because they suffer from diabetes, obesity and other illnesses. Hatha yoga can help an aspirant to cleanse the bowels, strengthen and purify the nerves but it certainly can't remove his ignorance. The yoga that removes ignorance is bhakti yoga. I am not demeaning hatha yoga, but if an aspirant wants to progress on the spiritual path and go deeper, he will have to undertake the path of bhakti.

How do bhakti, karma and jnana yoga complement each other?

Swami Niranjanananda: Bhakti yoga and karma yoga have been classified as separate yogas. However, there is an important point that needs to be understood. Hatha yoga, raja yoga, kundalini yoga and kriya yoga are yoga practices,

whereas karma yoga and bhakti yoga are states of mind achieved through yoga practices.

Just as there are eight stages of raja yoga, starting with the yamas and ending with samadhi, in the same manner, there are nine stages or practices of bhakti yoga. These practices lead to a state of mind that is finely tuned, pure, balanced, one-pointed, firm, without distractions and dissipations. The twelfth chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita* is devoted to bhakti yoga. It lists the qualities and state of mind of the bhakta, devotee or aspirant. This description leads one to understand that bhakti is a way of confronting the negative and reactive components of the mind. When these components are brought under control, the mental sensitivity and clarity indicates bhakti.

The nine stages of bhakti guide the individual's involvement and participation to attain this fine-tuning of the mind and emotions. The nine forms of bhakti have been enumerated in the *Srimad Bhagavatam*, the *Ramayana*, the *Bhagavad Gita*, and in other classical texts as well. In the *Ramacharitamanas*, in the 'Aranyakanda', the first form of bhakti is opening the mental doors to new ideas that can uplift you. It is being open, receptive and understanding. Associating with something virtuous can help to uplift one's nature, whether it is a person, an idea, a thought or an action. Diverting the mind from external, sensual and sensorial involvement and fixing it in higher consciousness is a second form of bhakti. The third form of bhakti is becoming egoless, not by subjecting oneself to situations where one begins to think that one no longer has an ego, yet by consciously working with one's own personality. In this way bhakti develops gradually.

Karma yoga and bhakti yoga are states of mind that have to be achieved, rather than as practices which have to be perfected. In this regard karma yoga, jnana yoga and bhakti yoga complement each other, as without karma yoga, bhakti yoga cannot be achieved, and without jnana yoga, karma yoga cannot be perfected. Therefore, jnana yoga, karma yoga and bhakti yoga have to be practised simultaneously.

What are the strengths of the different paths of yoga?

Swami Satyananda: According to the temperamental predominance there are four paths: karma yoga, bhakti yoga, raja yoga and jnana yoga. If the aspirant is predominantly emotional then bhakti yoga is the path; if predominantly dynamic then karma yoga; if predominantly psychic then raja yoga; if predominantly intellectual then jnana yoga.

There is always a combination of all the four elements in each person with the predominance of one. Therefore, the aspirant should combine all the four with the predominance of one. Karma yoga is important for it covers the whole scheme of life. Bhakti yoga is important for it is able to channel the wild emotions. Raja yoga is important because it is able to release the unconscious and subconscious negative forces. Jnana yoga is important because one knows what one is doing.

Yoga is an important science for man's total development and therefore it is important to understand not to set any limitations to the practices and science. Karma yoga improves the relationship with one's own life. Bhakti yoga improves the relationship with one's emotions. Jnana yoga improves the quality of the intellect. Hatha yoga improves the quality of the body and raja yoga improves the quality of the mind.

The practices of bhakti yoga create a balance in the dissipated emotional personality of the human being. The practices of raja yoga can clear up the complications and complex situations in the psychic body of the individual. This is about the treatment of sickness, but yoga can also transform the quality of the human mind and behaviour. Transformation of the human nature, transformation of consciousness and transformation of the quality of mind are important not only for the individual but also for society.

How much bhakti yoga can one practise in relation to the other yogas?

Swami Satyananda: It is understood that the various systems of sadhanas have to be placed properly. If they are not placed properly, there is going to be chaos in one's

expressions of life, personality and behaviour. That is the reason why many spiritual people look very crazy. They look crazy because they are moving through a process that is responsible for lopsided development.

When I talk about yoga I talk about integral yoga, yoga of synthesis. I do not overemphasize just one aspect of yoga because I do not think it is right. One thing is certain. If one is cooking two kilos of vegetables, one does not put in two kilos of salt or two kilos of butter. There is a correct proportion. In the same way, in the practice of yoga there is also a correct proportion.

There must be seventy percent karma yoga; twenty percent raja yoga, hatha yoga, kundalini yoga, and so on; five percent jnana yoga and five percent bhakti yoga. If one tries to practise seventy percent dhyana yoga, kundalini yoga, kriya yoga, tantra yoga, then one will go to the mental hospital. Or if one practises seventy percent jnana yoga, then one becomes an intellectual giant but remains a pygmy in other areas of the personality. If one practises seventy percent bhakti yoga one will be saying, "Oh God, Oh God, this microphone is working because of God's grace. This flower is red because of God's grace. Oh, today it is not raining because of God's grace." You bring God everywhere, even into the toilet. Too much bhakti is not good for it brings about an imbalance. Too much raja yoga also causes an imbalance and too much of jnana yoga creates imbalance too. People are gross and therefore they need a greater proportion of karma yoga.

In order to purify the mind, it is necessary to practise karma yoga. Bhakti, raja and jnana yoga are important for a balanced development, but karma yoga should predominate because if the mind is not purified of the dross, if the samskaras are not properly resolved, they obstruct the process of inner as well as mundane experience. With an impure mind there are a lot of mental problems which arise from one's interaction with day-to-day life and the people around.

With the awakening of kundalini or with the practice of tantra the perception changes, intuition changes and the possibility of discovery of deeper forms of knowledge becomes possible. Karma yoga, bhakti yoga and raja yoga are meant to deal with the various problems one faces during this process of transformation.

Bhakti yoga is necessary in order to overcome the hurdles; for the mind in its primordial stage has a lot of crude material in it.

Yoga is a system, a technique for stilling the turbulence of the mind, for harnessing it and maintaining its resilience. It aims at developing an integrated personality. The best way to achieve this is a synthesis of bhakti, karma, jnana and raja yoga. No one should be all intellect or all emotion. There should be a happy blending of both; otherwise one will have no peace in life.

What is the fruit of all yogas?

Swami Sivananda: The four kinds of liberation and the bhava samadhi of bhaktas, the lower samadhis of a raja yogi (savitarka, nirvitarka, savichara, nirvichara, sananda, sasmita, etc.) and the lower savikalpa samadhis (shabdavidya, dhrishyanavidya) of a Vedantin all lead to the experience of cosmic consciousness. The ways of approach may be different, but the fruit is the same. The experiences are common. Intuition, revelation, inspiration and ecstasy are synonymous terms.

The state of cosmic consciousness is grand and sublime. It induces awe, supreme joy and highest unalloyed felicity, free from pain, sorrow and fear.

What is the significance of the statement ‘now therefore’?

Swami Satyananda: As long as a man's wishes, desires and karmas persist he should follow the path of bhakti. Bhakti marga means pooja, reading the scriptures, japa and satsang. On the yogic path, asana and pranayama are for everyone; while satya, ahimsa, brahmacharya, asteya and aparigraha

should be practised according to one's station in life, one's *varna ashrama*.

Dharana, dhyana and samadhi are the practices of raja yoga. This is ashtanga yoga which is practised only after bhakti yoga. Read the original shastras and find out when the practice of yoga starts. The first sutra of Maharishi Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* says: *Atha yoganushasanam*. Here the word *atha* means 'now therefore'. 'Now' that you have passed your graduation, you may study further. 'Now' that you have practised bhakti yoga we will tell you the discipline of yoga. This is how it is written in all the sutras. The first sutra in the *Brahma Sutras* is: *Atha ato Brahmajijnasa*. 'Now we seek to learn the knowledge of Brahman'. 'Now' indicates that you have practised bhakti yoga and have completed the sadhana of raja yoga, 'now' you can study and practise Vedanta. These practical texts of the vedic dharma which may be called yoga or knowledge or Vedanta are not merely for one lifetime. To attain this state, a brahmachari in his station, a householder in grihastha ashrama and a sannyasin in his station of sannyasa ashrama must practise sadhana.

What are the historical phases yoga has gone through and what is its present phase?

Swami Niranjanananda: Yoga deals with life in totality and the aim of yoga has always been to promote understanding, harmony and inner awakening. Understanding creates a better environment for people to interact in. Harmony creates a better environment for people to handle their mental states so they can live life without excess struggle. The awakening of the human personality provides us with the opportunity to use our inherent potential and faculties. This has been the basic approach of yoga and according to the needs, personalities and mentalities of people, different methods have been adopted from time to time.

The cultural history of India, where yoga was preserved, shows that in medieval times, bhakti yoga was the most prevalent yoga in Indian society. That was a time when great

bhaktas and saints walked the land. Prior to that, there was a re-emergence of hatha yoga by people like Swatmarama, author of *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, Sage Gheranda, author of *Gheranda Samhita*, Goraknath and Matseyendranath, foremost propagators of hatha yoga, and Dattatreya, author of *Dattasamhita*. In another era, raja yoga was developed and practised throughout the nation. There also came a time when the practices of kriya and kundalini yoga were propagated by people like Babaji, Sri Yuktेशwara and Paramahansa Yogananda.

After the strong bhakti movement with people like Mirabai, Surdas, Kabirdas and so many others, there was a gap when no bhaktas came forward. Then jnanis came, followed by another gap after which hatha yogis came. Then there was a further gap, yet I have not found one instance in the cultural history of India when there was no yoga in the country. There has always been some aspect of yoga prevalent at any given time.

Now is the era or the age of integral yoga. An integral yoga awakening is taking place which does not follow any specific yoga. As Sri Swami Satyananda says, an individual is a combination of the faculties of head, heart and hands. Therefore, it is necessary to awaken these three faculties together. What is the use of awakening the faculties of the head (intellect) if the faculties of the heart (emotions) and hands (practical action) are not being used? What is the use of awakening only the faculties of the hands (creativity, action and performance), if the head and heart are not being used? What is seen now is a new direction in yoga, however, the aim of yoga has always been the same: understanding, harmony and awakening. With understanding, harmony and awakening one can walk to enlightenment without any problem.

Why is it necessary to combine various yogas?

Swami Satyananda: In the system of yoga certain steps are given. First, one practises karma yoga, then bhakti yoga, raja yoga and then one goes higher. By practising these yogas one will be training oneself properly. If one practises raja

yoga or laya yoga straight away, one can run into problems because the samskaras are not known.

One can realize, understand one's nature, personality, samskaras and weaknesses only when one practises karma yoga. Through the practice of karma yoga one realizes that one has attachment, desires, jealousy and anger. One realizes that one has violence and passion. Without exposing oneself in karma yoga one cannot realize the problems of personality.

Therefore karma yoga is considered to be the foundation of all yogas. Any practice of yoga without this foundation is bound to collapse. Concentration of mind is also very difficult. One has to fight with the mind all the time. One fights for three months, six months and finally surrenders. It is said that bhakti yoga should be practised because in the practice of bhakti yoga, concentration becomes spontaneous, natural and smooth.

There are nine methods of practising bhakti, but out of all these nine methods the best way is kirtan, because the practice of kirtan is non-intellectual and has the rhythm of sound, which automatically develops concentration and one-pointedness. Then come the practices of hatha yoga and raja yoga; for if the body is not pure in the awakening of kundalini it can create sickness. Many saints and yogis suffered for their whole lives; due to poisons in the body they developed disease.

How will one reach perfection in life?

Swami Niranjanananda: Swami Sivananda says that human nature is composed of the qualities of head, heart and hands. For an integrated development and nurturing of human life, it is important to work on these three aspects together. The heart represents the practice of bhakti yoga, the hands represent the practice of karma yoga and the head represents the practice of jnana yoga. In this context, hatha yoga and raja yoga are the base platforms from which one can launch into the higher experiences of yoga.

Hatha yoga and raja yoga are the foundations on which one builds the strength of emotions, intelligence and interactions in life. In the sequence of development, the practices of hatha yoga represent the primary class of yoga. The practices of raja yoga represent the high school of yoga. Bhakti yoga, karma yoga and jnana yoga represent the university education of yoga. These yogas take one to the perfection of body, mind, emotions, performance and intelligence.

What is the best combination of yogas?

Swami Sivananda: The individual is a composite of three fundamental factors: cognition, feeling and will. There are people with three kinds of temperaments: the active temperament, the emotional temperament and the rational temperament. There are the three yogas: jnana yoga for the person of enquiry and self-analysis or rational temperament, bhakti yoga for the person of emotional temperament and karma yoga for the person of active temperament. One yoga is as efficacious as another.

The *Bhagavad Gita* formulates the theory of the three *margas*, paths: the jnana marga, the bhakti marga and the karma marga. According to the teaching of the *Bhagavad Gita* there is no conflict among the three. The *Bhagavad Gita* harmonizes wonderfully the philosophy of action, devotion and knowledge. All the three must be harmoniously blended if one wishes to attain perfection. One should have the head of Adi Shankaracharya, the heart of Buddha and the hands of King Janaka. The three horses of this body-chariot move smoothly and the destination can be reached safely and quickly. Only then can one rejoice in the Self within.

Bhakti yoga cannot be separated from karma yoga or raja yoga. These yogas are not watertight compartments. A blending of all the yogas is necessary if one wants to achieve rapid spiritual progress. Bhakti yoga is the consummation of karma yoga, raja yoga is the consummation of bhakti yoga and jnana yoga or vedantic realization of unity is the consummation of all the rest.

How do karma, jnana and bhakti yoga evolve from one another?

Swami Niranjanananda: First of all one has to look at the concept of the word yoga, meaning harmony, and then relate this harmony to karma, jnana and bhakti.

In my opinion, karma comes first, jnana comes second and bhakti comes third. Karma happens naturally and spontaneously, but there is an absence of knowledge and awareness regarding karma. The moment we develop awareness and knowledge of karma there is jnana. Jnana in its final stage gives birth to bhakti. Here, bhakti means faith, conviction and the absence of ego. If ego manifests then one is not a bhakta.

Why does even a correct blend of yogas not lead to self-realization?

Swami Satyananda: Yoga means karma yoga, bhakti yoga, raja yoga and jnana yoga. Each yoga has something to complete in one's life. Bhakti yoga channels the emotions. It should be practised before raja yoga or with raja yoga. Karma yoga helps to balance the impurities and distractions of the mind. If the yogas are practised systematically, then one will never come across the problems created by the mind and emotions in the practices of meditation.

The reason why one faces the mind in meditation is because one has not treated the mind through bhakti yoga and karma yoga. In yoga, meditation is considered to be the highest point, but in modern countries meditation is overemphasized and incorrectly emphasized. Meditation is a very high stage and therefore needs a lot of preparation. If one does not practise the other forms of yoga, one will have to face difficulties in meditation.

Karma yoga is the philosophy of one's relationship with life. What is the relationship with everything around and what should be the attitude to work, family, children, problems, enemies and everything else? How should one react in success and failure, love and hatred, victory and

defeat? This is important. Karma yoga is the philosophy that fixes the relationship with everything else in the world in such a way that nothing disturbs the mind at any time, no matter what happens.

In the same way, bhakti yoga is so important, for without it one cannot properly balance the emotions. Therefore, it should be known whom to love. Who can accept all one's love, not react in a bad manner, and at the same time not be boring? Most problems which people suffer today are the problems caused by love or the absence of love. It is necessary to train the emotions as one trains the mind. An untrained mind, untrained emotions and untrained drivers make accidents. Therefore, in bhakti yoga the emotions are channelled to a divinity, in the form of a god, in the form of deva, in the form of guru.

If I love a person he should not exploit me. If he will not exploit me, I will love him more and more. God does not exploit his devotee. In the same way, the guru should not exploit his devotee.

When one has practised karma yoga and bhakti yoga, and then practises raja yoga, the mind automatically becomes quiet. If one does not practise bhakti and karma yoga there are emotional problems and mental problems in meditation; so one must say, "Okay, let them come." For stopping them will be the greatest disaster.

When one practises meditation, raja yoga, one is transforming the deeper and subtler stuff of the mind. When one is interacting with the world and living with other people, one must maintain some sort of discipline which is provided by karma yoga. Karma yoga and raja yoga together enhance one's spiritual evolution, but at the same time one must practise bhakti yoga. Without practising bhakti, supreme devotion, one cannot surrender the ego; one cannot understand the reality of one's being within the context of the whole universe.

Through raja yoga one can develop the mind and transcend the mind. Through hatha yoga one can purify

the body and the nervous system, and create an endocrine, nervous and psychic balance within the framework of the physical body. Through bhakti yoga one can channel the emotions towards sublimation. Through karma yoga one can express one's energy and thereby experience a release.

Self-realization cannot be reached by any yoga for it is not a distance. It is a state of mind, a state of consciousness which is here and now. One doesn't have to go a long way. Karma yoga, bhakti yoga, raja yoga or dhyana yoga do not lead to self-realization. If one wants to go to Bombay from Madras, the train will take one to Bombay, but if one has to go to America that train will only lead one towards America. From Bombay one will have to take a flight to Frankfurt, then another plane to the destination. From the airport one will have to travel to the hotel by car or underground railway, and so on. In the same manner, karma yoga purifies the chitta; bhakti yoga eliminates distractions of the mind; jnana yoga removes *avidya*, ignorance; hatha yoga removes the possibility of suspension of mind, *laya awastha*, and raja yoga helps to integrate and concentrate the wandering tendencies of the mind. That's all.

Even after attaining these states, self-realization cannot be assured because these yogas are negative practices. I am using the word negative in a positive sense. If I want to show a very important person into this room, first I will paint it, clean it and then make everything neat and tidy, so that when the person comes he feels at home. In the same way, these different paths of yoga purify the chitta, but one must still know how to get in.

What is a bhakta's approach to karma yoga?

Swami Sivananda: Even in bhakti yoga one should not abandon actions. One must perform actions but one will have to dedicate the merits or the fruits to God.

How important is bhakti to karma yoga?

Swami Satyananda: Karma yoga and bhakti yoga go hand in hand. Without bhakti yoga, karma yoga cannot be practised. Bhakti comes from within.

How do the different yogas work together?

Swami Satyananda: In dhyana yoga, in meditation, one should not interfere with the quality of awareness. Therefore, one should not suppress the mind or try to withdraw the mind even from the sense objects. One follows any object on which the mind alights and does not damage one's awareness. There comes a moment when objects vanish, but not the awareness. Nobody is there, time is not there and space is not there. That is dhyana yoga. First however, one must have prepared the body with hatha yoga – asana, pranayama, and so on. One must have purified the mind of the effects of the samskaras by living a life of karma yoga, and one must have steadied the mind with bhakti yoga, especially mantra and kirtan.

When the mind is purified, when the veil of avidya is rent asunder, the awakening of kundalini can take place either through mantra yoga, kirtan, or purification of the body by means of karma yoga or pranayama. But how can one do nishkama seva all the time? And who can do kirtan all day and night? There must be a synthesis of the paths – karma yoga, bhakti yoga, raja yoga and jnana yoga.

In bhakti yoga, one controls the emotions and directs them to the higher self. Thereby the mind and prana are controlled. In raja yoga, by pratyahara, by yama and niyamas, by dharana and dhyana, one controls the influence of the mind and consciousness. Thereby, one controls the prana. In hatha yoga one practises pranayama, kumbhaka, moola bandha, jalandhara bandha and uddiyana bandha. By controlling the prana, automatically the mind is suspended. However, not one but all three ways must be taken up because one way is never an efficient way, so the practices are combined. A synthesized practice of hatha yoga, raja yoga and bhakti yoga must be taken up side by side with other yogas.

Karma yoga is the basis of spiritual life. Bhakti yoga is the superstructure and raja yoga is the plaster and inner decoration. Unless one has a solid foundation one cannot

make a beautiful house. Plaster and decorations are not enough. Therefore, throughout the ages ashrams have always been places where both the guru and his disciples had to work very hard.

Jnana comes only after purification of chitta. One may think about one's ishta devata, symbol or Brahman, the cosmic being. One must have an outline for one's thinking, and that is provided by the guru. In jnana yoga the thinking process is absolutely logical. In bhakti yoga there is no place for logic. In raja yoga there is very little use of logic, but in jnana there is no place for illogical thinking. The thinking is systematic and orderly.

How should one synthesize the paths for balanced development?

Swami Satyananda: Renunciation is not freedom. According to the *Bhagavad Gita*, abstaining and refraining from duties and responsibilities is living an incomplete life. The yoga of the *Bhagavad Gita* is known as *poorna yoga*, or complete yoga. If one lays stress on bhakti yoga and says, "No hatha yoga, it is only for sick people. No raja yoga, it is only for swamis. No karma yoga, no jnana yoga. Only singing the name of God." it is called *apoorna yoga*, incomplete yoga.

Just as one has a nice mixture of people or colours, one must have a good combination of yoga because no person is homogeneous. The personality is composed of four essential elements: dynamism, devotion, mysticism and rationalism. This is called complete nutrition in life. According to these needs one should practise karma yoga for dynamism, bhakti yoga for emotions or devotion, raja yoga for mysticism and jnana yoga or Vedanta for rationalism.

It is wrong to say that one has to practise karma yoga first and one becomes expert in karma yoga, then one should take to bhakti yoga and then raja yoga or hatha yoga. No, nothing like that. Aspirants will have to practise all these yogas together. They will have to understand the right time, the right amount and the duration, depth,

intensity and emphasis. Sometimes they have to lay a greater emphasis on karma yoga. In case they have emotional personalities and they do not know how to adjust their surplus emotions of life, they will have to take to bhakti yoga. If they are predominantly psychic then they have to keep on meditating, there should be greater emphasis on meditation, and if they are rational by temperament they have to lay emphasis on jnana yoga.

Why is bhakti yoga essential to the practice of meditation?

Swami Satyananda: When surplus emotions are properly consumed there is peace of mind. The cause of frustration is emotions. The cause of mental disturbance is emotions. Therefore, the path of bhakti yoga is designed to adjust emotions so that when one practises raja yoga the deep-rooted emotions will not cause distractions and disturbance during the moment of practice.

When one just practises raja yoga and no bhakti yoga and karma yoga, one has to try hard to collect the mind together. But why do it that way? Why not accomplish the task by uniting the mind by bhakti yoga? Bhakti is the exact tool for the unification of mental tendencies.

Is there proximity between bhakti yoga and raja yoga?

Swami Sivananda: By fixing the mind again and again on God, all worldly thoughts die by themselves. Bhakti yoga can hardly be separated from raja yoga. There is a blending of these two yogas. Sage Patanjali says that samadhi can be attained through devotion unto God, *Ishwara pranidhana*, or by self-surrender to God. Self-surrender to God is an important item in the kriya yoga and a niyama of raja yoga. *Manamana bhava* is 'merging the mind'. It is a raja yoga sadhana. It is difficult to say where bhakti yoga ends and where raja yoga begins. Raja yoga is the fulfilment of bhakti yoga. There is no hard and fast rule or line of demarcation between bhakti yoga and raja yoga. A raja yogi is also a bhakta. A devotee is also a raja yogi. There is difference only

in name. Sri Krishna gives His word of assurance to Arjuna to encourage him, as he is in a despondent and confused state of mind, by saying, (18:65):

*Manmanaa bhava madbhakto madyaajee maam namaskuru;
Maamevaishyasi satyam te pratijaane priyo'si me.*

Fix thy mind on Me, be devoted to Me, sacrifice to Me, bow down to Me. Thou shalt come even to Me; truly do I promise unto thee, (for) thou art dear to Me.

He who has practised these four vital instructions will be able to effect unconditioned, unreserved self-surrender.

The jnani-bhakta is beyond all cults, creeds, formal religion or rules of society. As the wise man is constantly harmonized and as he is devoted to the One, he is regarded as superior to all the other devotees.

How do the various branches develop human creativity?

Swami Niranjanananda: Karma yoga is the creative expression of performance. Jnana yoga is the creative expression of intelligence. Bhakti yoga is the creative expression of emotions. Hatha yoga is the creative expression of the human body. Raja yoga is the creative expression of the mind. Therefore, yoga should not be thought of as a limited set of practices. It is a process that brings out the creativity from within and makes one a better and happier person.

BHAKTI YOGA – THE GUNAS, MEDITATION AND KIRTAN

How does one choose which yoga to focus on according to one's temperament?

Swami Satyananda: Everybody has his own nature. Some are dynamic by temperament, ambitious and passionate and aggressive. Some are passive, dull and pessimistic, others are balanced. All people do not belong to one category of nature. We are a combination of the three gunas.

The three gunas are known as sattwa, rajas and tamas. Not only human beings, but everything in nature is a combination of the three gunas. In the scope of evolution one *guna*, or one nature, is predominant and the others are subservient. One cannot be only rajasic. One may be predominantly rajasic but will have the other two gunas as well. Therefore, in spiritual life when one has a particular nature one has sometimes difficulty in getting through.

Those who are aggressive, dynamic, passionate and ambitious will have difficulty in practising yoga. They will have difficulties in practising meditation. Therefore, those people should understand that they must practise karma yoga, hatha yoga, bhakti yoga and raja yoga in combination. Those who are pessimistic, lazy and indolent in nature should practise more of karma yoga and hatha yoga and less or not at all raja yoga. Those who are balanced and harmonious by nature, nothing disturbs their mind, they will not practise karma yoga, bhakti yoga, hatha yoga or raja yoga; they just have to practise samadhi yoga. However, everyone is a combination. A person has dynamism, emotion, a psychic personality and rationalization. Therefore, one should practise a combination of karma yoga for dynamism, bhakti for emotions, raja yoga for channelling one's psyche and jnana yoga for directing the intellect.

In the process of spiritual unfolding, one must make use of the gunas and accordingly select a form of yoga. In fact, one need not practise yoga in an orthodox manner. The moment one becomes orthodox in yoga, yoga becomes a religion. If I am good, it is because I am good and not because I wanted to be good. Therefore, aspirants should first of all analyze their own nature and then start the practice of yoga suitable to their evolution.

How does bhakti yoga develop a sattwic nature in the aspirant?

Swami Niranjanananda: Bhakti yoga is not just the yoga of worship, rituals, kirtans, bhajans and mantras. Bhakti yoga

is a simple yoga in which the sattvic or balanced nature is established in one's personality. It is the tamasic and rajasic nature that creates problems in life, in the form of greed, ambition, aggression, desire, passions, fear, insecurity, lethargy and so on. Kirtan, mantra, even one's own religious inclination provide a direction through which one can experience bhakti. If a person is not good at meditation, yet does kirtan and is able to go into the feeling, the kirtan can become a meditative experience. The chanting of mantras can induce higher, blissful states in the mind. However, bhakti becomes most fruitful when it is combined with the other yogas, as the aim of bhakti is to attain inner purity.

How does bhakti yoga influence the activity of the gunas?

Swami Niranjanananda: Bhakti first starts with understanding the conditions of human existence. The nature of the human mind is tamasic. This tamasic mind is one that is constantly under the influence of aversion, jealousy, envy, anger, greed and arrogance. As long as these emotions are expressed in life the mind remains agitated and tamasic. Hatred, greed and anger are all tamasic expressions of the mind. It is in this tamasic state that one experiences the fleeting joys and sorrows of life, and it is by overcoming these conditions that one can attain happiness, peace and prosperity.

Sometimes worship of God is motivated by tamasic thoughts, sometimes by sattvic thoughts and at other times by rajasic thoughts. Regardless of whether tamas, rajas or sattwa inspire you, you are entitled to pray and practise worship. Tamasic or rajasic worship is not erroneous or wrong; however, this type of worship is not the complete description of bhakti.

In bhakti, through the connection between the devotee and God, the devotee experiences luminosity and sattwa, and becomes established in a positive frame of mind. Bhakti is the perfected end, the final attainment of a sattvic lifestyle. Conversely, self-indulgence is the result of a tamasic lifestyle. With this understanding, bhakti becomes a unique sadhana and process of upliftment.

Rishis, munis and saints have said that if one wishes to uplift one's life, one will eventually have to follow the path of bhakti. Samadhi does not improve life; samadhi is the highest experience in life, however, the experience of samadhi does not last. As long as the eyes are closed, one is engrossed in the blissful state of samadhi and meditation, yet the moment the eyes open the thoughts turn towards the objective world and the mind associates with the material world. The extroverted mind causes an obstruction in the continuous flow of inner awareness. When this obstruction arises in the continuous flow of awareness, how can one experience bhakti?

People consider worship to be a form of bhakti. That is true, however, bhakti is also a lifestyle. It is a science of the mind that can liberate one from negative, tamasic conditioning. Bhakti can establish one in a sattvic state to enable one to experience the connection between the *atma*, soul, and *Paramatma*, the Supreme Soul. This is the story of bhakti.

There are two influences in life: maya and bhakti. In the tamasic state one remains influenced by maya, illusion, and in the sattvic state one is under the influence of bhakti. Under the influence of maya one forgets one's real nature and distances oneself from peace; whereas when influenced by bhakti one experiences contentment and peace, no matter how worried and stressed one may be. To go beyond the tamasic state one has to connect the mind and emotions with God.

How does kirtan create the state of pratyahara?

Swami Satyananda: When kirtan is viewed from the point of view of raja yoga, it is the practice of pratyahara. Through kirtan the superficial sense impressions are automatically cut off. The melody, rhythm, sweetness and grandeur of the music promote this spontaneity. If one becomes more and more immersed in the kirtan, the state of pratyahara can reach the point where one loses even the awareness of oneself.

When pratyahara is perfected, whether through trataka, nada yoga or kirtan, there is a point when the mind is completely deprived of experiences and impressions. The mind becomes quiet and this automatically leads to the point of concentration. However, this experience should not be mistaken for being in a state of samadhi.

If one can purify body and mind with asana, why is kirtan necessary?

Swami Satyananda: When the nadis are not purified, the chakras are not functioning properly and sushumna is not awakened, then the awakening will take place in mooladhara chakra. This will create disaster. This is the precise reason why Swami Sivananda asked every person to practise a few asanas every morning to help purify the body, mind and the various components of the personality. However, his greatest stress was on singing the name, and this is a very important form of yoga. Singing the name, *sankirtan*, is the highest inner reality within a person. When an individual wants to bypass the tendencies and confrontations of the mind, then kirtan is the best form of practice. I am not belittling other forms of yoga.

People have practised dhyana yoga, mantra yoga, kriya yoga and kundalini yoga, but they have not been able to transcend the mind. They have not been able to hypnotize themselves for a particular period of time. On certain days a person can feel fine, sometimes he sees the light or has other visions, yet he has not been able to free himself from the mind and it can grab him at any time. The aspirant does not give time to know what the mind is, and therefore he is unable to face the mind's confrontations or look at it directly. People can talk all about technology and discuss democracy, autocracy, bureaucracy, theocracy, but they know nothing about the mind. They know the mind by anger, happiness, passion and elation. These are not the mind; they are just the *vruttis*, the modifications of the mind.

How can one transcend the mind when one knows nothing about it? Like an iceberg, a great part of the mind

is invisible. Man doesn't even have a mind to see the mind. Therefore, he must accept the discipline of kirtan and give himself completely to it. He needs to drop all social, religious and other such inhibitions and immerse himself in kirtan. Within moments he will be transported to a different realm of experience. He will begin to forget who he is and where he is. It doesn't matter whether he is a young man or an old man. What is important is being able to forget himself for a period of time in naman sankirtan.

How does the higher manifestation of bhakti enable one to pierce the veil of the three gunas?

Swami Satyananda: After having attained the vision of the purusha and having developed devotion or bhakti or true love for Him, one is able to distinguish between the body and the in-dweller of the body. It is at this moment that the threefold aspects of nature through which the entire cosmos is governed can be seen: sattwa, rajas and tamas. These threefold cosmic forces are not to be understood here as ethical forces, because usually in India it is said that a person who sleeps too much is tamasic, one who becomes angry often is rajasic and one who lives quietly like a saint or a sadhu is sattwic. That is the ethical aspect.

However, in the *Bhagavad Gita* it is not the ethical aspect which is discussed, but the cosmic aspect. The three gunas are also predominant in the cosmos. These static, dynamic and equalizing forces in the universe cause all kinds of things. After having obtained the higher vision, one is able to make a clear-cut distinction intellectually and intuitively, and not before that.

Why is bhakti the only means to liberation?

Swami Niranjanananda: The need for bhakti is release from the *kleshas*, afflictions, and attainment of divine wealth. In the scriptures, bhakti has been accepted as the means for ending suffering, not jnana or karma. Karma becomes a cause for suffering and jnana has no effect on the human mind. Jnana is like water flowing over the head. People hear

it, yet they are unable to imbibe it. Knowing full well what is *dharma* or *adharma*, righteousness or unrighteousness, people are still unable to forsake the path of *adharma*.

The same problem was faced by Duryodhana. Before the start of the Mahabharata war, Sri Krishna went to Hastinapur with peace proposals. He said that the war should not be allowed to take place as it would cause great destruction. However, Duryodhana said clearly that, without a war, he would not give the Pandavas even five villages, not even land equivalent to a needle's eye.

Sri Krishna asked, "Duryodhana, don't you know what is *satya* and *asatya*, truth and untruth, *dharma* or *adharma*?" Duryodhana replied, *Janaami dharmam na cha me pravrittih* – "I know very well what is *dharma*, but I do not have any inclination or liking for it." *Janami adharmam, na cha me nivrittih* – "I know what is *adharma* and I cannot free myself from that. I cannot forsake the path of *adharma*. I do not know which devata is seated inside me, compelling me to do all these works."

The point to be noted here is that Duryodhana had full knowledge of *adharma* and *dharma*, what is correct and incorrect. However, he was so overwhelmed with and bound by hatred that he took up the path of *adharma*, not *dharma*. Therefore, even when the mind knows very well what is correct, one's behaviour may not be in accordance with *dharma* or natural justice.

Until *jnana* or wisdom is imbibed, it cannot be a means for achieving liberation. This is the reason why neither *jnana* nor *samadhi* alone can give liberation. In this world, there is only one means to liberation and that is *bhakti*. One can sit for thousands of years in *samadhi*, one might even forget oneself and the world and colour the mind with that element, yet one will not attain liberation. The person who does not follow the path of *bhakti* does not attain liberation or *mukti*, and is called a *yoga bhrashta*, a yogi who has deviated from the path. The *sadhana* remains incomplete, whatever lofty *sadhanas* one might have done.

Sri Swami Satyananda said, “Although I have thoroughly studied all the shastras and texts of the tradition, my path became clear only after I gave a place to bhakti in my life. As long as I had not given a place to bhakti, my path was not clear.” This is why bhakti is referred to as an incarnation of Shakti.

BHAKTI AND JNANA YOGA

What is the difference between bhakti and Vedanta?

Swami Sivananda: Self-surrender is the highest form of bhakti. Self-surrender is surrender of the ego or individuality, and what remains is the Absolute of the Vedantins. Thus there is no difference between Vedanta and the highest form of bhakti. The bhakta surrenders the ego and a Vedantin disintegrates the ego. The ego is not there in both. The ideals are the same. Whether one eats rice or wheat, it is all the same; the purpose of both is to appease hunger. There is no quarrel between the two. Whether one follows bhakti or Vedanta the effect is annihilation of the ego. That is the truth.

How can jnana yoga and bhakti yoga be compared?

Swami Satyananda: For a jnani God is nowhere, but for a bhakta God is here and he is everywhere. The concept of bhakti completely transforms every speck of existence and then one is not a mere person any longer. At the same time, one must remember that in bhakti duality exists. There is the lover and there is the beloved. This *dvaita* or duality is something that bhaktas do not want to part with.

There are two forms of bhakti: the lower bhakti and the higher bhakti. The bhakti which one practises every day is the lower bhakti. Higher bhakti and jnana are one. What is jnana? Supreme knowledge, supreme experience, higher experience – that is called *jnana*. When one can give one’s heart, when one can give all one’s emotions, when one can give all one’s passions to God, then one starts to become a jnani.

The lower bhakti is independent of jnana. A bhakta may not have read any of the scriptures, he may not even know what kind of an object God is; he may not know whether He is inside or all-pervasive. However, if the emotion of bhakti enters the mind, like it did for Mirabai, Tulsidas or Surdas, then even one who is illiterate and has no knowledge of the Upanishads, Brahma Sutras, *Aham Brahmasmi* or *Soham* can attain God. Bhakti is independent of jnana. This is the last word of saints and sages.

I am not criticizing jnana. I am saying that not everyone in this world follows the same path. The path of bhakti appeals to many; it is a broader road. However, not everyone can walk the path of bhakti. Some people go the way of karma yoga, some jnana yoga and some raja yoga, the path of asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana, samadhi. Many people go on the path of jnana. It is a subtle and narrow path, it is a short-cut, but there are many difficulties on it. There are many possibilities of a fall. I am not favouring the path of bhakti; I am only making an analysis. Those who walk the path of jnana face many difficulties, because on this path there is no method to sublimate emotions. In the path of jnana there is no method to channel the sensitivities, feelings and emotions. It is a dry and lonely path. However, it is right for some people and for renunciates it is an excellent path.

What is the common factor between bhakti and Vedanta?

Swami Niranjanananda: Traditionally, it is believed that God is one and that God directs everything in life, in creation and so forth. This concept is all right when one is able to experience Advaita, when one's consciousness has evolved to that level where one can actually experience the oneness of creation and oneself with God.

Unfortunately, Advaita is not an intellectual philosophy, for the moment the intellect comes in one is not able to experience the unifying aspect of life. Therefore, many times people become confused as to what God and the role of God

is in their lives. These are eternal questions which people have been asking throughout the ages.

Let us consider this concept from two different angles: the world and the person. Bhakti is very much a personal affair. Bhakti cannot be taught to other people. Singing kirtan is not bhakti. Repeating a mantra is not bhakti. According to many, they may be external forms of bhakti, but real bhakti is a personal experience of oneness with the divine nature. However, the world representing maya on the other hand is also a powerful force. The role of bhakti is to move away from the attractions and repulsions of maya, the world. The manifest world represents the changing reality and the spiritual dimension represents the eternal existence. Therefore, how does one combine the changing reality with eternal existence?

Reality changes. Different people seeing a chameleon at different times of the day will describe it as having different colours. One person will see it in the morning and say, "I saw a funny brown animal at this spot in the forest." Another person will say, "No, I have also seen that same animal, but it was not brown, it was green." Yet another will say, "No, I have also seen it, but it was neither green nor brown; it was grey."

What each one failed to realize was that they were describing the same chameleon which keeps on changing colour. What is the actual colour of a chameleon? Those three people did not know. What is the actual nature of the manifest world? No one knows. What is the underlying reality of this world? No one knows. People identify with realities that keep on changing according to different environments and conditions.

Eternal existence is the realm of bhakti. It is movement from the world to the experience of eternal existence which is the eventual aim of bhakti in the form of Advaita, awareness of one principle everywhere and the principle of divinity. This divinity can be given different names at different times, whether one sees that aspect of divinity in a *sakara*, manifest form, or a *nirakara*, unmanifest form. Hence,

devotion always relates to moving away from the influences of the senses, the mind, the attractions and repulsions of the world, to another level where one experiences the nature of harmony, bliss, peace, the eternal experience within oneself.

Human consciousness has both potentials. Consciousness has the power to interact with the manifest dimension, with the unmanifest dimension and with the transcendental dimension. Consciousness has the power to become omniscient and omnipotent. If consciousness is seen in the form of a scale, then each individual is on one side where they are experiencing changing realities. They are not able to experience the fullness of consciousness where they eventually begin to experience the states of omniscience, omnipotence and omnipresence.

In bhakti one moves along this scale from beginning to end and as one does so, a transformation of the mind occurs. This enables one to experience the pure nature of the individual in relation to the cosmos. There is a poem by William Blake:

To see the world in a grain of sand
And heaven in a wild flower,
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand
And eternity in an hour.

These are the symptoms of one who is a bhakta. So, what is bhakti? Bhakti is being able to experience the macrocosmic consciousness in a microcosmic state. Maya is being overawed by the microcosmic environment. Moving from maya to bhakti is just a progression from one end of the scale to the other. Bhakti means realizing the nature which one holds dear in one's life. That is the meaning of bhakti.

What are the specific differences between bhakti and jnana yoga?

Swami Sivananda: Saguna upasana is bhakti yoga or the yoga of devotion. Nirguna upasana is jnana yoga or the yoga of knowledge. The yoga of devotion is much easier than jnana

yoga. In bhakti yoga the devotee establishes a near and dear relationship with God. He cultivates slowly any one of the five *bhavas*, sentiments, according to his temperament, taste and capacity. The five bhavas are: *santa bhava*, sentiment of peaceful adoration, *dasya bhava*, sentiment of master and servant, *sakhya bhava*, sentiment of friendship with God, *vatsalya bhava*, relationship between parent and child, and *madhurya bhava*, relationship of lover and the beloved. The last bhava is the highest culmination of bhakti. It is merging or absorption in God. The devotee adores God. He constantly remembers Him, *smarana*. He repeats and sings His name in kirtan. He speaks of His glories. He chants His mantra. He prays and prostrates. He hears His lilas. He does total, ungrudging, unconditional surrender; obtains His grace, holds communion with Him and eventually is absorbed in Him.

In jnana yoga or the path of Vedanta, the aspirant acquires the four means of liberation: 1. *viveka*, discrimination; 2. *vairagya*, indifference to sensual enjoyments; 3. *shat-sampatti*, six virtues: i) *sama*, tranquillity of mind, ii) *dama*, restraint of the indriyas, iii) *uparati*, renunciation, iv) *titiksha*, power of endurance, v) *shraddha*, faith in the words of the Guru or spiritual preceptor and in the Upanishads, vi) *samadhana*, balance of mind or one-pointedness of mind; and 4. *mumukshutva*, keen longing for liberation or deliverance from the round of births and deaths.

Then the aspirant approaches a *Brahmashrotriya guru*, one who has knowledge of the Vedas and Upanishads, or a *Brahmanishtha guru*, realized guru, who has realized the Supreme Self and hears the *shrutis*, the Vedas, from him. He reflects and meditates on the Self or atman and attains eventually *atma-sakshatkara* or *Brahmanubhava*, the absolute experience, direct realization of the Self.

How did Shiva present bhakti yoga to Sati?

Swami Niranjanananda: Radha once asked Krishna, “You are very fond of the flute. You always keep your lips close to it. What is the reason?” Sri Krishna replied, “I like the flute

because it's empty inside. As it is empty within, I can fill it with whatever I want, with whichever form and colour." The aim of human life should be to empty oneself of desires, selfishness and negative actions. Therefore, when describing the nine modes of bhakti to the Cosmic Mother, Sati, Shiva has presented them not only as *aradhana*, worship, but also as a means of bringing about a positive transformation in life.

This path has a combination of dhyana, jnana and bhakti. As one listens to a satsang, one is in a meditative state, *dhyana*. The mind is focused on one object, my discourse. This is necessary for the first stage of bhakti. For meditation it is not necessary that one closes the eyes and sits quietly. In meditation one has to attach the mind to some focus and make sure it does not stray from that. Attaching the mind to the ishta or chosen object of worship is dhyana. Attaching the mind to working for the ishta, thinking of the ishta, or visualizing the ishta is meditation. If one-pointedness is there, it does not matter whether the eyes are open or closed.

Sri Swami Satyananda used to say that people go to the Himalayas searching for peace or *shanti*, yet peace is not found in the Himalayas. People say that there is a lot of noise and disturbance in the world, yet really there is no noise and disturbance in the world; whatever is experienced is within. Due to one's mental state and desires, one comes to the conclusion that this place is peaceful and that place is disturbing, the environment here is pleasant and there unpleasant. However, if one is in control of one's mind then even in the middle of the market one will not be disturbed; the mind will remain one-pointed. Similarly, if one is not in control of the mind, then even if one sits in the caves of the Himalayas, desires will not leave and they will make one restless.

The sign of a good sadhaka is that he is able to have control over his mind in all situations. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Sri Krishna has given this advice (5:11):

Yoginah karma kurvanti sangam tyaktvaa' atmashuddhaye.

The yogi does all his actions devoid of attachment, for self-purification alone.

One who is attached must practise *samabhava*, the feeling of equality (2:48):

*Yogasthah kuru karmaani sangam tyaktvaa dhananjaya;
Siddhyasiddhyoh samo bhootvaa, samatvam yoga uchyate.*

Perform actions, O Arjuna, steadfast in yoga, abandoning attachment and balanced in success and failure. Evenness of mind is called yoga.

One must maintain equanimity in success and failure. This is *samatvam yoga*, the yoga of equanimity. It is the highest yoga and it comes when the mind achieves one-pointedness. One cannot have equanimity with a restless mind.

The process of bhakti integrates the three components of dhyana, jnana and aradhana. When one is practising shravana one is listening. There is noise in the surroundings, yet one is not listening to that; for one is listening only to the talk, speech, concentrated on my discourse. This becomes the shravana sadhana, the meditation and concentration.

While a mother works in the house her attention is always on her child; there is constant remembrance, constant attention. Can the aspirant do that with his ishta or chosen deity? He chants his name for five minutes and the mind wanders around to the shoes left outside the temple, to food and so on. The mind does not remain still for even five minutes. The aspirant keeps struggling with himself, fighting with himself and does not follow a simple approach.

Bhakti is simple and this is the reason why it is of primary importance. Bhakti has jnana hidden in it. When one has jnana or wisdom, then bhakti manifests. When one has jnana experience then one's faith enhances, one's belief grows. It is only when one has jnana that one comes to realize, "Until now I have been stuck in the bondage of karma and maya," and it is only with bhakti that one is able to realize the Self.

If para bhakti and jnana yoga are one, why are there two names?

Swami Sivananda: Para bhakti is jnana only. Adi Shankaracharya, a kevala-advaita-jnani, was a great bhakta of Hari, of Hara and Devi. Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa worshipped Kali and got jnana through Swami Totapuri, his Advaita Guru. Appayya Dikshitar, famous jnani of South India, was a devout bhakta of Shiva. Gouranga Mahaprabhu Chaitanya of Bengal was a fine advaita-vedantic scholar, and yet he danced in the streets singing God's names. It shows therefore, that bhakti and jnana can be combined with much advantage.

Para bhakti and jnana are one. The only slight difference is, a bhakta uses his emotion and a jnani uses his will and intellect. Bhakti begins with love and jnana with thinking and self-analysis. The end of both is the same – union with the Divine.

A bhakta devotee contracts, a Vedantin expands. The former contracts and enters God through self-surrender. The latter expands and becomes one with Brahman through assertion and identification.

The fruit of bhakti is jnana. Jnana intensifies bhakti. Even jnanis like Adi Shankaracharya, Madhusudana and Sukadeva took to bhakti later, after realization, to enjoy the sweetness of a loving relationship with God.

Knowledge of wisdom will dawn by itself when one practises bhakti yoga. Bhakti is the pleasant, smooth, direct road to God. Bhakti is sweet in the beginning, in the middle and in the end. It gives the highest, undecaying bliss.

When does bhakti become jnana yoga?

Swami Satyananda: For Mirabai, God was her beloved. For her, God was her husband. That is called supreme bhakti, para bhakti. Para bhakti and jnana yoga are one. When the mind is saturated in supreme love and one is not able to think of anybody else except God, and when everything has become very insignificant, one is not only a bhakti yogi but a jnana yogi. The difference is between jnana yoga and the lower bhakti. However, lower bhakti should also be practised.

It helps to discipline the mind and the senses. One goes to a shrine, sings kirtan, practises mantra and sings devotional songs. This is important even though it is not para bhakti.

One can practise any yoga on the basis of bhakti yoga, and therefore bhakti should be the centre of all one's practices.

How are jnana and bhakti interdependent?

Swami Sivananda: Bhakti must be preceded by the knowledge that the object of one's devotion and worship is God, who is omnipotent, omniscient, all-merciful, who possesses infinite auspicious qualities and who is the support and substratum of all. Without this knowledge there will be no faith in God, without faith there will be no attachment to God, and without attachment there will be no lasting and intense devotion. It is said in the *Bhakti Narada Sutras* (sutra 28):

Tasya jnaanameva saadhanamityeke.

In the view of some, knowledge (of the object loved) alone is the means to attain (devotion).

Some say, "Even in the worldly parlance, knowledge comes first. Through knowledge of a thing, one develops love for that object. A girl has knowledge of her would-be husband. He can sing well. He is beautiful. He has passed his I.A.S. examination. He is now a district magistrate, and so on. Then she develops bhava and prem for him. A patient obtains knowledge of the virtuous qualities of barley. Then he loves barley and takes with delight barley bread. He knows it is cooling and sattwic, and so on. So also one has knowledge of God at first, then one begins to love. Therefore, jnana is the sadhana or means for devotion." The following verse (29) speaks of the mutual dependence:

Anyonyaashrayatvamityanye.

Others are of the opinion that there is mutual dependence between devotion and knowledge.

One cannot know God without love and without exertion. It is not possible to love truly without knowing the object of one's love and without exerting to serve the beloved. It is also not possible to exert oneself for someone without knowing and loving him. All the faculties of the mind always cooperate with one another.

Anyonya-asraya is mutual dependence. The wife is depending upon the husband for her wants, clothing, food and attendance while she is sick. The husband is depending upon his wife for his food and other kinds of service. This is mutual dependence. The king depends upon the subjects for his revenue. The subjects depend upon the king for their protection, water supply, sanitation, lighting and medical treatment. This is also a case of mutual dependence. Even so, devotion depends upon knowledge and knowledge depends upon devotion.

How do the path of jnana and bhakti lead to perfection?

Swami Sivananda: Action, emotion and intelligence are the three horses that are linked to this body-chariot. They should work in perfect harmony or unison, only then will the chariot run smoothly. There must be integral development. Vedanta without devotion is quite dry. Jnana without bhakti is not perfect. How can one who has realized his oneness with atman remain without serving the world which is atman only? Devotion is not divorced from jnana, but rather jnana is exceedingly helpful to the perfect attainment of bhakti.

Jnana yoga is like crossing a river by swimming; bhakti yoga is like crossing a river by boat. The jnani gets knowledge by self-reliance and assertion; the bhakta gets darshan of God by self-surrender. The jnani asserts and expands; the bhakta dedicates and consecrates himself to God and contracts himself. Suppose in the body there is a small circle of the size of a one-rupee coin. This rupee contracts and merges itself into the circumference of the circle. This is bhakti. Imagine there is a two-anna piece in the centre of the circle. This coin expands so that it occupies

the whole body of the circle and the circumference also. This is jnana. A bhakta wants to eat sugar-candy; a jnani wants to become sugar-candy itself. A bhakta is like a kitten that cries for help; a jnani is like a baby monkey that clings itself boldly to the mother. A bhakta attains gradual liberation; a jnani attains immediate liberation. A jnana yogi exhibits psychic powers through his will; a bhakta obtains all the divine powers through self-surrender and the consequent descent of divine grace.

In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Sri Krishna clearly points out that bhakti and jnana are not incompatible like oil and water. He says in the following verses (4:39, 10:10 and 18:55):

*Shraddhaavaamllabhate jnaanam tatparah samyatendriyah;
Jnaanam labdhvaa paraam shaantimachirenaadhigachchhati.*

The man who is full of faith, who is devoted to it, and who has subdued all the senses, obtains (this) knowledge; and, having obtained the knowledge, he goes at once to the supreme peace. (4:39)

*Teshaam satatayuktaanaam bhajataam preetipoorvakam;
Dadaami buddhiyogam tam yena maamupayaanti te.*

To them who are ever steadfast, worshipping Me with love, I give the yoga of discrimination by which they come to Me. (10:10)

*Bhaktyaa maamabhijaanaati yaavaanyashchaasmi tattvatah;
Tato maam tattvato jnaatvaa vishate tadanantaram.*

By devotion he knows Me in truth, what and who I am; and knowing Me in truth, he forthwith enters into the Supreme. (18:55)

To deny jnana altogether, to say that there is nothing beyond heavenly worlds, as some sectarian bhaktas do, is the height of folly. To deny bhakti and Ishwara as some dry Vedantins or jnanis do is also foolishness. A happy combination of head and heart is perfection.

How do the bhavas of a jnani and a bhakta differ?

Swami Sivananda: The *bhavas*, feelings, of a bhakta and a Vedantin differ. The Vedantin entertains a feeling of identity with the Self. The bhakta feels that he is an instrument in the hands of God. The Vedantin develops Brahma Bhava; the bhakta develops the bhava of a servant of Brahman. The Vedantin identifies himself with Brahman; the bhakta entertains the bhava of duality. He worships and adores. Eventually through his supreme devotion the bhakta also gets knowledge and attains the same state which a jnani attains. The modes of sadhana and bhavas differ in the beginning but ultimately coincide

How do the jnani and the bhakta differ?

Swami Niranjanananda: What is the difference between an intellectual and a devotee? The intellectual swims hard to get to the other shore of the river, whereas the devotee sits in a boat and has faith that the ferryman will take him across. The intellectual is independent-minded and thinks, 'On the strength of my talent and knowledge I will gain everything'. The devotee has surrendered and says, "What strength or talent have I? Whatever God wants to make me do, let it be done."

An intellectual never asks anyone for anything, not even God. The devotee is always opening the heart and appealing to God. The jnani thinks, 'What good does it do me to make an appeal'? And the devotee thinks, 'If I do not ask God, whom can I ask'? On the strength of his discipline or sadhana, through his own will a jnani makes the effort to attain *siddhis*, psychic powers, and material wealth, whereas the devotee considers all wealth, glories and *siddhis* to be contemptible compared to God's grace. His attention does not go to wealth or glory; it remains constantly focused on, 'How can I acquire the grace of my Beloved? That is all I need in my life'. You have to make your decision, either become a jnani or become a bhakta.

Why do jnana and bhakti complement each other?

Swami Sivananda: Adi Shankaracharya defines bhakti as devotion to atman. One cannot entirely separate bhakti from jnana. When bhakti matures it becomes transmuted into jnana. A real jnani is a devotee of Hari, Sri Krishna, Sri Rama, Shiva, Durga, Saraswati, Lakshmi, Jesus and Buddha. He sees the same in all. Some ignorant people think that a jnani is a dry man and has no devotion. This is a sad mistake. A jnani has a very large heart. In the hymns of Adi Shankaracharya one can gauge the depth of his devotion. In the writings of Sri Appaya Dikshitar, one can measure the magnanimous depths of his unbounded devotion.

Swami Rama Tirtha was a jnani. Was he not also a bhakta of Sri Krishna? If a Vedantin excludes bhakti, he has not really grasped and understood Vedanta. The same *nirguna*, formless, Brahman manifests with a little *maya* in a corner as *saguna*, with form, Brahman for the pious worship of His devotees. Sri Krishna takes a jnani as a first-class bhakta. He says in the *Bhagavad Gita* (7:17–18):

*Teshaam jnaanee nityayukta ekabhaktirvishishyate;
Priyo hi jnaanino'tyarthamaham sa cha mama priyah.*

*Udaaraah sarva evaite jnaanee tvaatmaiva me matam;
Aasthitah sa hi yuktaatmaa maamevaanuttamaam gatim.*

Of them, the wise, ever steadfast and devoted to the One, excels (is the best); for I am exceedingly dear to the wise and he is dear to Me. (17)

Noble indeed are all these; but I deem the wise man as My very Self; for, steadfast in mind, he is established in Me alone as the supreme goal. (18)

All kinds of devotees are dear to God, for they are all noble souls. However, the wise man is exceedingly dear because he has a steady mind; he has fixed his mind on Brahman. He does not want any worldly object, but only the Supreme Being. He seeks Brahman alone as the supreme goal. He

practises *ahamgraha upasana*, meditation on the Self as the all. He tries to realize that he is identical with the Supreme Self. Therefore, Sri Krishna says, "I regard a wise man as My very Self."

Bhakti is not divorced from jnana. On the contrary, jnana intensifies bhakti. He who has knowledge of Vedanta is well established in his devotion. He is steady and firm. Some ignorant people say that if a bhakta studies Vedanta he will lose his devotion. This is wrong. Study of Vedanta is an auxiliary to increase and develop one's devotion. The devotion of a person proficient in vedantic literature is well grounded. Bhakti and jnana are like the two wings of a bird to help one to fly unto Brahman, to the summit of *mukti*, liberation.

Sukadev was a perfect jnani. He was an avadhoota. How is it then that he studied the *Bhagavatam* and told its stories for seven days to Raja Parikshit? This is a wonder of wonders. He was absorbed in his meditation, but he came down from his heights and preached devotion. Did he lose his *atmajnana*, the knowledge of the Self? What is the truth here?

Veda Vyasa wrote the eighteen Puranas for the benefit of the world. He wrote the *Mahabharata* which deals more with the path of action or life in worldly society, yet he was not satisfied in his heart of hearts. He was quite uneasy and restless. Sage Narada met Vyasa and enquired, "What is the matter with you, O Vyasa? You are in a sunken, depressed mood." Vyasa spoke out his heart. Then Sage Narada said, "You will have to write a book which treats of the love for Krishna and the lilas of Sri Krishna. Then only will you have peace of mind." Then Vyasa wrote the *Srimad Bhagavatam*, a book that is saturated with bhakti and kirtan of Hari. Rishis studied the *Srimad Bhagavatam* and narrated it in a lonely forest in the vicinity of Sukadev's hermitage. Sukadev was very attracted towards the stories of the rishis. He directly proceeded to his father and studied the *Srimad Bhagavatam* under him. Only then did he teach the *Srimad Bhagavatam* to Rajah Parikshit.

Look at the devotion of Sukadev! From this incident it is quite clear that devotion and jnana are inseparable and a jnani is the greatest bhakta. Those Vedantins who speak ill of devotion are deluded, ignorant persons.

What is greater – jnana or bhakti?

Swami Satyananda: This is a question that has been discussed in India for many thousands of years. Many great acharyas have put forth their arguments in different bhakti and jnana yoga teachings. Adi Shankaracharya said, “Without jnana yoga one cannot attain liberation even if one does pilgrimage or sadhana.” The great bhaktas, Mirabai and Chaitanya, said there is no way for human beings other than bhakti.

In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Arjuna asks Sri Krishna to be clear and precise about the importance of these different paths of yoga. Arjuna said, “Sometimes you say jnana yoga is supreme, sometimes you say bhakti yoga is supreme and sometimes karma yoga is supreme. I am confused.” Arjuna wanted to know for certain so that he may take one of these paths. In reply, Sri Krishna said, “Of course, there is the path of jnana and there is the path of bhakti, undoubtedly. However, if you think that one of these two paths is superior to the other, or that they are different from each other, or that their destinations are different from each other, then it is foolishness. If you are established in any of these two, you obtain the same results which you can obtain by the other path.” Then he added, “If you are firmly established, if you are well established.”

When you take a nail and drive it into wood, it goes in very easily. If you take the same nail with a hammer and drive it against a rock, it won't be easy, but you will have the experience. In the same way, each and every one has a definite point in the evolution of consciousness. According to his level of consciousness, if he practises the right type of yoga, he is automatically established in that.

In this connection, a detailed discussion was held in *Yoga Vasishtha* which is a very ancient text like the *Yoga Sutras*. It is

a dialogue between Sri Rama and his guru, Vasishtha. *Yoga Vasishtha* says that the two paths are like the two wings of a bird, and therefore everyone should try to develop both practices at the same time.

THE VALUE OF BHAKTI YOGA

Why is it important to shift from the head to the heart?

Swami Niranjanananda: People come to yoga for different reasons, but ultimately the practices will guide the individual towards balance. Enjoyment happens when we are contented, happy and at peace. That is the direction of sadhana. One of the strongest sadhanas to lead us in this direction is mantra and music because they affect the emotions and sentiments, not the intellect. Intellect can cause confusion, comparison, assessment, analysis, create questions and create answers, but mantras open the energy of the heart and explode the energy of the emotions and bring out that power. There is power in everything. There is inherent strength in the body, but it manifests only when we need to use it, whether it is to pick up a small stone or a large rock.

Energy is also inherent in emotions as well as in the mind. Mental energy is known as buddhi; emotional energy is known as *bhava*. As long as one is stuck to buddhi there is no salvation. When one comes to bhava, the air clears immediately. A classic example of this situation is two people who are madly in love and living together. In the course of time, there is strife and one incident destroys their connection and relationship completely. What happened to that feeling of love which was overpowered by greed, jealousy or anger? If they reconnect with love, the jealousy, greed and anger will have no place.

Maintaining emotional balance, the bhava balance, leads to enlightenment or evolution of consciousness. Enlightenment is evolution of consciousness. Mantra becomes the process, the tool by which the energy of bhava is elevated. Presently the bhava energy is not elevated. People

have good IQs but disturbed EQs. All EQs are at various levels, are distorted and depressed as people are craving and searching for something. Bhava becomes the energy, the force for ultimate self-awareness and self-realization. The mind is transcended or left behind.

People have to shift from the head space, buddhi, to the heart space, bhava. The heart space is the connecting force. It does not see any division or difference in anything or anyone. The people who have been inspirers in the course of the human journey have awakened their bhava, their heart space. Intellectuals have been appreciated, they have written good things, yet inspirers have shown how to follow the path of the heart. That is an indication that if one follows the path of the heart, one can change oneself and help other people come out of their limitations and grow.

What is the culmination of all yogas?

Swami Satyananda: Just as all rivers flowing from every part of the Himalayas ultimately reach Indranagar, the totality of man's consciousness – his mystic, occult consciousness, his psyche, subconscious and conscious mind – all meet at one point: bhakti. Once bhakti is realized there is nothing beyond that. Bhakti is the most powerful method to come face to face with and realize that formless, nameless, transcendental Paramatma in any form. It is definitely not a myth.

When one leaves from Athens, the pilot takes the plane to Delhi, not to Munger. Similarly, yoga can lead one to a certain point, but beyond that one will need bhakti.

Why is bhakti the highest yoga?

Swami Sivananda: It has been said in the *Narada Bhakti Sutras* (sutra 25):

Saa tu karmajnaanayogebhyo'pyadhikataraa.

It (supreme devotion) is again higher than action, knowledge and yoga.

Rishi Narada gives two reasons why bhakti and parabhakti are the highest yoga (sutra 26):

Phalaroopatvaat.

Because of its being of the nature of the result or fruit of all these.

Jnana is the fruit of the practice of *sadhana chatustaya*, the fourfold sadhana and meditation. Purity of heart and the effacement of the ego is the result of the practice of karma yoga. Kaivalya is the fruit of the practice of raja yoga, but bhakti is itself of the nature of result. In the case of bhakti, we begin with bhakti and end with bhakti. Love or bhakti has not come as a result of anything. It has not come to a devotee as a new thing. It is always there.

Devotion is higher than the others because it is its own reward. It is devotion for devotion's sake. It is love for love's sake. Therefore Rishi Narada says: *Phalaroopatvat*. That is the reason why it excels others. Those who follow other paths cherish some ulterior motives in view. So they fail to attain God. The other reason is explained in the next sutra (sutra 27):

Eshvarasyaapyabhimaanadveshitvaad dainyapriyatvaachcha.

(Devotion is higher than the others) because God hates egoism and loves humility.

Those who tread the path of jnana and yoga are liable to become proud of their powers and wisdom. Bhaktas are humble. Humility is the foundation of bhakti yoga.

God has no hatred or partiality for anyone. All are equal in His eyes. His heart is full of love even for the proud. He delivers the proud and the haughty through punishment, and the humble devotees through affectionate caresses. God does not allow pride to grow in His devotees. Pride is the root of all sorrows. It is the cause of worldly bondage. It brings sufferings of various kinds.

Bhakti is absolute self-surrender. In true devotion there is no room for the pride of one's own efforts or spiritual discipline. A devotee feels that he is an instrument in the hands of God and God does everything for him. There is not the slightest trace of ego. Therefore, the path of devotion is superior to all other paths.

How does the *Srimad Devi Bhagavatam* present bhakti yoga?

Swami Niranjanananda: According to the *Srimad Devi Bhagavatam*, there are three paths to the attainment of moksha. One path is karma yoga, the second is jnana yoga, and the third is bhakti yoga. Of these, bhakti yoga is said to be the most natural and easy. All that is required is connecting the mind with the Beloved, the chosen form of divinity. Jnana yoga is difficult, as it requires one to control the turbulent thoughts. Just as reins are needed to control a horse, just as a goad is needed to control an elephant, similarly jnana yoga and karma yoga are needed to control the dissipations, restlessness and distractions of the mind and to keep the senses in check.

In bhakti yoga, all one needs do is turn the torchlight of the mind away from the world of senses and sense objects and towards God. According to the *Srimad Devi Bhagavatam*, bhakti yoga is attained spontaneously when there is a change in the mental direction. It also states that the fruits which accrue through the means of *karma* or action, *jnana* or knowledge, *vairagya* or non-attachment, yoga, charity, dharma, austerities, fasting or pilgrimage, can be attained effortlessly by the devotee through bhakti yoga.

How does bhakti speed up and smooth the way for other yoga paths?

Swami Satyananda: The spiritual path becomes shorter if one has bhakti; the speed of evolution becomes quicker. On the mystic path for instance, if one practises kriya yoga, how long can one do it for? Three, four or five hours at a stretch.

If one does it any longer than that, one might be reduced to gas, and the reduction could not be explained in terms of losing a few pounds of weight. One might lose everything, but if one remembers God as one remembers husband or wife, mother or father, or anyone who is close and loved, then throughout the day and night there will be no extra generation of heat as in kriya yoga.

Why is the path of bhakti said to be the easiest?

Swami Satyananda: The path of bhakti is the easiest path because one operates with emotions, with faith and belief. It is not the path of pranayama or the path of kundalini. It is not the path of hatha yoga, karma yoga or jnana yoga. It is the path of 'self yoga' – everything is within me. I mobilize my willpower and the God within me is awakened.

The other paths such as jnana yoga, raja yoga, nada yoga, mantra yoga, kaivalya marga and so on, are all difficult to follow. One cannot practise nirvikalpa samadhi. If sannyasins cannot succeed on this path, then who will be able to? The practitioner may concentrate the mind for a short period of time, but the concentration soon breaks. Bhakti can never break for it is a continuous process, like the Ganga which flows ceaselessly without a break. Yes, the path of bhakti is the easiest and most straightforward. In the *Ramacharitamanas*, Sri Rama says (Uttarakanda, after doha 44, chau 1):

*Jau paraloka ihaa sukha chahahoo,
Suni mama bachana hridayaa dridha gahahoo;
Sulabha sukhada maaraga yaha bhaaee,
Bhagati mori puraana shruti gaaee.*

The path of bhakti is easy and pleasant to follow,
The Puranas and Vedas declare this to be so.
The path of jnana is difficult and full of obstacles,
Formless meditation is hard to practise,
Because it offers no base for the mind to rest.

Why is bhakti the easiest way to annihilate the ego?

Swami Sivananda: The lover's path is just as difficult as that of a Vedantin or raja yogi. No path is easy. There is no royal road in spirituality. It is only to encourage the aspirant that seers say that the path of devotion or love is the easiest. Every path, every yoga, demands the entire annihilation of egoism. The karma yogi kills his egoism through selfless service. The bhakta kills his egoism through self-surrender or *atma samarpana* or *saranagati*. The Vedantin destroys his egoism through self-denial or self-abnegation.

'Control the mind, annihilate the ego' is the essence of all yogas. Whatever be the name given to the yoga and whatever may be the methods employed therein, the ideal to be achieved is annihilation of the mind and ego. Bhakti yoga is a very sweet and easy method. One does not have to curb the emotions nor run to the forests. One has to direct the emotions to God and to see God as present in the world. This is the essence of bhakti-sadhana. Bhakti is thus only a reflection of the love for the Self, which the Upanishads declare. Only the names are different; one calls it Self, another calls it God. Names do not matter much. It is the feeling that counts and that is the same.

What argument does Rishi Sandilya put forth to prove the supremacy of bhakti?

Swami Sivananda: All righteousness and sins vanish when one attains supreme devotion because the intellect disappears and the objects of enjoyment are absent. Life will last until prarabdha karma is exhausted. The devotee is in a state of bliss. Pleasure and pain, merit and sin cannot touch him. He is a *jivanmukta*, liberated while living. All karmas with their generating forces are burnt in toto. It is said in the *Bhakti Sutras of Sandilya* (sutra 97):

Aayushchiramitareshaam tu haaniranaaspadatvaat.

Life is prolonged, but merit and sin disappear in the case of the man of perfect devotion because of the absence of objects of enjoyment.

Births and deaths of the *jiva*, the individual soul, are attributed to lack of devotion. Births and deaths cease forever when one attains perfect or supreme devotion. Therefore, Rishi Sandilya has placed bhakti on a higher level than jnana (sutra 98):

Samsritireshaamabhaktih syaannaajnaanaat kaaranaasiddheh.

Rebirth and deaths originate from want of devotion and not from want of knowledge, the former being inconsistent with the cause (of birth and death).

What branch of yoga is able to conquer time?

Swami Niranjanananda: Once, while listening to Shiva, Parvati asked, “It is evident that any being who inhabits a body made of the *pancha bhutas*, the five elements, is destined to die. God, is it possible to conquer time, to attain immortality? If so, what is the method?”

Shiva said, “Parvati, whoever comes to the world is subject to *kaala* or time, and lives his cycle of life here on earth according to the dictates of time. Kaala is quite frightening and it cannot be destroyed by any god, demon, celestial being or human. Only one who is a yogi, a sadhu, a tapasvi and is untouched by the maya of the transient world, one who has renounced the objects of the world and has focused his mind on God, one who has *bhakti* and *shraddha*, devotion and faith, can win over kaala, and reaching the supreme abode, attain the ultimate wealth of Shivaloka.”

Mother Parvati then asked Shiva, “How do the yogis and tapasvis win over kaala?” Shiva said, “This is a secret and mysterious vidya, which I cannot disclose before everyone. Come with me to some secluded place. There I will tell you about the means of conquering kaala, and listen carefully to this.” Saying this, Shiva took Parvati to a place in the mountains where no god, demon or attendant could reach them, not even a bird. There he propounded the teachings and said, “The first requirement for winning over kaala is to withdraw the mind from enjoyment of worldly objects and

focus it on God. This is the first step, for as long as one is influenced by the world and desires the objects of the world, one will be bound by the fetters of karma. Once one is stuck in this bondage of karma, one can only free oneself through *guru kripa*, the grace of guru, or the blessing of God.”

This was said to Mother Parvati by Shiva a long time ago, yet it is still applicable today. You cannot ignore the importance of bhakti. Bhakti is such a powerful tool and method, yet people have not understood it properly. They think it is simply worship of God, but in reality bhakti is the means for self-transformation.

Compared to other branches of yoga, what makes bhakti yoga unique?

Swami Niranjanananda: Bhakti yoga is the only yoga that indicates the way to *Ishwara pranidhana*, letting go and surrender to the divine will. The path of bhakti is superior to karma yoga, raja yoga, kriya yoga, kundalini yoga or any other yoga. The other yogas work at one level of the personality. Karma yoga deals with action, performance, the expression of the senses or the intellect, and it brings the component of creativity. Raja yoga enhances and deepens one’s awareness and perceptions. It leads one towards becoming the *drashta*, the observer, and brings in the component of awareness. Hatha yoga brings the component of purity. Jnana yoga brings the component of applying wisdom, not just knowing but being ‘wisdom-ful’.

Only bhakti yoga works at the level of ego, removing the component of arrogance from ego, *ahamkara*, and surrendering to the divine will. Ego is the last thing in everyone’s life that has to be transformed and transcended. That is the last barrier one has to cross. It will happen when the arrogance of the ego submits to the divine will, and that is the path of bhakti. Other yogas help to cultivate a new idea, habit, perception or lifestyle. They help to develop a different person, where one is in harmony with oneself, nature and the divine, whereas bhakti yoga takes one to and makes one prostrate in front of God.

4

Integral Bhakti Yoga

Feed the mind with thoughts of God, the heart with purity and the hands with selfless service.

—*Swami Sivananda Saraswati*

HEAD, HEART AND HANDS

How can one express ‘head, heart and hands’?

Swami Niranjanananda: With raja yoga, bhakti yoga and karma yoga you are able to manage the performance and expression of the qualities of head, heart and hands. Raja yoga and hatha yoga represent the personal effort to transform yourself, whereas bhakti yoga and karma yoga represent the yoga through which you can express the better you. This expression of the better you is the balanced growth of the qualities of head, heart and hands.

Who is an example of a bhakta who combined head, heart and hands?

Swami Sivananda: An almost supernatural, spotless purity rested like a divine mantle upon the sublime personality of Jesus, the Christ. His life was a wonderful combination of jnana, bhakti and karma. An ideal, integral development of head, heart and hand has rendered his life a model for humankind to emulate for all eternity. Christ was ever

conscious of his inseparable identity with the Supreme Self. Yet, deep devotion and love for the personal God constantly found expression in him in the form of prayers, praises and glorification.

What is the significance of ‘head, heart and hands’?

Swami Satyananda: Swami Sivananda used to say that, in order to experience completeness in life, one should combine jnana, karma and bhakti. He said many times that a human being is composed of the three qualities of head, heart and hands. Head represents the intellect, *jnana*; heart represents *bhavana*, feeling, sentiment, emotion; and hands represent action, performance, participation. People suffer when they ignore one of these aspects of life. Tension, frustration and a destructive environment in society are the outcome of ignoring a function and a quality of life which one can attain.

I teach hatha yoga, raja yoga, bhakti yoga, karma yoga, jnana yoga, kriya yoga, laya yoga, kundalini yoga and tantra, and these should be integrated. Just practising a few hatha yoga or meditation techniques and thinking one will achieve everything in life is unnecessarily overemphasizing one aspect. Raja yoga and jnana yoga develop the head, bhakti develops the heart, and karma yoga develops the hands. Simultaneous development of head, heart and hands is needed.

Why is it necessary to tune the components of the body-mind unit?

Swami Niranananda: The body is a system which functions in harmony with the other components of the body-mind unit. If the strings of a guitar are not tuned, there will be no sound. If one tunes one string only, one cannot create a melody or music. Some people only work with their body, one string of the guitar. Some people try to tune two strings, body and mind, yet somehow they are not in harmony. Some people tune the third one also: body, mind and emotion. The sound becomes a little better, however, it is not yet the

final sound. Few people tune the fourth string – the creative connection with life. When the four strings are properly tuned, a harmonious melody can be created.

One mistake modern civilization has made is putting the head before the heart and hands, whereas yoga advises one to look at all three aspects with the same attitude, intensity and awareness.

How can the qualities of head, heart and hands be cultivated? Yoga begins when one starts working with one's head, heart and hands. If one is working with the body to loosen up, to become more flexible, to stretch, one is influencing the physical states and will feel lightness, vitality and energy. However, one will not be able to access the dimensions of head, heart or hands with the practices of asana, pranayama or even hatha yoga. To access them, different systems of yoga have to be used.

Yoga has to teach both the way to disconnect, and the way to connect. One has to objectively analyze one's attitudes, aspirations, behaviours and relationships, free from the influences of selfishness and ambition. One has to live with a commitment to life with greater understanding and more maturity. Separation from distress and union with the positive, harmonious self happens when we are able to nurture the qualities of head, heart and hands.

Why is it important that head, heart and hands are balanced?

Swami Satyananda: Mahatma Gandhi had a balanced mind. As a result, he did incredible amounts of work, both efficiently and without leaving things half done. He never seemed to tire of karma yoga, unlike other people who do a certain amount of work and then lose interest or become tired. Why? The answer again lies with the mind. A concentrated yet relaxed mind can do the most intense work for long periods of time without tiring. It doesn't become diverted by external distractions or inner disturbances, but remains focused on the work in hand.

Supplement this with bhakti yoga to give it force and there exists a powerful combination. Bhakti channels the emotional energy into a positive direction instead of allowing it to be dissipated in all directions. Most people waste their emotional energy in useless petty arguments and heated discussions about nothing. The energy goes everywhere and without much power. If all this power is sent in one direction it has great force.

Why is bhakti yoga necessary to integrate head, heart and hands?

Swami Satyananda: Bhakti is the means to harmonize and channel the turbulent emotions. Much is said about harmonizing the body and mind. Most books on yoga are written on this integration of mind and body, of thought and action, yet little is ever said about harmonizing the emotions and integrating them with one's thoughts and actions. These emotions are powerful forces. It is difficult, if not impossible to achieve mental and physical stability if the emotions are rampant. It is like trying to tame a wild tiger by pulling its tail. It cannot be done! How can a person attain mental peace if the emotions are like a stormy sea? There has to be a simultaneous process of harmonizing and integrating the body, mind and emotions, one's actions, thoughts and feelings. This is the only sure way of achieving fulfilment in life and expanding awareness.

What is the experience of Sanatana dharma?

Swami Niranananda: The Sanatana tradition, the eternal, unchanging tradition, represents the culmination of all human belief. It is not a one-sided approach to life, but an integral approach. It is acceptance of each and every state and situation in life. It is the development of human potential in every condition. Therefore, we have a saying that each human being is a combination of the qualities of head, heart and hands. You are incomplete if you neglect any one of these three: head – representing intellect,

heart – representing simplicity, and hands – representing performance. These three qualities combined become the Sanatana experience.

How does the right balance of IQ, EQ and SQ help to ensure success in life?

Swami Niranjanananda: Swami Sivananda Saraswati was a medical doctor. He was a knower of the body, the mind, tantra and yoga. He was a scientist of both the external and the internal. He used to say that, during their lifetime, all human beings express the qualities of head, heart and hands. Head represents the intellectual abilities, heart represents the emotional abilities and hands represent the creative abilities. It is understood that if people lack any one of these three abilities, they are not well-off human beings as there is some deficiency. If they have emotional sensitivity and creative ability but not intellectual ability, they do not succeed in life. If they do not have emotional sensitivity but have the other two, still they do not succeed in life. If they do not have creative ability but have intellectual ability and emotional sensitivity, they are unable to progress in life.

Even science speaks about these three different abilities inherent in every human being. In my generation young people were concerned with improvement of the IQ, the intelligence quotient. Now people talk about the EQ, the emotional quotient. Having the highest IQ is not an indication of success in life if one lacks the emotional quotient. Apart from EQ, there is also the social quotient – SQ. IQ represents the faculties of the head, intellect, EQ represents the faculties of the heart and SQ represents the faculties of creativity, performance, interaction in society and life. These are the three areas of experience which have to be integrated. Whether one thinks from the perspective of Swami Sivananda – integration of head, heart and hands, or from the modern perspective of IQ, EQ and SQ, the theory, philosophy and practice is the same; it is called yoga.

What is the goal of jnana, karma and bhakti yoga?

Swami Satyananda: Samarpan is the experience of union and also of dissolution of the outer nature, which is the aim of all spiritual sadhana. As the devotee passes through different stages of sadhana, he experiences altered states of consciousness, behaviour and human interaction. Ultimately, he is led to the state where his individuality dissolves into the cosmic energy. Samarpan, therefore, is the highest state of mind that can be developed and experienced. Consciously surrendering one's entire existence into the hands of God is the highest state a spiritual aspirant can aspire for. It is the culmination of *jnana*, knowledge, the culmination of *bhakti*, devotion, and the culmination of *karma*, performance. It happens when jnana, bhakti and karma fuse into one stream and are directed to the fulfilment of the divine will. Samarpan is the ultimate point of evolution. It is the point where one consecrates oneself, where one dedicates oneself to the fulfilment of a greater purpose, which is in the bosom of the higher will.

Sri Krishna states in the *Bhagavad Gita* that the karma yogi sees inaction in action and action in inaction (4:18):

*Karmanyakarma yah pashyedakarmani cha karma yah;
Sa buddhimaanmanushyeshu sa yuktah kritsnakarmakrit.*

He who sees inaction in action and action in inaction, he is wise among men; he is a Yogi and performer of all actions.

The jnana yogi sees one soul abiding in all living beings (6:29):

*Sarvabhootasthamaatmaanam sarvabhootaani chaatmani;
Eekshate yogayuktaatmaa sarvatra samadarshanah.*

With the mind harmonized by Yoga he sees the Self abiding in all beings and all beings in the Self; he sees the same everywhere.

The bhakti yogi sees one God in everything and experiences Him everywhere (6:30):

*Yo maam pashyati sarvatra sarvam cha mayi pashyati;
Tasyaaham na pranashyaami sa cha me na pranashyati.*

He who sees Me everywhere and sees everything in Me, he does not become separated from Me nor do I become separated from him.

Having realized non-action, a karma yogi has nothing to do, so nothing remains to be known and there is nothing to be attained. Having realized the Self, nothing remains to be known for a jnana yogi, so nothing remains to be done or attained. Similarly, having attained God, nothing remains to be done or known for a bhakti yogi. On achieving the goal through any of these three yogas, the aspirant's self-conscious ego is completely dissolved and the essential element remains, which is realized. Then there remains no difference in the practices of these aspirants. Having become the spiritual sadhana, an aspirant is transformed into the spiritual goal. The last stage of all the different yogas aims to bring the aspirant towards the experience of merging with the cosmic or universal consciousness. As long as one does not completely surrender to God with head, heart and hands, one cannot commune with Him fully.

What is the relationship between karma, bhakti and jnana?

Swami Niranjanananda: Karma culminates in jnana, jnana culminates in bhakti, and bhakti culminates in realization. Karma is something physical with which one can easily identify as it is happening continuously. Then, when the recognition of the karma takes place, that is *jnana*, knowledge, but that jnana is a non-intellectual experience; it is the realization that 'I know'. This state of 'I know' is not influenced by people, events or circumstances. It is based on the principle of truth, not on the superficial reality that we are constantly trying to change to suit our needs.

Jnana is the inner realization of the underlying principle of reality. First there is awareness, next there is acknowledgment and then there is the realization that

this principle exists in relation to the karmas. When this acknowledgment has taken place with clarity of mind, jnana is converted into bhakti.

The first aspect of bhakti provides a clear direction for channelling the intellect, the second aspect for channelling emotions, and the third for channelling actions – ‘I am an instrument which is being played’. Once there is awareness of the intellect and emotions, and the realization of oneself as a tool, instrument or medium which is expressing one’s own nature, then bhakti is converted into realization. Karma, jnana and bhakti go together. One cannot be isolated or separated from the other. The moment one tries to separate them, a split takes place in one’s life, disharmony is experienced, and one goes off the path of evolution.

MANAGING THE HEAD

How can the mind be used to benefit an aspirant?

Swami Satyananda: Religious books have dealt extensively with the subject of the mind, and in a variety of ways. It is due to this mind that man is absorbed in the world. The mind has been said to be sinful, active, debased and the cause of all troubles. It is the cause of the soul’s bondage and of the experiences of happiness and misery, but it should be remembered that the mind is an instrument of self-elevation and the inspirer of emancipation. When the tendencies of the mind flow only downwards to sources of enjoyment, it becomes the cause of man’s fall and unhappiness, but when it flies upwards and flows towards higher subjects, it becomes the instrument for achieving efficiency in action, developing intelligence, knowledge and liberation.

It is of no concern whether the mind is a biological or psychological fact, but that it constitutes a medium for working in this world and is the instrument for acquiring knowledge and virtues and the realization of God and the soul. Wood is one and the same. It may be used in whatever manner one likes – to make a cudgel or a writing table. A

knife is one and the same, but one can cut one's finger or the vegetables. The first step in the path of spirituality is to control the mind and make it useful. The first sadhana of the sadhaka consists in understanding the mind, in knowing its direction and turning it upwards.

How does bhakti give a positive orientation and one-pointedness to the mind?

Swami Niranjanananda: Whatever one sees, hears or contemplates, the mind will identify with it. That is the nature of the mind. If one sees something good, the mind will become one with it. If one sees something that repulses, the mind will also become one with that. If one listens to some good words, the mind will identify with them. If one listens to some negative words, the mind will be influenced by those. Whatever the mind gathers through seeing, listening or experience becomes an integral part of human life and experience.

Shravana, or listening, is one of the fundamental vrittis in human beings. If one hears from someone, "You are a nice person," one will feel pleased and happy. If one is told, "You are bad," one will become unhappy just by hearing these words. The mind identifies with whatever one hears, and one reacts accordingly. If one is called mad, one will react like a madman and if one is called good, one will react as a good person. By simply listening, seeing and thinking, a reaction is caused. One sees a flower, one is attracted; one sees something rotten and one will run. Whatever one sees, the mind identifies with it, and having become identified with it, the mind either accepts it or rejects it.

To hold the vision, a form is needed. Similarly, words and knowledge are necessary for listening. To think and contemplate, experience is necessary. If there is no experience, there is no thought. Thinking and experience are complementary to each other. Only when one thinks, speculates and contemplates does one gain experience. If there is no contemplation, effort, or speculation, what experience can there be?

In the same manner, in bhakti yoga, one ishta, one mantra and one remembrance is necessary. The *ishta* is the particular form of God one is devoted to. It is the chosen ideal. One may see the ishta in any form that is appealing. One can see him or her in the earth, the sky, an idol, in every molecule, in the mind, oneself, the breath, in others, wherever one wants and in whatever form one wishes to see the ishta. The form in which one sees the ishta is for the bhakta the concrete form, sakara, of the ishta.

Whatever one hears, it should be good. That will change and transform the mind. Listening to criticism and praise of others only wastes time. In criticism and counter-criticism, in gossip, one gains nothing. On the contrary, it reduces the sensitivity of the mind. The capacity to comprehend becomes limited and one begins to base one's thoughts on the opinions of others. One makes decisions based on the decisions of others. Gossip, criticism and praise, aversion and love, envy and jealousy, inclination and desire: all these stunt and limit sensitivity and discrimination. However, when one hears something that gives inner happiness and peace, and offers a goal or aim in life, then that represents mental and emotional one-pointedness.

How does bhakti influence one's day-to-day life?

Swami Niranjanananda: Yoga hopes that whatever one attains is for a lifetime, so it must become part of one's nature, character and expression; part of one's life in total. However, if one only considers the day-to-day benefits of bhakti yoga at a mental level, then the attainments are: better focus, clarity, one-pointedness, conviction and confidence. These are the natural outcomes of having perfected bhakti yoga and karma yoga.

How does raja yoga prepare the mind for the experience of bhakti?

Swami Niranjanananda: Sage Patanjali's system of raja yoga starts with the yamas and niyamas. The yamas prepare the ground for the expression of bhakti. The foundations of

bhakti are connecting with truth and faith to experience happiness, which is the first stage of bhakti yoga. Moving from tamasic conditionings to sattvic conditionings is the second stage of bhakti. Aspirants overcome the limiting factors of life and try to connect with the illuminating factors. Similarly, clearing the heart of deviousness and crookedness, clearing the emotions of negative influences which bind the individual by generating karmas, and exploring how they can divert their emotions inwards so that they can have the understanding and experience of peace and oneness, is bhakti yoga.

The niyamas of raja yoga include *santosha*, contentment, and *ishwara pranidhana*, surrender to the divine will, so in raja yoga we are already creating the foundations for the development of bhakti yoga. It also indicates that santosha is equally important for the mind in raja yoga and for the emotions in bhakti yoga. Similarly, ishvara pranidhana is important in raja yoga for mental peace and equally important in bhakti yoga for the development of identification. Therefore, the yamas and niyamas of raja yoga prepare the mind for the experience of bhakti.

Raja yoga is predominantly a mental process. In pratyahara, dharana and dhyana one is purifying the mind. In samadhi one is still purifying the mind, as indicated by the stages of samadhi such as *sabija*, with seed, and *savichara*, with reason, which indicate that there is still movement happening in the field of intellect. While raja yoga works with the upper levels of the mind, thoughts and mental experiences, bhakti yoga works at the deeper, more subtle and powerful level of emotions.

What quality of mind should one try to attain?

Swami Satyananda: The mind should become quiet, not through laziness, but by being active and aware of someone or something. When one loves somebody the mind is concentrated on that person all the time. When one loves a child or a man or woman, one feels pleasure and happiness.

The mind is preoccupied with that person all the time and one is full of *bhakti*, love and joy. Otherwise there is no joy in this world.

Why is the intellect unable to experience God?

Swami Satyananda: God can definitely not be comprehended through the intellect. God is not a matter for the intellect. The intellect can understand and explain, but the intellect cannot perceive, it cannot experience. Many years ago I was travelling in Europe. At dinner time an Indian sweet was served. The gentleman travelling with me asked for the name of the sweet and I told him. He said, “Oh, so this is a rasagulla. I have written an essay on it.” He had done research on Indian sweets at some university in England and had written an essay on rasagulla, yet when a rasagulla was placed in front of him he did not know it was a rasagulla because he only had intellectual knowledge and had never experienced it.

How can one control the mind?

Swami Satyananda: Yoga says to control the mind, but bhakti doesn't say that. Bhakti says that the mind does not stop; it is like the wind. Even if there is no wind discernible, the flag of Hanuman flies brilliantly; it never stops, it is always moving this way and that. Similarly, the mind remains awake even in dreams. Even in death it remains awake and one receives the assets that are left behind afterwards. Adi Shankaracharya spoke about this in *Mohamudgara*, which begins with the line *Bhaja Govindam, Bhaja Govindam* (verse 21):

*Punarapi jananam punarapi maranam
punarapi jananeejathare shayanam.
Iha samsaare bahudustaare
kripayaapaare paahi muraare.*

Undergoing the pangs of birth again and again, passing through the throes of death again and again, lying in the mother's womb over and over again; this process of

samsara is very hard to cross over without the infinite kindness of Lord (Murari). O merciful Father, kindly save me.

Bhakti says, “Why try to control the mind when it never stops, when its nature is continuous movement? God has said that it is the nature of the mind to chatter just as it is the nature of ice to be cold. Why labour to control it?” So what is to be done? God says to divert the mind towards Him. Engage the mind in the subject that one loves. If one loves God, engage the mind in Him.

To keep water still, it has to be kept in a container. If it is poured on the ground, it will run in different directions. The water in a river always flows and never remains still, but the water in a pond is always calm and still. The water in a pot is also still. The mind is like a river. When the emotional relationships or feelings for someone stabilize, the mind also becomes stable. When the emotions and feelings are unsteady, the mind cannot remain calm.

Just as a base is needed to contain water, such as a glass or a pot, so the water does not run everywhere, in the same way, a base is needed for the mind so that it becomes stable. A base is needed to control the mind. At present, one’s base is defective, like a container with a hundred holes from which water escapes as soon as it is poured in. It is better to have a new container rather than plugging up the holes. The cost is the same. The way has clearly been defined in the *Ramacharitamanas* (Sundarkand, after doha 47, chau 2–4):

*Jananee janaka bandhu suta daaraa,
Tanu dhanu bhavana suhrida parivaaraa.
Saba kai mamataa taaga batoree,
Mama pada manahi baadha bari doree.
Samadarasee ichchaa kachhu naahee,
Harasha soka bhaya nahi mana maahee.
Asa sajjana mama ura basa kaise,
Lobhee hridaya basai dhanu jaise.*

Those who collect strings of attachment
With mother, father, relations, sons, wife,
Body, wealth, house, friends and family,
Make a rope out of them and tie it to my feet.
Those who are impartial, having no desires,
In whose heart there is no place
For happiness and sorrow, courage and fear,
Such bhaktas reside in my heart,
In the same manner as riches
Reside in the heart of a greedy man.

Why is the intellect and reasoning not important when discussing spiritual topics?

Swami Sivananda: Vain discussion about God must not be encouraged because it can go on indefinitely and there will still be no certainty that it will arrive at the truth. There are as many viewpoints as there are intelligent people, but discussions lead to endless arguments and to no certain conclusion. Mere reasoning does not lead to realization of God. The intellect is frail and finite, and it is not able to grasp the Infinite. None of the great problems which affect human life have been conclusively solved by reasoning. Reasoning has only complicated the issues. Therefore, depend not on reason, but depend on intuition which is ever infallible and correct. As it is said in the *Narada Bhakti Sutras* (sutra 75):

Baahulyaavakaashatvaadaninyatatvaachcha.

There is plenty of room for diversity in views and no one view, based upon mere reason, is conclusive in itself.

In argument there is room for excess and it cannot determine anything. A conclusion arrived at through the process of reasoning is never the truth. God is attained not through argument but through the practice of devotion. Every topic relating to God is capable of being argued out

in a variety of ways. Anger arises to win victory over one's opponent. Vehemence is an unavoidable concomitant to argumentation or discussion. The ego is the cause for such vain discussion. How can there be perception of Truth so long as there is the ego?

Convincing reasons may be given to support two diametrically opposite views. Hence, it does not follow that a view is true because it has the support of reason. What one person considers well established by reason can easily be shaken by another more intelligent person. A lawyer uses reason to prove even a false case to be true. Therefore, reason is often an unreliable guide. Science provides many examples of exploded theories which were all once considered as well-established through reason. No one view based on mere reasoning can be considered true once and for all, for it can be proved to be untrue by better reason. Vain discussion will go on indefinitely for days together, yet people will not arrive at definite, positive conclusions. They will be fighting over words, roots, conjunctions and other grammatical points.

God is certainly not in *vyakarana*, logic or prosody. He is in the chambers of the heart. He is to be realized by purity and meditation, and not by vain discussions. That is the reason why in the *Kathopanishad* Lord Yama says to Nachiketas, "This atman cannot be obtained by too much learning, or discussions, or intelligence. He who gets the grace of God, who is chosen by God as His favourite has the darshan of atman. He reveals to him His Nature. To him alone He manifests Himself." Therefore, the aspirant should give up heated discussions and strive to be humble, do practical sadhana, and not waste time and energy in vain discussion.

Why should one rely more on the heart than the head in bhakti yoga?

Swami Satyananda: Knowledge and erudition are not going to help. It is a wasted act. Similarly, it is futile to go on giving satsang on the *Ramayana*, deciphering the inner meaning,

explaining the symbolism behind all the characters. Instead, I suggest people read the *Ramacharitamanas* as it is, feel and understand it as it is. If the brain is applied, God becomes still more elusive. Sri Aurobindo, an intellectual giant, once said, “Reason was the helper and reason is the barrier. Transcend reason.” The intellect has become a hurdle and should be removed from the path of bhakti yoga. The head has nothing to do with the relationship with God, and no place in the connection with the guru, either. In the past I was an intellectual. I have racked my brain and conducted many brainstorming sessions on the discourses of Adi Shankaracharya, Vedanta and Advaita, but now I realize that Satyananda is a nobody. It was like planning to go to the moon without a farthing in my pocket. Gradually, I cut off the connection between the heart and the head. Coming to Rikhia has cured me of the intellectual quagmire.

What one should really care about is Rama’s blessing and grace, having the good fortune of Rama’s darshan in this beautiful human form and one’s faith in him becoming deeper and deeper. Sitaji’s beautiful character should move the heart and bring tears to the eyes, the heart should become softer and softer, more and more tender, and slowly one should merge in the *nirakara*, the formless.

Whether it is Ganesha, Rama, Krishna, goddess Kali or Shankara Mahadeva, no deity can be understood through the head. Approaching any of these through the intellect results in confusion, but once the heart takes over and replaces the head, even a stone turns into a talking God engulfed in light. Love, bhakti and devotion can move mountains. Love is powerful. Therefore, in bhakti yoga one should rely on the heart, not on the brain.

So experience is more important than knowledge in bhakti?

Swami Satyananda: The heart gives experience but the intellect can, at most, give knowledge. To anyone who thinks that knowledge of God is enough, I say, “No, God is a matter

for experience, and not only God, everything in life: sweets, colours, love, hatred. One can write page after page on love, but if one has never loved anybody, one knows nothing at all. God has to become a living experience in man's life, and that is possible only if he functions through the heart. The heart is the source of the feelings like love, hatred, jealousy, fear, anxiety and many more. These feelings are nothing but experiences. One feels heat, pain, fear, love. They can be perceived and this cognition is real knowledge. Everything is known through the heart.

How can anybody believe that God can be understood through the intellect? Maybe He can be discussed through the intellect, but He cannot be felt. The intellect cannot realize or feel God; it is beyond the capacity of an intellectual. There are many great thinkers in the world, many intellectuals who can write book after book, but they have never had the faintest experience of the divine. To have an experience of God, or of the whole universe, the absolute totality, one needs heart. Feelings are expressed through the heart. Love, hatred, passion, sacrifice and anger are feelings. They are felt, they are not seen. Similarly, one cannot see God, cannot say, "Show me God, then I will believe in Him." No, God has to be felt.

How does Truth reveal itself?

Swami Satyananda: In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Sri Krishna says (3:21):

*Yadyadaacharati shreshthastattadevetaro janah;
Sa yatpramaanam kurute lokastadanuwartate.*

Whatsoever a great man does, that other men also do; whatever he sets up as the standard, that the world follows.

The essence of God is not easy to comprehend through books. Books should be read, but books alone cannot lead to the ultimate truth. The way is within because one is the

nearest person to Him, and God is closest to one. He is so close, just turn the mind and He will be seen. A poet has said:

The Lord is in the mirror of the heart,
One can see him whenever he bends his head.

In order to change the mind, everything has to be turned about: all the concepts, behaviour, thinking, fears, psychoses, passions, affections, attachments, idiosyncrasies, silliness and rascality. One has to change everything that one is. However, it is difficult to change. Aspirants who take sannyasa only change their dress, nothing else changes. Change is not easy. It is easy to change one's name, religion, dress or country, but one cannot change oneself. It is the hardest thing that a man can do. The one who can do it is not a man, he is a junior God.

How does one make the changes necessary to open oneself to God?

Swami Satyananda: Intellect is a medium for knowledge, and emotion is the instrument of experience. To experience peace and Godhood within, the emotional body or the emotional personality has to be developed. If the emotions are blunt, people can talk about God for days together in a temple or from a church pulpit, but God is far from them. However, if the emotions are rich one just hears about Him and goes into a trance, because emotions are the eyes through which a greater love and awareness can be experienced. Therefore, it is of utmost importance for a raja yogi or a hatha yogi to develop the emotional personality.

How can the emotional qualities be enhanced?

Swami Satyananda: The seed of bhakti lies in the heart of everyone. It is something that is hidden away deep within each person. It has been planted in the fertile soil of the individual being and waits to be germinated and to grow, but first it must be watered with aspiration. In time it will

sprout and arise spontaneously. Nothing needs to be added. Everything is already inherent within the seed. It needs only the chance to grow. Each person is potentially a bhakta.

Generally however, this bhakti is not able to blossom, for it is hidden and covered with mental misconceptions, problems, dogmas and unhappiness. Each person should be an ecstatic bhakta because everyone has the potential to tune in with the inner world beyond the limitations of individuality. Each one has an individual mind. This mind is the centre of consciousness. Most people always live on the periphery of consciousness, yet the possibility of functioning nearer to the centre always exists. And when this potential exists, then bhakti must also exist in potential form. The nearer one moves towards the centre, the greater will be the feeling of bhakti.

Every person is really a bhakta, but this is not manifested or experienced because of lack of knowledge and a fog of misconceptions. Bhakti does not need to be artificially created or cultivated; it already exists within each person in seed form. All one has to do is to let the seed grow into a beautiful flower. As Swami Sivananda said, "Love is the law of life. To love is to fulfil this law, and fulfilment of this law leads to eternal peace and everlasting happiness."

What is the bhakti vritti?

Swami Niranjanananda: Bhakti is a state of mind and consciousness. Just as the desire for enjoyment is a state of mind and the desire for sense objects a tendency of the mind, similarly, when one desires to connect with God, develop positive qualities, eradicate tamas and cultivate the sattvic nature, one has to face one's own self. In this context, the nature of bhakti is psychological.

In the scriptures, bhakti has been considered a *vritti*, a modification of the mind. In the *Yoga Sutras* of Sage Patanjali five types of vrittis have been identified (1:6): *pramana* or direct knowledge, *viparyaya* or wrong knowledge, *vikalpa* or fancy, *nidra* or sleep and *smriti* or memory. Influenced by

tamas, rajas and sattwa, these five vrittis give rise to other vrittis which are expressed in one's behaviour.

The *Yoga Sutras* of Sage Patanjali state (1:5): *Vrittyah panchatyah klishhtaklishtah* – “In the five vrittis there is the experience of both happiness and unhappiness.” After going beyond these five, another vritti is born, the *brahmi vritti*, the self-aware, spiritual vritti. The brahmi vritti is also called the *bhakti vritti*, as it leads to identification with the source, the Brahman.

How does bhakti become a balance for the intellect?

Swami Satyananda: The intellect is a severely limited form of gaining knowledge, yet it is the power of the intellect that the modern world seems to most admire. There is nothing wrong with this, providing one can understand its limitations. It is this that most people don't appreciate. In fact, this will never be appreciated until one experiences something way beyond the intellect, which clearly shows the insignificance of logical thinking as a means to knowledge.

Bhakti is an excellent method of providing a balance to over-rigid attachment to the intellect. It is a great help in removing intellectual constipation and is a means of giving direction and release to emotions and feelings. One of the biggest problems in the modern world is the inability for intellectual people to express emotions. These emotions become pent up and suppressed. People forget how to laugh and release their emotions in a positive and non-destructive manner. Emotions are often expressed in outbursts and violence. The path of bhakti provides a perfect method of expressing these unruly emotions. Furthermore, the emotions are not only released, they are channelled towards making the mind one-pointed. This is a positive use of emotional forces. The emotions are directed towards the goal of higher awareness and experience.

The emotions are such a powerful force in human beings. Most people are completely ruled by them. They are buffeted to and fro according to the dictates and whims

of their emotions. If these emotions can be channelled and concentrated, one's whole being will also be channelled and concentrated. It is impossible to calm the mind if the emotions are turbulent. It is like trying to calm the sea when there is a typhoon or hurricane in the area. If one can calm the mind, the typhoon and the sea will automatically become much calmer. So it is with the emotions; once harmonized, one's whole being will automatically follow suit. This is the boon of bhakti yoga.

BALANCING THE HEAD AND HEART

What is the best management of intellect and emotion in daily life?

Swami Satyananda: Emotions are only meant for bhakti yoga, not for every little thing of this world. Nature has provided man with an intellect to deal with all the worldly matters. He can love and hate everybody intellectually, but the heart must be reserved for one thing only. When hearing the glory of God, when singing His name, when sitting before a man of God, or when narrating or listening to His stories, at these times the intellect should be locked away and the emotions brought out.

I have practised this throughout my life and if one tries it, one will find that every worldly situation can be managed through an intellectual process. Running an ashram, living with disciples, receiving money and parting with it, giving advice to people, having interpersonal relationships, even the most intimate relationships, these are all intellectual affairs. The emotions should be conserved and not wasted on such matters.

Just as one does not use a machine gun to get rid of a mouse from the kitchen, in the same way, it is not necessary to waste the emotions on dealing with all the little things in life. Relationships with the whole world are cursory and cannot or should not be so deep that they are rooted in emotions. If the emotions are conserved and reserved for

one purpose, they will serve as a swift vehicle leading one straight into a higher experience.

The reason why people do not have higher experiences is that they give their emotions to worldly things and their intellect to God, and so they fail in both areas. Giving one's emotions and personality to the world will not pay any dividend, and one will only meet with disappointment, frustration, depression, disillusionment and disease. If the intellect is given to God one will get nowhere. One may have some funny ideas about God, or pray and pray and pray, but to what avail? Therefore, one is failing spiritually and one is failing in one's empirical affairs. The situation must be reversed: intellect for the world and emotions for God.

What is the difference between intellect and emotions?

Swami Niranjanananda: The difference between the two is in the mind. It does not exist in the spirit, nor does it exist in the sentiments. The difference only exists in the mind, in the intellect. The purpose of the intellect is for survival in the world and in society, and the purpose of emotions and sentiments is for connecting one with one's divine, transcendental nature. If people use their emotions in the world, they will always suffer. They have experienced this. They are emotional with friends, they are emotional with their family, and due to emotion they become attached, the mind becomes clouded. Proper judgment cannot take place, expectations develop, and when expectations are not fulfilled, grief is experienced. All this is due to *buddhi*, intellectual ability. *Buddhi* allows one to attach; *buddhi* does not allow one to detach. Everyone asks the question, "How to detach?" Nobody asks the question, "How to attach?" People are attached; however, they are attached to the petty things in life. Husband, wife, children, property, finances; these are petty things in life, they come and go, they crave people and people crave them, they are attached to them and in the course of time, this brings grief. Emotions are also sentiments that can connect one with one's transcendental

nature, but instead, one uses one's emotions to connect with the world.

The sutra in spiritual life is, "Use your intellect to survive in the world with dignity, and use your emotions and sentiments to connect yourself with your inner spirit." If this principle is followed, one will always be happy. However, the moment one mixes intellect and emotions, one is creating a muddle in one's own head. If one falls into the pit, it is one's duty to get out of the pit. Intellect and emotions are both aids to survive in this world: intellect in the material world, emotions in the spiritual world.

Why is the intellect a hindrance in all things spiritual?

Swami Satyananda: At some point, reason must be transcended. There is a time when intellect is necessary, but a time also comes when life must be steered by positive feelings. Those feelings are not the feelings of jealousy and fear, but the feelings of devotion and love. When these feelings come into play, God takes a form. He is seen; He begins to speak. In the *Ramacharitamana*s (Ayodhyakanda, after doha 129, chau 1) it is said:

*Kaama koha mada maana na mohaa,
Lobha na chhobha na raaga na drohaa.
Jinha ke kapata dambha nahi maayaa,
Tinha ke hridaya basahu raghuraayaa.*

O Lord, Thou shalt reside in the hearts
Of those who are bereft of sensuality,
Anger, pride, intoxication, delusion, greed,
Perplexity, attachment, hostility, deceit,
Arrogance and illusion.

One may say that this is all psychosis or neurosis. Well, it is better to suffer from God psychosis and neurosis than from worldly psychosis and neurosis. I prefer to be called a spiritual psychotic. The intellectuals of Bengal used to call Ramakrishna Paramahansa a psychotic. The western

psychologists call this Christ neurosis. It is better to have Christ neurosis than to have any other worldly neurosis.

Reason is a barrier, not a helper, and therefore both reason and intellect have to be transcended. God is not at all a matter for intellect and reasoning, nor is God a matter for scriptures or logic. He is solely a matter of bhavana, emotion.

How should one understand emotions and the mind?

Swami Niranjanananda: There is a question as to which is superior in life, the emotions or intelligence. These simply represent two aspects of human nature. The mind, the linear process, has two attributes: the positive and the negative. When the mind thinks in a negative way it can do a lot of harm, and when it thinks in a positive way it can do a lot of good. When negative emotions like fear, anger or rejection arise they harm the body and the personality. When positive emotions manifest, such as love, compassion, generosity or affection, they uplift one in many ways one does not even understand. Ultimately, the heart and mind should be taken as two attributes of the one human nature.

If a person is trained in the objectivity of scientific enquiry, how can bhakti become part of his life?

Swami Niranjanananda: When a person looks at the sunset, he sees the beauty of the sunset, the colours, the sky, the clouds and the radiance of the sun. If he analyzes the sunset scientifically, he says, 'This is all unreal. The colours exist due to the sunlight hitting the particles in the atmosphere'. If he analyzes the sunset with a scientific bent of mind, the joy and beauty of the sunset will be lost.

In the same manner, if one tries to analyze scientifically what bhakti is, one will fail, as it is not a subject for scientific analysis. A subject of scientific analysis is the brain and mind, and the object of experience is the human heart. Scientific discovery belongs to the domain of brain and mind. Appreciation of joy and beauty belong to the domain of the individual heart. Therefore, intellectual gymnastics of the

mind and brain should not be confused with the innocence and purity of heart. Bhakti is not an intellectualization, but an experience of something that is beautiful, uplifting and inspiring in one's life.

What is meant by madness on the bhakti path?

Swami Satyananda: Once true bhakti dawns, no other sadhanas need to be done. No scripture is needed, no sadhana and no guru. There is madness, and this madness brings one closer to real experience. Unless one goes a little bit mad, one can't transcend the hard realities which are faced in everyday life. How important is comfort in life? How important is a wife and children? How important is money and property? They can only be transcended if one gets a little bit high, and in order to do this a dose of divine love is needed.

This devotion is not a religious act. It is exactly the same act which is being enacted with a beautiful girl, or a young man, with a bottle of champagne. It is exactly the same act, but the person is different and the bottle is different. Neither the young man nor the young girl is there, but there is something else: Rama or Krishna or Guru. Those who can love an impersonal god can do that also. One has to find the way to get high. Therefore, I do not disagree with those who feel that bhakti yoga is the most important, most powerful and highest path for the attainment of that higher experience.

Why is there conflict between head and heart?

Swami Niranjanananda: Emotion is the movement, the dynamism, of the subtle psychic personality. This emotion is not what one experiences in the form of anger, or passion, or frustration; it is not even what one experiences in the form of love or compassion. Rather it represents a state of harmony between the gross nature and the subtle nature – that is real emotion. What one expresses in life is only a reaction that takes place between one's feelings and their

association with the mind. For example, why does a person get angry? It is because of an association between the energy of the heart and the present experience of the mind, and that triggers off a reaction. Jealousy acts as a similar trigger. Anger, violence, crime, compassion, equanimity, serenity are expressions of an interactive process which is taking place between head and heart. However, these expressions can be used to move towards a state of balance within oneself, by observing, analyzing and understanding where one is going wrong. Even the eradication of anger or the discovery of compassion and love are not the answers to finding this balance or harmony between the gross, manifest nature and the subtle, psychic nature which is lying dormant.

Human beings are extroverted by nature, identifying with the senses and the external environment. They have been looking out so much that they have forgotten to look within. They have lost touch, lost the awareness, the quality of observation that can help them find equanimity between the gross self and the subtle self.

The experience of the interaction between heart and head is always just a reaction. People react, and they believe that reaction is an expression of our emotion – but yoga says no! The yogic term for emotions is *bhavana*, which is different from passion, *kamana*, and mental obsession, *vasana*. *Bhavana* is harmony between head and heart. To awaken the *bhavana*, the real emotion, the first condition is that one has to stop reacting. When one reacts, intelligence becomes clouded, the discriminative ability, *viveka*, no longer exists, and personal peace is lost. Even in love there is a conditioned expression of mind, for in love there is always an expectation, always passion and desire – and these are also reactions.

Yoga says: stop reacting. This stopping of the reaction does not mean that one isolates oneself from what is happening around. Yoga also says: be involved. It is an involvement without reacting; it is an involvement that is flowing, and therefore one does not experience struggle – flow is passive and struggle is reaction. This is the stage one

has to come to in order to experience the harmony between the gross and the subtle nature. When there is no alignment, no harmony between head and heart, actions have no aim, yet once there is alignment between head and heart, the expression becomes different.

How does bhakti purify and harmonize the mind?

Swami Satyananda: If some kind of bhakti is felt naturally, no matter how small, one is well on the way to cleaning out the mind of conflicts and phobias. One should follow the path of bhakti, for this is the means to calm the fluctuating mind, remove mental problems and make it more one-pointed. A cloudy, murky personality will be transmuted into one that is as clear and sparkling as a crystal. The aspirant should live and take whatever comes, whether good or bad, for actually there is really nothing that is either good or bad. These are merely relative concepts.

Do and accept. This leads to peace of mind. Many of the tantric deities are depicted performing *abhaya mudra*, a mudra which indicates that everything will be all right. Everything one is thinking now is incorrect and in time all one's misconceptions and fears will disappear. These deities are indicating a great truth but without words. They are speaking through this mudra. Listen to them. In time one will find that they are 'speaking' the truth.

Bhakti yoga purifies the mind. There is a beautiful analogy given by St John of the Cross in his book *Dark Night of the Soul*. He says, ". . . this purgative and loving knowledge acts upon the mind which it is purging and preparing for perfect union in the same way that fire acts upon a log of wood in order to transform it into itself. Fire, acting on the wood, first of all begins to dry it by driving out the moisture and causing it to shed water. Then it begins to make it black, dark and unsightly, and even to give off a bad odour . . . and finally, the fire begins to kindle the wood and give it heat. At last, it transforms it into itself and makes it the same nature of the fire."

How does bhakti yoga make the mind calm?

Swami Satyananda: The aim of bhakti yoga is to channel the desires, ambitions and emotional responses into the feeling of bhakti. This will eradicate the fluctuations of the mind and induce one-pointedness. This is clearly described in the *Uddhava Gita* when Sri Krishna said, “Though attracted by objects of desire and though he has not yet gained control over the mind, my devotee is not overpowered by them, being shielded by his strong devotion to me. Just as fire steadily grows from a small flame to a blazing fire and burns fuel to ashes, so does devotion to me. O Uddhava, blaze forth and consume all obstacles.”

This makes the mind one-pointed and the receiver fit for the grace of illumination and bliss. First of all, the heart and the mind should flow in one direction. Bhakti transforms and transmutes the individual being from the gross to the more refined. It changes *tamas*, inertia and ignorance, into *rajas*, intense activity. Then it changes *rajas* into *sattwa*, the purified state of calmness and receptivity. One becomes progressively sensitive in perception and feelings. In fact, the state of *sattwa* is closely associated with bhakti. Adi Shankaracharya points out in the book *Vivekachudamani* (verse 119):

*Vishudhdhasattvasya gunaah prasaadah
Svaatmaanubhootih paramaa prashaantih.
Triptih praharshah paramaatmanishthaa
Yayaa sadaanandarasam samrichchhati.*

The characteristics of pure *sattwa* are cheerfulness, realization of one’s self, peace, contentment, bliss and steady bhakti towards the atman, by which the aspirant enjoys eternal bliss.

There is a direct relationship between the clarity of the mind and bhakti, and here this means spontaneous bhakti, not artificial bhakti. The cleaner the mind, the greater the flow of bhakti, and the mind becomes intensely one-pointed. In the *Srimad Bhagavatam*, Sri Krishna says (3:29:11–12):

*Madgunashrutimaatrena mayi sarvaguhaashaye,
Manogatiravichchhinnaa yathaa gangaambhaso'mbudhau.
Lakshanam bhaktiyogasya nirgunasya hyudaahritam,
Ahaitukyavyavahitaa yaa bhaktih purushottame.*

The unceasing flow of the mind-stream towards me at the mere mention of my virtues, combined with motiveless love, prem, for me is the characteristic of the real bhakti yoga. (11–12)

Of course, this bhakti need not only be felt towards Sri Krishna; it can be felt towards any deity, any saint or guru. This powerful one-directional bhakti leads to wonderful things. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Sri Krishna says (9:22):

*Ananyaashchintayanto maam ye janaah paryupaasate;
Tesdaam nityaabhiyuktaanaam yogakshemam vahaamyaham.*

For those men who worship Me alone, thinking of no other, for those ever-united, I secure what is not already possessed and preserve what they already possess.

In the process of bhakti yoga one expresses one's deepest emotions and by expressing one's deepest emotions one is trying to create an order and a discipline in the mind.

How does one open one's head and heart?

Swami Niranjanananda: By developing *viveka*, discernment and *vairagya*, non-attachment; for having an open mind is *viveka* and having an open heart is *vairagya*. The faculties of the mind and heart are twofold: one is positive and the other is negative. One is sublime and the other is mundane or being caught up in desires, ambitions and *samskaras*. Becoming caught up in one's own web of desire and emotion is negative, as it limits the full expression or potential of the personality.

To have an open heart, the first thing to do is to free oneself from self-generated passions. Passion reflects aspirations and desires in relation to the external world.

This leads to attachment to the fruits or results one hopes to receive from one's actions. If one can free oneself from these self-generated passions, then one will experience non-attachment.

When one is able to experience non-attachment, then new feelings will be generated which will be more universal and transcendental in nature. They are not confined to oneself alone, yet express themselves equally in every aspect of the manifest dimension. Non-attachment or vairagya is necessary in order to have an open and all-expansive heart.

The second aspect for opening the mind is viveka. Viveka is not rationality; it is not even having a good store of knowledge. It is the process by which knowledge can be differentiated from non-knowledge; 'right' can be differentiated from 'wrong'. This aspect is also developed when there is acceptance of life and not struggle against it. The struggle occurs at a personal and social level and affects the entire human structure.

The search for fulfilment and satisfaction, which is the main drive of every human being, tends to be compartmentalized by the intellect, and this compartmentalization eventually leads to obsession. When clarity of mind is absent, obsession is experienced. Then mental tension and conflict begin, leading to limitation of the mental faculties. Limitation of the mental faculties is experienced externally as fear, insecurity, anger and frustration which become the normal experience of one's daily life. However, along with mental clarity, acceptance of life and dharma, viveka is attained.

Dharma is not a lifestyle, nor is it a philosophy or theory of life. It is a practical understanding of where one's duties lie, as an individual belonging to a society, as a human being inhabiting this planet and as an individual unit of the cosmic identity.

It is a hard path to develop an open heart and mind. One should be more realistic about life and more aware of what one does. Once one is able to accept oneself and one's life,

maybe one will learn to adjust oneself also. Self-adjustment is one of the greatest qualities which one can aspire for.

What kind of mind should a bhakta have?

Swami Sivananda: There are two types of mind. The lower mind filled with passion and the higher mind filled with purity. There are two kinds of intellect, the worldly intellect and the pure intellect. There are two kinds of egoism, pure egoism, which identifies itself with the divine, and the impure egoism, which identifies itself with the body. There are two kinds of thought, pure thought and impure thought. The pure thought pertains to God and the impure thought pertains to the body and the world. The lower mind creates impure thought, impure intellect and impure egoism. All these three form a vicious circle. The three work in cooperation. The pure mind and the impure mind move in diametrically opposite directions. The higher mind unifies. The instinctive mind separates and divides.

The mind of a bhakta is the pure mind or sattwic mind. A pure mind likes solitude, silence, simple living, high thinking, study of spiritual books, philosophical discussions, concentration of the mind, and the company of sadhus and sannyasins. A stainless mind can be judged through one's speech, face and eyes. Through these expressions, the opinion can be formed whether a person has a stainless mind or not. Higher desires, noble aspirations, lofty ideals, true spiritual feeling, mercy, sympathy, pure unselfish love, devotion, enquiry into the nature of the atman, inspiration, genius – all these come from the higher, pure, sattwic mind. The pure mind is Brahman itself. It is an embodiment of purity itself.

An impure or rajasic mind likes crowded cities, much conversation, luxurious life, low thinking, company of the opposite sex, reading romantic novels, eating dainty dishes and selfish activities. The instinctive mind is the lower, impure mind of passion and desire. The vast majority of persons have this instinctive mind only. Even the so-called

civilized and educated persons live on the plane of the instinctive mind. Their senses are very sharp and acute, and they run after more refined things for their sense gratification. They identify themselves with the physical body and the senses. They have no idea of the subtle atman which is entirely distinct from the body and the senses. Their 'I' is the physical, gross body only, though they know that there is a mind.

A gross mind is absolutely unfit for the practice of bhakti. The substance of such a mind is callous and cannot vibrate properly to feel the presence of the divine. You can drive a nail into clay, but not into stone. Before the practice of bhakti can really begin, the mind has to be purified by selfless service, japa, pranayama and various other spiritual practices.

The sattvic mind must be developed by annihilating the lower, impure, instinctive mind. The lower mind should be overcome by the higher mind. You will have to make them one, into one sattvic mind. It is through the sattvic mind that you will have to control the lower or instinctive mind of passion and emotion. *Santosha* or contentment, *shanti* or peace, balance of mind, inner spiritual strength, fearlessness and absence of irritability are some of the signs of spiritual progress. It is only when one has acquired these attributes that the practice of bhakti truly begins.

What is the fulfilment of human life?

Swami Niranjanananda: The source of life is the heart, not the mind. The mind and heart must be connected. In the lives of common people there is separation between the mind and heart, but in the lives of sadhakas and saints there is a connection. This connection, this reunion of heart and mind, is the fulfilment of human life. It is possible to attain this connection once you have become friends with the mind, vanquished the six enemies of passion, anger, greed, infatuation, pride and envy, and found the light needed to dive deeper into the mind by cultivating the six virtues

of life, or *shatsampada*: equanimity, self-control, sensory withdrawal, endurance, faith and constant concentration on reality.

BHAKTI YOGA FOR A QUIET MIND

What are the effects of kirtan?

Swami Niranjanananda: Kirtan creates two effects; its vibrations awaken the pranas and its bhava transforms the consciousness. This is why kirtan is the first sadhana the scriptures prescribe to bring the mind under control.

How can bhakti serve to channel one's emotions?

Swami Satyananda: When one sits for meditation there is so much mental distraction. On analysis, it can be concluded that these distractions were caused by emotions. There is emotional dissatisfaction and lack of emotional fulfilment, and one is always discontented. The path of bhakti is considered to be an important path which aspirants must keep in view.

You know how to love your children. Think of God as your child. You know how to love your father or mother. Think that He is your father and mother. You know how to talk to your master or leader. In the same way, consider yourself as the servant and He as the master.

The emotions need to be channelled, and the best channel is the one which can be practised. Some devotees consider God as their husband or wife, others consider God as their mother or father. The emotional attitudes must be channelled towards God in this way. Then meditation can easily take place.

How do emotions affect meditation?

Swami Satyananda: Emotions obstruct mental japa. Emotions create turbulence in the mind which is otherwise quiet and unruffled like the ocean. Like thoughts, emotions too have vibrations and they spread into the mental field. Their range

extends not only up to the physical and mental bodies, but even into causal bodies. Just as the thought vibrations have a rhythmic pattern, the emotional vibrations too have a rhythm. Mostly the mind becomes entangled in the emotional quagmire and cannot free itself. It happens more so when one sits for japa and, even though one does not will it, still the mind cannot become free from the strong emotional ties.

Modern science has researched the muscular system of the body. The emotions cause the secretion of chemicals in the brain which can lead to the spread of toxins and also elixir. The brain specialists testify that in the muscular functions not only the magnetic waves of the brain but also the chemical secretions are responsible. In that case it is essential to have emotional balance. Observations have shown that through mantra japa the vibrations in the brain bring about special transformation that gradually results in emotional balance.

Mantra japa has an effect not only on the mind, but inevitably on the body too. Some time ago, doctors at the Hypertension Department of Beth Israel Hospital, in the US, carried out joint research on japa and meditation. They found that japa and meditation have a beneficial effect on the human mind and body. When a person is frightened, hormonal secretions from the endocrinal glands have a harmful effect on the body, but regular practice of japa and meditation immunizes the aspirant against harmful glandular secretions due to emotional states like anger and fear.

How does bhakti yoga prepare the mind for meditation?

Swami Satyananda: The mind is never steady. It is restless by nature, like a monkey. When a monkey is stung by a scorpion, it becomes all the more restless so that even a whole bottle of champagne won't quieten it – it becomes super-restless. This is the nature of the mind. It is always moving, never static, unable to hold still or fix itself at one point. Activity is the natural formation and structure of the mind.

The mind is made up of three substances or elements, three qualities of nature: sattwa, rajas and tamas, which are equilibrium, activity and immobility, respectively. These are the three eternal qualities of which the mind is composed. In order to create a state of spontaneous concentration, bhakti yoga should be practised. According to the great gurus of the past, the mind becomes one-pointed spontaneously by the practice of bhakti yoga, in the form of kirtan, satsang and reading about the lives of great saints. Without adding bhakti yoga to one's spiritual sadhana, dissipation of the mind cannot be stopped.

Bhakti yoga helps to concentrate the mind. Without removing the mental dissipation it is not possible to attain dhyana yoga or samadhi. The spade work has to be done. Just sitting in padmasana, the lotus posture, will not help. There has to be preparation.

What is the cause of mental distractions in meditation?

Swami Satyananda: The distractions and dissipations of the mind are due to the overflowing of emotions. The mental concentration is disturbed due to this emotional maladjustment. Whenever one sits for meditation or concentration, the mind does not stick to one point. Again and again it becomes extroverted, it becomes aware of the past, it becomes aware of the future, it becomes aware of the present. Emotion is the cause of this dissipated awareness.

The word emotion here is not used in the ordinary sense of the word. Here the word emotion is used in terms of an energy in man, and for this it is said that bhakti yoga is the method by which the mind can be made one-pointed. Chanting a mantra rhythmically for an hour in a group will help to stop the mind running all over the place.

Here is an experiment: while practising meditation and concentration there has been fighting with the mind and emotions, but now don't fight with the emotions. Sit down in a corner silently and instead of concentrating on one thing according to raja yoga, just close the eyes and practise

meditation or concentration or anything else through the method of bhakti yoga. A great change will be experienced and there will be successful control of the flow of emotions.

How does bhakti help to still the mind?

Swami Sivananda: Namdev, Eknath, Ramdas, Tulsidas, Tukaram, Mira and Madhusudana Swami were a few of the blessed souls to whom God gave His darshan. These bhaktas were yogis in their past lives, and they came into the world with a great asset of spiritual tendencies. They had worshipped God in many births with sincere devotion and did not do much sadhana in their final cycle of birth or incarnation. Devotion was natural and spontaneous in them due to the force of previous spiritual and devotional tendencies.

Ordinary people should adopt drastic, special measures and special sadhana for developing bhakti rapidly. New grooves, new channels and new avenues have to be cut in the old, stony, devotionless heart. Several methods have to be harmoniously combined to cultivate bhakti to the maximum degree. If one method fails to kindle bhakti, other methods will have to be resorted to also. Just as the doctor, in order to cure an illness, will saturate the system with medicine in various forms through various routes, such as by hypodermic injection, intravenously through veins, and orally in the form of mixtures through the mouth; so also the heart will have to be saturated with bhakti through prayer, japa, kirtan, serving bhaktas, charity, studying scriptures, austerity, pranayama, meditation.

Pranayama steadies the mind and removes tossing of the mind. Therefore, it is a help in developing bhakti. Yoga includes all those processes, physical as well as super-physical, whereby the modifications of the mind are restrained and the mind is rendered fit to realize the presence of the Supreme. Just as the reflections of the sun in the water of a lake cannot be seen when there are waves and when the water is in an agitated condition, so also the

self-effulgent God can hardly be seen when the mind-lake is in a disturbed condition. Calm the mind. Still the bubbling thoughts and silence the emotions. See God face to face.

What is the goal of bhakti yoga and human life?

Swami Satyananda: The nature of the mind is to be fickle. Just as the nature of wind and water is to flow, the nature of fire is to burn, the nature of the moon is coolness and the nature of the sun is heat, the nature of the mind is to be fickle and changeable. If there is no movement, there is no mind. It is almost impossible for the mind to become unmoving and peaceful. It is an arduous task to concentrate the mind on one point. That is why Kabirdas says, *Mai una santana ka dasa jinhone mana mara liya* – “I am the servant of the saints who have killed the mind.”

Those who have brought their minds under control become gods. That is why Rama and Krishna are gods. To bring the mind under control is the goal of yoga, the goal of bhakti yoga, and the goal of man’s life. However, it is not so simple. Therefore, do not think much about the mind. The more you think about the mind, the more troubled you will be. Those who think too much of the character, behaviour and workings of their mind suffer greatly. Therefore, think less about the mind.

Can one attain one-pointedness through bhakti?

Swami Satyananda: When the mind becomes steady and one-pointed, the coming and going, the cycle of life and death, ceases. Until manas, buddhi and chitta become stable, death is inevitable. Kabirdas says:

The kings go, the poor go, wind and water go,
But the saint whose mind is steady never goes.

The mind can become steady anywhere, not necessarily in yoga. In fact, it is quicker to become one-pointed in bhakti. For many people it is not possible to make the mind steady in meditation. They can maintain one-pointedness for some

time, but then distractions come again. That is why Tulsidas says that self-realization is too high up. The scriptures praise it, but it is extremely difficult to attain. Even if that state can be reached, the question remains whether it is possible to maintain it.

Only in bhakti yoga can the human mind stabilize itself easily. This is because bhakti is based on *bhavana*, emotions, and yoga is based on *sadhana*, practice. Sadhana needs to be cultivated, it requires effort, while bhavana just needs to be consolidated and channelled. Bhavana for one's children, one's wife or husband, one's enemies and for one's friends already exists within. It is strong and deep, not superficial. If there is hatred for somebody one cannot sleep at night, or if somebody in the family is sick one does not feel like eating. These strong emotions flowing in all directions, right and wrong, just need to be redirected like the course of a river.

Does one seek to lose oneself in meditation?

Swami Satyananda: This attitude of losing oneself in meditation is important, because if one doesn't forget oneself, one is not in meditation, one is somewhere else. This losing could be just for a moment, at lightning speed, but it has to be. During that time the ego is superseded by a higher awareness. That is why bhakti yoga uses the relationship with God or the higher being, and that type of relationship is very powerful.

When bhakti is combined with meditation, why do negative emotions alternate with phases of deep devotion?

Swami Satyananda: The whole body and mind must be transformed and purified. Bhakti yoga is a powerful method of reducing the ego. Most of this mental debris is usually unrecognized. It is only when one becomes more sensitive and aware that these mental aberrations and impurities are seen. At this point they can be slowly whittled away. Without removing the mental disturbances it is not possible to become consumed with expanded awareness, in the same

way that the wood cannot be consumed by the fire until it has been purged of moisture. This is one meaning of the word purgatory in Christianity; it is the stage in spiritual life where the mind is purged of all dross.

This process of purging the mind is not constant, but rather it fluctuates. One experiences peak periods of awareness and of bhakti, after which one is again subjected to purging. St John of the Cross says, “The fire of love once more attacks that which has to be consumed (the mental dross) for more purification.” This drop back into a state of anguish and mental disturbance is absolutely necessary, so that the aspirant can be further purified. More and more mental dross of a subtle nature is purged in the course of time. One feels more and more bhakti. St John of the Cross says, “The soul does not attain a sublime sense of love until it has passed through many trials, tribulations and a great part of purgation.”

How can one transcend the limited human personality?

Swami Satyananda: Bhakti yoga is one of the most powerful methods of inducing meditation. One who is swept away by a powerful current of bhakti will find that meditation will arise naturally. It will come about as a natural consequence of having a concentrated mind. So if devotion is felt, whether it is tangible or intangible, let it be the supercharger that launches one into the realms of superconsciousness. It is said that there are two types of fools: the ignorant fool and the fool who is saturated with bhakti. The happiness of the bhakta is infinitely greater than that of the ignorant fool, for it is based on love and knowledge. So if one follows the path of bhakti yoga, one may find that one has become a fool, but a wise, blissful one.

Intense bhakti will induce the joy of meditation. One becomes the perfect receptacle of divine nectar. One will come face to face with oneself. The root of the word ‘personality’ comes from the word persona, which means ‘a mask’ or ‘an appearance’. Therefore, one’s personality, one’s

individuality is a mask, a shell of something much greater. Bhakti yoga is a method of seeing behind that mask, of seeing behind one's limited personality.

Which sadhana prepares the mind for the experience of God?

Swami Niranjanananda: In the twelfth chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita*, Sri Krishna indicates the signs of a person who is able to become free from the world even while living in it.

The first indication is the quality of *adveshtha*, without the feeling of duality. The statement is: *Adveshtha sarvabhootanam* – one who looks upon all beings without duality. An average person will always think in terms of you and I, high and low; however, a realized being who has attained the state of *adveshtha* does not differentiate between high and low, happy and unhappy. For such a person every being is a child of that one God. This is a state of mind which is free from the experience of duality, for it is duality which is the cause of pain. Sri Krishna says (12:13–14):

*Adveshtaa sarvabhootaanaam maitrah karuna eva cha;
Nirmamo nirahankarah samaduhkhasukhah kshamee.*

*Santushtah satatam yogee yataatmaa dridhanishchayah;
Mayyarpitamanobuddhiryo madbhaktah sa me priyah.*

He who looks upon all beings without duality, who is friendly and compassionate to all; Who is free from attachment and egoism, balanced in pleasure and pain, and forgiving. (13)

Ever content, steady in meditation, self-controlled, possessed of firm conviction; with the mind and intellect dedicated to me, such a devotee of mine is dear to me. (14)

Sri Krishna says that a person who remains under control is dear to him. The question may arise, "Why does God say

that only such a person is dear to me? Is everyone not dear to Him?"

If parents have four children, would they not be fonder of the one who listens to them rather than the three who don't? They may look after them all equally, yet the one who is obedient will be dearer to them. In the same way, God prefers those who are obedient to Him, who adhere to what He says. Therefore, one is not dear to God just because one is God's child. One has to raise oneself to the level where one can be dear to God. This is where the need to acquire positive qualities comes in.

Positive qualities can be established in life through sadhana. The scriptures say that to be rid of the negative qualities that constrict the mind, one has to practise truth. One needs to make room for positivity in life. Many methods have been given to attain this state of mind. These methods are a compilation of practices which can be adopted in life to evolve, grow and reach the highest state.

Kirtan: The first method as mentioned in many scriptures is kirtan, not meditation. This is because kirtans are mantras, and mantras are vibrations which influence the energy patterns.

The cosmic consciousness manifests in an individual life in the form of mind, and the cosmic energy manifests in the form of prana. When cosmic consciousness and energy come into this body, their behaviour, nature and character undergo a change. However, their basic form is the same, the mind being a manifestation of consciousness, and the pranas of energy.

Kirtan creates two effects. Its vibrations awaken the pranas and its bhava transforms the consciousness. This is why kirtan is the first sadhana the scriptures prescribe to bring the mind under control.

Kirtan began to be perceived as part of religion with the coming in of other cultural and religious influences in India. Kirtan has nothing to do with religion; it is a science to purify life. It is a sadhana of life, and it must be understood, learned and practised in that form.

Mantra: The second method is mantra. It is said in the scriptures: *Mananat trayate iti mantrah* – “That which can liberate the mind from its bondages is mantra.” That energy, element or force which can free the mind from its involvement with sense objects is mantra.

When singing kirtan and dancing to their tune, one can attain bhava samadhi, while mantras are practised to make the mind one-pointed, to quieten its distracted behaviour. When one sits down with closed eyes and starts doing japa of the mantra, the mind will automatically become quiet, at least for twenty beads.

Usually, when people sit down to meditate they seem to be running after two rabbits at the same time. That can never be achieved. One thought appears and they run after it; the second thought appears and they run after that. If they want to catch a rabbit, they need to chase only one. This is what is achieved through one-pointedness. If they catch one thought they should follow it to the end. If a second thought arrives, ask it to go away. When they can do just this much, they can be free of the bondage of the mind; the mind energy can be freed.

Vairagya: The third sadhana is vairagya. Vairagya does not mean renouncing. To be free of the effects of *raga*, attachment, is vairagya.

Imagine that it is the height of summer and you are standing out in the sun. After a few minutes you become uncomfortable and restless. How can you adjust in this situation? You can come indoors and stand under a fan or in air-conditioning and you will again become comfortable. This is the analogy for vairagya. The heat does not go away. The blistering sun does not go away. You just change your location. In the state of raga you hold on to something, whereas in vairagya you shift your focus to something else.

Another example: Your neighbour goes away for a few days and gives you the keys to his house to look after it, saying that you may use the house whenever you are there. You look after the house, perhaps watch the television, play

music, use the fridge, however, you do not become attached to anything there. You do not think that the objects there belong to you. Your sentiment is, “They belong to my friend. I am only looking after them.”

When you feel concerned about others it is a state of *vairagya* and when you are concerned only about yourself it is a state of *raga*. *Vairagya* means that you accept an object, but you do not become involved in it. You look upon it as something given to you for safekeeping. You do not attach a sense of mine-ness to it. When you think that it is yours, it is *raga* and *asakti*, or attachment. When you think that you are only looking after it, that is *vairagya*. Therefore, *vairagya* does not mean renunciation but modification of *raga*.

Santosha: The fourth method is *santosha*, contentment; cultivating the *vritti* of *santosha*. Discontentment holds a large space in one’s mind. One is discontented with most things, even insignificant ones. In fact, discontentment is a permanent mental condition for everyone and getting rid of it is a difficult task.

A human being is never contented. It is easy to speak of contentment, yet it is hard to experience it. Contentment can be experienced when there is a certain degree of *sattwa* in the mind. There is no contentment in *tamas* or *rajas*. *Santosha* manifests only in the state of *sattwa*. Therefore, if one wants to free oneself from *tamas*, *santosha* should be practised as a *sadhana* and awakened in one’s life. It will be difficult, one may struggle, the mind will again and again go towards discontentment, yet it can be brought to the state of contentment. One can keep saying, “It is all right. Whatever has happened is all right. Don’t be upset; be happy. You have received whatever was destined for you to receive.”

Sri Swami Satyananda says that irrespective of the effort an individual puts in, they always receive what was destined for them. They may perform millions of actions to enhance their status in life, to look good, yet they only indicate the discontentment of their life. The highest manifestation of *sattwa* is contentment. Once there is contentment in life,

sattwa has become established in it. The sattwa guna has finally entered one's life.

Satsang: The fifth method is aimed at transforming one's way of thinking. *Satsang* means association with truth. The word is often used to mean the company of a sage, yet that is not its real meaning. Satsang can also be practised in seclusion. One does not need to come to an ashram for that. If one can associate with truth in life, that is satsang.

Once there is awareness of truth in one's life, one becomes free from untruth, of that which is changeable. Instead, the truth which is permanent, the ideas which are eternal, take over the mind. Thus, satsang means research on truth, search for truth and making the effort to live with truth. It means making life *satyamaya*, filled with truth. It means that there is no pretence in life, no hypocrisy.

When one practises satsang, one does not pretend to be that which one is not, for one's essential nature cannot change. It can be modified, one can try to improve it, and it will improve only when one allows the practice of truth to manifest in one's life. A person who practises and lives truth is known as a satsangi.

Shraddha and vishwas: The other methods to uproot the negative vrittis and allow the birth of positive vrittis in life are *shraddha* and *vishwas*, faith and trust. They are essential for the evolution of mind, as it is faith and trust which connect one with the inner spirit.

Once, a person came to a sage and said, "Master, I need to cross the river, but I don't have any means. There is no boat and I don't know how to swim." The sage said, "Bring a piece of paper and a pen." He wrote something down on the paper, folded it and gave it to the man saying, "Put this piece of paper in your pocket and walk over the river." The man did as he was told and found that he could indeed walk on water. He walked ten or fifteen steps and suddenly a thought came to his mind, "What is this powerful mantra due to which I can walk on water? Let me see it at once." He opened the piece of paper. It had only one word written

on it: 'Rama'. "That's it!" the man exclaimed. Instantly, he went under. As long as he had faith and trust in the sage and on what he had written down, he could walk on water. The moment his faith faltered, there was no trust, and he drowned.

It is faith and trust that intensify the energy of the mind. Faith and trust connect one with the inner self, and when one is able to create this connection one experiences peace and clarity of mind, and manifests outstanding abilities. This, the sages say, is the goal of life. This is what will allow one to live appropriately and act for one's evolution as well as that of the world.

How does the *Ramacharitamanas* connect with one's inner peace?

Swami Satyananda: I want to give you a few ideas, very simple ones, not just religious ones. These ideas are intimately related to our daily life. Everyone, whether they are Hindus, Christians or Muslims, whether they are rich or poor, men or women – their peace of mind has been hijacked. Everyone's peace of mind has been hijacked. We feel disturbed. Where is *shanti*, peace? Where is she? Who will tell us? Where has she gone? Where has our peace of mind gone? What is this peace? Is she a damsel? Is she an idea? Is she an experience? How did you find peace of mind? How do you define peace of mind?

When we say *Om shantih, shantih, shantih* three times, it is for peace of the total mind: the conscious mind, the subconscious mind and the mind which one does not know, the unconscious mind. Peace in the conscious mind means peace upon earth; peace in the subconscious mind means peace in the skies or under the earth; then there is peace in heaven and peace everywhere.

I am talking about the peace "that passeth all understanding." I am not talking about that peace of mind where you delude yourself by taking a few tranquillizers. I am not talking about that peace which gives you a good sleep. I am talking about that peace which is called *Om shantih, shantih,*

shantih – and that peace has been hijacked and we do not know where she is.

Everyone is searching: the individual soul, you and me as individuals, we are all searching for peace. Where has the shanti gone? Far, far away, that is the answer. But where is that far, far away? Has the shanti gone to England? Who has kidnapped her? Has she gone to China, far, far away? Or has she gone to the Netherlands?

This is the problem that these people have been singing about during the chanting from the *Ramacharitamanas*. A monkey is taking a flight to find out where peace has been hidden, where she is lying captive surrounded by the ten senses, the *dasha indriyani*.

Shanti has been kidnapped because one has become the slave of tensions, one has become a slave of the ten senses. This ten-headed monster known as the indriyas lives in a palace. Ten-headed Ravana lives in a city or a citadel which is golden, not stone. Whose is that citadel? The body is the *puri*, the city, where peace of mind has been held in captivity. So it means that one has to search for peace within. Therefore, the first truth is that one has hijacked peace. Secondly, that peace has to be sought within, not outside.

A ten-headed demon kidnapped Sita, the symbol of supreme peace. She is Maha Devi.

Duyah shantih antariksham shantih
Prithivee shantih aapah shantih
Oshadhayah shantih vanaspathayah shantih
Vishvedevah shantih brahma shantih
Sarvam shantih shantireva shantih
Saa Maa shantiredhi.

Peace in heaven, peace in space
Peace on earth, peace in the waters
Peace to the herbs, peace to the trees
Peace to the universal God, peace to the Creator
Peace to the whole, peace, only peace
Peace will grant me peace.

You hear these mantras, then repeat *Om shantih, shantih, shantih*. Everyone wants peace, and this peace itself is Sita who has been kidnapped by your ten senses and kept as a prisoner in this golden Lanka. Neither has your peace gone somewhere within, nor has someone else disturbed your peace. You alone have disturbed it. You yourself are responsible for that. Your peace has vanished because you have become the slave of these ten senses.

What is the power of bhakti yoga?

Swami Satyananda: Everybody knows how to love. Everybody wants to love and everybody wants to be loved. Therefore, there has already been training in how to love, but now another training is required in how to divert the forces of love from the mundane to the spiritual. Bhakti yoga has the capacity to unite the scattered tendencies of the mind. When raja yoga is practised without bhakti yoga and karma yoga, one has to try hard to integrate and focus the mind. But why do it that way? Why not accomplish the task by uniting the mind through bhakti yoga? Bhakti is the exact tool for unification of the mental tendencies.

SEVA – BHAKTI OF THE HANDS

How does helping others connect one to God?

Swami Satyananda: There are two sides to social work. One involves doing good for the sake of others and the other involves performing service for your own purification. Whatever you do for others, in the end it reaches God. You dedicate it to God, not to human beings. You are just a medium; God is the one who gets it. Hindus, Christians and Muslims all hold this same view and say the same thing.

Is seva a path to God?

Swami Satyananda: There are thousands of ways to be happy, to find peace, to find God, or awaken yogic strength. The easiest way, which Swami Sivananda spoke about, is

mentioned in the *Ramacharitamanas* and has been talked about by Mahatma Gandhi, Vinoba Bhave, Christ and Mohammad; it is the path of *seva*, service. Yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana and samadhi are the eight limbs of the yoga of Patanjali. Swami Sivananda's eightfold yoga consists of serve, love, give, purify your heart, meditate on God, realize Him, be good, and do good.

How is bhakti expressed in seva and prem?

Swami Niranjanananda: The word 'bhakti' comes from the root 'bhaj sevayam'. Generally, people think that bhakti is performing worship, however, there are many different aspects of bhakti. It has been called a modification or *vritti* of the mind. The scriptures state that the word 'bhakti' has come from the root 'bhaj sevayam', to which the suffix 'ktin' is added, forming the word 'bhakti'. The meaning of the root verb *bhaj sevayam* is to serve, and the meaning of the suffix *ktin* is to love. That is why bhakti is explained as *seva*, selfless service, and *prem*, love. Prayer, worship or pooja are only methods of bhakti.

What is the real meaning of seva and prem? Seva, selfless service, is to work for the benefit of others. The action which brings happiness or benefit to another, improves another's lot in life, is seva. What people desire and do for themselves is not seva; it is karma. When their feelings are connected with others then that action is not karma; it is called seva. The effort made for the happiness and elevation of others is seva. That is the first lesson in bhakti.

The first step is 'bhaj sevayam', seva, and the second step is adding 'ktin', meaning prem or love. The state of love is where the heart is soft towards everyone in the world, where one experiences a sense of connection, empathy, affinity and oneness with all. Just as seva is the first step in bhakti, love is the second step; the confluence of both is bhakti.

What is the outcome of seva?

Swami Niranjanananda: As one begins to identify with others more and more, and as one begins to help others more and

more, a beautiful quality develops within that is known as love. Real love is the ability to understand, appreciate and be one with others, and to feel for them as one feels for oneself. This quality comes after one has learned to express oneself in the form of service. This love transcends all feelings, emotions, expectations and desires.

How does one know if one serves with the heart?

Swami Sivananda: If one wants to serve another person truly, one should try to please him in all respects, and do nothing that only pleases oneself. Doing such actions that can bring immense happiness constitutes real service, but generally under the camouflage of serving others, people only try to please themselves. This is a serious mistake. Real service is giving the handle of a sharp knife to another to hold, holding the sharp blade oneself. A real *sevak* rejoices in suffering. He takes on his shoulders the most responsible, difficult and most arduous and uninteresting work and kills his own little self just to please others. He willingly undergoes pain and suffering in order to serve and please others.

What is the interpretation of bhakti yoga according to Swami Sivananda and Swami Satyananda?

Swami Niranjanananda: Worship of God, contemplation on God and mantra japa are not considered bhakti; they are the means or methods to achieve bhakti. The definition of *bhakti* is an expression in life in which one experiences love within, and through which others feel happy. *Seva*, selfless service to others, and *prem*, unconditional love, are the only two kinds of interactions in life that have been accepted as expressions of bhakti.

A *bhakta* is one in whose life service and love are awakened. Such love should be innocent, simple and guileless with not a trace of insincerity or expectation, just pure love. Only then does bhakti fructify. Commonly, the love one experiences in life is directed towards one's family, friends, wealth or possessions. The scriptures have another point of

view. Sage Sandilya says that only supreme love towards God is bhakti.

Supreme love includes the emotion of love and the action of service, combined with jnana, the knowledge that 'I am doing God's work.' Thus, these three ideas converge in bhakti. 'I am serving God's will' is jnana, wisdom or knowledge. 'I am not doing it for myself but for others' is seva or selfless service, and 'I love everybody, my love has become universal' is supreme love. These three aspects together become bhakti. This is the interpretation of bhakti given by our paramguru, Swami Sivananda, and furthered by our guru, Swami Satyananda.

How does one find this place of universal love within one?

Swami Satyananda: It is said that through the power of love, anything is possible. Through the power of doubtless devotion, one can cross the ocean. Through the power of surrender, one can climb the highest mountain. Practically it is true, but only listening does not help. One has to practise.

It is not that one has to obtain the love or devotion or surrender, because everyone has these qualities, but they do not know how to use them properly. That is what needs to be learnt. It is learnt while serving and helping others, and not expecting anything. Then the love and devotion gradually comes, and one learns how to use love, devotion and surrender, more and more. When one has devotion, one becomes aware of what one is doing, and learns without being taught. One can learn while becoming aware of both things, not only material things, even while serving humanity. When there is surrender and devotion one becomes aware of one's thinking, reasons and feelings, and that is how one comes to know oneself. That is how one can discover one's psychology, and that is how one can help others.

What should be a bhakta's attitude while serving others?

Swami Sivananda: One who is established in cosmic love does not shun society; he loves all. He loves the Self which

pervades all creatures. Selfless service springs from him as the breath springs from all living beings. When he finds that someone is suffering, he rushes to relieve them, not because he loves that particular person, but because he has realized that his own Self pervades the other person, because the goodwill that fills his heart naturally flows towards a suffering person and endeavours to remove his affliction. This service he renders naturally – service for the sake of service, love for love’s sake. It is a love that does not clamour for reciprocity; it is service that does not look back for appreciation or reward. In this love, in this service, all are equal.

Why are devotion and surrender crucial for selfless service?

Swami Satyananda: When everything is done with devotion and surrender, then there is no duality. There is no hatred, jealousy or anger. Of course, it is easy to say, but it is also easy to practise if one is really eager. Helping others also indirectly helps one’s spiritual progress. One becomes aware of the samskaras, of what is the subconscious mind. If one can understand the psychology of others, one can also understand oneself, how to correct what is wrong, how to create proper samskaras, how to change their direction. That means, if one is feeling angry, one can just convert it into devotion and remodel it. Anger seems so terrible to others, and later one feels guilty and suffers as a result.

If the anger is converted into devotion, one will feel happy and others will be happy. This is a kind of medicine through which one can cure illness, not only psychological, even physical. Of course, the physical illnesses are mainly related to the mind, and when the mind feels happy it is sure that automatically the physical sicknesses will go away.

Therefore, to realize God one needs to surrender oneself and devote oneself completely. This is how, while surrendering, while devoting, while serving others, one sees God. What is God? God is everywhere, everything is part of God. God means universal consciousness. While awakening

one's little psychosis, while getting rid of this limitation, one becomes unlimited. That means one emerges into this superconsciousness, into this universal consciousness and obtains universal perception. That is called God in religious language. Those who really know it, do not specifically refer to God, Jesus or Christ, Mohammed, Rama or Krishna because for them it is all one and the same, just a different name.

Is seva necessary for spiritual evolution?

Swami Sivananda: Love vibrates in the form of service, charity, generosity and benevolence. *Daya* is active benevolence. It is the positive expression of love; ahimsa is the negative expression of love. Passive goodness alone is not sufficient. Active goodness or positive goodness is essential for spiritual advancement. The aspirant should be ever doing actions. The spirit of service must be ingrained; it must be innate or inherent, not a mere show. All service is empty if there is no love, affection, sincerity and bhava. If one serves with bhava and love, God is behind one.

Adi Shankaracharya, Jesus, Buddha and Mohammed served. King Janaka and Samartha Ramdas served. Serve, love, give. One who practises these instructions can live through hard times and bad days enlightened by heavenly rays.

Make others truly happy as one strives to make oneself happy. Speak a helpful word, give a cheering smile, do a kind act, serve a little. Wipe the tears of one who is in distress; render smooth a rough place in another's path. You will feel great joy.

God's plan for man's evolution is work. Love of God and serving others is the secret of true life. The meaning of true life is service and sacrifice. Life is meant for service and not for self-seeking sacrifice. Do the duties well, sincerely. Privileges will follow unasked.

How do karma yoga and bhakti yoga express the qualities one has developed through personal effort?

Swami Niranjanananda: When people come to living and experiencing yoga, they have to use tools which can help

them express the qualities attained through personal effort. There are two methods to express those qualities in life. The first method is management of one's actions, and the second method is management of one's sentiments, which are the components of karma yoga and bhakti yoga.

In the normal manner, emotions, sentiments and feelings are directed outwards, yet when the same emotions are directed inwards to discover inner harmony, peace and joy, the word for that is bhakti. Then the actions in the world do not become the cause of mental or emotional blocks or bondage. Bhakti means to merge, to fuse, to come together. When the channels flowing outwards are redirected to experience the inner self, the inward flow of emotions and sentiments are known as bhakti. With the perfection of bhakti yoga one is able to transcend the negative, restrictive conditionings of tamas.

Karma yoga means learning how to perform actions in the most creative way, where those actions do not become the cause of further conditioning, but the cause of one's own experience of freedom. In nature, everything lives for the benefit of others; only human beings live for their own happiness. As they feed their selfish nature by searching for pleasure, they bind themselves more and more with the invisible rope of self-oriented actions. This is karmic bondage. The only way to avoid karmic bondage and become free is to understand that, at one point, there is a coming together of human effort and divine will. When human effort and divine will are parallel to each other, that is karma yoga. When the human effort is considered important and the divine will is not, then a different mentality develops. When personal performance identifies with the divine will, surrender happens naturally.

With the combination of the faculties of head, heart and hands, performance improves. The quality of life, behaviour and thinking improves. With this improvement, one attains the aims defined by yoga. One learns how to live a life of awareness, expressing the qualities of intellect and heart in

a balanced way. In the broader context of yoga, one moves from the conditioned state to the unconditioned state, from a conditioned, restrictive mode of behaviour, performance and thought to the creative, expressive and free nature. In yogic terminology, this is the movement from tamasic qualities to sattvic qualities. This journey frees one from self-oriented conditionings and makes one selfless. One performs actions with the focus on creativity, with inspiration, with determination, and with feeling, which becomes the expressive nature of yoga. Life becomes an expression of service. One experiences oneness with the higher nature, which is not a personal or subjective experience; it is a connection with people, with the world, with creation and with God.

How can unconditional love be developed?

Swami Niranjanananda: Service is an extension of one's actions. When one is able to serve others without expectations, it becomes seva. Seva has to be connected with the idea of compassion and love. Love has to be experienced in an expressive, unconditional way. From the example of Sri Swami Satyananda, it can be seen that unconditional love means giving and involving oneself, and conditioned love is taking, withdrawing and isolating oneself. People are conditioned, and therefore the expression of their qualities is also conditioned. They take from other people to fulfil their needs and aspirations. They become happy with what they have received and they isolate themselves from other people. Taking and isolating oneself is reflected in relationships too – 'me and mine' – not letting go of what is considered 'mine'. Taking and withdrawing, not sharing, is conditioned love.

How should seva be understood?

Swami Niranjanananda: The literal meaning of the word *seva* is 'to be with that', *saha eva*. Seva does not mean service; it means to be with that which is human, compassionate and loving. Seva is connecting with the divine, transcendental

nature and expressing that nature in thought, word and deed. One has to let go of the many identities and ideas that one holds close. Surrendering to the divine will and becoming an instrument of that peace is the outcome of seva.

Swami Sivananda said the purpose of seva should be to purify the heart. Purification of the heart comes when the expectations and attachments become more refined, not sensorial, not sensual, not anticipating gain and loss, but when one feels for everyone as one would for oneself. It is a shift in perception from self-oriented to self-expressive. Purifying the emotions through seva improves the qualities of the heart, which are further intensified through bhakti yoga. Seva is developed through karma yoga and purity of heart is developed through bhakti yoga. Both go hand in hand.

How can one serve this large family?

Swami Sivananda: Do not lose a single opportunity in helping and serving others. Serve cheerfully and willingly. Never show Sunday-face or castor-oil face. Use every minute in serving others in the best possible manner. Do not expect anything when you serve a person or give a gift. Thank him for giving a good opportunity to serve him. Serving others is serving God. Serving humanity must not be merely mechanical acts. It must be done with atmabhava. Service is yoga for purifying the heart and the consequent descent of light. All workers must drill and hammer the mind with this bhava.

Serve others with the feeling that God dwells in all and receives one's service as worship. The world is nothing but a manifestation of God. Serving humanity is serving God only. Service is worship of God. Never forget this. God can be best served or worshipped by serving His creatures. When serving, remember one is working for God. There will be rapid spiritual growth. One will soon be transmuted into divinity. Always scrutinize the motives. Slay selfish motives.

How does one maintain the thought of God in daily life?

Swami Satyananda: Think of others and have a heart for their suffering. Thinking of others is thinking of God. Do people ever think of their starving neighbours when they are eating? They are only concerned with whether or not their children and their own family members have eaten. Their concern is limited to their family's welfare. But I am different because I am concerned with the welfare of all. When I eat, I think of the hungry and the starving and send food to such houses. When the cold hits me, the first thought that crosses my mind is whether others have a covering to protect themselves from the cold.

This is my personal experience. I pray to God for supravision, *divya drishti*, with which I can locate hunger and starvation and then do something to alleviate it. Therefore, thinking about the poor and the needy is like thinking about God. To help others is to worship God. If one is able to think about others, one is able to think about God. If one cannot think about others, certainly one cannot think about God; one is only thinking about oneself. It is essential that one should learn to think about others first, then about oneself. People never think before eating, 'is there someone close by who has no food to eat?' Never, never, never!

Life is for serving others. The more energy that is spent in elevating and serving others, the more the divine energy will flow to one. Serve humanity with divine bhava. The cancer of individuality will be dissolved.

Is it through service that one finds God?

Swami Sivananda: Never mind whether realization comes or not. Every effort should be made to improve oneself, to render oneself perfect for the service of others. Look upon all beings as God. If one's concept of God includes the idea that He is all-pervading, then why can't one see Him in all creatures? What makes one hesitate in translating one's belief into action? Such notions that He is available only behind

locked doors and closed eyes will have to be given up. First, His presence must be felt in everyone and everything as one serves. Then He will shine of His own accord in the chambers of the heart.

NEED FOR OPEN HEART SURGERY

How does one see God through the eyes of the heart?

Swami Satyananda: I always had great difficulty in practising bhakti. I used to sing, pray and do japa, but I did it all through the mind. I sang from the mind, prayed from the mind and did japa from the mind. It was the mind which was involved in my practice of bhakti. I wanted my heart to be involved in bhakti, but I did not know how to involve it because it was a very untrained heart. I have never practised affection, *sneha*. I have not loved anyone – neither father nor mother, sisters nor brothers, wife nor son. Of course, I never had a wife or son. Loving my disciples would be the last thing I would do. I have never practised affection, never trained or directed my heart. I have never given my heart to anyone or mobilized it in any form. Even if I worked for yoga, it was not with the heart but with the mind. I met people; I laughed and conversed with them all through the mind, so my heart remained very much untrained.

When I wanted my heart to come into operation, I found it didn't know anything, it couldn't do anything. So it was my problem. Even then I wanted to solve that problem through the mind, intellect, reasoning and logic. When I wanted to bring in my heart, it was just quiet and said, "I don't know." I decided I must develop some sort of relationship with God. I thought about what kind of relationship I could have with God. Is he my father? I didn't like the idea. Is he my mother? No, I am an old man. I can't love my mother. Is he my sister? No, that is a funny idea. Is he my brother? No, certainly not, I am a rascal. Finally, I realized that I am the servant and God is my master.

How can emotions be used for spiritual development?

Swami Satyananda: Man possesses all three faculties of intellect, emotion and spirit, although they appear in different degrees in each individual. There are many situations in life when one is not only intellectual but also emotional. Even too much intellectualism is actually suppression of emotion. The question is how to employ the emotions for spiritual development. A certain amount of emotional energy should be sublimated through divine love, bhakti, and using the emotions for constructive purposes, such as maternal love or social service.

If this is not done, there will be emotional imbalance, and that has taken place in many cases. Even those who have faith in God are sometimes found to be unbalanced because the emotional energy is not let out, but suppressed inside. Only in bhakti yoga can the human mind stabilize itself easily. Give some time to serving God and the mind automatically becomes one-pointed. There has to be balance in life. There needs to be as much devotion to God as cravings for enjoyment. Enjoy this world as much as is possible, but side by side give as much devotion to God as possible.

What is it like for the heart to be open?

Swami Satyananda: It is the opening of the heart that is important, not the philosophical concept of God. Once the heart is opened, everything becomes clear. Whether God has a form or no form, whether God is a man or a woman, whether God is an American or an Indian, everything becomes clear at that time. The moment one has awareness of God, one loses external consciousness. When rubbish is put on the fire, the fire consumes it until nothing is left. In the same way, when bhakti, the inner devotion, flows from the heart, the worldly awareness will not remain. One will forget one is a lady, an American, or South American, or Indian, forty-five years old, or fifty-five years old. Everything will be forgotten. At that moment, the consciousness is

completely consumed, just as the rubbish is consumed by the fire.

What is the importance of ‘heart’ in spiritual development?

Swami Satyananda: Heart is spontaneity of feeling, selection and choice. Greater force has to be used to get off the mental plane; a little bit of practice with a dry mantra here and a dry deity there will not do. One of the great saints of India was Mirabai. She was a princess and a queen and then became a swami, a sannyasin. She left her kingdom and devoted her whole life to the spiritual quest until she reached the final destination. Every Indian knows her songs. Mirabai says that when there is infinite love, there is no further practice. My beloved is in me, and therefore I don't have to go anywhere. This spontaneity of devotion, this bhakti yoga, is the culminating point which everyone should remember.

When one wants to evolve in spiritual life, dry raja yoga will not do; full, exciting kundalini yoga will not do. I have absolute respect for all these, for I teach them. I am not criticizing them. I am only pointing out their limitations. One has to awaken the devotional aspect in oneself, which everyone has. If one did not have this stuff, how could one love, hate, be sad or happy?

What is the role of the heart in self-realization?

Swami Niranjanananda: The heart is very much misunderstood in our society. Modern civilization has encouraged the development of the qualities and faculties of the head; emotions are believed to be a weakness in life. This belief is reflected in statements like ‘Boys don't cry’ or ‘Grown-ups don't cry’. From the beginning of life, the emotions or heart qualities are repressed, suppressed and not allowed to manifest spontaneously. People have lost the connection with the heart qualities. We look at ourselves and our successes in life as achievements of the IQ.

When we identify with the head for a long time, there develops an awareness of a vacuum, an absence of what

nourishes, supports and protects our life. In other words, it is the absence of God from our life. The Upanishads and the Vedas have proclaimed that God lives in the heart. If God lived in the head, it would be possible to experience or attain Him through meditation and samadhi. However, even those who attain samadhi don't realize God. In a book written about six thousand years ago by Sage Narada, there is a story where Narada is asking God where He lives, and God answers, "I do not live in heaven, nor do I live with the yogis. I live in the hearts of those who remember me." The Vedas and Upanishads have proclaimed that the experience of God is possible when the heart is awakened. Therefore, the seat of God-realization is the heart, not the head.

ATMANIVEDANA

What is the true path to the divine?

Swami Satyananda: The ways of the world are many, but the way to God, to spirit, to divinity is one. Dedication to the uplifting of others, seeing others in oneself and oneself in others is the ultimate yoga. There is no other way to change the limited, egocentric vision to a cosmic vision. This is the path and this is the yoga of the new millennium – call it 'freedom yoga'.

The simple person, who does not use his head too much, finds God very soon. God gives darshan easily to people who have the heart of a child. Those who are adult at heart, who are intellectual and talk about the shastras and knowledge, do not reach God. It is not even essential to be a good person to reach God. It becomes essential to be good for social reasons; otherwise, there would be riots and terrorism. To get to God, it is simply necessary to learn to love. That is all.

What are the two hearts in everyone?

Swami Niranjanananda: There are two hearts: one on the left side which is the physical heart, and the other on the right side which is the spiritual heart. The left heart beats

boom-boom and is responsible for circulation, while the right heart beats soundlessly. The right heart beats and another circulation takes place, not of blood but of *bhava*, sentiment. It is this sentiment, this bhava, which connects one with everything: the visible and the invisible, the seen and the unseen. The expressions of the left heart are material and physical in nature. The expressions of the right heart are transcendental and spiritual in nature.

When one sees the beloved, the left heart begins to pound and when one sees God, the right heart begins to pound. Seeing one's beloved, the left heart says, "I love that person." Seeing one's God, the right heart says, "I am one with that person." The left heart always maintains duality: I and that, I and he, I and she. The right heart is always united, "I am one." That is the sentiment. This is not a physical experience. These examples are being used to define the qualities of the heart. One is a physical organ and the other is the actual energy of the heart.

Bhava, sentiment, is the most important aspect of the invisible heart. The invisible heart beats to the sentiment which manifests when one encounters something pleasant, beautiful, unique, divine and transcendental. What are these sentiments, these bhavas? A sentiment represents a mood of the mind. If love is a sentiment, it influences the mental behaviour. Compassion as a sentiment alters the mental behaviour. Affection as a sentiment alters the mental behaviour. Even anger and aggression are sentiments that alter the mental behaviour.

In the Indian tradition, nine major sentiments have been defined. They reflect the nine moods of the mind. These moods are not guided by buddhi, chitta or ahamkara, but by the sentiment being generated in the heart. How does one recognize that these sentiments are appropriate? The way to measure the quality of a sentiment is that it must have beauty and love in it. A sentiment without beauty and love is destructive. A sentiment filled with beauty and love is constructive. That is the only measure of a positive sentiment

and a negative sentiment. When a positive sentiment arises, the heart opens up and what Sri Swami Satyananda describes as 'open-heart surgery' becomes possible. With the opening of the heart, all limitations dissolve and one is able to connect with every being.

What is the connection between the heart and the universe?

Swami Satyananda: The heart is the universe. Two important things should be remembered: one is the heart, the other is the intellect. The heart is the creative principle and the intellect is the destructive principle. The heart is the way to God and the intellect is the way to the devil. This can be seen in the modern world. Even in personal life, one is closer to family, friends and relatives only through the heart. Closeness to somebody through the intellect is only for selfish motives. A person with selfish motives speaks nicely but has his own purpose, which is from the brain, the head.

The heart is free from selfishness. It is the source of the most important quality, which is sacrifice, selflessness. A mother is selfless, God is selfless, guru is selfless, because they operate at the level of the heart. Leaders of a country are not selfless because they operate through the intellect, through dialectical methods. If anybody in the world wants to approach God, to have any connection or relationship with God, intellect is the barrier. Intellect, reasoning and logic will have to be transcended. Intellect can be helpful to some extent, but it becomes a barrier at a certain point and will have to be transcended.

To get to the root of this question, it needs to be understood that God is the centre of the universe. The heart is the eye through which He can be seen. One will never be able to see Him without heart. Studying the scriptures, the Puranas, the Koran and the Bible will be to no avail. God can only be seen through the eyes of the heart. The same God is the centre, the inner soul, of the universe and the totality of the universe. God and the universe are identical; there is

absolutely no difference. In the *Ramacharitamanas* (Balakanda after doha 7, chau 1) it has been said:

*Seeya raamamaya saba jaga jaanee,
Karau pranaama jori juga paanee.*

Knowing the whole world
Is pervaded by Sita and Rama,
I bow down to it, my hands folded in prayer.



5

Bhakti Yoga and Religion

Religion means what yoga means – union.

—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*

SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

What is bhakti yoga?

Swami Satyananda: The path of devotion is the path of bhakti yoga, but bhakti should not be understood in the religious sense. Religion and bhakti are not the same and when one practises a religion, one does not necessarily practise bhakti yoga. Bhakti is intense awareness of the object one loves. This love and attachment is not intellectual, not merely ritualistic, not just an expression of a particular cult. It is a part of one's being. One does not have to learn how to love, how to practise attachment; they are already within everyone. Everyone has brought the essential elements of attachment from the animal incarnations. Attachment is the remnant of instinct. Therefore, this attachment that is within can be sublimated.

Whatever is holy or divine, whatever has good vibrations, whatever can inject good thoughts and ideas, whether it be a good society or a good relationship with a person, that is really the best form of bhakti. God has to become a living force in society, and not be merely confined to churches, pagodas or temples.

As Kabirdas rightly said:

A Hindu says that Rama is dear to him,
But a Muslim says that Rahaman is dear to him.
Both are destroyed by fighting with each other,
But none of them tries to guess the secret.

When I am talking about bhakti yoga, I am not talking about an organized religious system. Religions have got some parts of worship, rituals, and so on, but they do not help. People go to the temple, ring the bell, wave the arati, place flowers and do all sorts of things, but nothing happens, not even a bit of change. The moment they come out of the temple they have a heart attack.

You may go to temples and discharge all religious obligations as taught by your tradition, but that alone will not help you to unlock the inner chambers. At best, they will maintain the sense of fulfilment in your psychological condition.

What will be the next phase for bhakti yoga?

Swami Satyananda: The next phase will be when people say that bhakti yoga is necessary for the whole world, irrespective of caste, colour and religion; that it is necessary for children to know how to devote their time to divine service. There should be no fanaticism, no conversion from one religion to another, no socio-political creed. When a person is converted from one religion to another, it is not religion; it is a socio-political creed used for social and political purposes. One only makes more Muslims, more Christians and more wars. Bhakti yoga has no religious creed.

I can read the Bible without becoming a Christian. If I say, "I am a Christian," what harm is there? If I take a cross in my hand and you take a mala in your hand, what harm is there? They are holy objects. The cross is sacred, a mala is sacred, a yogadanda is sacred, bhasma is sacred, sandal paste is sacred, tulsi is sacred, and a Christmas tree is sacred in some areas.

Bhakti and religion have come to be combined but they are not the same. There has been a mistake and now people are not able to separate them. Religion is mainly for disciplining society – what is right and what is wrong. Religion is dharma, as known in India. What is dharma? Dharma is duty, dharma is virtue, dharma is quality, dharma is propriety – that is the meaning of dharma. Therefore, dharma is for society primarily and bhakti is one's relationship with God, how one expresses one's emotion, *bhav*, attitude, and *bhavana*, sentiment.

Bhakti and dharma have somehow become confused with each other because of their association for centuries. One can be a *dharmatma*, one who adheres to dharma, but one need not be a bhakta. There are many people who are good and virtuous, but they don't believe in God. I know people who don't believe in God or in any reality, but they are good people. There are people who believe in God, who worship him twice a day, who go to all the *tirthas*, holy places, but they are not dharmatmas. From this it is distinctly clear that dharma and bhakti are two distinct paths. They can be walked together – well, one can be a bhakta and a dharmatma both. One can practise both of them together, but when one is analyzing them, devotion and religion are two separate paths.

What is the difference between bhakti yoga and religious bhakti?

Swami Satyananda: Bhakti means real love. If one loves God that is bhakti. Anyone who loves God practises bhakti. Everybody can practise bhakti regardless of their religion. Bhakti is a relationship with God. Sri Rama says in the *Ramacharitamanas* (Aranyakanda after doha 15, chau 6):

*Mama guna gaavata pulaka sareeraa,
Gadagada giraa nayana baha neeraa.
Kaama aadi mada dambha na jaake,
Taata nirantara basa mai taake.*

I am always under the control of that person
Who sings my praise with a rejoicing heart,
Whose speech is obstructed by intense joy,
Whose eyes are full of joyful tears,
Who is free from desire, anger and hypocrisy.

When there is reverence, adoration for God, that is called bhakti yoga. If one does not believe in God, one may believe in guru and give adoration to him. That is also bhakti yoga, but when one prays in the spirit of an organized religion, that is not necessarily bhakti yoga; that is a ritual. Therefore bhakti yoga is neither a religion nor a part of religion.

What is the difference between bhakti marga and bhakti yoga?

Swami Niranjanananda: Bhakti is seen in two forms. One is *bhakti marga*, path of bhakti, and the other is *bhakti yoga*, yoga of bhakti. Bhakti marga is the ritualistic path adopted by different religions in the form of prayer, worship, adoration, repetition of mantra and so on. The Indian system of thought makes a distinction between bhakti marga and bhakti yoga and the scriptures indicate this clearly. In the *Srimad Bhagavatam*, the bhakti marga is described when the nine-fold path of shravanam, kirtanam, smaranam, padasevanam, archanam, vandanam, dasyam, sakhyam and atmanivedanam is explained. The first six stages here are different external rituals that one has to perform to connect with the source of divinity. They allow one to develop a relationship with the object of one's worship, experienced in the seventh and eighth stages. Finally, complete surrender comes about in the ninth stage.

Bhakti yoga, on the other hand, is a path in which one observes and redirects one's emotions by changing the conditions where different emotions are evoked. Those conditions have to be changed and the fluctuation between emotions has to cease. The yogis said that in order to perfect bhakti, one has to fine-tune one's life, environment,

and mental and emotional behaviours. Thus, bhakti yoga is a process of personal observation and modification of the destructive and detrimental states, conditions and behaviours, and understanding what is right and what is wrong.

The religious aspect of bhakti begins with *shravan* and *kirtan*, listening to and chanting God's name. The yoga aspect of bhakti begins with *sanga*, association. Bhakti in itself means purification of emotions, however when religions took components of bhakti into their fold, they had to turn bhakti into an external ritual which could connect one with the object of one's adoration. That is why there is the rosary, the prayers, the mantras eulogizing deities, and many external rituals that are performed with the idea 'I am connecting with God'. That connection with God is a religious connection. One identifies with modes and places of worship and makes them the medium to offer one's respect. That is religious bhakti, not yoga bhakti.

What is the difference between bhakti in religion and bhakti in yoga?

Swami Niranjanananda: Bhakti is a state of mind. One definition of bhakti is 'that which unites you with the divine' and the second definition is 'that which makes your emotions tender, chaste and pure'. Religion adopted bhakti in the form of worship to the divine, and yoga adopted bhakti in the form of emotional purification.

The first trait of a bhakta, according to Sri Krishna, is 'not the one who sings God's name, is not the one who does chanting, is not the one who does kirtan, is not the one who only contemplates about Me'. That is one stream of thought in the commentary of Sri Krishna. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, when Sri Krishna comments on bhakti and bhakta, he clearly says (12:13-20): *Advashata sarvabhootaanaam* – 'The one who sees divinity in all; the one who sees only one soul in everyone'. Who is able to see the divine in all beings? *Maitrah karuna eva cha* – 'The one who is a friend, who is friendly and

compassionate to all'. The one who is free from attachment, egoism and the idea of 'I, me and mine'; the one who is free from selfishness; the one who does not have hypocrisy and arrogance; the one who is always balanced in pleasure and pain, who does not feel happy or sad at the time of pleasure and pain, yet is always balanced in both states; and finally, the one in whose life mercy is expressed in behaviour and character – "such a being, such a devotee, is dear to Me."

In these eight verses, Sri Krishna explains how a bhakta should be. Worshiping God is a form of bhakti in the religious tradition. The state of inner purification is true, for only through it can one direct the emotions towards the soul and the divine that is within.

What is the purpose of religion?

Swami Satyananda: Religion is simple to define: the relationship between God and the individual soul, the devotee. Whatever relationship one may have, that is dharma. God takes care of us; that is His dharma. I remember God; this is my dharma, and by God's grace may I follow my dharma. This is the ultimate definition of religion. Dharma has this one definition only. The rest means nothing. Some people bury the dead in tombs, others burn them in flames. Some have a custom of wearing rings and others wear the mangalsutra. Some keep their wives to their left after the wedding and others to the right. Some people believe in touchability and untouchability, others do not. These are customs and traditions, not dharma. Whether to cremate or to burn somebody, to conduct a marriage in this way or that, to light a candle, *deepak*, or lamp, is a matter of custom or tradition. The Hindus say one thing, the Christians another. This is not religion, but today it goes under the banner of religion.

Religions are institutions which are formed from time to time to guide people. Christ preached some sermons and his disciples wrote them down. Mohammed preached and that was written down. Saints and sages gave teachings which

were written down and later administered to the people. However, later on the actual meaning of these teachings could no longer be explained to the people. Religion has become socially rigid and no one is able to change it. For example, no one is in a position to bring any change in *varnashrama dharma*, the system of the four principle castes, although no one actually practises it nowadays.

How did religions replace faith or the connection of the heart?

Swami Niranjanananda: Many people identify faith with religion, however, faith should be seen in a different context, for faith predates religion. Faith has given birth to the philosophy of Advaita Vedanta, which today is adhered to by the sannyasins in India. When human beings first appeared on the planet, they came endowed with faith, not with intellect. When they were hungry, how did they know which fruit to eat or which animal to kill to satisfy their hunger? It was not due to a logical analysis or an intellectual decision. It was faith that propelled them to eat something about which they had absolutely no knowledge. It was faith that propelled them to take the risk between life and death.

When humans began to ask, “Who am I? What is this body? Am I alone in this universe?” it was faith which connected them to the cosmos, to the universe. It was faith which made a human being see the spark of divinity in a stone, a tree, a river, a mountain, in the sun, moon and stars.

Religions like Shintoism in Japan and the ancient Indian traditions honour nature, creation, and have respect for the divinity that exists within it. When the identity of the divine essence is perceived in everything – in material objects, in stones, trees, animals and humans, it gives birth to the Advaita Vedanta philosophy – that God is in everything, everything exists in God.

Advaita Vedanta was the first philosophy of humanity, and it is not a religion. The Advaita Vedanta philosophy was the outcome of faith in a higher reality, a higher existence,

and it predates every kind of religious belief. There was no Christianity 2,000 years ago. There was no Islam 1,500 years ago. What was the role of faith before these religions existed? What was the role of faith 10,000 or 20,000 years ago? It was pure. It had nothing to do with individual aspirations to realize the transcendental reality.

This faith, this heart connection, was dimmed with the advent of civilization and identification with sources of comfort and luxury. With trends to manipulate nature to suit one's needs, this faith was overshadowed by the greed of materialistic attitudes. Greed gave birth to what can be called emotional infidelity and intellectual infidelity. There was disconnection from the heart at that point.

Today all the heart experiences that one expects, desires and expresses are not pure experiences of the heart. They are tainted, coloured and conditioned experiences. Even compassion, faith, belief and love are conditioned. People worry about associations and relationships, desires and aspirations. There is no place for faith in today's life. People have lost faith in nature and in themselves due to their own folly and shortcomings.

Today, they associate faith with religion. When much later in human history religions came and organized themselves as sects, as traditions, as groups of followers and believers, the spiritual awareness went out of religion and what remained was a blind ritualistic process which had to be adhered to by believers and followers of that religion. Organized religions created a set of disciplines in order to maintain and retain control. Faith, the connection of the heart, ceased to be a reality in one's life.

How does yoga reach out to all religions?

Swami Niranjanananda: The root of the word 'religion' in Latin is *religare* which means 'to come back to', 'to reunite or join'. This process of unity or returning represents the coming together or merging of the individual with the divine. The word *yoga* means the same thing – 'to yoke',

‘to bind together’. The words ‘yoga’ and ‘religion’ mean basically the same thing – the coming together of two things: one manifest and the other unmanifest, human nature and divine nature.

The main difference in the yogic system is that there are specifically defined practices which deal with moral conduct, the physical body, the mind and the experience of spirit. The yama and niyama of ashtanga yoga are used in order to create a positive and creative change in one’s thinking, behaviour, performance and lifestyle. They deal with the moral aspect of life. Every religion puts forward the same ideas, although maybe in a different order.

Yoga goes into the physical aspects. Through the practices of asana and pranayama the entire physical structure is balanced. If one is ill, one can get well soon and become healthy by doing yoga. If there is any type of imbalance in the systems of the body or in the brain, one can get rid of that imbalance and obtain optimum physical health.

Yoga also deals with the mind. People have tension, anxiety, depression, inhibition and fear. The process through which they can gradually control or eliminate these disturbances from the mental structure is pratyahara and dharana. Then, to cater to one’s spiritual needs, one has the aspect of dhyana which culminates in samadhi.

There are different personality types. Some people are emotional by nature and feel inclined to bhakti, ritual, worship and contemplation. Some are intellectual and cannot understand the bhakti aspect. They like to study, analyze, think, rethink, formulate their own ideas and make their own decisions. They are the jnanis or *buddhijivis*, intellectuals. Some people are psychic and perceptive by nature and just flow intuitively with life. Then there is the dynamic type of personality who likes to be always doing something and involved in some active expression. Therefore, various practices have evolved for the variety of personality types in order to awaken that predominant

faculty to the maximum, and to use it to bind the human and divine natures together.

Yoga is definite about not interfering with anyone's beliefs and religion, and this is why it is being accepted and taught all over the world. Due to this, there are ashrams and swamis teaching yoga in almost every country. When I was in South America in the early part of the seventies, I taught meditation, pranayama and asana to nuns and priests and had discussions with them. They felt that the practices of yoga gave them a deeper understanding of their own experiences in prayer, sadhana and meditation.

If people have a clear understanding of how yoga deals with the moral, physical, mental and spiritual structures independently by focusing on incorporating the divine areas of their personality into the body, I do not think there can be conflict with any other belief, tradition or religion. Rather, yoga complements the realizations and experiences gained through other traditions and religions. In an inter-religious group, it is possible to have common bhajans of no particular religion in order to cater to all.

How do you explain the lack of bhakti in religion today?

Swami Satyananda: The materialistic outlook has completely broken the backbone of Christianity in western countries. This is not good because Christianity is one of the finest religions, based on the preaching of the great saint Jesus Christ. As their religion breaks down, people look for another religion to adopt. In their search they find two superior religions – Buddha dharma and vedic dharma. The preaching of Buddha and his religion constitutes a great dharma. It teaches mental peace and shows the path of dhyana, jnana and bhakti. If one does not have devotion towards God, then one can have it towards Buddha, who is regarded as God. The Buddhists say:

I take refuge in Lord Buddha,
I take refuge in the Dharma,
I take refuge in the Sangha.

Why is sacrifice of one's self necessary?

Swami Satyananda: Unless one is able to give one's mind and awareness totally, this path of yoga is just any ordinary religion. In the morning one gets up, does asana, pranayama and meditation – it is like a religion. Those who are keen for realization have to make a sacrifice of their own self. As one sacrifices an animal, one sacrifices oneself.

People are not willing to accept that by changing their religion they will not reach God sooner. They will not reach God if they change their path or caste. They have to change themselves to reach God, whatever their religion or caste may be. They have to change their faith and belief because God is a subject of faith and belief. Sri Krishna says in the *Bhagavad Gita* (12:20):

*Ye tu dharmyaamritamidam yathoktam paryupaasate;
Shraddadhaanaa matparamaa bhaktaaste'teeva me priyaah.*

Those devotees who follow the immortal dharma, endowed with faith, regarding Me as their supreme goal, are exceedingly dear to Me.

God is not a subject of red cloth and beard. He is not a subject of Mulla Nasaruddin, Mulla Kamruddin, Pandit Ramchandra. God is a subject only of faith and belief. It does not make any difference whether one is Hindu, Muslim or Christian. Whatever one may be, if one is true one's devotion will take one to God. In the *Ramacharitamanas*, Sri Rama tells Shabari that he acknowledges the relationship of bhakti and bhakti alone.

How do religions and bhakti yoga differ?

Swami Niranjanananda: Bhakti yoga is generally defined as the yoga of devotion, adoration and contemplation. This understanding has come about because of religious interference in people's spiritual lives, and it continues due to habit. Religions have defined their own methods of worship as devotion and their own methods of contemplation as the means to commune with God. Somewhere, the

idea of worship and communion with God has overlapped with the concept of bhakti yoga. However, looking at the classical texts and scriptural references, it is clear that bhakti yoga does not mean devotion, but it is a process of personal, psychological, intellectual and emotional transformation, moving from a tamasic state of existence to a higher quality, a purer state of existence.

What is the result of bhakti yoga?

Swami Niranjanananda: When ambitions do not dictate the affairs of life, when personal greed and needs do not dictate one's actions, the emotional transformation experienced through bhakti yoga changes the entire life, it transforms the entire consciousness. The outcome of bhakti yoga, perfection in the nine stages of bhakti yoga, has been described by Sri Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita*.

The final outcome of bhakti yoga is not seeing duality, distinction or division between people. With bhakti yoga, we are endowed with friendship, compassion and forgiveness. We transcend the ego expressions and are equipoised in pain and pleasure. These are the qualities that arise from bhakti. Sri Krishna describes the result of having perfected bhakti in the twelfth chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita*.

We have not even started to practise and attain the first experience of bhakti yoga, for we have always used bhakti as a method of coming closer to what we believe to be divinity. Bhakti yoga is confused with religious rituals, prayers and chanting, but bhakti is not that. Bhakti yoga is a process of inner psychological change and transformation. The heart is as complex as the mind, if not more!

How does the practice of yoga relate to religion?

Swami Satyananda: Religion means getting oneself connected again. Religion means what yoga means – union, but in fact, what we understand by religion today is a set of rituals, a set of superstitions, a set of communal feelings. If by religion we mean that, then certainly yoga does not mean religion, but

if by religion we mean a process by which an individual is returning from the experiences of objectivity to the self, then yoga means the same as religion. This is a question which is often asked in the West, but I always tell them that yoga is science, and it can be proved.

Religion is essentially not different from yoga. Yoga contains all that is said in religion and religion contains all that is said in yoga, but there is one difference – yoga is secular in approach while religion is not – otherwise there is absolutely no difference between them. Religion is accepted by those people who believe in God, but there are people in the world who do not want to believe in God, or who want to believe in God but not as a bhakta. Those people take to yoga. One should not see any difference in this, but yoga should be left absolutely free from any religious touch.

Christ, Buddha and every saint and prophet wanted to give love, but what happened? What did their disciples do? They distributed religion, not love. They created nations and institutions, but that is not love.

How can one fulfill the purpose of one's own religion?

Swami Satyananda: If you have a religion, you pray and you do pooja, but where is your mind, what are you thinking? For how long have you been praying and doing pooja? What is the net outcome of that? I am not discouraging you. I only want to say that, if the people who believe in religion take the help of yoga practices to discipline their body, mind and emotions, they will be able to fulfil the purpose of their own dharma, whether Hindu, Christian, Islam or any other religion. Even if you do not believe in religion, you are free to do so. Religion cannot be a compulsion.

What is the real purpose of human life?

Swami Satyananda: Consciousness or awareness, in its varying degrees, is a special gift of man. We know what we are doing, unlike the lower animals. For instance, I am giving a discourse on the subject of yoga, and I know

it. I am aware of it, and I can remember it. This kind of awareness is not complete awareness, only a fraction of awareness, a part of awareness. The awareness of awareness, on the other hand, is a faculty which must be developed, point by point, step by step. This awareness of awareness is complete awareness, and it can be developed through yogic practices. The real purpose of human life is to experience this complete awareness. The fully developed awareness is God-realization – samadhi. It is awareness in all its infinite completeness, becoming one with God, communion with God, and that communion is yoga. It is attained through the development of the superconscious.

The superconscious state and the God of religion are one and the same thing. There is no difference between what yogis attain and what deeply religious people attain. In any case, the superconscious state is difficult to attain for any person, no matter of what persuasion. How to overcome these difficulties has been the subject of much research in India. Down through time, people have come forward with their prescriptions of how to deal with the difficulties. There are numerous prescriptions for the attainment of supreme awareness, nirvana or moksha, kaivalya or God-realization. There are prescriptions to aid one to become an instrument of the Divine Spirit or the Holy Ghost, in short for every sort of manifestation. One of these aids is bhakti yoga, the yoga of devotion. Bhakti yoga is not so terribly different from the devotion that is practised in Christianity, but there are differences of course.

If all religions are born of bhakti yoga, do you think religions like Hinduism, Christianity and Islam will eventually be merged into one world religion?

Swami Satyananda: There will not be any universal religion at any time because people will not allow it. There are many such elements, which they will not allow. There cannot be a universal religion, for the need of nations, the need of people from different countries is different.

All religions nowadays teach nothing but ethics. Whatever religion you go to, they will say, "Do not speak falsely." This is ethics, it is not religion. As a matter of fact, whether it is Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Judaism or Zoroastrianism, all that remains is ethics. They teach you to be righteous, to be truthful, that is all, but religion is meant to be much more than that. Therefore, religion will become one limb of yoga, as far as yoga ethics are concerned, and yoga ethics will have to change according to the needs of the people and the times.

There are so many religious beliefs and injunctions that have tended to make man become subservient to man externally, not only in Hinduism but in every religion. If we follow them word by word, we will never improve in this life and our society will become very closed and compartmental. We are improving today because we are fighting with religion. Society as a whole is making advancement because we do not accept religion as a whole. I am Christian but I do not follow it, therefore I am improving.

If we start to follow Christianity or Hinduism in toto, we will fall because religion is old. All religions are based on the fundamental, selfish aims of kings, monarchs and rulers. They patronized them because they knew that the instructions given by the religion were in their interests. Religion is not free from capitalistic tendencies, and this religious instinct sometimes comes into yoga. We cannot help it, because people are not so intellectual. Therefore, if you want pure yoga you will have to differentiate it from religion. I personally believe in God but I do not believe in religion; this is my final view. I think that religion has been the main cause of men's ignorance, but God is something else.

Can bhakti yoga lead the aspirant towards truth?

Swami Satyananda: In the process of finding out the unknown and mysterious things of the universe, the sages contributed their own experience, but these experiences were not

identical. No, no, no, certainly not, and they said they were not identical because the thing they were trying to discover is not a simple thing. It is like seven blind people trying to explain an elephant. In the same way, the Jain philosophy says, 'possibly it is like this, possibly it is not like this. Possibly it is neither like this nor like that. Possibly it is like this or like that also'. It may be called the doctrine of probability because no individual can say that he has understood the intimate secrets or is the master of the secret, if there is one. Therefore, they say this is my experience. Sage Patanjali says this is my experience. Vyasa says this is my experience. Christ says this is my experience. Mohammed says this is my experience. Moses says this is my experience. Many other saints and sages came and gave their own experience. From their experience one thing is clear, that there is something behind and beyond what you are. This is a fact – you can't say that there is nothing.

The sum and substance of the experiences and teachings of these great saints and sages is that there is something. One cannot say there is nothing. Now about that something, some say it is a different thing and they practise yoga in order to be able to experience something beyond this, the depths of the mind, going into jivatma, individuality, ego, then going beyond. People have to go through a process of meditation where they experience it. Well, it is not that simple. In bhakti yoga, the bhakti movement in India, not the yoga movement but the bhakti movement in India, it is made very clear. It is said, 'No, you cannot know the whole truth. No! For if you happen to know the whole truth then it is a logical fallacy, because when you say that you know something, it means that you are accepting duality. How can one know the knower?' Therefore, don't worry about these things, just practise your devotion with faith and love and forget everything else. All religions are born of bhakti yoga.

BHAKTI YOGA FOR HUMANITY

Does the practice of religion transform consciousness and personality?

Swami Satyananda: Most people in the world are religious. They are Hindus, Jews, Buddhists, Christians, Muslims and so on. However, though they practise their religion, it does not influence the quality of their mind. I am not criticizing, I am just citing facts. For the vast majority of religious practitioners, the ceremonies are just external. They go to church, synagogue or temple; they prostrate before the deity; they observe many rituals, but what change does it make?

I do not expect it to change the whole personality, that is very difficult, but at least it should change the quality of one's reactions to the events of life. It does not do that. On the contrary; for example, most religions of the world have been responsible for intolerance and even for genocide, so religions have not really improved the quality of humanity.

This comes about because religions have moved without yoga. When a religion is just a religion, it is extrovert, but when a religion is combined and integrated with yoga, it improves the quality of one's inner awareness.

Is religion separate from the loving and passionate core of human nature?

Swami Satyananda: Emotion, passion, attachment, the knowledge and feelings of pleasure and pain, are based on or are the offspring of this stuff called *bhava* or attitude, *bhakti* or devotion. People have been living the life of Christians, devoted to Christ and God and Church. Or they have been living the life of Hindus, devoted to Hindu dharma, the temple, Sri Rama and Sri Krishna and so forth. In the course of time, these religious formalities have followed a tradition of decadence. There is nothing wrong with them, but everything has degenerated and decayed. Gurus in Hinduism as well as in Christianity have failed to explain

how bhakti is intimately connected with the emotions and passions of people's lives. Just as a passionate man loves a woman or vice versa, so people must approach their deity with the same force, attitude and spontaneity. Does anyone have to make an effort when they love somebody? No! It is not difficult.

How can bhakti solve the problems of the mind?

Swami Satyananda: Lumbago is not the only pain that man suffers from, nor is arthritis. It is true that there is pain, but there are many other problems in the human mind, consciousness and psyche. If one were to search for an individual cure for these problems, it would take a lifetime. However, there is a common cure for them all in bhakti. Therefore, one must practise kirtan, have satsang and read the lives of great saints, whoever they may be: Mirabai, Ramakrishna, Saint Francis, Sri Aurobindo, Saint Teresa of Avila or Saint John of the Cross. A devotee should read the teachings of Saint Thomas Aquinas, for example, and just try to live like that, but not make bhakti a religion or a sect. This will take time to develop because the intellectual mind is a hard nut to crack. Therefore, a devotee should not take recourse in vain discussions.

Why is it incorrect to confine saints and sannyasins to a system of belief?

Swami Satyananda: It is not appropriate to attach any religion with sannyasins, for they do not have any religion. They may have been born into a religion, but they do not have any religion. They are always non-sectarian. Therefore, one must read the teachings of every saint and learn about them. The biggest definition of saints is that they do not belong to any one individual religion, but to all. They do not consider any one person as their own, but all as their own. Notions such as 'This is my nephew; that is my mother' do not apply to saints. For them, all are their own whether they call them disciples, devotees or followers.

Paropkara, helping others, is the basis of the life of all saints. They are not born to help their own souls, but to help others. Saints are not recognized by their religion, but by their genius. If a piece of diamond drops from someone's pocket, one will not identify it with a religion or sect. If one does not identify differences in diamonds or even currency notes, then one should not see differences in the virtues of saints.

Do bhaktas come from all walks of life?

Swami Sivananda: Many saints came from the so-called lower classes. They were illiterate. They did manual labour to make ends meet. They were persecuted by persons in power. Sadhana was a dealer in meat. Dharma was a poor Jat cultivator. Sena was a court barber at Rewa. Kabirdas was a common weaver. Raidas was a cobbler. Namdev was a tailor. Tukaram was a cultivator.

However widely bhaktas may differ in other respects, they are all alike in their pure and one-pointed love for God. One should not judge a devotee or a saint by his birth or literary attainments. In devotion, caste, culture, physical appearance, birth, possession and occupation do not matter. It is said in the *Narada Bhakti Sutras* (sutra 72):

Naasti teshu jaatividyaaropakuladhanakriyaadi bhedah.

Among them (the devotees) there is no distinction based on caste, learning, beauty, family or birth, wealth, observance or profession and the like.

Nishada was born in a low caste, Shabari was a rustic woman, Dhruva was an uneducated boy, Vidura and Sudama were very poor, Vibhishana was an ugly Rakshasa, Hanuman was a monkey, Jatayu was a bird, Gajendra was an elephant, the gopis of Vrindavan were not initiated into vedic rites, but all of them attained God-realization on account of their devotion and self-surrender.

What is the focus of bhakti in various religions?

Swami Satyananda: In Christianity, the focal point of bhakti is Christ or the Virgin Mary. These can also lead to transcendence if the bhakti is great enough. In fact, this is the method that many great Christian saints have used in order to know the unspeakable. Saints like Saint Bernard, Saint Teresa, Saint Francis and so forth, were all bhaktas. They all used their love of Christ as a means to deeper understanding of existence. In this way, they harmonized their whole being. From this arose cosmic understanding and bhakti.

In tantra, there are vast numbers of forms of Shakti, the cosmic mother. They represent the various aspects of existence. They represent the absolute. It does not matter whether it is Kali, Durga, Chhinnamasta, Tripurasundari, Saraswati, Dumavati, Shodashi, Bhuvaneshwari, Annapurna or any of the hundreds of other traditional forms of Shakti. If one feels bhakti to one of these forms, and many people do in India, then one should direct one's emotional and mental energy towards it. This will channel the forces of one's being.

Incidentally, this is why the spiritual climate of India is so extraordinary. There are countless numbers of deities, all of which are perfectly acceptable as a focal point of bhakti. Such is the tolerance and freedom of worship. The worship of the supreme can be directed towards anything. Why not? These different images act as a centre through which one can expand awareness, but there must be compelling devotion. There must be attraction towards a particular form. Without this there cannot be bhakti.

Certain systems of Buddhism use deities as a means to higher awareness. Actually, Buddha was against the use of deities, for he knew that they could so easily lead to superstition, ignorance and dogma. This is partly true, and was certainly the case in Buddha's time when religion had totally degenerated into mere ritual without meaning, purpose and understanding. However, this will not occur

if one keeps in mind the purpose of bhakti and is tolerant of other forms of worship. Bhakti can lead to expanded awareness. After the death of Buddha, many Buddhists realized that there was justification for the use of deities. Therefore, many deities were introduced into such sects as Tibetan Buddhism – Amogh Siddhi, Tara, Avaloketeshwara and others. These represent different aspects of existence and states of awareness. They can be used as objects of bhakti. They can invoke power well beyond their material form.

In Islam, Mohammed discouraged the worship of images of the supreme for the same reason as Buddha, because among superstitious people it can so easily lead to mere idolatry. This again was certainly true when Mohammed was alive. People worshipped idols in a blind fashion. Rituals were performed in mere lip language without any real feeling, which led to ignorance, exactly the opposite purpose of worship and bhakti. There has to be an attitude of understanding. Islam, however, is a bhakti religion. The bhakti is directed towards Allah, the all-embracing God. He is worshipped as an abstraction.

What we have said about Islam also applies to Judaism: the bhakti is directed to a nebulous or formless form of the supreme. One can use a specific form as a focus of devotion or one can use an abstraction; it does not really matter. The important thing is to feel some type of bhakti, to express it and channel it in one direction towards the form, or non-form of the supreme.

Is ritual and worship part of bhakti yoga?

Swami Niranjanananda: The twelfth chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita* is the clearest definition of bhakti yoga that has ever been presented. It predates every religious, moral and ethical belief of the present-day traditions of Hinduism, Christianity and Islam. This is the concept of bhakti yoga that has been ingrained in India and the yogic culture. Worship is called *aradhana*, not bhakti yoga. Mantra repetition and other

practices are called *upasana*, not bhakti yoga. Bhakti yoga is a process of inner transformation.

BUDDHISM

Is there bhakti and bhakti yoga in Buddhism?

Swami Satyananda: Bhakti is rarely associated with Buddhism, but Buddha himself was actually the epitome of a bhakta. He was said to be ever blissful. He was even known as the ‘compassionate one’, which surely implies bhakti. Wherever he went he radiated love. Though he did not preach bhakti yoga as a method, he himself was a perfect example of an intoxicated bhakta. The same also applies to Buddhism; it does not teach bhakti yoga as a path, for it is easily misused and can lead to blind superstition, but its prescribed paths eventually lead to the experience of bhakti.

It is said that Buddha urged his disciples to have faith, but not blind faith in dogmas or the scriptures. It is faith in the existence of a higher reality, of the possibility of attaining liberation and knowledge.

One of Buddha’s basic teachings is that the world is full of suffering. This is not a statement of despair, but a means to wake people up to their current way and quality of life. It was intended to give people a kick so that they questioned their unhappiness and started to seek higher levels of being. The aim of Buddhism is the same as all other systems – supreme knowledge. It is only the methods that appear to differ. Yet its methods are basically raja yoga and jnana yoga. The culmination of these practices leads to the knowledge of equality and sameness of all people and all things. This is called *samata jnana* in Pali. This leads to all embracing compassion for everyone. This is bhakti, not the path of bhakti yoga, but the experience. Also one of the well-known dhyana Buddhas symbolizes bhakti. This is *Ratna-Sambhava*, the jewel born, who represents the outgoing love that arises because of the realization of the essential unity of all things and beings.

There is a popular Buddhist bhakti sect in Japan called Jodo, the Fair Land School. They worship *Amida* (Amitabha, the infinite light) a personification of the source of all revelations and intuitions. Amida is associated with forty-eight vows, one of which is that he will not attain enlightenment until, by his enlightenment, all other beings will also gain enlightenment. Worship of Amida helps to break down ego motives and to have respect for the wellbeing of others. The mantra *amitabha* is repeated over and over again. This is the same method as other forms of bhakti yoga and is a form of japa yoga. Keeping Amida continually enshrined in his heart, the aspirant is compelled to think of others and not become lost in his own experiences. Remembrance of Amida helps to break down selfishness.

Shoma was a great Jodo bhakta. He was a poor labourer who lived in Japan in the 19th century. The following story is recorded in a book on his life: He once went to a Buddhist temple in the countryside. He entered the main door and immediately relaxed and rested in front of the shrine of Amida. One of his friends was astonished for he thought that Shoma had no respect for Amida. Shoma replied, 'I am back in my parent's home, and for you to think as you do, you must be a stepchild'.

Shoma was totally happy in the embrace of the great compassionate heart of Amida. This story is similar to the stories of bhaktas in other religions: the surrender of the devotee to the divine.

BHAKTI YOGA AND CHRISTIANITY

What is the influence of yoga on Christianity?

Swami Satyananda: Christ came to India. As a child, Christ used to question the leaders of the Essene community and they gave him whatever knowledge they had. However, they were not able to answer all his questions on spirituality. They told him that there were many questions that only the Indian

seers could answer. Christ came to India by the overland route. He travelled all over India and took with him the philosophy that was prevalent here two thousand years ago.

In those days, Vaishnavism and Buddhism were prevalent here. What can be found in Christianity today is an amalgam of bhakti and raja yoga from the Vaishnava tradition and the universality of Buddhism. In Christianity you find the yamas and niyamas – *satya*, truth; *ahimsa*, non-violence; *asteya*, non-stealing; *aparigraha*, non-accumulation; *shaucha*, cleanliness; *brahmacharya*, celibacy. That is raja yoga. How then can you differentiate between raja yoga and Christianity? Raja yoga is one of the most important components of Christianity. What is bhakti? ‘God, you are everything. I am Thine, My Lord, Let Thy will be done’ – that is Vaishnava bhakti.

The philosophy of Christ is simply a combination of Buddhist ethics and Hindu bhakti. Bhakti, love of God, self-surrender, ‘Thy will be done’; that is the teaching of Christ. Christ gave ethical instructions and Buddha also gave similar commandments. When Christ came to Nalanda, he liked Buddhist ethics very much, but he saw the imperfection in it. He saw that it lacked faith in God, so he said, “When I go back to my people, I will teach the Buddhist ethics plus faith in God,” and he preached those commandments in the Sermon on the Mount.

The philosophy of Christ was a happy blending of Hindu faith and Buddhist ethics, which he came across in Nalanda, in Varanasi and Nepal. Nepal is a land where Hinduism and Buddhism have blended into a homogeneous culture. Even Brahmins eat meat there; it has religious sanction. Varanasi is the centre of Hinduism and Nalanda was the centre of Buddhism. Christ went to study in these three places and he learned three different philosophies, which he later combined.

Right from his birth Christ was greatly inspired. He came to fulfil a mission, but he did not find the atmosphere conducive in his birthplace, so he went to India as it was the land of spiritual culture. Just as we go to America or Germany for technical training, Christ came to Nalanda,

Varanasi and Nepal, and then he went back fully illumined. Christ knew pranayama and he must have been a hatha yogi. He also had certain psychic powers, *siddhis*, because he brought Lazarus back to life, he cured many people and he walked on water.

When Christ returned to Jerusalem, he preached what he had learned to the people there, but they did not understand him and they crucified him. He survived, however, and came to Kashmir, perhaps wanting to return to India, but he could not make it and died on the way in Kashmir. This is what we believe in India. It may not be what is believed in the West.

What is the connection between Christianity and bhakti yoga?

Swami Satyananda: The latter half of the twentieth century has seen the tremendous impact of the yoga movement throughout the world. Foreign visitors to India are drawn to yoga. In the past, at the time when Jesus visited India and lived here for twelve years, two spiritual disciplines were prevalent: one was Buddhism, a religion of ethics and morality, and the other was Vaishnavism, a religion of pure devotion. Jesus came under the influence of both these disciplines, and when he returned to his own country he began preaching a new religion.

Thus Christianity is a beautiful blend of good conduct and pure love. Apart from this it has no deep philosophy, mysticism or intellectual quest. Unlike Advaita Vedanta, there is no logic, cosmology or scientific discussion on the origin of the universe. Christianity is based on the simple belief and deep faith that God has created this world. It emphasizes ethics and morality, good social and personal conduct, and is full of dos and don'ts. It is a religion of moral codes and right conduct. We also find many similarities between Christianity and the Vaishnava sects, which predominantly follow a line of pure love and devotion to God. Vaishnavism emphasizes complete surrender, prayer and egolessness. This is the path of *navadha* bhakti, the nine stages of bhakti.

In bhakti marga, it is also believed that Brahma creates the universe, Vishnu sustains it and Shiva destroys it. There are no other cosmological details. On the other hand, in Samkhya, Vedanta, Nyaya and Vaisheshika there is scientific investigation into the origin of the universe and an intellectual, logical quest into the nature of the universe. Both the bhakti cults of India and Christianity believe that God created this world, along with all the sentient and insentient beings, the sky, the earth and the elements. However, in the Christian world during the last quarter of a century, science and technology have made tremendous progress in unprecedented strides. Higher education of the masses has led to an increase in material prosperity and affluence. It has engendered boundless and unlimited individual freedom of thought and action, complete freedom of choice in matters of personal belief, lifestyle, marriage, religion, faith and conduct.

During this period, the Christian world came into contact with Indian thought and religion, and yoga was the agent, the medium. The West was initiated into Indian philosophy and religion by the yoga movement. Previously, the West was completely ignorant of Indian philosophy and culture, except for a few highbrow intellectuals. Yoga introduced the western world to Indian philosophy and culture.

What is the story of Christ's second visit to India?

Swami Satyananda: Christ came to India twice. Christ breathed his last in India. In the same way as Buddha acquired realization at Gaya, Christ achieved realization in India and left his mortal body here. Christ did not die on the cross; there is no proof. Christ died in Kashmir, in India. Christ was crucified, but did not die because he was a yogi. He was treated and cured and then he lived and preached surreptitiously in what is now Iraq.

He came to India about thirteen years after his crucifixion, at which time he was already about forty-nine or fifty

years of age. His mother, Mary, and another companion named Magdalene came with him. Mary has a *mazar*, a tomb, in Srinagar. It still exists and is called the grave of Mariam. It is near Hazrat Bal in Kashmir where the sacred hair of the prophet is kept. Outside Hazrat Bal there is a tomb named Nabi Asaf. It is also called the tomb of Yuz Asaf. The keeper of the tomb is a Muslim. I have been there. Many tourists go there. One of my disciples offered a payment to the keeper of the tomb if he would show him the records relating to the tomb, but the keeper would not permit it and refused to part with the records.

History is written for a purpose. Many things are concealed, many things are added, many things are bloated, many things are floated and many things are destroyed. The history that one reads has been dictated. It is not the real history of what happened. There are many entries that happened and many more that did not occur.

Christ was buried here in Kashmir. There is a reference, an *ayat*, in the Koran to this. It is written clearly, "So did we bury Yesu the Nabi, the son of Mary, in the land of rivers, rivulets, waterfalls, valleys, forests and meadows." *Nabi* means prophet. We call him Yesu, like you say Jesus. In Spanish it is Isus and the 'I' is pronounced 'ya'. So Yesu the Nabi, the son of Mary or Mariam, was buried in the land of valleys, forests, meadows, rivers, rivulets and waterfalls.

Israel has no answer to this description. Only Kashmir has the meaning. We are proud that Christ came to our country and we are proud that he died here. Maybe one day we will also have a temple for Christ, like we have mandirs for Chandi, Devi, Durga, Rama, Krishna and Hanuman. He will become one of our gods. Why not? Let God come in many forms. Let God come in thousands of forms. Just as we want many models of shoes, clothes, telephones and cars, so let there be hundreds of models of God also. Choose any one. Some have chosen Christ – okay; some have chosen Hanuman – good; some have chosen Devi – perfect!

Where do divisions of sect and religion stand in relation to bhakti?

Swami Satyananda: Do not think of yourself as a devotee of Shiva, Rama, Krishna, Devi, Christ or Buddha. Sects are always different, but God is one. One father has ten sons and each son has a separate family and home. However, that does not make the grandfather different in each family and home. In the same way, sects are many and different but God is the same. A variety of names does not mean that Rama, Vishnu, Krishna, Shiva or Shakti are different. By sect I am a Shaiva, but if I worship Rama do I become a Vaishnava? If I worship the Mother, do I become a Shakta? If I worship Jesus or Mother Mary, do I become a Christian? These are sects and traditions, but bhakti is not limited to a sect.

There is no harm if Shiva kirtan is sung in a Vaishnava house, if Christian hymns are sung in a Hindu house, or if Rama and Krishna kirtan is sung in a Christian house. Five-star hotels keep a Bible in every room. Nowadays they have also started to keep the *Bhagavad Gita*. I used to read the Bible, Koran and *Bhagavad Gita*. What difference has this made to my personality? Whether one is Christian, Muslim or Hindu, what difference does it make? These are sects, and sects are not the personalities of anyone. Essentially, people are not Christians, Muslims or Hindus. They are human beings; we are all one. There is no special anger called Christian anger, no special passion called Christian passion.

These are the ways, the paths, but basically we are all one. Imperfections are almost the same in everyone. The qualities of anger, greed, lust and passion are the same in each one throughout the world, whether they are from the East, West, North or South. Similarly, the quality of goodness is the same in everyone. Fundamentally people are one and the same. So it does not matter what name they repeat – Sri Rama, Om Namah Shivaya, Hail Mary, Hail Jesus. Many Indians intermarry with men and women from foreign countries, and many foreigners marry Indian men and women. Yet they do

not see any difference in that, they see the difference only in God's name.

What is the foundation of the teaching of Jesus?

Swami Niranjanananda: Christ was not the founder of Christianity; he was a person who lived the effulgence of spirituality in his life and inspired people to discover their own spiritual effulgence by promoting two major ideas, which from the yogic perspective are bhakti yoga and karma yoga. The life and the teachings of Jesus reflect the sentiments, essence and truth of bhakti yoga and karma yoga. The intention of Christ was not to make people self-realized. His intention was that everybody should live a good, qualitative life with conviction, faith, devotion, understanding and appreciation, making the effort to always help other persons.

Bhakti yoga and karma yoga are the two foundations of spiritual life, not in the religious sense but in a practical and truly spiritual sense. Spirituality begins the moment one makes the attempt and effort to change the destructive and negative in life to become more positive and constructive. One becomes spiritual the moment one negates the negativity and associates with positivity. The moment one stops perceiving oneself as an individual unit and begins to experience oneself as a part of a greater system, one becomes more spiritual. The moment one is able to soften the sentiments, feelings, thoughts, aggressions which contain within them specks of hatred, anger, frustration, jealousy, ego, one becomes spiritual.

Spirituality is connecting with the positive and creative aspect of life, not moksha, not self-realization, but becoming good and doing good. The whole idea of Swami Sivananda when he says, 'be good and do good' is an indication of the transformation that happens in the human personality when the negative changes into positive – and that is spirituality.

Yoga is a discipline, but spirituality is the beginning of transformation of the human personality from negative to

positive. If an aspirant has bad thoughts he is not spiritual, but if he has good thoughts he is becoming a little bit more spiritual than before. If actions are self-oriented they are not spiritual, yet if actions contain a glimpse of selflessness, they become spiritual. When something positive is added in life it becomes spiritual, and when something negative is added to one's life it becomes material and destructive. Crucifying the gross and the material, and resurrecting the luminosity of the spiritual by becoming good, by doing good, by living bhakti and karma yoga was the teaching of Jesus.

ISLAM

How do bhaktas experience bhakti in Islam?

Swami Satyananda: Islam is almost entirely a devotional religion. It has produced Sufism which is noted for its intense bhaktas. Sufism emphasizes the use of dancing, music and singing. Its followers do prescribed dancing steps while chanting mantras. This purifies the heart and accentuates the feeling of bhakti. Awareness is heightened and the mind becomes more one-pointed. The ego drops away and so in turn does the veil of delusion. This leads to eventual transcendence and realization.

The most well-known mantra used in Islam is *la ilaha illa'llah* which means 'there is no god but God'. This is repeated over and over again like japa. In Islam this process is called zikr, and it is said that the *zikr* (remembrance), the *zakir* (person who remembers) and the *mazkur* (remembered one) become united through intense practice and devotion. This is exactly the same as in yoga and bhakti yoga and many other systems.

Eventually, with intense bhakti there arises an effortless flow of awareness to the object of devotion. This is called *fana*, and is comparable to dhyana or meditation. This eventually leads to *baqua*, which is called samadhi in yoga. This is the exact parallel of raja yoga but in the field of

bhakti yoga. There is always emphasis on the ascent of devotion so that it can receive the descent of grace. This is similar to the concept used in the integral yoga of Sri Aurobindo.

There are innumerable well-known bhaktas in Islam and Sufism. As an example we will give a few quotations from Rabia of Basra who was born in the 8th century in what is now Iraq. When she was a young girl she suffered from hunger, slavery and beatings. Nevertheless she became a bhakta and said:

Beloved,
My aspiration is but one . . .
To remember thee and thee alone . . .
I have made thee the companion of my heart.
The groaning and the yearning
Of the lover will continue
Until the heart has found its rest in the beloved.

She also said, “One mark of the awakened mind is that it is centred in the supreme and will not wander after anything else. The mind that is absorbed in the service of the one has craving for nothing else.”

Here is another poem by the Sufi Attar:

Joy – joy – I triumph
Now no more I know
Myself as simply me.
I burn with love.
The centre is within me
And its wonder
Lies everywhere about me.
Joy – joy – no mortal thought can fathom me.
I am the merchant and the pearl – both.
Lo, time and space lie crouching at my feet.
Joy – joy – when I would in a rapture
Plunge into myself and all things know.

Who was the saint Hazrat Rabia?

Swami Sivananda: Hazrat Rabia was a great woman-saint of Islam. She had intense devotion for God, was pure and pious. Her heart burnt with the fire of divine love and she lost herself in union with the Divine.

Rabia was born in Basra in 717 CE into a poor family. Her parents died in a famine soon after her birth. She was caught hold of by a man who sold her into slavery to a rich man. Rabia's master gave her a great deal of hard work, and yet Rabia fasted all day long and spent a great part of the nights in prayer and meditation. One night Rabia's master heard some sounds and woke up. He looked down from his window and saw Rabia in the courtyard. She was bowing in worship and her master heard her say, "O my adorable Lord. You know already my heart. I wish to worship You always. You have made me a slave. What can I do now, how can I serve You constantly? As I am a slave, I can worship You only at night." The master saw a light above Rabia's head which illumined the whole house. The next morning he released her and begged her pardon.

After some time, Rabia came to Basra and lived there until her death at the age of ninety years. Rabia liked solitude very much and led a simple life. Once when Rabia was nearing Mecca, the Kaaba left its place and came to welcome her. Rabia said, "It is the Lord of the house I desire. What have I to do with the house?"

Once Rabia was asked why she worshipped God. "I have not served God for fear of hell, for if I have I would be a wretched hireling; nor for love of paradise, for then I would be a disloyal servant; nor have I served Him for the sake of reward. I have served Him only for the love of Him."

What is the story of Mansoor?

Swami Sivananda: Mansoor is known as the 'Saint of Baghdad'. He was a poor but pious and virtuous Muslim fakir. He practised constant meditation and saw God in all names and forms. He had the cosmic vision and the divine

light descended on him. He identified himself with the Self and proclaimed to the world the doctrine: Analhaq – I am God. The God-intoxicated Mansoor uttered Analhaq wherever he went. Analhaq corresponds to *Soham*, *Shivoham* and *Aham Brahmasmi* of the Vedantins.

As Mansoor was a good man, the Maulvis or priests pitied him and tried their best to convince him that he was wrong in uttering Analhaq. Mansoor stood firm in his convictions. Then the Maulvis ordered that Mansoor should be publicly hanged to death. He was told to choose between his belief and his life. He did not move an inch.

Mansoor's legs were cut off first, but Mansoor smiled and uttered Analhaq. Then his eyeballs were pulled out; still Mansoor uttered Analhaq with a smile. The onlookers pitied Mansoor and millions of people uttered Analhaq. Mansoor had the greatest satisfaction. Despite the request of the people, Mansoor was beheaded. The blood that gushed from his trunk cried Analhaq. The body was burnt and the ashes cried out Analhaq.

What was the power of Mansoor's japa and conviction?

Swami Satyananda: Many centuries ago in Iraq, there was a saint called Mansoor, who was a Sufi. He used to repeat the mantra 'Analhaq, Analhaq', which literally means, 'I am the truth, I am the truth'. So he used to repeat 'Analhaq, Analhaq, Analhaq' and the orthodox group was not very happy with him because he was saying something they could not understand, or even if they could understand, he was posing a threat to their authority. That was the problem.

So they had him arrested and then he was brought to the court. His mistake was proved. First they took whips and whipped him a number of times, but Mansoor repeated the japa of Analhaq constantly. Then they said, "This man has practised so much japa he is unable to feel the whips. Now peel off his skin." The witnesses and observers say in the books, when his skin was peeled off, each and every fibre and nerve of the body was reverberating, resonating, 'Analhaq,

Analhaq, Analhaq'. As long as they went on peeling off his skin they could hear the mantra. Mansoor sacrificed his life, but he had to do it. That was his conviction.

MANY WAYS TO ONE TRUTH

What is the common ground of the various faiths?

Swami Sivananda: I follow the religion of love. I am a true Christian, a true Muslim, a true Hindu, a true Buddhist, a true Sikh and a true Parsi. True religion does not consist in ritualistic observances, baths and pilgrimages, but in loving all. Cosmic love is all-embracing and all-inclusive. In pure love no one is shut out from its warm embrace. It is wide enough to include the humblest of us, from the tiny ant to the mighty elephant, from the condemned prisoner to the mighty emperor, from the worst scoundrel to the most reputed saint on the surface of this earth.

Why do we have different names for God?

Swami Satyananda: When we repeat the name, it will remind us of God. Name is only a reminder. *Sri Ram, Jaya Ram, Jai Jai Ram* is only a reminder. The idea which it invokes in us is that of divinity, and divinity has no form. Divinity is total, all comprehensive and universal. God's Name reminds the devotees of purity, divinity and greatness. They can take any name or read any scripture, whether it is the *Bhagavad Gita*, the works of Adi Shankaracharya, the Upanishads, the Vedas, the Bible, the Koran, the Guru Granth Sahib, the couplets of Kabirdas, Mira or Ramdas. They make no difference to one's religious beliefs. I have found the taste of salt to be the same in Europe, India and China. I have found the same sweetness in the sugar of Russia, the UK and the USA. I have never found any difference in the taste anywhere. What I don't understand is how the difference in God's Name cropped up in the first place. It must have been the work of mischief mongers.

What happens in India is that in one family, the mother worships Christ and reads the Bible and the father goes

to the Shiva temple. They go to all the temples. I have a Muslim friend in Hyderabad. Earlier he was a senior officer at the Imperial Tobacco Company in Munger. His wife was a Brahmin from Assam. They married when they were in England, a love marriage. Like the Novena worship in Christianity, similarly we have a nine-day pooja called Navaratri, when we worship Shakti, the Divine Mother. During Navaratri, my Muslim friend and his Hindu wife would invite me to sit with them for worship.

What is the essence of prophets of all times?

Swami Sivananda: The personal aspect of Being is termed Ishwara, Allah, Hari, Jehovah, Father in Heaven, Buddha, Shiva and many more. The impersonal aspect is called Brahman by Vedantins, 'Unknowable' by Herbert Spencer, 'Will' by Schopenhauer, 'Absolute or Noumenon' by some, and 'Substance' by Spinoza.

Read the teachings of Buddha, Jesus, Mohammed, Confucius, Shinto, Chaitanya or Shankaracharya and others. Remove selfishness. Calm the passions. Remove egoism. Purify the heart. Analyze your thoughts, scrutinize your motives, cleanse the dross of impurity. Realize God. This has been the essence of the preaching of all prophets, seers and sages of all times. This is the essence of sadhana.

How does one open one's head and heart?

Swami Niranjanananda: People have their own concept of God. For many, God may be an image or symbol. For others, He may be an historical or mythological figure or only a concept.

If God is a concept of something nice, positive, pure, creative and transcendental, then not only every practice of yoga but every action and thought in life will lead one to that experience. Through an expanded consciousness one will begin to experience the purity, simplicity and expansive nature of oneself. The moment one does that, God will present Himself. If God is a person, whether in

the form of Buddha, Rama, Christ, Krishna or any other avatara, whether historical or mythical, then according to the inclination and programming of one's mind, different practices will lead to an explosion of the inner experience.

There are people who were atheists in their early life, who never believed in Christ, but after a few years of yoga practice have become born-again Christians. Why? They have an experience which changes their mind and belief completely. People have told me, "Swamiji, I do my mantra *Om Namah Shivaya* and I get the vision of Christ. Is it wrong?" I say, "No, it is not wrong, you are expressing a symbol which is embedded deep in your consciousness and the mantra is helping you to bring that image out, to experience it." Afterwards they tell me "Swamiji, I am grateful to yoga because now I can understand the teachings of Christ. Thank you very much." I say, "Welcome." and that is the end of it.

Each one of us experiences God in our own way. There is no fixed way leading to God. Are there highways in the sky? No! You can go anywhere, the sky is the limit! In the same way, there are no defined highways to God. People say that a particular system exists or that their way is the only way, but if God is an omnipresent reality, then there is no system which can be the only way to God. If one system becomes the only way then God is not omnipresent. If God is the omnipotent reality then every action and thought can bring one closer to God.

Potency of thought and action also exists in every individual. Thoughts are powerful. If I think badly about you, you will definitely pick it up, maybe not consciously but unconsciously. If I think well of you, you will pick it up in the same way. If I think badly about you, after a few days you will begin to avoid me for no rhyme or reason. That is what happens. Has it not happened to you? If you think well of somebody, even if they are a stranger, they will click with you.

Even thoughts, feelings and emotions can lead to God-experience. If you use an image or symbol it will bring the

image that you cherish closest to your heart to the surface of your mind, according to your conditioning. Therefore, it is not a question of which practice of yoga can make you aware of God. Experience of God is a personal matter, and God is experienced when bhakti awakens inside. Bhakti is fine-tuning. It is not devotion. Devotion may be the outer face of bhakti, but only when you are able to fine-tune yourself will you experience God.

What are the three areas of human expression?

Swami Niranjanananda: There are three areas in which human beings express themselves unconsciously. The first is knowledge, expressed unconsciously in a conditioned, defined and set way. The second area is karma or action, which is also expressed in a conditioned, defined and set way. The third area is bhakti or faith, which again expresses itself in a set way. All three are unconscious. A yogi is one in whose life these three manifest in an effortless and conscious way.

Visionaries create an environment where people are taught the path of jnana, karma and bhakti. Christ taught the path of jnana, karma and bhakti. Buddha taught the path of jnana, karma and bhakti. One does not even have to look so far back in history. Sri Swami Satyananda is teaching the path of jnana through yoga. Pratyahara, dharana, kriya yoga, nada yoga, are practices to make one aware of oneself. Through such practices, one comes to know how the personality behaves and acts, how one reacts, and how one can achieve balance. This is *jnana*, applied – not intellectual knowledge. Sri Swami Satyananda is also teaching the path of karma yoga through seva. Service, love and compassion for other people – help them out, be available, that is the path of action through seva. In his own life he is experiencing bhakti. Two thousand years later it will be said that Swami Satyananda taught the path of jnana, karma and bhakti.

It is the destiny and path of a human being to walk the path of jnana, karma and bhakti. People walk differently

and express these in their own way at different times. When they begin to apply knowledge, action and faith, then they become complete human beings and God-realization takes place. Whether it is through the methods of Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Vaishnavism, Shaivism or Shaktism, they are being taught how to live knowledge, action and faith. Whatever the social and political interpretation of a system may be, the main thrust and direction concerns actualization of these three things.

What has been your personal experience of God?

Swami Satyananda: I have not seen God as you understand the word 'seeing', but I have felt and also heard Him. It is not just a belief. In fact, I have been a student of both western and eastern philosophy and have always thought about God in my mind. There was a time when I was an atheist, but that was a temporary phase. After all, when we say God does not exist, what proof have we got? Nobody can prove that God exists or that God does not exist. Atheism has no proof and theism has no proof. I have had clear instructions in life. I did not think that they were divine instructions or divine commandments. I thought it was my over-soul, my higher mind. I was involved in kundalini yoga and other yogas, so I thought that my higher mind was speaking.

How important is the belief in God, the soul and afterlife for learning yoga?

Swami Satyananda: For yoga, it is not important whether you believe or you do not. Even an atheist can start yoga, but after some time he begins to believe in a higher form of consciousness. He may not call it 'God' but he may call it 'higher awareness', which is not individual but cosmic.

If you are an agnostic, if you do not believe in the existence of an immortal soul, or you do not believe in the continuity of the self after death, that is up to you. I am not going to interfere with your philosophy. It is not important

whether you believe in God or not. The important thing is whether you enjoy peace of mind.

ASSIMILATING ALL RELIGIONS

Why is there conflict between different religions?

Swami Sivananda: All religionists do their bhajan in their own way. The goal is the same, but the paths are different. Essentials are the same in all religions, but non-essentials are different. Ignorant, petty-minded people fight over non-essentials and neglect the core or essence of religion. Why do you count the leaves in vain? Eat the mangoes directly. Every religion demands from the aspirant purity, good character, mercy towards all creatures, brotherly love, speaking truth and attaining God-consciousness.

If the essence of all religions is one and the same, to what avail is this wrangling and quarrelling amongst sects? Let us therefore strive in right earnest after the achievement of that great end of human life. The true essence of all religions, devotion to God's divine love or bhakti, alone can free us from the wheel of births and deaths and give us highest knowledge, infinite bliss, supreme peace, eternal satisfaction and immortality!

Is there one true religion for the whole of humanity?

Swami Satyananda: Humanity is diverse, just as seasons and colours are diverse. To think that there can be one religion for the whole of humanity is a foolish, as well as a dangerous and dictatorial idea. If you are thinking of religion, you should think of a personal religion. I have a personal religion, you have a personal religion, everyone has a personal religion. Our personal religions come closer together, so we say we are Christians or Buddhists.

To have one religion and one language for the whole of humanity is not a good idea. A garden where only mango trees grow is monotonous. There should be mangoes, apricots, peaches, grapes and walnuts. If only dates are

grown, what will happen in Belgium, Holland, England and France? In my personal opinion, one religion, one language, one government, one humanity is a dangerous, non-progressive and impossible idea. Moreover, to impose such an idea encroaches on man's individual freedom.

I am myself. I do not want to conform to your ideas or way of thinking and you should not conform to mine. I am me and you are you. If you check the thumbprints of five million people none will be the same. It is God's intention that the world has to be diverse. Humanity should not be regimented into one nation, one religion, one language where everybody says, "Good morning." Why should you say, "Good morning?" Some may say, "Namaste," some may shake hands, others may touch the feet or hug each other. These are different forms of expression.

How did tantra represent the original understanding of humankind?

Swami Niranjanananda: In ancient times, there were no organized religions, no Christianity, no Islam, no Zoroastrianism, Judaism or Hinduism. In those times, people communed with nature and nature communed with people. Energies communed with people and people communed with energies. Gods and men moved together. Gods were the completeness of man, and man was the completeness of God. In this environment, appreciation for that inherent energy, the shakti and the sentientness was there in all objects. Animals, trees, insects represented the shakti and the sentient potential. Every form of life became an expression of that shakti and sentient potential. The respect, adoration and worship came out of this awareness that we are all part of that nature.

I am not different from an animal, an insect or a tree. The same shakti, the same sentientness which exists in them is also in me. I am made up of the five elements. The world, the animals and insects are made up of the five elements. What is the difference? The entire creation is made from the

same common stuff. With this realization about shakti and the sentient awareness, communication started. It was the time when gods moved with men and men moved with gods.

After thousands of years, research was conducted in England, in the 1970s. It is known as the Findhorn Project. A community, living in a farming area, agricultural area, protected their environment and chanted mantras and spoke to the spirits residing in trees, flowers and fruits, and they used to respond back. This experiment indicated that every individual has the ability to commune with the shakti, the power. That power can be suppressed and restricted, or encouraged to develop.

Tantra was not a practice in those days, rather, it was an understanding of the relationship that exists between the individual, nature and the divine. The individual, nature and the divine – this is the triangle of tantra. Originally, tantra was an understanding of this connection and of the way of living this connection. Shamanism and other practices are also part of tantra. They are tantra, for they represent the same ideal, they represent the same objective. Of course, tantra has become a bigger body, involving the physical, the mental, the emotional, the spiritual dimensions of the individual and the practices to explore these dimensions, whereas the other traditions in the world, which are also part of tantra, have become confined to basic concepts and rituals.

What is the origin of religion?

Swami Niranjanananda: Once upon a time, all traditions were part of the same system which allowed human beings to commune with the higher forces. However, when the dross of the mind becomes thicker, like layers and layers over the mind, the mind is not able to project its shakti. If one puts one layer of cloth over a torchlight, then two, three, four, then five layers, how much light will shine through all these layers? So when the dross of the mind covers the luminosity, one loses contact with the spiritual dimension and with what is called the prithvi energy, the Gaia energy, the earth energy.

When that touch is lost, when one is disconnected, the mind needs a focus, and for that organized religions have to come in. Spontaneous nature is lost due to the dross of mind. When people say what one has to do – how to pray, how to meditate, how to do japa – then eventually interpretations of that philosophy become a religious dogma.

Sri Swami Satyananda said, “Christ was not a Christian. Christianity came much later. Christ did not establish Christianity, he simply lived a good life. He was a Jew.” People created the distinction, not he. The same thing happened with Buddha. Buddha was not a Buddhist, he was a Hindu through and through, but his system was given a separate identity after he died, just as Christ’s system was given a different identity after his death. If at the time of Christ people had said, “Your philosophy is going to be called Christianity,” he would have said, “No, don’t do it!” If Buddha had been told, “Your philosophy will be called Buddhism in the future,” he would have said, “Don’t do it!”

There are many things which are follies of human mind which have become the tradition, and they are not the actual things, the reality. Reality is something different. Appearance is different and reality is different. This organized belief system comes in when the mind is totally confused and doesn’t know how to express its luminosity. However, if we can remove the dross of the mind then all religions would converge into one behaviour. Where all religions converge into one behaviour and one expression, that will be known as the Sanatana dharma, the eternal religion which does not change, but which brings out the best in everyone.

The original belief system of the world is that all are part of the same energy and sentient nature. That has to be explored and one has to unite with that and become one with that. From that idea, tantra, Shamanism, Shintoism came, so many other ‘isms’ which have been named in different countries, by different groups, by different languages, in different manners. The underlying idea however, is the same: appreciation of life, nature and the divine.

How can one embrace all religions, while accepting the differences?

Swami Satyananda: Your digestive system should be strong enough to digest all the philosophies of the world. You have to assimilate them. You have done it in the past when many sects, thoughts and religions were assimilated into your religion, and yet the Sanatana dharma remained intact. You cannot destroy a religion. All religions – Christianity or Islam or Buddhism – are products of a supermind. Politicians misuse them, but just because religions are misused by politicians, you should never think negatively about a religion. You should be able to metabolize it. Religion is also metabolized like the food you eat and digest. Seers and saints gave you the strength and the art of assimilating them and yet keeping your own dharma intact.

Your rishis and munis, your wise men, have given you permission to follow any religion, to talk about any religion, to believe in any religion. Your ancestors gave you full permission to worship in any form. Nobody can say, “Why do you read the Bible?” Why not? It is your right. Your ancestors said that you can read the Bible and worship God in any shape or form. There is nothing to be afraid of. If you practise that, you should be able to digest all types of food one day. I have been able to digest and assimilate the Shaktas, the Vaishnavas, the Shaivas, the followers of Hanuman and Kali, the Jains, the Buddhists, the Pashupats, the Christians and the Muslims too. Yogis have the capacity to unite and assimilate all sects and religions, and this is the definition of a *digvijayi*, an all-conquering yogi. This is the way. Why has your digestive system become so weak?

Sri Rama had that power, which is described in the *Ramacharitamanas*. There were many castes, sects and creeds in his age. There were men and women of innumerable faiths. The number of religious sects was great. He assimilated each one of them. How did he do it? Not by the sword, of course! You cannot metabolize religions with a crusade or jihad. They are not the right methods. Jihad

and crusade are political acts. That is not the correct way to have faith in every religion, to follow the dictum of every religion. The right approach is to recognize the philosopher or prophet of every religion. No jihad and no crusade. I don't say that my way is the only way. No. My way is one of the ways. I never say that my path is the only path. What I propose is that it is one of the paths. This is the message that should be communicated to the world at large.

Where has terrorism originated? When you have a set definition of religion, a set definition of God and a set definition of your culture and civilization, you are on the way to destruction. You see God in whichever form you pray to Him. God does not have one form, God has many forms. God is in the sun, the moon, the sky, the earth, in water, on earth, on all sides, in the mountains, in fire, in the whole universe. Every shape and form is God. He is Vishnu, who is everywhere. You can see God in any form.

What is the living source of Sanatana dharma?

Swami Satyananda: The Sanatana dharma of India is a village religion. It is not a city religion. A religion that is created in a pure environment under clear skies with chirping birds is the religion that is eternal, *sanatana*, true. The religion that is born of temples and churches is not religion, but sectarianism.

Religion is born in the most suitable environment in nature, of its own. How can religion be born of a temple or taught? Religion is a gift of nature; it is not a gift of schools, churches, temples or mosques. You receive religion naturally. Even if your mother had not told you that there was a governor of the world, even if your father had not told you that there is a god called Rama, you would have still known of God. To believe in God, to worship and have faith in God, you do not need a school. Kabirdas and Ramakrishna Paramahansa were not educated. To have an enduring faith in God you do not need to be literate. All that is needed is an environment that is pure, where the eating habits are pure and the air and water are clean. This is the Indian culture.

What is the concept of yoga with regard to religions?

Swami Niranjanananda: Yoga is certainly not a religion in the way religion is understood today. There are two ways of understanding religion. The first is the concept of religion as a structured belief, like Islam, Christianity, Shintoism, Buddhism, Shaivism, Shaktism and others. The second concept is of the external obligation and commitment one has towards the evolution of consciousness. It concerns the positive and creative contribution one makes to society, friends, family, strangers, nation and the world in general, for their upliftment and evolution. That is the second concept of religion.

The first concept of structural belief does not come into the realm of yoga at all, for yoga only speaks of *Ishwara*, the unmanifest, undecaying reality. This has been stated in Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* and other yoga texts like the *Gheranda Samhita* of Sage Gheranda, the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* of Swatmarama, the *Dattatreya Samhita* of Dattatreya, and the *Parashuram Samhita* of Parashuram. These are treatises on yoga written at different times in antiquity, and nowhere have they mentioned that a yogi must adhere to a belief or a manifest form of divinity.

The whole aim of yoga is *nirakara*, realization of the unmanifest. Yoga believes in the evolution of individual consciousness. It says that human consciousness has the potential to evolve and shed self-created images, forms, ideas, identities and beliefs, and ultimately realize the cosmic or universal nature of the Self. This involves a transition from individual to cosmic identity. Yoga also says that, once one attains a cosmic identity, one becomes omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent.

Omnipotence is the awakening of Shakti or kundalini through the chakras, finally merging with the aspect of *Shiva*, pure consciousness. Once this energy merges with one's pure nature, which is the concept of kundalini yoga, one has the potential of omnipotence.

After omnipotence comes omnipresence. Omnipresence is more than being everywhere at one time. It is being aware of everything at one time, being present in every moment.

In this context, the union of the individual with the universal consciousness is a reality in yoga. It is not just a belief. In this way, yoga is clearly distinct from the so-called 'structural religious' concepts.

Sannyasins are given one symbol: the flame or the light. Within light lies the manifestation of every form of divinity. One person may see Christ, somebody else may see Krishna, Shiva, Mohammed or Buddha, for that is their symbol.

People have their own personal preferences. Some may adore Shiva, others may worship Christ, Mother Mary or Kali. These personal characteristics do not reflect the idea of yoga. It reflects their personal attachment. I may believe in Shiva and respect him more than other people do. Or I may have special feelings for Rama, Christ, Zeus, Thor, Krishna, Radha, Saraswati, Lakshmi or Sita. It makes no difference.

What role does yoga play in helping to assimilate religions?

Swami Satyananda: Some people may have the doubt that yoga is also a religion. Yoga is no religion; it is the foundation or root of religion and people of every religion in the world are adopting it. No religion is spoiled by adopting yoga. Holy water which becomes poison cannot be holy water. Yoga is that scientific weapon which destroys man's narrow-mindedness. With it, both man's life and religion become healthy and wealthy. Yoga is the name of the future culture, it is a scientific culture, and the future is bright.

All religions of the world believing in one God have given birth to violence because their philosophies have political overtones. Don't forget that religion and philosophy have far-reaching consequences. They can give birth to violence. The non-dualistic vedic religion that we pursue generates peace, non-violence, love, comradeship and brotherhood. Spirituality and philosophy, not social factors, are responsible for the development and growth of brotherhood and peace. For this reason our great sages and seers have always said, *Eko Brahma dwitiyo nasti* – 'God is only one, without a second'.

6

Bhakti Scriptures

Bhakti is a state of mind.

—*Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*

BHAKTI SCRIPTURES

What books are recommended for cultivating bhakti?

Swami Sivananda: A devotee should study books which place before him the ideals of devotion: the glory, sweetness and lilas of God; the stories of saints; the practices which help to cultivate devotion. Devotion develops by the study of such devotional scriptures.

Some of the most important books are *Ramayana*, *Srimad Bhagavatam*, *Narayaniyam*, *Bhagavad Gita*, *Vishnupurana*, *Adhyatma Ramayana*, *Tulsi Ramayana* or *Ramacharitamanas*, *Sandilya Bhakti Sutras*, *Shiva Purana*, *Devi Bhagavatam*, *Narada Pancharatram*, songs of Alvars and Nayanars, *Tevaram*, *Tiruvachakam*, *Dasabodha*, *Tukaram's Abhangas*, *Jnanesvari*, *Bhakti Rasayana*, *Bhakti Rasamritasindhu*.

It is said in the *Narada Bhakti Sutras* (sutra 76):

Bhaktishaastraani manananeeyaani tadbodhakakarmaani karaneeyaani.

(For the attainment of bhakti) the teachings of scriptures that promote devotion should be constantly meditated

upon and actions that arouse devotion should be performed.

Why is it necessary to follow the guidelines given in the scriptures?

Swami Sivananda: There should be strict adherence to the injunctions of the *shastras* or scriptures until a firm conviction in God is attained and until profound devotion is established. Actions enjoined by the scriptures should be diligently performed until that state of absolute forgetfulness of external existence is reached. Even after firm establishment in divine resolve, the scriptures must be respected. The scriptures are the words of God; they are the guiding lights for aspirants. Swerving even an inch from the path chalked out by the shastras will bring about a downfall for the devotee. Some deluded aspirants foolishly imagine that they have attained perfection and are above the laws of the scriptures, so they cease to observe them and suffer hopeless downfalls.

An aspirant must first have intellectual conviction and then firmness in living up to the ideal. He must practise and live up to the principles which he knows by conviction are essential for his happiness, spiritual evolution and God-realization. The personal examples of fellow devotees who are sure and steady in their daily observances exercise a tremendous influence over others. Realized people follow the scriptures in their actual life and thus set examples for the ordinary person who needs constant guidance in his life. When one is established in *dharmā*, righteousness, one is eligible to protect the shastras. By living up to the ideals of these texts, one protects their teachings. In the *Bhagavad Gita* (16:24), Sri Krishna says:

*Tasmaachchhastram pramaanam te
kaaryaakaaryavyavasthitau;
Jnaatvaa shastravidhaanoktam karma kartumihaarhasi.*

Let the scriptures be the authority in determining what ought to be done and ought not to be done. Knowing these rules and regulations, one should act here in this world accordingly and be elevated gradually.

If the devotee who has made some spiritual progress is not careful and does not observe the rules of the scriptures, he may easily relapse into past habits. Just as a young plant is fully protected in the beginning, so also a neophyte on the path of devotion should be well protected. If he mixes with worldly-minded people, he will lose his faith in God quickly. He must always be in the company of sadhus, mahatmas and bhaktas. Their company is an iron fortress for him. If the injunctions of the shastras are followed rigidly, nothing can shake one's conviction. Just as a nail is driven deep into a plank by frequent hammering, so also the spiritual impressions and convictions become deep by strictly observing the sacred laws of the scriptures.

How should one approach the teachings of the scriptures?

Swami Sivananda: If the mind of an aspirant follows the injunctions of the shastras, he will not suffer uneasiness and will evolve quickly. He will feel that he is on the right path and is progressing spiritually. He will feel the nearness of God and have peace of mind. He will be cheerful, fearless and satisfied. One who deliberately violates the rules of good conduct prescribed by the scriptures will surely fall and return to his previous state of worldliness and ignorance. Sri Krishna says (16:23):

*Yah shaastravidhimutsrija vartate kaamakaaratah;
Na sa siddhimavaapnoti na sukham na paraam gatim.*

One who discards scriptural injunctions and acts according to his own whims attains neither perfection nor happiness, nor the Supreme Goal.

The scriptures are infallible. They are revelations which have been traditionally handed down from the rishis and seers to their disciples in succession. The realized sages prune away the superfluities and excrescences when the times necessitate readjustments. This remoulding does not change the essence of the scriptures, rather it allows the concepts to continue through the passage of time and remain relevant to man's quest for the supreme attainment. The Vedas have come from the mouth of God. The scriptures and the spiritual teachers will thus always be there to guide people in the path of truth and righteousness. The concepts in the Vedas are eternal, although the books may not be. However, only those who have purified their minds will be able to understand the real significance of the teachings of scriptures.

NARADA BHAKTI SUTRAS

Are there sutras on bhakti yoga like the raja yoga sutras of Sage Patanjali?

Swami Satyananda: Bhakti does not merely mean devotion. It means total surrender. Bhakti yoga is one of the powerful systems of yoga. As we have raja yoga sutras, we also have bhakti yoga sutras. There are two important texts on bhakti yoga. One book is called *Narada Bhakti Sutras*. The other book is known as *Sandilya Bhakti Sutras*. Narada and Sandilya were two gurus who have written concise books on bhakti. It has been said in the *Narada Bhakti Sutra* (sutra 58):

Anyasmaat saulabhyam bhaktau.

The practice of devotion is easier than other methods (in the attainment of salvation).

Who was Rishi Narada?

Swami Sivananda: Sage Narada moves about playing on his veena, singing the praises of Sri Hari, drawing the hearts of people towards God thus radiating joy, love and peace throughout the afflicted world.

Through the power of yoga he can move wherever he likes in the twinkling of an eye. The misunderstanding and quarrels he creates are all intended for the good of the world. He inspired Valmiki, Vyasa, Sukadeva, Prahlada, Dhruva and other great souls to practise devotion.

Sage Narada tells his story in the *Srimad Bhagavatam*: “In my former birth, I was born of a certain maidservant of vedic rishis. Certain yogis had collected at a place to pass the rainy season and I was engaged as a boy to serve them. Seeing me void of all fickleness as a boy and self-controlled, the munis who looked on all with equal eyes were kind to me, especially as I gave up play, followed them, served them and talked little. With the permission of the venerated, I at one time partook of the remnants of their meal, and the impurities of my mind were all removed. When thus my mind became pure, my inclination grew towards their dharma. By their favour, I heard them sing the beautiful stories of Sri Krishna. Hearing those stories every day with faith, I gained holy love for Sri Krishna. Through that love, my mind became fixed on Him and I came to perceive my sthoola and sukshma bodies as only false reflections of the real Self or Brahman. The bhakti that grew up in me destroyed my rajas and tamas. Then, when the kind rishis were about to leave the place, they imparted to me most of the occult knowledge which had been given to them by Bhagavan Himself. Through that knowledge I have known the maya of Bhagavan. It is by that knowledge that one reaches the plane of Bhagavan. As I cultivated this occult knowledge, Bhagavan appeared Himself and gave me knowledge and powers directly.

Some time after my teachers had gone away, my mother died of snake-bite. I deemed that as an act of God and went towards the north. After crossing several forests, rivers and mountains, I at last reached a solitary forest and there sat under a Peepal tree. As directed by my teachers, I meditated on the Self, in the Self, through the Self. My mind had been completely conquered by bhakti. As I was devotedly meditating on the lotus feet of Bhagavan with

teardrops in my eyes, Hari gradually appeared in my heart. The hairs of my body stood on end through exuberance of holy love. I was completely lost in joy and knew neither self nor any other. The indescribable Ishwara spoke thus in solemn words, “O Child, you cannot again have My vision in the present birth. I revealed Myself to you now in order to increase and strengthen your love towards Me. You have cultivated strong devotion to Me through the influence of satsang even for a short time. When you leave your present body, you will be a devotee very near and dear to Me.”

After a thousand yugas, he came out of Brahma’s breath when Brahma began to recreate the world. Since then, Sage Narada is moving throughout the three worlds playing the veena, a gift from God Himself. He is the only rishi of whom the veena is a constant accompaniment, as it is of the goddess Saraswati. His constant mission is the good of the universe. He is the friend, philosopher, guide and consoler of all – gods, demons and men. He creates quarrels for the good of the world. He is a great teacher of devotion and an embodiment of devotion.

What are the *Narada Bhakti Sutras* about?

Swami Sivananda: The *Narada Bhakti Sutras* is a very popular treatise in India on bhakti yoga. This treatise is lucid and practical in its exposition of the birth, growth, development, unfolding and expression of bhakti. This is a useful book for earnest and sincere aspirants who tread the path of devotion.

This book is a great standard work on bhakti yoga. It contains laconic aphorisms ascribed to Devarshi Narada. Sage Narada propounds the doctrine of love to God, a path which can easily be followed by the ordinary man. It does not demand either great knowledge of philosophy or total renunciation of the world. Research students will find great help in this book in their study of the psychology of bhakti.

The sutras have an expressible charm and beauty. They make a direct appeal to the heart. Sage Narada speaks to all alike. There is not even the slightest trace or tinge

of sectarianism. For sincere devotees who are in need of practical spiritual instructions, in a short compass, on the path of devotion or divine love, there is no better book than *Narada Bhakti Sutras*. The language is very simple.

The bhakti sutras of Narada number eighty-four in all. The first twenty-four of them deal with the nature of bhakti. The next nine sutras, twenty-five to thirty-three, explain why and how the path of bhakti is superior to karma, jnana and yoga. Sutras thirty-four to fifty (seventeen in all) describe the methods by which bhakti may be practised and developed. The next sixteen sutras, fifty-one to sixty-six, give a description of the external marks by which bhakti can be detected in a true devotee. The last eighteen sutras, sixty-seven to eighty-four, glorify the great realized souls who are full of devotion to God.

What is the origin of the *Narada Bhakti Sutras*?

Swami Sivananda: Sri Veda Vyasa was staying in his hermitage of Badarikasrama. One day Narada went to the ashram in the course of his wanderings. Sri Vyasa welcomed the rishi with due rites and said, “Man seeks freedom, but without devotion it is dry. Devotion is the only way for attaining salvation. All the others have importance only in so far as they are auxiliary to it. I humbly ask you to explain to me the virtue of devotion.”

Narada said, “Your disciple Jaimini has already discussed the problem of action in the Purva Mimamsa. You have yourself completed the enquiry of the problem of knowledge in the Uttara Mimamsa. Now you have taken up the problem of devotion. Its full explanation will be given by you in your *Srimad Bhagavatam*. I shall explain bhakti in the form of sutras.” So saying, Sage Narada delivered a discourse on devotion in eighty-four aphorisms.

What is the difference between the writings of Sage Narada and Sage Sandilya?

Swami Sivananda: Devotion is the highest sentiment. Sage Narada has dealt with the subject from the point of view

of sentiment alone, whereas the *Bhakti Mimamsa* of Sage Sandilya is an enquiry into the philosophy of devotion. The two treatises are companions. They supplement each other.

What are the two classical texts on bhakti yoga?

Swami Niranjanananda: The bhakti tradition has two prominent texts. The first is the *Narada Bhakti Sutras* by Sage Narada, and the second is the *Bhakti Sutras* by Sage Sandilya. The bhakti propounded by Sage Narada is emotion-based, whereas the bhakti propounded by Sage Sandilya is knowledge-based. In the knowledge-based bhakti, a person does not desire anything for himself or others; he wants only to be close to God. The emotion-based bhakti involves prayer and the desire to do away with the lack, suffering and sorrow in life. For this reason, knowledge-based bhakti has been considered *nirakara bhakti*, bhakti without form, and emotion-based bhakti, *sakara bhakti*, bhakti with form.

Sage Narada says that supreme love towards God is bhakti. Sage Sandilya says that any kind of love and attraction towards God is bhakti. Love is seen in both definitions of bhakti. According to Sage Narada, only one who has freed his senses from the bondage of maya and is able to worship God with one-pointed devotion is a bhakta. He says that first you must free the senses and the mind from the bondage of maya. The bindings of maya are happiness and sorrow. You hope for happiness from the objects of attraction and you want to avoid that which repels you.

How do the *Narada Bhakti Sutras* describe love?

Swami Sivananda: It is said in sutras 51 and 52:

Anirvachaneeyam premasvaroopam.

Mookaasvaadanavat.

The nature of love towards God is inexplicable in words.
Just as the taste of a mute man. (51–52)

The intrinsic nature of divine love defies precise definition or description. Bhakti or divine love is a realization so profound that it is not possible to describe it adequately and exactly.

It is possible to describe the means of devotion, but not the sweetness of devotion itself. When it is impossible to describe the taste of apple to one who never tasted it, how can the joy of supreme love be communicated by words? Love is a feeling felt within the heart. When one is underneath the water he cannot speak. Similarly, when one is drowned in the ocean of divine love, he is unable to speak. Speech deals with external objects. Prem or bhakti or divine love is an internal emotion which does not originate from an external impulse coming from any external object. The language of tears or sighs can express to some extent the inner state of the devotee.

The nature of love is as indescribable as the taste of a dumb person. It is like the dainty dish tasted by a mute person. Direct experience of divine love is something which is produced without the help of any external stimulus. It is a vision of truth or God which transforms the being of the devotee. It is not a thrill. It is not ordinary self-forgetfulness. The devotee feels God's touch within the heart.

The mute man will reveal his experience through smile. He may dance and jump with joy.

How does Sage Narada describe the way to reach the goal of life?

Swami Satyananda: It is said in the *Narada Bhakti Sutras* that according to Sage Narada, devotion is characterized by complete dedication of all activities and observances to God and by the experience of extreme agony while forgetting Him (sutra 19):

*Naaradastu tadarpitaakhilaacharataa tadvismarane
paramavyaakulateti.*

Narada is of the opinion that the essential characteristics of bhakti are the consecration of all observances and

activities through complete self-surrender to God and extreme anguish in the event of forgetting Him.

There are many instances of such devotion. The gopis of Vrindavan can be cited as examples. In the last pronouncement of the *Ramayana* it is said that, 'God should be dear to me in the same manner as a woman is dear to a man. As money is dear to a miser, so shall God be dear to me'. The last goal of life is the attainment of total surrender to God and refuge in Him, nothing else. If this is not achieved, one has to come back with a return ticket in the next birth!

BHAKTI YOGA IN THE SHIVA PURANA

How did Shiva explain the importance of bhakti to Sati, his consort?

Swami Niranjanananda: Shiva used to spend a lot of time on pleasure trips to Kailash with Sati. During these excursions, Shiva would tell Sati about creation. He explained how, before creation arose out of sexual union, it was mental and did not have a material body. Yet when the soul enters a material body, it becomes bound by the fetters of *prakriti* or nature and suffers due to the bondage of karma. A being becomes deluded by *maya*, the veiling power, forgets his own self and runs after momentary pleasures, transient objects and happiness. He wants to fulfil his desires, for which he struggles and generates tensions and suffering.

Sati asked, "Is there some means, some karma, some anushthana through which one can be relieved of one's sufferings, conflicts, mental unrest and the bondage of the world, and achieve the ultimate state?" Shiva replied, "Yes. The actions or *karmas* should be such that one is aware that one is Brahman, the ultimate, ever-expanding reality; that God or Ishwara, the non-decaying reality, is in you."

Whoever takes birth in this world, his main karma in life is to experience the God within. He is born to find this out. The Sanskrit dictionary *Amarkosha* has defined *samsara*, the

world, as *Samsarati iti samsara* – “That which keeps moving like a snake is samsara.” The world or the *samsara* is the interaction of the senses and their objects, nothing more than that. The senses and their objects: sound, touch, taste, form and smell, interact in the process of life. People desire happiness based on this interaction only. They want to listen only to the pleasant and not the unpleasant. They want to see only good things and they are disturbed when they see bad things. Everyone tries to attain the desired object of the particular sense in different forms: as gross matter, as emotions or as thought. However, while doing all this, one should also become aware that God resides within, in the form of the ultimate reality.

Sati then asked, “What are these different anushthanas or methods through which one can realize this infinite God element within oneself?” Shiva replied, “The method is bhakti,” and he explained the ninefold bhakti or *navadha bhakti*, the nine elements or components of bhakti. They are listed in the *Shiva Purana* as: shravana, kirtana, smarana, sevana, dasya, archana, vandana, sakhya and atmanivedana or atmasamarpan:

*Shravanam keertanam chaiva smaranam sevnam tathaa;
Daasyam tatharchanam devi vandanam mama sarvadaa;
Sakhyamaatmaarpanam cheti navaangaani vidurbudhaah.*

If one considers the first step of this ninefold path of bhakti, *shravana*, listening, it is essentially a method of focusing the mind. There is sound all around: people are talking, there is the sound of the traffic, yet the listeners are focusing their attention, listening and trying to understand. They are one-pointed and meditative. However, if their mind wanders and becomes attached to the surrounding noise and there is a break in their concentration, then they will not be listening to what is being said. Therefore, shravana is a type of meditation in which the mind is focused on one thought, one point, or one discourse.

What is the meaning of shravana?

Swami Niranjanananda: Sri Rama says, *Duji rati mama katha prasanga* – “One should enjoy listening to kathas.” People receive happiness, inspiration and joy from listening to the *kathas* or stories of the lilas of God. When they read a novel or a story, it is essentially entertainment, whereas when they study the qualities of God, or hear about them, it is not just entertainment to give momentary pleasure. It creates a positive transformation and inspires them to live differently. As a result, they become more evolved.

Once a *pandit*, priest, was narrating a story. He used to tell uplifting stories and many people would come to listen to him. Among the listeners was a man who wished that his sons would also come to these sessions, but the sons were not interested. One day, the father prevailed upon one of his sons to come. The son heard the spiritual story with great attention. The *katha* finished and everybody got up, dusted their clothes and prepared to depart. The father did likewise and asked his son, “How did you like the *katha*?” The son said, “The *katha* was very inspiring, but I cannot appreciate one thing. People listen to the *kathas* and try to imbibe the good points, yet the moment the *katha* ends they dust themselves off. They shake off everything and leave.”

Nobody takes home the *jnana*, the wisdom, of the *katha*. However, if the essence, the underlying teaching of the *katha* is imbibed, one’s life becomes divine and the mind becomes inspired and connected with positive thoughts, which takes one away from suffering. Psychologists have written about the power of positive thoughts, as this is what gives mental strength. Thus, when the thoughts become positive through *shravana*, listening, then the *shakti* of the mind is awakened and the path of *bhakti* becomes easier.

What are the other steps of bhakti yoga according to Shiva?

Swami Niranjanananda: The second step is *kirtan*. The meaning of *kirtan* is singing the names of God, singing his glories. When the mind sings the names and glories

of God, the *bhava* or feeling that manifests at that time connects you to your *aradhya* or object of worship. Otherwise, what is the difference between kirtan and a normal song? People sing film songs, love songs and many other songs. However, when they sing these, their *bhavana* or emotion is not purified, awakened or evolved. It is just entertainment, and entertainment is only a mental experience, not an awakening of bhavana, pure feeling or emotion. Kirtan is a manifestation of pure and awakened bhavana. That bhavana helps one in connecting with one's ishta.

This is the reason kirtan is given so much importance, for through this practice one is awakening one's pure feelings and connecting with one's personal deity. Kirtan is a means of positive self-transformation.

Third is *smarana*, remembrance or contemplation. Normally when one remembers something, one tries to bring that subject in front of one's eyes. Does remembrance mean recalling God all the time, twenty-four hours a day? No. It is something that overshadows the mind and remains with one all the time.

Just as a mother has a constant awareness for her child, similarly, if a bhakta has constant awareness of God then he does not need to meditate, do sadhana or go to satsang. That remembrance, that awareness develops a connection with God and makes him aware of God; it awakens him.

Fourth is *padasevana* or worship of the guru's feet. In this context, service to God's feet means to walk in His footsteps and keep control over one's own pride. For one who follows in the footsteps of God and offers his faith to God, there is no place for ego or vanity. The same sentiment is echoed in the *Bhagavad Gita* when Sri Krishna says to Arjuna, "Offer every action to Me." This means making oneself humble, devoid of pride and vanity. This allows one's consciousness to evolve.

The devotee walks the path the guru has shown without any vanity or ego. With simplicity of heart, he believes that he will benefit by walking the path. He develops a firm

connection with his faith and belief. Devoid of ego, he walks on the path following the guru's instructions, and keeps walking, keeps walking. He applies the guru's teachings in his daily life, in his behaviour. This is the meaning of padasevana or service to the guru's feet.

The fifth is *dasya bhava* or the feeling of being a servant of God. *Dasya bhava* gives an indication of one's relationship with God – that one is only a servant obeying the commands of the master. The servant is not worried about the result, about what is going to happen, good or bad. This is *dasya bhava*.

Through these different bhavas, one can easily experience one's aradhya or worshipped deity. There can be no bhakti without bhava or feeling, and that bhava gives an indication of one's relationship with the aradhya. Swami Sivananda used to say, "I am a servant of God. I do whatever he says." Swami Satyananda said, "I have experimented with different relationships with God. I have thought of him as a friend, as my son, as my lover, however, none of these relationships gave me any satisfaction, any fulfilment, until I became his *dasya* or servant. That is the feeling with which I live today."

A person's relationships are based on his bhavana or feelings. Sri Swami Satyananda has always said, "First decide what your relationship with God should be. The relationship between God and his devotee is expansive. Until you are able to establish the feeling inside and recognize your relationship with God, you will not be able to become a bhakta in the true sense. The day you are able to recognize your relationship as a result of your bhava, you become a bhakta and your relationship is established."

In the bhakti shastras, the first two bhavas are *shanti*, peace, and *dasya*, service. As long as the mind is restless, one cannot become focused on God or His symbol. That is why the first instruction is, "Become peaceful, become quiet." Thereafter, this thought is held in the mind, 'I am only a servant of God'. The bhakti shastras say that these two

bhavas are for those who have just started their journey on the path of bhakti.

How do people normally start their practices of yoga, anushthana, mantras and so on? First, they still the body, quieten the senses and make the restless mind peaceful. Next, they focus on a symbol. They start their practices only after that. First is body stillness, then stillness of the mind and then the practice sequence. This is the method of yoga. When they practise bhakti, they withdraw the mind from the disturbances of the world and focus on the *shanta bhava* or the feeling of peace. At that point there is nothing else besides them and their deity. There is no other cause to make their mind restless. Then they bring to mind the feeling that they are a *sevaka*, a servant. Through this feeling, they start the journey on the path of bhakti yoga.

The sixth part of bhakti is *archana*, offering one's karmas to God. How is it possible to offer one's karmas? All beings live in this world bound by their karmas, and suffer and enjoy the fruits of action. Offering the karmas and not feeling any connection with them is a difficult process. When one is asked to offer one's karmas, normally it is interpreted as the feeling of *Naham karta, Hari karta, Hari karti hi kevalam* – "Whatever actions I am doing are done by God and I am only his medium." However, this feeling is limited to the mental and intellectual plane and has no relevance to the spiritual plane. If one carries this sentiment and yet is unable to cut one's connections with karmas, it is an indication of one's hollowness within. If one is able to cut all connections with karmas and their enjoyment, only then can one rightly say, "I am not the doer; God is the doer." Then all actions, whether internal or external, become only the expressions of the *indriyas*, the senses.

Offering the karmas can also mean that one is offering a pure consciousness, pure intellect and pure mind to God. When the karmas become a tool for the expression of the senses, and do not cause any obstruction to the free flow of the infinite consciousness, at that time the consciousness

becomes free of distortions. It becomes polished and pure. That consciousness is then offered to God with the feeling, 'this is yours, please take it'.

When one renounces karma and doership, then there is no self-interest and bondage. Whatever one is doing is offered to God for the welfare of all. When this feeling is awakened and becomes strong, a person is no longer under the bondage of karma. The individual soul's connection with karma is broken and remembrance of God is spontaneous. This spontaneous remembrance purifies and refines the other karmas.

The seventh step of bhakti is *vandana*, which means 'bowing down before God', and 'letting go of one's ego'. This does not mean, 'Oh God! You are so good, you are so beautiful', and so forth. Vandana means that one lives like the person one is worshipping. If one likes a person, one tries to live that person's behaviour and philosophy. One tries to live his qualities without any hypocrisy. If hypocrisy comes in, then it becomes a show, and a show has no place in bhakti.

If, like a cat wearing a tulsi mala and sitting in an assembly of rats pretending to be a bhakta, a devotee also puts up an act, then he is deceiving himself. However, if he sincerely tries to live an ideal, that will surely transform his personality. This is the culmination of sadhana. The gross form of this is praising or performing vandana of God in order to merge oneself with the omnipresence of God, renouncing all pretences, hypocrisy and show.

The eighth step is *sakhya* or friendship. I am a friend of God, His companion, I play with Him, I am His follower. The examples of this bhava are Sudama and Krishna, or Sugriva and Sri Rama. When two people become close to each other then this bhava develops.

Sakhya bhava, dasya bhava and atmasamarpan develop faith or *shraddha*. The relationship which develops with the ishta or personal deity has no negativity in it. The relationship of friendship is a close one. Children listen

more easily to their friends than to their elders. In friendship things are accepted quicker. Where there is no friendship it is more difficult to accept any idea, and the mind becomes critical and analytical.

The ninth step is *atmasamarpan* or *atmanivedana*, surrendering oneself to the divine. The thinkers of India have visualized life as a boat crossing the ocean of worldly existence with two oars: the mind and the intellect. From life to death a person lives with the help of these two oars. In spiritual life, when one reaches the stage of surrender, one hands these oars over to God so that He then takes the boat forward. The feeling at this time is, 'I have surrendered the oars to the ocean. Let the boat go to whichever shore it wants to go to'. For surrender, one requires strength and ability. Just thinking, 'I am surrendering to you', or saying, "I am offering you everything I have," is not enough. Until one develops equal vision and performs one's karmas accordingly, one's mentality is not transformed, and surrender remains limited to the intellectual plane. To reach this state, bhakti and karma must have a solid base. Bhakti and freedom from karma are the two sankalpas or resolutions which, when awakened, make one a *siddha*, a perfected being.

SRIMAD BHAGAVATAM

What is the origin of the *Srimad Bhagavatam*?

Swami Sivananda: Maharishi Vyasa divided the Vedas into four parts for the benefit of the people at large. He composed the *Mahabharata*. He wrote the eighteen Puranas and yet he was not quite satisfied. He had no peace of mind. One day, he went to the bank of the river Saraswati and sat there in a reflective mood.

Sage Narada appeared before him and said, "O Maharishi, in your books you have not sung the praise of God to the extent you described the other aspects of dharma. You have failed to deal at length with the Bhagavata dharma.

That is the reason why you are restless now. Therefore, describe the lilas of Sri Krishna for the good of the world. You will enjoy everlasting peace.”

Sage Vyasa at once began to write the *Srimad Bhagavatam*, consisting of eighteen thousand verses, three hundred and thirty-five sections and twelve chapters. This book is named *Bhagavatam* because it speaks of the glory of Bhagavan or Vishnu. It is one of the most authoritative scriptures and a work of great repute in India. It exercises a direct and powerful influence on the opinion and feelings of the people. It contains the essence of all the Puranas.

Why is the *Srimad Bhagavatam* especially loved by bhaktas?

Swami Sivananda: The textbook of the highest kind of bhaktas is the *Srimad Bhagavatam*. It embodies the great ideals of renunciation, devotion and knowledge brought to a stage of unblemished perfection. This Purana, far above what a Purana is supposed to be like, is the cream of the devotional literature of the Hindus. It is the wealth of the lovers of God. It is a book of divine wisdom. It advocates the path of non-action. Sri Krishna Chaitanya Gouranga is said to have been considering this work as the greatest of Indian spiritual productions. It is a great authority on pure spiritual dharma, not as a means for artha and kama, but directly for moksha. It has a fascination even for those who are keenly alive in finding out its defects. The whole body of the work is completely saturated with high expositions of bhakti, vairagya and jnana, devotion, renunciation and wisdom. The ideal of renunciation and knowledge of Rishabhadeva, Jadabharata and the Brahmana of Avanti, the devotion of Dhruva, Prahlada and Ambarisha, the wisdom of Narada, Kapila and above all the immortal life and teachings of Bhagavan Sri Krishna to His devoted disciple Uddhava, form the nucleus of the *Srimad Bhagavatam*.

What is the story of Sri Krishna in the *Srimad Bhagavatam*?

Swami Satyananda: Kamsa, the demonic king, had given his sister Devaki in marriage to the prince Vasudeva. While he was taking the bride and bridegroom home in their chariot there was a divine mandate, a divine voice that announced, “Kamsa, the eighth child of your sister will kill you.” Kamsa immediately decided to kill his sister. Eventually, however, he agreed to let her live. Kamsa imprisoned Vasudeva and Devaki in Mathura. Each year for six years, Devaki gave birth to a male child and Kamsa destroyed them all, as he was afraid that any one of them might be Krishna.

When Devaki was expecting the seventh child, God ordered the appearance of his Yogamaya in the land of Vraj, in Vrindavan. Here Rohini, the elder wife of Vasudeva, was residing with Nanda and his wife Yashoda. Nanda was the chief of Gokul, the loveliest village in Vraj. God directed Yogamaya to transfer the seventh foetus from Devaki’s womb to Rohini’s. The seventh child was Balarama, the elder brother of Krishna. Even today, Baladeva Chhath in memory of Balarama’s birth, is celebrated in Vraj, but at that time it was celebrated secretly for fear of Kamsa. Meanwhile, Vasudeva informed his captor’s guards that the seventh conception had aborted. The servants and guards ran to their king, Kamsa, and raised slogans of his glory – “Victory to our king, the seventh pregnancy has aborted.”

When the eighth child, Krishna, was born to Devaki and Vasudeva, he appeared to them as God and ordered Vasudeva to take him to Gokul and replace him with the daughter who had just been born to Nanda and Yashoda. This daughter was Yogamaya. Vasudeva immediately escaped from Mathura and took Krishna to Gokul.

As soon as Kamsa found out that the eighth child had been born, he went to the prison and found that it was a girl. When Kamsa tried to kill her she appeared as the eight-armed Durga and said, “How can you kill me? The child who will kill you has already been born somewhere within this world. Nothing can save you now.” Overwhelmed with fear,

Kamsa began to plan the death and destruction of Krishna and arranged for all the children born within the last ten days to be killed.

Meanwhile in Gokul, Nanda joyfully celebrated the birth ceremony of Krishna. When the cowherd men and women of Vraj learnt that Nanda and Yashoda had had a son, they were overwhelmed with joy. They dressed themselves in costly garments and ornaments as if for a festival and engaged in jubilant celebrations. The gopis applied kumkum to their foreheads and ran to Nanda's house, singing these songs:

Happiness to Nanda
Victory to Kanhaiya Lal,
Victory to Kanhaiya Lal.
The women of Vraj sparkle like 'barfi',
The gopis and cowherders are singing a song
As sweet as 'gujhiya',
The lovely Baladeva is like 'peda'
And his mother Rohini,
Who is as beautiful as a juicy mango,
Is like 'rasa kheer'.
Kheer has become the rasa. It is all sweetened.
Let there be some salty things too.
Nanda is king and he is salty,
The village of Gokul is 'garam masala',
Shyam is a 'jalebi'
And Yashoda has produced a son like a 'laddoo'
In a night which resembles 'rabadi'.
Yes, in a night like 'rabadi'
She has produced a son like a 'laddoo'.

Kamsa instructed the demoness Pootana to destroy the babies born that month. Pootana went to Gokul to kill Krishna. She took the form of Miss Universe and, dressed like a beautiful woman, entered the house of Yashoda, where she was destroyed by Krishna.

Gokul was a village of simple cowherd boys and girls, who did nothing but tend the cows, sell the milk and live a happy

and simple life, very much like my neighbours in this area. They were innocent people and Krishna lived among them, played with them and flirted with them. The early childhood of Krishna took place in Vraj.

As a child, Krishna ate the butter and curd of the house and when his mother admonished him and told him that thieving was not appropriate for the son of the leader of the cowherds, Krishna told his mother that he would not stop thieving, that she could do anything she liked but that was something he would not stop. While the gopis of Vraj were preparing yoghurt, butter and other items from milk, they sang kirtan and wished that Krishna would come to their homes to eat the yoghurt, to drink the milk and to be jolly with all his friends.

Let us perform arati to the child Krishna.

Let us sacrifice our body, mind and wealth to Him.

He is the most loved one of Yashoda.

He is the star in the eyes of Baba.

He is the most loved one of the gopis.

Let everyone sacrifice their life to Him.

Let us perform arati to the child Krishna.

BHAGAVAD GITA

How does the *Bhagavad Gita* prepare the aspirant for bhakti yoga?

Swami Satyananda: The eighteen chapters of the *Bhagavad Gita* are the stages of yogic evolution on the path of a sincere aspirant. This great pilgrimage starts from the point of dejection, frustration, depression and ends at the final stage of human evolution. As far as the aspirants are concerned, this stage is the liberation of karma, the renunciation of everything, where the mind is completely free from attachment as well as detachment. The mind is neither a slave of attachment nor a slave of detachment. That is a state called moksha or nirvana where the mind,

the human consciousness, is completely free from all kinds of pains.

Sri Krishna speaks of the yoga of right understanding, the yoga of action, the yoga of renunciation of fruits of action and the yoga of meditation. This is followed by the yoga of wisdom and experiences, the yoga of the imperishable Brahman and the yoga of raja yoga. Yama, niyama, truth, ahimsa, brahmacharya and all these things come only after one has transcended some of the limitations of the mind. Usually, if people who are unqualified are given lessons on yama and niyama they become dull. When they are given lessons on higher stages of yoga they also grow dull. Therefore, in the *Gita* it says to start meditation after purifying oneself. One should have certain experiences first and in those experiences one must try to have some realization of the imperishable Cosmic Being. Then one is ready to start raja yoga. After raja yoga is completed, the glories come. That is called vibhooti yoga. In the *Gita* the word *vibhooti* is used, which means 'glories of the Divine'. Take any miracle; what is that? It is the glory of the Divine. After the manifestation of divine glories or vibhootis, the vision of the Cosmic Purusha, the Cosmic Being takes place within, with the eyes closed. Then the whole Cosmic Being, in which all the worlds, all the rivers, all the suns and stars, everything is included, is seen in miniature. When this is finished, bhakti yoga starts.

Prior to that experience, all devotees practise bhakti yoga as a part of their mind only. That bhakti is an expression of their psychologically complex mind. Sometimes at earlier stages bhakti is a form of neurosis. Devotion for Rama can be called Rama neurosis and devotion for Christ can be called Christ neurosis because the mind is not purified; you brood. Instead of brooding over worldly affairs, you brood over Rama or Christ or anything. Instead of loving a woman or a man, you love Christ or Rama. It is the expression of your lower mind and that does not help you much.

Real bhakti starts when you have seen Him. It is also said in the *Ramayana*, "How can you have bhakti for God when

you have not seen Him?” How can you love one whom you have never met? At least you must have a glimpse. I love you because I have seen you once when you were passing through on the train. However, if I did not see you, if I did not even see your picture, how could I do it? In the same manner, you may love God; you may have actual devotion for God once you have had a glimpse of Him. So, in the eleventh chapter it talks about a glimpse of the Cosmic Purusha in which all the rivers, all the stars and everything that the universe contains are seen by the person within himself. Then devotion begins to grow. The experience is so awe-inspiring that you can't help but become a bhakta.

What is the *Bhagavad Gita*?

Swami Sivananda: The *Bhagavad Gita* is a dialogue between Sri Krishna and Arjuna, narrated in the Bhishma Parva of the *Mahabharata*. It comprises eighteen chapters of a total of seven hundred Sanskrit verses. On the battlefield of Kurukshetra, Sri Krishna, during the course of His most interesting and instructive talk with Arjuna, revealed the profound, sublime and soul-stirring spiritual truths, and expounded to him the rare secrets of yoga Vedanta, bhakti and karma. All the teachings of Sri Krishna were subsequently recorded as the 'Song Celestial' or the *Bhagavad Gita* by Sri Vyasa for the benefit of humanity at large.

The *Gita* is the cream of the Vedas. It is the essence of the Upanishads. It is the universal scripture for all people of all temperaments and for all times. It is a wonderful book with sublime thoughts and practical instructions on yoga, devotion, Vedanta and action.

The whole world is a big battlefield. The real Kurukshetra is within you. The battlefield of the *Mahabharata* is still raging within you. Ignorance, *avidya*, is Dhritarashtra, the blind king. The individual soul is Arjuna. The indweller who dwells in the heart is Sri Krishna, the charioteer. The body is the chariot. The senses, *indriyas*, are the horses. The mind, egoism, senses, *samskaras*, mental impressions; *vasanas*,

latent tendencies, cravings; *raga-dvesha*, likes and dislikes; passion, jealousy, greed, pride and hypocrisy are your dire enemies.

What is the sadhana of bhakti yoga in the *Bhagavad Gita*?

Swami Niranjanananda: When referring to bhakti sadhana, Sri Krishna says that in order to focus your emotions, connect your mind to your breath and concentrate on *Om*. Breathe in, breathe out, and meditate on *Om*. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Sri Krishna offers a number of methods for focusing the emotions. He talks about japa yoga as a method whereby the mind can be made one with the Beloved or ishta. Sri Krishna's technique of mantra japa is a sadhana. The first step is to sit down and calm the physical senses. Sit in solitude at a place where the external environment will not agitate, disturb or distract the senses. Next, bring the mind to a point of focus at the nose tip or the eyebrow centre. Practise either nose tip gazing or eyebrow centre focus. Keeping the attention focused on the nose tip or the eyebrow centre, become aware of the breath and repeat the mantra in time with the breath. This method given by Sri Krishna is meditation with japa.

The second method involves mantra repetition throughout the day, spontaneously, easily, while moving about: eating, walking, strolling or running. The Gayatri, Omkara, *So Ham* or the Mahamantra can be chanted. The first technique is japa with meditation or concentration wherein one has to still the senses and the mind, focus the mind on the symbol of the ishta and do japa of the mantra. This second technique is japa without meditation, which is easier. These are the two practices that Sri Krishna has given. The methods of bhakti in the *Bhagavad Gita* are based on the science of yoga. Sri Krishna spoke of the techniques of sadhana and the signs of a *bhakta*, devotee. He has not specifically referred to shravana, manana, kirtan or bhajan, however, he has accepted all of them. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Sri Krishna was asked (12:1):

*Evam satatayuktaa ye bhaktaastvaam paryupaasate;
Ye chaapyaksharamavyaktam tashaam ke yogavittamaah.*

Who may be considered the greater devotee, the one who worships your *sakara* or manifest aspect, or the one who worships your *nirakara* or unmanifest aspect?

In reply to this question, Sri Krishna says, “Both are equal and both methods will lead to the attainment of God. Whether you walk the *sakara* path or the path of the *nirakara*, you will still come to me. Whether you take the shortcut or the longer route, your goal remains the same.” However, the one who seeks this goal needs to have some merit and high qualities. These qualities are referred to in the twelfth chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita*.

Sri Krishna has accepted every kind of worship, whether idol worship or singing bhajans and kirtans. He says, whatever your chosen method, continue with it. At the same time, practise japa, whether with meditation or without meditation. Do japa of Omkara, Gayatri, the Mahamantra or the mantra given to you by your guru.

Sri Krishna also teaches *pratyahara*, withdrawal of the senses. Just as a turtle withdraws its limbs into its shell, one should gather one’s senses. The turtle has two legs, two hands, one tail and one head outside the shell, which he withdraws in. The *Bhagavad Gita* says a human being has six senses (15:7):

*Mamaivaamsho jeevaloke jeevabhootah sanaatanah;
Manahshashthaaneendriyaani prakritisthaani karshati.*

An eternal portion of Myself, having become a living soul in the world of life, draws to (itself) the (five) senses with the mind for the sixth, abiding in Nature.

There are five senses and the mind, which is defined as the sixth sense. Like the limbs of the turtle, these senses are outside the shell. The shell covers the *atma*, the soul. From within the shell, the five senses and the mind have emerged. Upon withdrawing these, you are withdrawn into yourself.

While you are interacting with the world, the senses are extroverted and will remain extroverted. When you close your eyes and begin contemplation of the Divine, your senses will introvert. This is pratyahara, withdrawal of the senses and the extroverted expressions and nature.

What is the significance of the *Bhagavad Gita* being delivered on the battlefield?

Swami Satyananda: Although the *Bhagavad Gita* is a part of the great epic *Mahabharata*, it is not a dialogue between the higher soul and the lower soul. It is a dialogue between a blind person and a person with divine eyes. Dhritarashtra, the king, was blind and Sanjaya, the man with divine eyesight, was looking on. Sanjaya narrated the whole *Gita*. So, the man with the eyes is the narrator and the man with no eyes is the hearer. It is always like that.

The *Bhagavad Gita* is not a sermon on the mount, in the jungle, on the shores of an ocean or in an ashram. It is a sermon delivered on the battlefield, when arrows are about to shoot forth, when on both sides you could see nothing but two strongholds of enemies trying to kill one another. At any moment the signal for battle would be given. It was at that time that the sermon was given. You can understand the dramatic situation.

It is not in peace that the sermon is to be taken. The *Bhagavad Gita* is not for one who has attained peace. It is not for one who has renounced. The *Bhagavad Gita* is not for one who is dead. It is for one who has to step into the battle of life, who has to face the turmoil, the trials and the wilderness of life. The *Bhagavad Gita* is for one who feels nothing but confusion, nothing but trouble, nothing but dejection. Everything is wrong, wrong, wrong, but still he must face it, he must go forward, he must strive on. This book is for such a person and it is to be understood in this light.

What is the view of bhakti yoga in the *Bhagavad Gita*?

Swami Sivananda: In Chapter 2 of the *Bhagavad Gita*, Arjuna pleads with Sri Krishna (2:7):

*Kaarpanyadoshopahatasvabhaavah
prichchhaami tvaam dharmasammoodhachetaah;
Yachchhreyah syaannishchitam broohi tanme
shishyaste'ham shaadhi maam tvaam prapannam.*

My heart is overpowered by the taint of pity; my mind is confused as to duty. I ask You: tell me decisively what is good for me. I am Your disciple. Instruct me who have taken refuge in You.

Sri Krishna gives His answer to this question from Arjuna in the last chapter. The essence of the whole *Bhagavad Gita* is contained in verses 65 and 66 of Chapter 18. Verse 65 contains the essence of *navavidha bhakti*, or the nine modes of devotion. Here is the sadhana for perfect control of thoughts. By fixing the mind again and again on God, all worldly thoughts die by themselves.

The next verse (18:66) contains the essence of self-surrender. The Advaita Vedantin explains the verse thus: "Give up the notion that you are an individual soul. You will attain liberation." An acharya of the bhakti cult explains it thus: "Surrender the fruits of all actions and the actions themselves at the feet of the Divine. God will give you liberation."

*Sarvadharmaanparityajya maamekam sharanam vraja;
Aham tvaa sarvapaapebhyo mokshayishyaami maa shuchah.*

Abandoning all duties, take refuge in me alone. I will liberate you from all sins; grieve not.

In this verse, Sri Krishna gives His definite answer to the query of Arjuna: "Work without egoism, without expectation of fruits. Surrender the actions and their fruits as offerings unto God. Divinize your life by melting the mind and the ego in God. Spiritualize your life by dedicating your mind and intellect to God. Fix the mind on God and be devoted to Him. Be intent on the welfare of all beings. Sacrifice everything unto God, then you will enter into His Being." This is the note ringing throughout the *Bhagavad Gita*.

What is the amritashtaka?

Swami Satyananda: In the twelfth chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita*, Sri Krishna gives instructions to Arjuna regarding bhakti yoga. The last eight slokas of this chapter comprise the very essence of bhakti and a bhakta. What should be the definition of a bhakta? How should we understand him in his spiritual nature? All this is dealt with in the last eight slokas.

There is a general understanding that bhakti is necessarily associated with an ecstatic trance and hysterical singing of kirtan in a loud voice. However, you will find in these slokas that the life of a bhakta is guided by practical actions of responsibility, nobility, grace and dignity. It is not only singing and repeating God's name which is the decisive factor in the life of a bhakta, but it is his behaviour, qualities and action in relation to other beings which finally decide the issue.

I call these eight slokas (12:13–20) *amritashtaka*. *Amrit* means nectar, and *ashtaka* is a group of eight.

*Adveshata sarvabhootaanaam maitrah karuna eva cha;
Nirmamo nirahankaarah samaduhkhasukhah kshamee.
Santushtah satatam yogee yataatmaa dridhanishchayah;
Mayyarpitamanobuddhiryo madbhaktah sa me priyah.*

That bhakta of Mine who is non-jealous, friend of all beings, without notion of mineness, free from ego, balanced in pain and pleasure and tolerant;
Continuously contented and in communion with cosmic consciousness, self-controlled and firmly determined, dedicated to Me in mind and intellect, is dear to Me.
(13–14)

These two slokas are revelations to Arjuna that a devotee of God, who is full of the qualities given, is dear to Him. By this we understand that a bhakta has got to be much more than a lover of God.

Dvesha is a strong word – stronger than hatred, much more intense than jealousy. *Dwish* is the root word which

means to hate, to be jealous, to renounce, to set aside. Hatred and jealousy do not exactly convey the meaning of dwesha. When you are overpowered by dwesha against somebody, you have every kind of intolerance for his achievements. It is the opposite of rage.

Santushtah is a combination of *sam-tushtaha*, complete contentment. *Tushtaha* is derived from the basic root word, *tush* meaning 'cessation of thirst'. Thirst here means craving for enjoyments, like *spriha*. Hence, complete absence of all kinds of cravings makes a bhakta santushtah. This should mean that contentment does not develop any desire, even in the form of a seed. It is not what we understand by satisfaction or gratification. The state of contentment does not necessarily dawn after the cravings have been fulfilled, but it is an outcome of realization that objects can never gratify the senses.

Satatam denotes that, even as the Ganges flows without any break, likewise self-contentment should be without any break. The psychological process of contentment should not be obstructed by any kind of desires seeking gratification. This does not pertain to worldly pleasures alone, but even with the very life you live. The *Gita* is not referring to momentary satisfaction of the senses which is the state of the nervous system, but of a psychic process which remains unfluctuated amidst sense gratification and dissatisfactions of the lower self. *Satatam* should mean here the 'continuity of a higher state of mind'. If prosperity has given your mind a state of pleasure, then its absence should not create any change in the psychological process.

Atma has different meanings in relation to the context. It usually means the innermost Self, the invisible truth; the microcosmic truth, *jivatma*. But here it means the lower self – a combination of senses, body and mind.

*Yasmaannodwijate loko lokaannodwijate cha yah;
Harshaamarshabhayodwegairmukto yah sa cha me priyah.*

He is dear to Me by whom people are not disturbed, who is not disturbed by people, and who is free from delight, anger, fear and agitation. (15)

A bhakta should develop the feeling of God's presence in all beings and manifest the same in actual practice. This should be done side by side with his personal love for God. It is not at all difficult to feel that the whole world is a manifestation of God. However, this is only a philosophical feeling, and as such it will not serve the bhakta to that last point of realization.

It is said previously in the *Gita* that the people who worship God can be brought under four categories: 1. Those in distress who seek devotion; 2. Those who seek to know him; 3. Those with a purpose in their mind who worship Him for wealth, progeny, success etc.; 4. Those who love God in a spiritual sense, without any intention whatsoever.

All these types of bhaktas, if they practise the virtues enumerated herein, become very close to him. But he is closest and dearest to God who perceives Him in his immanent and transcendental aspects. It is not enough if one merely practises the so-called social virtues or just practises the classical emotional bhakti. One will have to combine both aspects of bhakti. It is only when the two forms of bhakti are blended together that it becomes perfect.

Udvijate is derived from the root word, *ut-wega*, meaning 'upward speed', the upward speed of mental feelings. When you disturb someone, or annoy him, or tease him, then the state of mind is exploded and agitated; it is annoyance or agitation. It is not anger.

Lokah is used for a mass, people, a community, a society. *Yasmat lokah na udvijate* – 'by whom people are not agitated'. This is a way of expression. It can be expressed as, 'he who is not a source of annoyance to the world, he who does not create agitation among people'.

In addition to his dedication to a life of realization of God, a bhakta should develop this social virtue with a double purpose: for social peace and for mental peace.

The word *mukta* means free. When the rope by which one is bound is taken off, one becomes mukta. When one is released from prison, he becomes mukta. Therefore, mukta means a state of no bondage. In this context, one should study jivanmukta and videhamukta. Freedom for a bhakta constitutes freedom from delight and anger, fear and agitation, the changing conditions of the mind.

*Anapekshah shuchirdaksha udaaseeno gatavyathah;
Sarvaarambhaparityaagee yo madbhaktah sa me priyah.*

That bhakta is dear to Me who expects nothing from anyone, who is pure, impartial, devoid of agonies, and who renounces the feeling of doership in all undertakings. (16)

Suchihi is derived from the word *saucha*, purity. This constitutes one of the five niyamas of raja yoga. Purity includes the internal as well as external.

Udasinah is a state of mind free from the expressions of delight and joy. *Ut-asinah* means 'being seated above'. The purpose is to show indifference.

Parityagi is a combination of *pari*, 'absolute', and *tyagi*, 'renunciate'. *Arambha* should mean 'doership in all undertakings'. *Sarva-arambha-parityagi* literally means 'he who has completely renounced all the beginnings'. This expression means 'he who has renounced the feeling of doership in all the undertakings'.

The word *bhakta* is derived from the root word, *bhaj*, which means 'to serve', and in a broader sense 'to serve God and men'. By tradition, *bhakti* means prayers, worship, meditation and loving God's transcendental form. But in a broader sense, the word should mean 'service of God and men' and also 'meditation on God and the service of men'.

*Yona hrishyati na dweshti na shochati na kaangkshati;
Shubhaashubhaparityaagee bhaktimaan yah sa me priyah.*

He who does not rejoice, does not hate, does not grieve, does not desire; that man, full of bhakti, who

renounces the good and bad effects of his karma, is dear to Me. (17)

A bhakta should be able to control his temperamental reactions and impulses. To rejoice, to hate, to grieve, to desire and to be influenced by the effects of karma is a natural and temperamental action of jiva. Therefore, it is said that a bhakta must at least have enough self-control to overcome these natural and temperamental impulses.

This is necessary in order to maintain mental peace, purity of heart, divinity in sattwa, and also for an undisturbed and unobstructed flow of bhakta. If a bhakta is affected every now and then by the fluctuating impulses of his nature, then maya will drag him down to lower planes of body, mind and senses, where he may become bound to the effects of prakriti and the three gunas.

Therefore, it is instructed that a bhakta should take care of his mental conditions while discharging the routine bhakti. If he ignores the mental conditions as many do, he is surely going to face an emotional crisis, ultimately resulting in a spiritual crisis. So, the narrow conception of bhakti should be broadened on these lines.

In the previous slokas, Arjuna was asked to integrate social virtues with individual bhakti, and now he is being asked to integrate individual mental peace with individual devotion.

*Samah shatrau cha mitre cha tathaa maanaapamaanayoh;
Sheetoshnasukhaduhkheshu samah sangavivarjitah.
Tulyanindaastutirmaanee santushto yena kenachit:
Aniketah sthiramatir bhaktimaan me priyo narah.*

That man, full of bhakti, is dear to Me who is mentally balanced towards friends and enemies, likewise in honour and in dishonour, in heat and in cold, in pleasure and in pain, and free from association with worldly objects;

Unto whom praise and reproach are alike, who is silent, contented with whatever he has, without attachment to home and fixed in mind. (18–19)

*Ye tu dharmyaamritamidam yathoktam paryupaasate;
Shraddhadhaanaah matparamaa bhaktaaste'teeva me
priyaah.*

Those devotees who fully observe this nectar of pious wisdom as told above, who are endowed with faith and are solely devoted to Me, are extremely dear to Me. (20)

RAMAYANA

What is the *Ramayana*?

Swami Sivananda: The *Ramayana* of Valmiki is perhaps the most ancient and glorious epic in the world. It is known as the *adikavyam* or first poem. The *Ramayana* exercises a great moulding power on the life of every person. It contains lessons for husbands and wives, parents and children, brothers and sisters, friends and enemies.

Valmiki once asked Narada, “O Venerable Rishi! Please tell me whether there is a perfect man in this world who is at once virtuous, brave, truthful, noble, steadfast in duty and kind to all beings.” Narada replied, “There is such a person, a prince of the Ikshvaku line. His name is Rama and he is just, brave, gentle and wise. He is a great hero and loves his subjects immensely. He is a protector of dharma, well-versed in the Vedas and the science of arms. He is unique in the possession of virtues and matchless in beauty. He is an obedient son, a kind brother, loving husband, a faithful friend, an ideal king, a merciful enemy and a lover of all living beings.”

Valmiki, reflecting on this flowing description, was walking along the banks of the river Tamasa. He happened to see a pair of krauncha birds sporting with each other in love. Suddenly, the male bird was shot dead by a cruel fowler, and the female, seeing her mate rolling on the

ground in the agony of pain, screamed out most pitifully her lamentations. The sage felt great pity at the sight of the fallen bird and his grieving spouse and burst forth in the exclamation, “Never, O fowler, shall you obtain rest, as you have killed a krauncha in the midst of his love.” These words came out spontaneously in the form of a musical verse in the anushtup metre, having four lines of eight syllables each.

Then Brahma, the Creator of the world, appeared before the poet and said, “Sing Rama’s charming story in the same melodious metre. As long as this world endures, as long as the stars shine in heaven, so long shall your song spread among people.”

Having inspired the poet with the knowledge of Sri Rama’s story, Brahma vanished. Valmiki sat down in meditation and saw every event in Sri Rama’s life in detail in yogic vision and began to write the *Ramayana*. The melody of the *Ramayana* was born from a heart of love and pity for the wounded bird.

When applied to the *Ramayana*, the verse of Valmiki, sung out of pity for the krauncha, can be interpreted in the following way: Sri Rama and Sita represent the two kraunchas, Ravana represents the hunter. The hunter Ravana cruelly separated Sita from Rama. So, there is a slight similarity in these cases.

Who are the characters of the *Ramayana*?

Swami Sivananda: Valmiki’s *Ramayana* contains 24,000 verses which have been grouped into 500 chapters and seven *kandas* or sections. It contains genuine classical Sanskrit poetry. Rama’s young sons, Kush and Luv, were the first to recite the poem in the garb of ascetics. Coming from the hermitage of their teacher Valmiki, they sang the wonderful poem in the presence of their father Rama and other heroes of the story.

The *Ramayana* is a marvellous book which contains the essence of all Vedas and all sacred scriptures. It is a treasure

and a reservoir, and delineates the character of a son who kicks off the throne, the pleasures of the senses and the world. In order to fulfil the words of his father, he lives in the forest for a period of fourteen years. The book depicts the character of a father who sends his most beloved son into exile in order to keep up his word. It describes the character of an ideal, chaste wife who is devoted to her husband till the end of her life, shares his adversities, serves him untiringly in the forest and regards her husband as God. Above all, it points out the character of a brother, Lakshman, who places brotherly affection above everything else in this world. He follows his brother to the forest, leaving all pleasures of the palace, and leads the way to ward off all dangers.

The description of nature in the *Ramayana* is most sublime and beautiful. One can actually feel that the hills, rivers, trees and birds are really one with the joys and sorrows of the people. The description of battle scenes is magnificent. The chief characteristic of the *Ramayana* is simplicity. Pathos and tenderness run through the whole poem. Poetry and morality are charmingly united. There is loftiness of moral tone. The *Ramayana* has a historical basis. It is a book of antiquity and not a mere allegoric poem. It is a marvellous inspiring book for all times, that has loomed large for centuries over the destinies of millions of people and will certainly continue to do so for ages to come.

What is it about the *Ramayana* that instils bhakti in a devotee?

Swami Sivananda: The Valmiki *Ramayana* is the standard history of Sri Rama. It is a majestic epic expounding *dharma*, righteousness, by way of depicting the great heroic life of the ideal person, Sri Rama. The greatness of the Valmiki *Ramayana* cannot be adequately described. It is a huge didactic poem which has its main aim in constraining people to follow the path of righteousness, and towards this end it employs the popular technique of appealing to the hearts of people by narrating in a homely style the story of a life

devoted to righteousness. The picturesque life of Sri Rama described by Valmiki is a grand glorification of the greatness of Sri Ram. Hence the *Ramayana* is in a way an expanded form of the name and glory of Sri Rama. A study of the *Ramayana* is a contemplation on the various divine qualities of Sri Rama, which purifies the mind of man and renders it spiritual.

The secret of the *Ramayana* is the attainment of liberation through control of mind. Killing the ten-headed monster, Ravana of Lanka, is the annihilation of the ten modifications of the mind: infatuation, hatred, lust, anger, miserliness, delusion, pride, egoism, jealousy and ostentation or vanity. Sita represents mind. Rama represents Brahman. Sita unites with her husband Rama. Mind merges in Brahman by concentration and incessant meditation on Rama. This is the esoteric teaching of the *Ramayana*.

Constant repetition of the two-lettered mantra *Rama* (*Ra* and *Ma*) with purity of feeling and perfect concentration, leads to the control of mind, and samadhi. The thinker and the thought, the meditator and the meditated, the worshipper and the worshipped, become blended into one. Mind is filled with Rama. As you think, so you become. The mind becomes identical with Rama. The jiva's will becomes merged with the cosmic will.

Do the characters of the *Ramayana* have a symbolic significance?

Swami Satyananda: In the past I also thought everything in the *Ramayana* was symbolic. I took Ravana, the exile, Ayodhya, Janakapuri and everything to be allegorical and figurative representations, but not any longer. If I take them as symbols now, my sadhana comes to nothing, it is in vain. Now I think of Rama just as Tulsidas and Valmiki have presented him. I don't accept Rama in the spiritual context as he is painted in the *Adhyatma Ramayana*. I gave plenty of discourses on their symbolic significance; for example, how the ten heads of Ravana were our ten senses, and so on. It is

a science of scriptural discourse, but a sadhaka should take Rama as a *sakara purusha*, a factual man. Kakabhushundi tells us that Rama and Sita have been consistently the same throughout their incarnations, as described in the mythologies of various epochs. The rest of the gods and goddesses appeared in a variety of hues in different times and incarnations. Today I believe in this principle only.

What is the esoteric meaning?

Swami Sivananda: The esoteric meaning of the *Ramayana* is this: Ravana represents *ahamkara* or egoism. His ten heads represent the ten senses. The city of Lanka is the city of nine gates which is the physical body. Vibhishana corresponds to the intellect. Sita is *shanti* or peace, and Rama – *jnana* or wisdom. To kill the ten-headed Ravana is to kill egoism and curb the senses. To recover Sita is to attain the peace which the *jiva*, the individual, has lost on account of desires. To attain *jnana* is to have *darshana*, divine vision, of Rama or the Supreme Self.

He who destroys the two rakshasas, *raga* and *dvesha*, likes and dislikes, is a yogi, and united with peace he enjoys eternal bliss. Sri Rama stands for what is 'good'; Ravana for what is 'bad'. They fight with each other until Sri Rama becomes victorious, because the negative is always overcome by the positive.

RAMACHARITAMANAS

In what order did the scriptures appear? Did they evolve from a primitive source?

Swami Satyananda: Rama's time was the Treta Yuga. In those days civilization was highly evolved. Moreover, the basis of our religion is the Vedas, just like the Koran is the basis of the Muslim religion. There are actually three Vedas according to scriptures, but there are said to be four when they are chanted. When *Rig Veda* is chanted, *Sama Veda* emerges out of it. Then, to explain these four Vedas, many

texts were written like *Grihya Sutras*, *Kalpa Sutras*, and so on. They were called the 'six shastras'. To explain them, the eighteen Puranas were written along with the stories of the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. People may not understand them, but the Vedas are the basis of the Indian religion and the entire culture follows them in one way or another. Whether it be idol worship, belief in rebirth or performance of rituals, these are all aspects of the vedic religion. Whether you wear the sacred thread, believe in idol worship, or consider the gods and goddesses as many but still one, this is all vedic religion.

The Vedas are written in verses with different *chhanda* or metres. These metres were named *anushtup*, *trishtup*, *gayatri*, *jagati* and so on. An uncultured civilization cannot create such a literature in different metres. Thousands of years ago, at the time when the vedic literature was written, the civilization was not primitive. On the contrary, it was highly developed. If the human race had remained in a primitive state until just a few centuries ago, man would not be able to write poetry now. In order to write poetry it is necessary to have knowledge of language, script, metre and an organized way of presenting and expressing ideas. The civilization which produced such brains would have had to make alphabets and then polish the script for thousands of years. They would have had to create the different metres, and to think, read, write and express many ideas. It must have taken thousands of years to accomplish all this.

In the *Ramacharitamanas* there are slokas, there are dohas, there is chopayi, there is sarvaya, there are soratas, there is chapah.

The *Ramayana* and *Ramacharitamanas* are different, not the same. They are two different scriptures. The word *Ramayana* indicates Valmiki Ramayana, the story of Rama written by Valmiki in Sanskrit. *Ramacharitamanas* means the work of Tulsidas on Rama in a Hindi dialect. It is not in Hindi. The subject matter is Rama in both, but when Valmiki writes it is called *Ramayana*. When Tulsidas writes it is called

Ramacharitamanas. Besides this there are other *Ramayanas* written by Champu and other authors throughout India.

In what language was the *Ramacharitamanas* written?

Swami Satyananda: The language in which the *Ramacharitamanas* is written is not the urban language of sophisticated people. It is a rural dialect. The people of Jhansi, Gwalior and Chatarpur do not have to be told the meaning because that is their spoken language. The *Ramacharitamanas* is almost entirely in the Bundelkhandi language, which is the language they speak even today. The man who wrote it was also a good Sanskrit scholar. It may be called simple, but its expression is so apt that it could not be expressed any better, even in Sanskrit.

What is the story of the seven kandas in the *Ramacharitamanas*?

Swami Sivananda: The incarnation of Sri Rama and his childhood life are described in Balakanda. Rama guards the sacrifice of sage Vishvamitra, slays the ogresses Tataka and Subahu, and frees Ahalya from her curse. He breaks the bow of Siva, marries Janaki and annihilates the pride of Parashurama.

In Ayodhyakanda preparations are made for installing Rama as heir-apparent. His stepmother Kaikeyi stands in the way and sends him into exile for fourteen years. Sita and Lakshman follow him. King Dasharatha is very much afflicted at heart on account of his separation from Rama and dies of grief. Rama, Lakshman and Sita are entertained by Guha, a hunter-chief, and crossing the Ganga they meet Rishi Bharadvaja who advises them to go to Chitrakoot. They build a cottage, Parna Kutir, made of grass and leaves. Bharata, another devoted brother, goes to the forest and asks Rama to return to the kingdom. Finally, he takes Rama's sandals, places them on the throne and rules the kingdom in the name of Sri Rama. Bharata lives in the village of Nandigram.

In Aranyakanda, Rama kills the giant Viradha in the Dandaka forest. Thereafter, they pay a visit to the Rishis Sarabhanga, Sutikshna and Atri. Anasuya, wife of Atri, gives an inspiring discourse on the duties of a wife to Sita. When they meet Rishi Agastya, Rama receives celestial weapons. They encounter the giantess Surpanakha in the Panchavati forest, and Lakshman cuts off her nose and ears. Khara and Trisiras, along with fourteen thousand giants (brothers of Surpanakha) retaliate, fight against Rama, but are slain in the battle.

Surpanakha goes to Lanka and complains to her brother Ravana, who sends his uncle Maricha in the form of a golden deer to appear before Sita, Rama and Lakshman. Sita requests Rama to get the deer for her. Rama proceeds to catch the deer and kills it. In the absence of Rama and Lakshman, Ravana carries Sita away. Jatayu, the king of vultures, challenges Ravana, but is mortally wounded. Rama obtains all information about Sita from the dying Jatayu. Subsequently, Rama and Lakshman kill the demon Kabandha near the lake Pampa. They meet the pious Sabari who offers them roots and fruits with great devotion.

In Kishkindhakanda, Rama meets Hanuman on the banks of the lake Pampa. They proceed to Mount Rishyamuka and make an alliance with Sugriva. Sugriva kills Vali with the help of Rama. Sugriva is crowned as the king of Kishkindha. Rama consoles Tara, wife of Vali. Hanuman, with a party of monkeys, proceeds in search of Sita. He takes with him the ring of Rama as a token. Jambavan, chief of bears, finds Sampati, brother of Jatayu, in a cave, who gives out facts. Hanuman climbs up the top of a hill by his direction and from there he leaps across the ocean to Lanka.

In Sundarkanda, Hanuman's exploits are described. During his aerial journey, Mainaka, an island peak, invites Hanuman to rest on its top at the request of the ocean. Afterwards, Simhika, a monstress living in the ocean, drags him down by catching his shadow. Hanuman kills her. Then, he gets a distant view of Lanka and enters the city at night.

He finds Sita in the Ashoka grove. He gives her Rama's token and message. Hanuman destroys the Ashoka grove. The rakshasas imprison Hanuman, but he frees himself and sets fire to Lanka. He returns to Rama and gives him Sita's gem. Rama is highly delighted when he receives Sita's token and her message.

In Yuddhakanda, Nala, one of the monkey-chiefs, builds a bridge across the ocean by the advice of the ocean. The heroes, with a large army of monkeys, cross the ocean and reach Lanka. Vibhishana, Ravana's brother, tells them how to destroy Ravana and his army. Kumbhakarna, Indrajit and Ravana are killed in battle. During the battle, both armies use *astras* or weapons charged with mantras. Rama sends an *astra* on Ravana's party. All rakshasas appear as Rama. They kill one another. Ravana discharges on Rama *Nagastra*, an arrow that becomes serpents full of poison. The arrows have mouths like serpents and vomit forth fire all around. Then Rama discharges *Garudastra*, arrows which become *garudas*, eagles, and cut off the serpent arrows on all sides. *Garudas* are the enemies of serpents. Rama uses *Brahmastra* to kill Ravana. Sita is rescued and her honour is tested in the fire. She comes out more glorious and effulgent than ever. Vibhishana is crowned king of Lanka. Sri Rama with his party returns to Ayodhya in the flying chariot called *Pushpaka*. Rama is crowned emperor, and the people of his kingdom feel extremely happy.

In Uttarakanda, Sri Rama's reign is described as *Rama Rajya*. There is righteousness, plenty and prosperity everywhere. There is neither disease nor sorrow. There are neither dacoits nor thieves. The four *varnas* duly observe their *dharmas*. After a long and prosperous rule, Sri Rama goes back to his Supreme Abode.

Will a devotee still benefit from chanting the *Rama-charitamanas* even if he does not understand the language?

Swami Satyananda: Everyone wants happiness and wealth. Chanting of the *Ramacharitamanas* is being done in the

ashram every morning and is attended by people who don't understand Hindi at all. What need is there to understand the *Ramayana*? Does one need to understand rasgulla? Does one need to understand samosa? There is simply no need to understand the *Ramacharitamanas* because it has not been written by a poet. A divine soul was invoked within the person who wrote the *Ramacharitamanas*. When any great power says something through you, when any great power writes through you, it is called mantra. When any great power makes you speak, it is called a blessing, otherwise we are all the same human beings.

You say you don't get time, so take only ten or twenty minutes. Just read one verse. In every house, one person can be given this duty. Just as it is the duty of the wife to cook the food, the duty of the man to earn and the duty of the grandmother to sort the rice, similarly, the duty of reading one or two verses of the *Ramacharitamanas* should be given to one person. You will see that happiness, wealth, health and good samskaras will be maintained in every home through this practice.

What was the historical and cultural context in which the *Ramacharitamanas* was written?

Swami Satyananda: The *Ramacharitamanas* was written about four to five hundred years ago. At that time, vedic dharma was on the decline. The Mughal Empire had been established in India. Idol worship, worship of a god with form, and other vedic ideas were being negated. The kings of Rajputana were becoming weak and everyone was bowing down to the Mughal Empire. Nobody was opposing it. Everyone had begun living in comfort. The Mughals were free to do as they pleased. At times such as these when the king is unable to protect the dharma or the nation, the sadhus and sannyasins take this task into their own hands.

That was the time when saints like Mirabai, Tulsidas, Kabirdas and Surdas lived. These saints were all born in the same century and they all emphasized bhakti. This was

because Islam placed a lot of emphasis on bhakti, and they did not oppose Islam. They did not preach any religion that was opposed to Islam. Devotion to the divine is supreme, whether it is to Rama or to Shiva. At that time, many renowned saints undertook to tell the stories of Rama and Krishna, sing bhajans about them and discuss them. They searched for the perfect being from all the stories. That hero turned out to be Rama for Tulsidas. Slowly people began listening to the stories, singing the *Ramayana* and performing Ramalilas. In this manner, gradually there was an awakening of dharma in the hearts of people.

Surdas propagated Krishna's character. Mira focused on love for Krishna. Tulsidas preached Rama bhakti and he also brought in Shiva, as the kings of those times were Shaivite. This is the historical aspect. Sadhus and saints are mindful of history, however, they do not take the path of politics. They take another path. After all, what is politics? "People should listen to what we say. They should follow what we say." This is politics. Why go only along that path? There are other ways of getting ideas across. It is these other ways that sadhus and saints adopt. Gradually, Mira's bhajans were sung everywhere; *Ramacharitamanas* kathas were held in every village.

How did the poet-saints nurture sakar worship and take it to the common people?

Swami Satyananda: Tulsidas wrote the *Ramacharitamanas* during the Mughal period, but is there any hint of the political climate anywhere in the book? There were so many wise people then, there was Surdas and there was Mirabai, but there is no hint of politics in their writings at all. We sannyasins never enter the political arena. We are never high-profile. Mirabai left Chittor and went to Mathura, and she left Vrindavan and went to Dwarika. How did a single woman travel so far in those days? Mirabai was no fool. She could not travel so far and remain uninformed about the political world around her. She must have been well aware

of what was happening in the world, but she did not write of it anywhere. She thought of showing the way to bhakti rather than merely distracting people. There was no point in rousing the people against the king, as he would simply have you killed. Mirabai, Tulsidas, Surdas, Keshavdas and the other poets merely showed people the way to bhakti, for the Muslim rulers could not object to it. After all, in Islam bhakti is very important. That is why we made our religion bhakti-predominant and not Veda-predominant. We did not reject the Vedas; we just paid more attention to bhakti.

It was during Muslim rule that the biggest dispute of form versus formless was put to rest and was thoroughly explained. Islam believes in the formless God. They do not accept an idol of God; they do not even accept an incarnation of God. The Christian religion does not accept it either. They accept messiahs, divine messengers, or the son of God, but they do not accept an *avatara*, an incarnation of God. In our culture, Rama or Krishna were not messengers of God, they were God Himself. This understanding had to be saved too. If God is formless, then how can He incarnate? Rama was the son of a king, so how can he be God? There are always people who ask questions such as these. Their doubts were reconciled not through lectures, but through music.

Doubts were resolved through song and poetry, for the effect of poetry and song on the subconscious mind cannot be matched by the effects of prose and lectures. Four lines of a song can be easily memorized, but four lines of prose cannot. Human memory grasps poetry easily, but it is not so with prose. The *Ramacharitamanas* can be read in full in one day, but I could not have done it had it been in prose. This is why the saints and sadhus of that time took recourse to poetry and song, picking up emotions that were relevant to the lives of the people, such as maternal love, romance, sorrow, despair, competition, separation, abduction. The *Ramacharitamanas* has been written in relation to such emotions.

Is storytelling of the *Ramacharitamanas* still popular today?

Swami Satyananda: The tradition of storytelling is dying out, however, in my childhood *Ramacharitamanas* was recited in villages every day. Even illiterate people memorized the *Ramacharitamanas* just by listening to it so often.

In those days I was in Almora. At the Bageshwar temple there was a big platform and they used to stage the Ramalila there. Each year people would come from all over the place. In Kumaon, it is very difficult to walk on foot. It takes five or six hours to reach any place. However, during the nine days of the Ramalila, Almora would be completely packed. A few years later, the famous dancer Uday Shankar came to Almora. He opened his cultural centre where he started showing the *Ramayana* in a different form, as a shadow play. They made a huge stage in the northeast of Almora and there they would stage the shadow play. One person would sing the *Ramayana* and the song would be depicted through shadows. This used to take place during Ashwin Navaratri.

How was bhakti yoga taught to Shabari in the *Ramacharitamanas*?

Swami Niranjanananda: Bhakti texts offer many methods to attain the state of bhakti. The methods that Sri Rama gave to Mata Shabari to achieve the fruit of bhakti in her life are easy and practical. Sri Rama says that first of all, one should pay attention to the company one keeps. If the company one keeps is good, then the mind and thoughts will be good. One should remain infused with good thoughts so that no negativity is born towards another; the love of God and attraction to God remains constant. One should give up one's ego, imbibe the teachings of the guru and internalize them. One should practise mantra japa and connect the mind to one's beloved, one's *ishta devata*, or chosen form of the transcendental power.

The teaching of navadha bhakti is relevant to everyday life. If an ordinary piece of wood is kept with a piece of

sandalwood for some time, the ordinary wood will become fragrant. This is the result of company. If there are good people and good thoughts all around, then one's thinking, behaviour and interactions will also be good, and that will become the expression of one's life. If one lives in a negative environment full of petty thoughts, then one's whole life will become petty and narrow. This is why it is said that one should keep the company of good people. One who is filled with *sattwa guna* or pure, noble qualities is called a *satpurusha*, a good person. It is not necessary for such a person to be a guru, be wise or liberated. He can be an ordinary person. The only requirement is to connect with the sattwic expressions in life and not with the rajasic or the tamasic expressions. Bringing about a change in behaviour and conduct is an aspect of bhakti that Sri Rama has spoken about.

Sri Swamiji, how did the *Ramacharitamanas* bring bhakti to your life?

Swami Satyananda: After thoroughly studying the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Bible, the Koran and many other spiritual books for which I have great respect, I stopped my reading with *Ramacharitamanas*. This one book paved the way in my life. The greatest obstacle in my life was that I knew too much about God. I could think so much about Him, but He only remained within the precincts of my mind; I couldn't go beyond. This book took me out from the gravitational force of mind and intellect. This is the only book I read now. I don't read letters or newspapers. What is the use of reading them? They could not break the gravitational pull of my mind, but *Ramacharitamanas* took me out.

Ramacharitamanas is the story of Rama as narrated by Shiva to Parvati. I had in mind to render it into English. Until now all the renderings of this book into English have been poor because they are written by scholars, teachers and lecturers, and not by someone who can feel it. I have not received the mandate yet, but if I receive the mandate,

I will carry it out. Of course, I have also given up writing. I don't hold a pen in my hand now, but if I write a book at all by hand, as I have done in the past, it will be the literal translation of *Ramacharitamanas*. It will not need a commentary because the book itself is a commentary on faith.

What is the nature of bhakti proposed in the *Ramacharitamanas*?

Swami Satyananda: Rama has become the central point in Tulsī's *Ramacharitamanas*. This represents the total idea of God – Rama. The poetry has been put beautifully, the arrangement of words, the expression and punctuality of ideas. It is the best of all the books I have read. There are beautiful things in each and every word. One of the last sentences of the *Ramacharitamanas* (Uttarakand, doha 130) is:

*Kaamihi naari piaari jimi lobhihi priya jimi daama;
Timi raghunaatha nirantara priya laagahu mohi raama.*

May Rama become dear to me constantly, as the woman is very dear to the passionate; as money is very important to the greedy man.

In *Aradhyaakanda* (doha 204) it says:

*Aratha na dharama na kaama ruchi gati na chahau
nirabaana;
Janama janama rati raama pada yaha baradaanu na aana.*

I have no liking for wealth or for religious merit or for sensuous enjoyment, nor again do I seek the state of perfect and perpetual calm. Birth after birth let me have the devotion to Sri Rama's feet: this is the only boon I ask and nought else.

Rati means 'passion for women', the deep-rooted attachment and passion; not only love, it is more than that. *Janama-*

janama means 'every life'; *rati* means 'the moment a man and a woman are intimately related'. *Rati* is sex. *Rama pada* means 'perfect union with Rama's feet'.

Rama means 'Rama', *charita* means 'life', *manasa* means 'esoteric'. The esoteric life of Rama. The *Ramacharitamanas* is the most powerful tonic for generating bhakti. One should read it regularly to please God and to please oneself. Tulsidas has said:

Only those persons can tread this path
Who are specially graced by Hari.
Those who sing this story without deceit
Attain success in their desired aim.

What is the significance of the *Ramacharitamanas* today?

Swami Satyananda: The *Ramacharitamanas* deals with life, its conflicts, frustrations and disappointments. It is a book which deals with life in total – the life which began the day one entered the mother's womb, and which will end the day one lies down in a grave or the body is cremated. This life has so many facets: mind, relationships, various affairs, beliefs, lies and deceptions. There are so many things that one medicine cannot cure it. The *Ramacharitamanas* gives a complete idea of the timetable of life. It is a timetable of life. Just as one has an aeroplane or railway timetable, so one also has a life timetable. Life is a journey and one should have a timetable.

What does the *Ramacharitamanas* say about the nature of God?

Swami Satyananda: In the *Ramacharitamanas* there is a story about Garuda, the eagle. Garuda was in doubt about the nature of God, so he went to Brahma, the creator; then to Vishnu, the preserver; then to Shiva, the destroyer. Shiva told him, "Look, I don't have time to answer your questions. I am very busy. Go to Kakabhushundi and he will dispel your doubts." Garuda was directed to listen to the story of Rama

from Kakabhushundi, who was a crow. The interesting point to note is that Garuda is the king of birds and the crow is a scavenger. This story is like the butler instructing the master or lord of the house. So, Kakabhushundi told Garuda the story of Rama.

It has been said that whenever God takes birth, Kakabhushundi comes to observe the infant form of God. It is a very beautiful story. In reality *Ramacharitamanas* begins with this story. The satsang by Kakabhushundi is incomparable. He tells his whole life story and the story of his past lives. He used to sit with Sage Lomasha and discuss the manifest and the unmanifest. Kakabhushundi became a crow due to a curse. The point revolves on whether God has a form or not. Is God only abstract? Is God just formless? It means one is confining God to formlessness. After all, formlessness is also a limitation, a confinement. When one is able to describe God, then He is describable. If God is indescribable, then whatever one describes Him as is just one aspect. God is formless and God has a form.

At a certain point in his evolution, man realized that the entire universe is permeated by Sita Ram, God and his maya. I salute, I offer my prayers with folded hands to everything in this universe because the entire reality, right from Brahman, the cosmic being, to the minutest creature, the entire reality is permeated by Him. Therefore, there is an important chant in the *Ramacharitamanas* which everyone knows: *Siya Rama Maya Saba Jaga Jane* – after having realized that the entire universe is permeated by God and His Maya, I offer my salutations with folded hands. *Mangala Bhavana Amangala Hari* – He is the storehouse of auspiciousness and the dispeller of inauspiciousness. The bestower of auspiciousness and eliminator of inauspiciousness is God's name.

What is your experience of the *Ramacharitamanas*?

Swami Niranjanananda: The *Ramacharitamanas* is not just a mythological story of someone born thousands of years ago; it is an incredibly special book. In the verses of the

Ramacharitamanas are hidden *shabar mantras*. These are mantras of immense power that give instant benefit and result. Only knowledgeable people are aware which the shabar mantras are within the text. Nevertheless, when the *Ramacharitamanas* is chanted, the effect of those shabar mantras changes lives instantly, even for those who do not know them.

When Sri Swami Satyananda was in isolation in Rikhia, doing the sadhana of *panchagni*, the five fires, one day he said, “I read many books, imbibed a lot of knowledge and learnt a lot about man, God and religion, but my mind never felt satisfied. I always felt something was lacking. However, when I started the chanting of *Ramacharitamanas* in the correct form, I realized that I did not need to read or know anything more. The full meaning of life and God is given in this easy and incomparable book.”

When Sri Swami Satyananda said this, I did not understand what he meant. I have also chanted the *Ramacharitamanas* many times and done akhanda paths. Still, I was not able to understand his deep words. When I was doing the *panchagni*, I chanted the *Ramacharitamanas* during the sadhana and completed three rounds of nine-day readings of the full text.

During the first reading, I was absorbed in the story. In the second reading, I observed that my mental state had changed. In the first reading, the words appeared as they do: black inscriptions on white paper, but in the second reading they did not appear in that form. Instead, it seemed as if the words, couplets, stanzas and slokas were written in jewel-encrusted letters and were sparkling. It was as if each page was a storehouse of precious stones. When I read it the third time, my awareness became even more subtle.

I am telling you about this experience with the *Ramacharitamanas* as I have seen myself as a seeker and a laboratory, and have made an effort to understand how change comes about in one’s awareness and life through a process of sadhana. When the third reading was taking place,

my awareness had become so subtle that I started to see the shabar mantras. If this process had continued, it is possible that I would have glimpsed, experienced and learnt many more things.

Whatever Sri Rama may have been – a child, a king, an avatara, or a *maryada purushottam*, an ideal man – the *Ramacharitamanas* is an unparalleled book. It depicts Rama's character as the culmination of spiritual thinking and understanding. The methods of spirituality are contained in a hidden manner in the form of the mantras. As one connects with the chanting, the effects of the mantras start playing on the awareness, and they awaken new areas of consciousness, leading one towards enlightenment and liberation.

Never take the *Ramacharitamanas* lightly as just a story-book or a historic text. Its incidents may be historic, yet the benefit that you receive from chanting it, the satisfaction, happiness and peace that you gain from it, will never be had from any other literature, scripture or philosophy anywhere in the world.

Over centuries, it has been the experience of people in society that the chanting of Sundarkand, one of the chapters of the *Ramacharitamanas*, brings peace and joy, and fulfils all desires. Whether or not you understand what you chant, whether you believe in Rama or not, it does not matter. The chanting will give you the result.

What makes the *Ramacharitamanas* a favourite book of bhaktas?

Swami Satyananda: I have not seen a book like the *Ramacharitamanas*. The *Bhagavad Gita* contains knowledge, but the *Ramacharitamanas* has the sweetness of nectar. I am a man of that taste because my whole life has been dry. I have never experienced sweetness. I have always lived in solitude and quiet with no concern for anyone. I have my own way of eating and sleeping. So, the *Ramacharitamanas* came into this dry life with the sweetness of nectar. Since childhood I

have also had a good relationship with poetry and literature which I have studied in depth, whether it be Hindi, Sanskrit, English or any other. The *Ramacharitamanas* complements that aspect of my nature, but the biggest contribution it has made in my life has been to establish a sakara concept of God.

What is the best way to read the *Ramacharitamanas*?

Swami Satyananda: The *Ramacharitamanas* is neither a poem nor a story; it is a mantra. If someone has to learn it, the first thing to do is organize a month-long dedicated session or a nine-day dedicated session in which the book is read from beginning to end, in the form of a sadhana.

When introduced as a daily practice, what benefits does the *Ramacharitamanas* bestow?

Swami Satyananda: Villagers should sing or listen to the *Ramacharitamanas* daily. Don't tell me that you don't know how to read because I am not asking you to read it. I am not even asking you to understand it. I am simply saying that *Ramacharitamanas* should be heard or sung daily in all village homes. That alone is sufficient.

Along with *Ramacharitamanas* you should also sing *Hanuman Chalisa*. Begin this tradition from today, if you do not already do it. Family members of all age groups, including and especially the children, should gather every-day and sing *Ramacharitamanas* together. Those who do not know the words or cannot read should just listen. It is so easy to sing.

This practice will bring all kinds of peace, plenty, prosperity and auspiciousness to your homes: the happiness of having children as well as having food to feed them; the happiness of labouring in your fields and reaping a good harvest; of keeping disease and disharmony away from your home. What happiness does one enjoy in the family apart from these? Tulsidas sings the glory of *Ramacharitamanas* (Uttarakand, after doha 128, chau 1-3):

*Raama kathaa girijaa mai baranee,
Kali mala samani manomala haranee.
Samsriti roga sajeevana mooree,
Raama kathaa gaavahi shruti sooree.
Ehi maha ruchira sapta sopaanaa,
Raghupati bhagati kera panthaanaa.
Ati hari kripaa jaahi para hoee,
Paau dei ehi maaraga soee.
Mana kaamanaa siddhi nara paavaa,
Je yaha kathaa kapata taji gaavaa.
Kahahee sunahee anumodana karahee,
Te gopada iva bhavanidhi tarahee.*

One who is specially gifted by God
Treads this path of devotion.
The desires of his soul are fulfilled.
One who sings the story of Rama without deceit
And those who recite, hear and assent to it,
Cross the worldly ocean as if it were
As shallow as the hoof-print of a calf.
Those who recite, hear and sing the story of Rama
Wipe out the stains of the Kali Yuga
And the impurities of their souls.
Then they ascend, without effort, to His abode.

How has the story of Sri Rama been adapted in various versions through the centuries?

Swami Satyananda: The *Ramacharitamanas* that you read is not historical; it is spiritual. Actually, the *Ramayana* has many different versions and many different stories. One of them says, for example, that during the battle Ahiravana carried off Sri Rama and Lakshman to the netherworlds and Hanuman rescued them, and a few times Hanuman himself was caught in difficulties. The *Kamba Ramayana* from South India is a very different version. It is not historical; it is only a poem. There are many *Ramayanas* in Sanskrit: *Ananda Ramayana*, *Atma Ramayana*, *Bikat Ramayana*, *Adhyatama*

Ramayana and *Abhūt Ramayana*. There are *Ramayanas* where Sita is believed to be Ravana's daughter. I have even seen a film like that.

In the *Kamba Ramayana*, the South Indian version written by the poet Kamban, Sita swoons when she first sees Sri Rama. There is a poetic description of Sita's body that has been completely ignored by Tulsidas. Tulsidas did not go beyond the bounds of literature, but Kamban described it in vivid detail. There is another drama named *Prasannaraghava*, which has described scenes in Sri Rama and Sita's cottage beautifully. Then there is *Uttara Ramacharitam* by Bhavabhuti in Sanskrit. The episode regarding Rama and Sita's twins, Luv and Kush, have been taken from that. Sita's exile, her stay at Valmiki's ashram, the birth of Luv and Kush, the slaying of the demon Lavanasura, Shatrughna's participation in the post-birth rituals of Luv and Kush, and Sri Rama's ascension to heaven is all described in the *Uttara Ramacharitam*.

A scholar from South India has written the *Atma Ramayana*, which is based entirely on Vedanta. Rama is the *Paramatma*, the Supreme Soul; Sita is the *jivatama*, the individual soul; the five *karmendriyas*, motor organs, and the five *jnanendriyas*, sensory organs, make up the ten heads of Ravana; and ignorance is the demonic energy that is within each of us. The whole thing is explained in these terms.

Then there is the *Ranganatha Ramayana* in Bengali and another one in Maharashtra. In Burma and in the Indonesian islands of Bali, Sumatra and Java, there are different stories of Sri Rama. In Thailand, his name is Ramakirti, and Sita and Rama are depicted as siblings. It is the same in Laos. Certainly there are differences, but there is a new joy in every reading.

Rama was not fair. He was dusky, hued like the blue lotus, like the colour of the sky at dusk, and his eyes were red. Just as our eyes are black, Germans have light eyes, Punjabis have brown eyes, the Italians and Spanish have very black eyes, similarly Sri Rama's eyes were red.

How does the story of Ahalya point to the divine power of Sri Rama?

Swami Satyananda: When Sri Rama was just sixteen years of age, he travelled with Vishwamitra, his guru, across the Ganga in the north of Bihar. On his way he encountered a desolate place that seemed to have been an ashram at one time. He said to Vishwamitra, “This seems to be a nice place but it is deserted. What is the matter?” So, Vishwamitra narrated the tragic story of Ahalya, a woman who had been turned to stone by the curse of her husband. Rama touched that rock with his feet, and she was resurrected. She became her own self, a beautiful lady, freed from the curse of her husband.

About eight years later, Sri Rama was exiled by his father, who was under pressure from his third wife. Rama left the kingdom of Ayodhya with his wife, Sita, and his younger brother, Lakshman, to live in the forest for fourteen years. When Sri Rama arrived at the Ganga he wanted to cross the river, but the boatman refused, saying, “No, no, no. I am not going to take you on the boat.” Rama said, “What’s the matter? Why not?”

The boatman replied, “I’ve heard that when you touched a stone, it became a beautiful lady. My boat is made out of wood. If you touch my boat it too might become a lady and then how shall I earn my livelihood? So I am not going to take you on my boat.” Rama said, “But we want to cross to the other side. What can we do?” The boatman replied, “Oh, there’s a way out. I will wash your feet first because I have heard that whatever the dust of your feet touches comes alive. I don’t want the transformation of my boat.”

This is the beautiful and moving story that every Indian knows, sings and aspires for – that the dust of the feet of Sri Rama will resurrect, elevate and completely transform one’s life.



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- Sri Swamiji, how did the *Ramacharitamanas* bring bhakti to your life? 273
- What is the nature of bhakti proposed in the *Ramacharitamanas*? 274
- What is the significance of the *Ramacharitamanas* today? 275
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BHAGAVAD GITA

3: Bhakti Yoga and Other Yogas

- (18:65) Fix thy mind on Me, be devoted to Me, sacrifice to Me, bow down to Me. Thou shalt come even to Me; truly do I promise unto thee, (for) thou art dear to Me. 89
- (5:11) The yogi does all his actions devoid of attachment, for self-purification alone. 102
- (2:48) Perform actions, O Arjuna, steadfast in yoga, abandoning attachment and balanced in success and failure. Evenness of mind is called yoga. 102
- (4:39) The man who is full of faith, who is devoted to it, and who has subdued all the senses, obtains (this) knowledge; and, having obtained the knowledge, he goes at once to the supreme peace. 106
- (10:10) To them who are ever steadfast, worshipping Me with love, I give the yoga of discrimination by which they come to Me. 106
- (18:55) By devotion he knows Me in truth, what and who I am; and knowing Me in truth, he forthwith enters into the Supreme. 106
- (7:17) Of them, the wise, ever steadfast and devoted to the One, excels (is the best); for I am exceedingly dear to the wise and he is dear to Me. 108
- (7:18) Noble indeed are all these; but I deem the wise man as My very Self; for, steadfast in mind, he is established in Me alone as the supreme goal. 108

4: Integral Bhakti Yoga

- (4:18) He who sees inaction in action and action in inaction, he is wise among men; he is a Yogi and performer of all actions. 124
- (6:29) With the mind harmonized by Yoga he sees the Self abiding in all beings and all beings in the Self; he sees the same everywhere. 124
- (6:30) He who sees Me everywhere and sees everything in Me, he does not become separated from Me nor do I become separated from him. 125

- (3:21) Whatsoever a great man does, that other men also do; whatever he sets up as the standard, that the world follows. 135
- (9:22) For those men who worship Me alone, thinking of no other, for those ever-united, I secure what is not already possessed and preserve what they already possess. 147
- (12:13) He who looks upon all beings without duality, who is friendly and compassionate to all; Who is free from attachment and egoism, balanced in pleasure and pain, and forgiving. 158
- (12:14) Ever content, steady in meditation, self-controlled, possessed of firm conviction; with the mind and intellect dedicated to me, such a devotee of mine is dear to me. 158

5: Bhakti Yoga and Religion

- (12:13–20) ‘The one who sees divinity in all; the one who sees only one soul in everyone’. Who is able to see the divine in all beings? ‘The one who is a friend, who is friendly and compassionate to all’. The one who is free from attachment, egoism and the idea of ‘I, me and mine’; the one who is free from selfishness; the one who does not have hypocrisy and arrogance; the one who is always balanced in pleasure and pain, who does not feel happy or sad at the time of pleasure and pain, yet is always balanced in both states; and finally, the one in whose life mercy is expressed in behaviour and character – “such a being, such a devotee, is dear to Me.” 186
- (12:20) Those devotees who follow the immortal dharma, endowed with faith, regarding Me as their supreme goal, are exceedingly dear to Me. 192

6: Bhakti Scriptures

- (16:24) Let the scriptures be the authority in determining what ought to be done and ought not to be done. Knowing these rules and regulations, one should act here in this world accordingly and be elevated gradually. 230
- (16:23) One who discards scriptural injunctions and acts according to his own whims attains neither perfection nor happiness, nor the Supreme Goal. 230

- (12:1) Who may be considered the greater devotee, the one who worships your *sakara* or manifest aspect, or the one who worships your *nirakara* or unmanifest aspect? 252
- (15:7) An eternal portion of Myself, having become a living soul in the world of life, draws to (itself) the (five) senses with the mind for the sixth, abiding in Nature. 252
- (2:7) My heart is overpowered by the taint of pity; my mind is confused as to duty. I ask You: tell me decisively what is good for me. I am Your disciple. Instruct me who have taken refuge in You. 254
- (18:66) Abandoning all duties, take refuge in me alone. I will liberate you from all sins; grieve not. 254
- (12:13–14) That bhakta of Mine who is non-jealous, friend of all beings, without notion of mineness, free from ego, balanced in pain and pleasure and tolerant; Continuously contented and in communion with cosmic consciousness, self-controlled and firmly determined, dedicated to Me in mind and intellect, is dear to Me. 255
- (12:15) He is dear to Me by whom people are not disturbed, who is not disturbed by people, and who is free from delight, anger, fear and agitation. 257
- (12:16) That bhakta is dear to Me who expects nothing from anyone, who is pure, impartial, devoid of agonies, and who renounces the feeling of doership in all undertakings. 258
- (12:17) He who does not rejoice, does not hate, does not grieve, does not desire; that man, full of bhakti, who renounces the good and bad effects of his karma, is dear to Me. 258
- (12:18–19) That man, full of bhakti, is dear to Me who is mentally balanced towards friends and enemies, likewise in honour and in dishonour; in heat and in cold, in pleasure and in pain, and free from association with worldly objects; Unto whom praise and reproach are alike, who is silent, contented with whatever he has, without attachment to home and fixed in mind. 259
- (12:20) Those devotees who fully observe this nectar of pious wisdom as told above, who are endowed with faith and are solely devoted to Me, are exceedingly dear to Me. 260

BHAKTI SUTRAS OF SANDILYA

2: The Journey Begins

(sutra 1) Now, then, an enquiry into the doctrine of devotion. 63

3: Bhakti Yoga and Other Yogas

(sutra 97) Life is prolonged but merit and sin disappear in the case of the man of perfect devotion because of the absence of objects of enjoyment. 116

(sutra 98) Rebirth and deaths originate from want of devotion and not from want of knowledge, the former being inconsistent with the cause (of birth and death). 117

MOHAMUDGARA

4: Integral Bhakti Yoga

(verse 21) Undergoing the pangs of birth again and again, passing through the throes of death again and again, lying in the mother's womb over and over again; this process of samsara is very hard to cross over without the infinite kindness of Lord (Murari). O merciful Father, kindly save me. 130

NARADA BHAKTI SUTRAS

Introduction

(sutra 2) That (devotion) verily is of the nature of supreme love of God. 2

1: Understanding Bhakti Yoga

(sutras 2-3) That (devotion) verily is of the nature of supreme love of God. And it is of the nature of nectar. 18

(sutra 16) Vyasa, the son of Parasara, is of the opinion that bhakti consists in attachment to worship of God and other similar acts. 19

(sutra 17) Sage Gargah thinks that bhakti consists in talks of His glory and greatness and the stories of His various sports and the like. 19

(sutra 18) Sage Sandilya thinks that it must be without hindrance to the enjoyment of bliss in the atman. 19

- (sutra 19) Narada is of the opinion that the essential characteristics of bhakti are the consecration of all observances and activities through complete self-surrender to God, and extreme anguish in the event of forgetting Him. 19
- (sutra 82) Bhakti or divine love, though in itself one only, manifests itself in the following eleven forms: 1. Love of the glorification of the Lord's blessed qualities, 2. Love of his enchanting beauty, 3. Love of worship, 4. Love of constant remembrance, 5. Love of service, 6. Love of Him as a friend, 7. Love of Him as a son or child, 8. Love of Him as that of a wife for her husband, 9. Love of self-surrender to Him, 10. Love of complete absorption in Him, 11. Love of the pain of separation from Him. 26
- (sutra 34) Teachers have sung the way of attaining bhakti. 30
- (sutra 35) Devotion to God is achieved by abandoning all sensual pleasures and attachment to sensual objects. 30
- (sutra 36) By uninterrupted worship, success is attained in the practice of devotion. 30
- (sutra 37) Bhakti develops from listening to and singing of the attributes and glories of the Lord, even while engaged in the ordinary activities of life in the world. 30
- (sutra 38) But devotion is obtained chiefly by the grace of great men or through a slight measure of divine grace. 31

3: Bhakti Yoga and Other Yogas

- (sutra 28) In the view of some, knowledge (of the object loved) alone is the means to attain (devotion). 104
- (sutra 29) Others are of the opinion that there is mutual dependence between devotion and knowledge. 104
- (sutra 25) It (supreme devotion) is again higher than action, knowledge and yoga. 112
- (sutra 26) Because of its being of the nature of the result or fruit of all these. 113
- (sutra 27) (Devotion is higher than the others) because God hates egoism and loves humility. 113

4: Integral Bhakti Yoga

- (sutra 75) There is plenty of room for diversity in views and no one view, based upon mere reason, is conclusive in itself. 132

5: Bhakti Yoga and Religion

(sutra 72) Among them (the devotees) there is no distinction based on caste, learning, beauty, family or birth, wealth, observance or profession and the like. 200

6: Bhakti Scriptures

(sutra 76) (For the attainment of bhakti) the teachings of scriptures that promote devotion should be constantly meditated upon and actions that arouse devotion should be performed. 229

(sutra 58) The practice of devotion is easier than other methods (in the attainment of salvation). 231

(sutras 51–52) The nature of love towards God is inexplicable in words. Just as the taste of a mute man. 235

(sutra 19) Narada is of the opinion that the essential characteristics of bhakti are the consecration of all observances and activities through complete self-surrender to the Lord and extreme anguish in the event of forgetting Him. 236

RAMACHARITAMANAS

1: Understanding Bhakti Yoga

(Aranyakanda, after doha 34, chau 4) The first form is keeping company with positive, pious, good people and shunning the company of those who are negative and a bad influence. 31

(Balakanda, after doha 4, chau 2) The pious are those who ‘take away your heart and mind upon separation’. It means there is so much identification and oneness with them that one feels, ‘we are two bodies but with one mind and one spirit’. 31

3: Bhakti Yoga and Other Yogas

(Uttarakanda, after doha 44, chau 1)
The path of bhakti is easy and pleasant to follow,
The Puranas and Vedas declare this to be so.
The path of jnana is difficult and full of obstacles,
Formless meditation is hard to practise,
Because it offers no base for the mind to rest. 115

4: Integral Bhakti Yoga

(Sundarkand, after doha 47, chau 2-4)

Those who collect strings of attachment
With mother, father, relations, sons, wife,
Body, wealth, house, friends and family,
Make a rope out of them and tie it to my feet.
Those who are impartial, having no desires,
In whose heart there is no place
For happiness and sorrow, courage and fear,
Such bhaktas reside in my heart,
In the same manner as riches
Reside in the heart of a greedy man. 132

(Ayodhyakanda, after doha 129, chau 1)

O Lord, Thou shalt reside in the hearts
Of those who are bereft of sensuality,
Anger, pride, intoxication, delusion, greed,
Perplexity, attachment, hostility, deceit,
Arrogance and illusion. 141

(Balakanda after doha 7, chau 1)

Knowing the whole world
Is pervaded by Sita and Rama,
I bow down to it, my hands folded in prayer. 181

5: Bhakti Yoga and Religion

(Aranyakanda after doha 15, chau 6)

I am always under the control of that person
Who sings my praise with a rejoicing heart,
Whose speech is obstructed by intense joy,
Whose eyes are full of joyful tears,
Who is free from desire, anger and hypocrisy. 185

6: Bhakti Scriptures

(Uttarakand, doha 130) May Rama become dear to me constantly, as the woman is very dear to the passionate; as money is very important to the greedy man. 274

(Ayodhyakanda, doha 204) I have no liking for wealth or for religious merit or for sensuous enjoyment, nor again do I seek the state of perfect and perpetual calm. Birth after birth let me have the devotion to Sri Rama's feet: this is the only boon I ask and nought else. 274

(Uttarakand, after doha 128, chau 1–3)

One who is specially gifted by God

Treads this path of devotion.

The desires of his soul are fulfilled.

One who sings the story of Rama without deceit

And those who recite, hear and assent to it,

Cross the worldly ocean as if it were

As shallow as the hoof-print of a calf.

Those who recite, hear and sing the story of Rama

Wipe out the stains of the Kali Yuga

And the impurities of their souls.

Then they ascend, without effort, to His abode.

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SRIMAD BHAGAVATAM

4: Integral Bhakti Yoga

(3:29:11–12) The unceasing flow of the mind-stream towards me at the mere mention of my virtues, combined with motiveless love, prem, for me is the characteristic of the real bhakti yoga. 147

VIVEKACHUDAMANI

4: Integral Bhakti Yoga

(verse 119) The characteristics of pure sattwa are cheerfulness, realization of one's self, peace, contentment, bliss and steady bhakti towards the atman, by which the aspirant enjoys eternal bliss. 146

Glossary

Abheda bhakti – union between the devotee and the object of devotion; bhakti of total union

Acharya – spiritual preceptor, master

Adharma – disharmony; not fulfilling one's natural role in life; unrighteousness

Advaita – non-duality

Advaita Vedanta – non-dualistic philosophy of Adi Shankaracharya based on the experience of Brahman as the Absolute Reality, the union of Brahman and atma, (the universe and the individual soul)

Ahamkara – faculty of ego, awareness of the existence of 'I'; one of the four parts of the antahkarana or inner instrument

Akhanda – unbroken, whole; entire; complete

Amritashtaka – eight slokas of *Bhagavad Gita* (12:13 to 12:20) describing the qualities of a bhakta

Ananda – pure bliss; natural state of consciousness

Anushthana – a resolve to perform a sadhana, often mantra sadhana, with absolute discipline for a requisite period of time; a fixed course of sadhana

Aradhana – service, adoration

Aradhya – symbol, object of worship

Aranyakanda – third section (kanda) of *Ramacharitamana*s

Arati – worship involving waving of lights with reverence before a deity

- Archana, Archanam** – worship
- Artha** – prosperity; material need; accomplishment; attainment in all spheres of life
- Asakti** – attachment
- Ashram** – place of spiritual practice and growth through internal and external labour
- Ashtanga yoga** – the eight limbs of yoga described by Sage Patanjali in the *Yoga Sutras*: yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana and samadhi; the ashtanga yoga of Swami Sivananda: serve, love, give, purify, do good, be good, meditate, realize
- Ashwin Navaratri** – nine days of worship of the Cosmic Mother (September–October)
- Atma, atman** – the self beyond mind and body; principle of life, highest reality, Supreme Consciousness, spirit, soul
- Atmabhava** – feeling of unity with all; seeing the atman (soul) equally in all beings
- Atmajnana** – direct knowledge of the self
- Atmanivedan, atmanivedanam** – complete self-surrender
- Atmasamarpan** – self-surrender
- Avadhoota** – ascetic who has renounced all worldly attachment and connections
- Avatara** – descent or incarnation of God to the mortal plane
- Avidya** – ignorance of reality; ignorance
- Ayodhyakanda** – second section (kanda) of *Ramacharitamanas*
- Balakanda** – first section (kanda) of *Ramacharitamanas*
- Bhagavan** – God
- Bhagavad Gita** – literally, ‘divine song’; Sri Krishna’s discourse to his disciple Arjuna delivered on the battlefield of Kurukshetra at the commencement of the great Mahabharata war; one of the source books of Indian philosophy, containing the essence of the Upanishads and yoga
- Bhaja Govindam** – literally ‘Adore Govinda’, a spontaneously composed song and philosophical text by Adi Shankaracharya; also known as *Mohamudgar*
- Bhajan** – devotional song

Bhakta – devotee

Bhakti – intense inner devotion in which the intellect, emotions and self are channelled towards a relationship with the divine; highest love

Bhakti marga – path of worship, ritual and adoration leading to the experience of bhakti

Bhakti Mimamsa – other name for *Sandilya Bhakti Sutras* of Sage Sandilya

Bhakti yoga – branch of yoga in which emotional energy is channelled to a higher reality of life; a systematic path with nine stages which expand, strengthen and purify the emotions

Bhakti Yoga Sutras – sutras on bhakti yoga, composed by Sage Narada and Sage Sandilya

Bhava, bhavana – feeling; condition; attitude; inclination or disposition of mind

Bhava samadhi – samadhi attained through intense emotion

Bheda bhakti – the worshipper and the object of worship maintain separate identity; bhakti of duality; bhakti yoga described by Sage Vasishtha to Sri Rama

Brahma Sutras – famous, terse and far reaching classical vedantic text written by Sage Vedavyasa

Brahmanubhava – the absolute experience, direct realization of the Self

Brahmi vritti – mental modification that leads to identification with the witnessing consciousness or Brahman; spiritual aspect of the vrittis, the self-aware, individual consciousness

Dama – control of the outer senses; self-command through self-restraint and curbing the passions

Darshan – a glimpse; vision; direct perception; philosophy

Dasya bhava – feeling and attitude of relating to God as a servant

Daya – compassion, kindness to all

Devi Bhagavatam – a subsidiary text of the *Shiva Purana*; a collection of stories, myths and doctrines of Devi, the Cosmic Mother

- Dharma** – the natural role one plays in life; ethical law; duty; the laws or fundamental support of life; righteousness
- Drashta** – witness, uninvolved observer, onlooker, seer; the consciousness which knows what is going on; the inner self
- Dvaita** – duality
- Dweshha** – repulsion, aversion; hatred, enmity, dislike; one of the five causes of affliction (kleshas) described in Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* as aversion to the unpleasant; see Kleshas
- Gayatri mantra** – a most sacred twenty-four syllable mantra which enables learning
- Gherand Samhita** – traditional text on hatha yoga by Rishi Gheranda
- Guru Granth Sahib** – central religious text of Sikhism
- Guna** – quality; the three gunas, qualities or aspects of prakriti (nature) are sattwa, rajas and tamas
- Hanuman Chalisa** – devotional song dedicated to Hanuman
- Hatha Yoga Pradipika** – a major classical text on hatha yoga compiled by Yogi Swatmarama
- Havan** – offering an oblation into a fire
- Ikshvaku** – first of the solar kings
- Ishta deva, ishta devata** – one's personal chosen deity and form of worship
- Ishwara** – higher reality; God; non-changing, indestructible principle or quality
- Japa** – a meditation practice involving repetition of a mantra
- Jivanmukta** – liberated in life; an enlightened person, a person purified by true knowledge of the Supreme Reality and freed from future births while still embodied
- Jivatma** – individual or personal soul
- Jnana** – knowledge, cognition, wisdom; higher knowledge derived from meditation or from inner experience
- Jnanakanda** – inner or esoteric portion of Veda which refers to spiritual knowledge, or the knowledge of the supreme spirit, as distinguished from knowledge obtained through ceremonial rites

- Kaivalya** – final liberation; highest state of samadhi; that state of consciousness which is beyond duality
- Karma** – action and result; law of cause and effect
- Karma yoga** – yogic path of action; union with the Supreme Consciousness through action; action without attachment to the fruits of action
- Karmakanda** – another name for bhakti marga; the path of ritual and worship to attain the state of bhakti
- Katha** – a tale, story
- Kirtan, kirtanam** – singing of God’s name in a group of people; discipline of bhakti yoga
- Kishkindhakanda** – fourth section (kanda) of *Ramacharitamanas*
- Klesha** – pain, affliction, suffering; five afflictions or causes of all suffering described in Sage Patanjali’s *Yoga Sutras*, viz avidya (ignorance), asmita (sense of ‘I’ identity), raga (attraction), dwesha (aversion) and abhinivesha (fear of death)
- Kundalini** – the evolutionary energy in a human being; spiritual energy; Devi described as the potential energy of a human being dormant in mooladhara chakra, which when awakened, awakens the chakras resulting in progressive enlightenment
- Lilas** – literally, ‘play’; activity of prakriti and its three gunas
- Madhurya bhava** – attitude of a lover of the beloved deity
- Mahabharata** – epic of ancient India said to be composed by Sage Vedavyasa, involving the history and consequences of the great battle between the Kaurava and Pandava princes. It consists of eighteen sections and the *Bhagavad Gita* is a part of it
- Mahabhava** – the highest type of self-surrender to the divine
- Mahamantra** – the ‘great mantra’; generally used for the mantra *Hare Krishna Hare Rama*
- Maharishi** – great sage or saint
- Mahatma** – literally, ‘great soul’; used with reference to a person who has destroyed the ego and realized the self as one with all

- Manamana bhava** – feeling in which the mind is fully turned and devoted to the divine
- Mantra** – words of power; sound vibrations which liberate the mind when repeated
- Marga** – path
- Mohamudga** – literally ‘the hammer which destroys blind detachment’; see Bhaja Govindam
- Moksha** – liberation from the cycles of birth and death and the illusion of maya
- Mukti** – release, liberation, final absolution of the consciousness from the chain of birth and death and from the illusion of maya
- Mumukshutva** – intense yearning for liberation
- Muni** – one who contemplates; one who has conquered the mind; one who maintains silence or stillness of mind
- Narada Bhakti Sutras** – one of the main bhakti yoga texts, authored by Sage Narada
- Navanga yoga** – name for bhakti yoga; yoga of nine limbs
- Navaratri** – a period of nine days; celebration of the Cosmic Shakti
- Nirakara** – without form, formless; unmanifest
- Nirguna** – without quality or attribute; formless
- Nirvana** – cessation of suffering, final liberation or emancipation in Buddhist thought; higher state of existence or awareness
- Nishkama** – without desire, expectation or personal interest
- Niyama** – observance of rules or rules of personal discipline to render the mind tranquil in preparation for meditation
- Nyaya** – one of the six Indian philosophical systems (darshana); the spiritually correct way; recognition of real spiritual experience by the omniscient mind that is all-encompassing and all-pervading
- Omkaara** – the sound of Aum (Om)
- Padaseva, padasevanam** – showing respect; adherence to the guru’s teaching; discipline of bhakti yoga
- Para bhakti** – supreme devotion, bhakti. It is said to accompany or follow the highest knowledge and be a state of consciousness which is self-contained

- Paropakara** – social karma, working for the benefit of others in society
- Pooja** – worship
- Prakriti** – individual nature; nature; manifest and unmanifest nature composed of the three gunas; the active principle of manifest energy
- Prarabdha karma** – actions already performed which, like arrows shot from the bow, cannot be retrieved; previous karmas which have matured enough to give fruit
- Puranas** – eighteen ancient texts containing the earliest mythology of the tantric and vedic traditions
- Purva Mimamsa** – one of the six Indian philosophical systems (darshana) in the form of questions; it contains the theory of traditional rituals (karmakanda)
- Raga** – passion; affection; attachment; one of the five causes of affliction or kleshas described in Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* as attraction or attachment to what gives pleasure; see Klesha
- Ramacharitamanas** – a version of the *Ramayana* written by Tulsidas in a Hindi dialect. It is composed in poetic form and is chanted by devotees throughout India
- Ramalila** – the story of the *Ramayana* performed as dance-drama
- Ramayana** – one of the most famous ancient Indian epics, relating the life of Sri Rama, the most widely known version was composed by Valmiki, containing about 24,000 verses in seven sections
- Rishi** – seer; realized sage; one who contemplates or meditates on the Self
- Sadhana** – spiritual practice or discipline performed regularly
- Sadhu** – good or holy person, sage, saint
- Saguna upasana** – worship, adoration or service of God with form, qualities (guna) or attributes
- Sakara bhakti** – love and devotion of God with a form, qualities (guna) or attributes
- Sakhya, sakhya bhava** – attitude or way of relating to God as a friend; relationship between Arjuna and Sri Krishna

- Samadhi** – the culmination of meditation, state of oneness of the mind with the object of concentration and the universal consciousness; self-realization; the eighth stage of raja yoga
- Samarpan** – surrender
- Samatvam** – equipoise; balance in life
- Samskara** – mental impression stored in the subtle body as an archetype; the impressions which condition one's nature, causing one to react or respond in a certain way
- Sanga** – association, company
- Sangha** – community, group of people
- Sankirtan** – see Kirtan
- Sannyasa ashrama** – traditionally the fourth stage of life after the age of 75; total renunciation
- Santosh, samtushta** – complete contentment, complete absence of any desire
- Satsang, satsanga** – gathering in which the ideals and principles of truth are discussed; spiritual association; association with the wise and the good
- Seva** – literally, 'being That'; service; selfless service; to become one with the divine transcendental nature and to express that nature in thought, word and deed
- Shabar mantra** – hidden mantras of great power
- Shaiva, Shavaite** – relating to the God Shiva; one who worships Shiva as the supreme reality
- Shakta** – relating to Shakti, the Cosmic Mother; one who worships the various manifestations of shakti as the supreme reality
- Shiva Purana** – collection of six ancient scriptures that tell the story of Shiva; see Puranas
- Shravan, shravanam** – to listen, to hear the scriptures; the second of the three steps on the path of knowledge in vedantic sadhana; discipline of bhakti yoga
- Shuddha** – pure in nature
- Siddha** – an adept or perfected person; one who has developed his/her psychic and pranic capacity to the point of mastery
- Sloka** – verse

- Smaran, smaranam** – remembrance, recollection; discipline of bhakti yoga
- Srimad Bhagavata, Bhagavatam** – one of the 18 major Puranas dealing with the avatars of Vishnu, it speaks in great detail about the life of Sri Krishna; see Purana
- Sthoola** – gross, basic; relating to the waking state of consciousness
- Sukshma** – subtle; relating to the world of the psyche
- Sundarkanda** – fifth section (kanda) of *Ramacharitamanas*
- Sutra** – thread; condensed statements strung together to give an outline of a philosophy
- Swayamvara** – choosing of a husband by a woman in a public ceremony
- Tantra** – most ancient universal science and culture which deals with the transition of human nature from the present level of evolution and understanding to a transcendental level of knowledge, experience and awareness; a particular path of sadhana including mantra, yantra and other esoteric practices
- Tapasvi** – ascetic, one who practises austerity, tapas
- Treta Yuga** – second of the four aeons of the world; the yuga in which Sri Rama lived
- Uddhava Gita** – classical text giving teachings of Sri Krishna to his friend and disciple, Uddhava
- Upanishads** – the philosophical portion of the Vedas, traditionally 108 in number; containing intimate dialogues and discussions between guru and disciple on the nature of the Absolute and the path leading towards it; literally, ‘to sit near and listen’ (to the spiritual teacher)
- Upasana** – personalized form of worship
- Uttara Ramacharitam** – celebrated drama by Bhavabhuti, which describes the later stages in the life of Sri Rama
- Uttarakanda** – seventh section (kanda) of *Ramacharitamanas*
- Uttara Mimamsa** – one of the six principle systems of Indian philosophy (darshana), usually called Vedanta
- Vairagya** – non-attachment; absence of sensual craving and desires; detachment; supreme dispassion

- Vaisheshika** – one of the six principle systems of Indian philosophy (darshana)
- Vaishnava** – the sect that reveres incarnations of Vishnu as the Supreme Reality
- Vanaprastha ashrama** – traditionally the third stage of life, from the age of 50 to 75 years of age; withdrawal from involvement in wordly life in order to practise sadhana
- Vandana, vandanam** – adoration, salutation; one of the means to attain the state of bhakti
- Varna ashrama** – social system for four principal castes (varnas): priest, warrior or ruling class, merchant and labourers
- Vasana** – subtle impressions which are the seeds of desires
- Vatsalya bhava** – affection towards one's offspring; relationship with God as between parent and child
- Vedanta** – one of the six principle systems of Indian philosophy; literally, 'the last part of the Vedas'; the school of thought based primarily on the Upanishads; the doctrine of non-dualism (Advaita)
- Vedas** – ancient texts revealed to the sages and saints of India, explaining and regulating every aspect of life from the Supreme Reality to worldly affairs; four in number: *Rig, Yajur, Sama, Atharva*, which are further divided into the Samhita, Brahmana, Aranyaka and Upanishads; the oldest books in the library of humankind, parts of them revealed to sages and seers before 5,000 BC
- Virahara, viraha** – state of separation; the suffering caused by separation
- Vishnu Purana** – one of the most celebrated of the 18 Puranas
- Vivekachudamani** – treatise by Adi Shankaracharya with instructions for spiritual progress and self-realization
- Vritti** – a modification arising in the mind related to a thought pattern; a particular mental state or condition
- Yama** – self-restraints or rules of conduct which render the mind tranquil
- Yoga Vasishtha** – a monumental scripture on Vedanta in the form of a dialogue between Sri Rama and his guru Sage Vasishtha
- Yuga** – aeon; an age of the world

Glossary of Names and Places

- Agastya, Rishi** – sage known for his knowledge and siddhis
- Ahalya** – wife of Sage Gautama, redeemed from a curse by Sri Rama's grace
- Alvars** – followers of the Vaishnava tradition in South India
- Ambarisha** – mythological king of the solar dynasty; devotee of Vishnu
- Anasuya** – wife of Rishi Atri; mother of Dattatreya, Soma and Durvasa
- Annapurna** – form of Durga, the Cosmic Mother
- Appayya Dikshitar** – (16th century CE) saint of South India; devotee of Shiva; ancestor of Swami Sivananda Saraswati
- Arjuna** – name of the third Pandava brother; son of Indra and Kunti; in the *Bhagavad Gita* he received divine revelation from Sri Krishna
- Atri, Rishi** – sage in the *Ramayana*; husband of Anasuya
- Ayodhya** – birthplace of Sri Rama
- Babaji** – mystical, ever-young yogi of the Himalayas
- Balaram** – elder brother of Sri Krishna
- Bharat** – brother of Sri Rama; son of King Dasharatha and Kaikeyi
- Bhavabhuti** – (7th century CE) Indian court poet and dramatist
- Brahma, Brahman** – God of the Hindu trinity who creates the universe; God as creator; manifest force of life and creation; ever-expanding, limitless consciousness; absolute reality

Bhuvaneshwari – form of the Cosmic Mother

Buddha – (566–483 BCE) ‘the enlightened one’; commonly referred to as the founder of Buddhism

Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, Gouranga – (1485–1534) reformer of the Vaishnava faith; one of the contributors of the bhakti movement in India during the Mughal era

Chhinnamasta – form of the Cosmic Mother

Chitrakoot – place of exile of Sri Rama where Tulsidas had darshan of Sri Rama and Lakshman

Dandaka – forest in central India, mentioned in the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*

Dasharatha – king of Ayodhya; father of Sri Rama

Devaki – mother of Sri Krishna; wife of Vasudeva

Dhritarashtra – blind king; father of the Kauravas in the *Mahabharata*

Dhruva – bhakta famous for his steadfast worship of Narayana; the pole star is named after him

Dhumavati – form of the Cosmic Mother

Durga – goddess who removes difficulties; wife of Shiva

Duryodhana – eldest son of King Dhritarashtra and Gandhari

Dwarika – the capital of Sri Krishna’s kingdom at the western point of Gujarat

Ek Nath – (1533–1606) Indian saint of Maharashtra; famous for his inspiring *Ek Nathi Bhagvatha*

Gajendra – elephant king who was rescued from a ferocious crocodile by Vishnu

Gandhi, Mahatma – (1869–1948) Indian national leader who established his country’s freedom through a non-violent revolution

Ganesh – elephant-headed Hindu deity; remover of obstacles; son of Shiva and Parvati

Ganga – river Ganges; most sacred river in India

Gargah, Sage – one of the sons of Brahma

Garuda – eagle vehicle of Vishnu

Gopis – companions of the young Krishna in Vrindavan

Gorakhnath, Yogi – founder of the Nath sect; author of *Gorakhsha Samhita*

Govinda – another name of Sri Krishna

Hanuman – name of a powerful monkey chief possessing extraordinary strength and powers which he manifested on several critical occasions on behalf of Sri Rama, the Lord of his heart

Hara – another name of Shiva

Hari – name of Vishnu, the god of the Hindu trinity who is entrusted with the preservation of the universe; Supreme Consciousness

Harischandra – king of the solar dynasty, famous for his unflinching adherence to truth

Hazrat Bal – tomb in Kashmir where the sacred hair of prophet Mohammed is enshrined

Hazrat Rabia – (8th century CE) woman Sufi saint and poet of Basra, present-day Iraq

Indrajit – another name of Meghnad, son of Ravana

Jaimini – (2nd century BCE) sage and philosopher, founder of the Mimamsa school of philosophy

Jambavan – king of bears who served Sri Rama, known for his medical skills

Janaka, King – father, progenitor; name of a famous king of Videha or Mithila, who was the foster-father of Sita. He was famous for his great knowledge, good works and holiness

Janakapuri – capital of Mithila ruled by King Janaka

Janaki – another name of Sita; daughter of King Janaka

Jatayu – eagle with divine gifts; friend to King Dasharatha and Sri Rama

Kabir, Kabirdas – (1440–1518) Indian poet and mystic, whose teachings blend Hinduism, Sufism and bhakti

Kaikeyi – one of the three wives of King Dasharatha; mother of Bharat

Kailash – sacred mountain in the Himalayas; residence of Shiva and Parvati

Kakabhushundi – he was cursed by his guru, Sage Lomasha, to incarnate as a crow; devotee of Sri Rama and narrator of Sri Rama's story

- Kali** – primal manifestation of Shakti; destroyer of time, space, object and ignorance
- Kamsa** – King of Mathura; maternal uncle of Sri Krishna
- Kapila, Sage** – name of the sage who founded the Samkhya philosophy
- Keshavdas** – (1555–1617) scholar and poet; author of devotional poetry to Sri Rama, *Ramachandrika* and *Rasikpriya*
- Kishkindha** – kingdom and capital of King Sugriva, king of monkeys; name given to fourth section of *Ramacharitamanas*
- Krishna, Sri** – the ‘black’ or ‘dark one’; eighth incarnation of Vishnu; avatara who descended in the Dwapara Yuga. Sri Krishna is perhaps the most celebrated hero in Hindu mythology and seems to be an historical figure. To uphold dharma he orchestrated the Mahabharata war. His teachings to his friend and disciple Arjuna during that war are immortalized in the *Bhagavad Gita*
- Kumbhakarna** – brother of Ravana slain by Sri Rama
- Kush** – one of the twin sons of Sri Rama and Sita. He was made king of Kusavati by Sri Rama
- Lakshman** – hero of the epic *Ramayana*; brother of Sri Rama, son of Dasharatha and his wife Sumitra
- Lakshmi** – goddess of fortune, prosperity and beauty; consort of Vishnu
- Lanka** – island residence of Ravana; present-day Sri Lanka
- Lomasha, Sage** – guru of Kakabhushundi
- Luv** – one of the twin sons of Sri Rama and Sita
- Mahadevi** – the great Goddess; another name of Parvati
- Mahavira** – (599–527 BCE) contemporary to Buddha; founder of the Jain religion advocating non-violence, compassion and restraint
- Mainaka** – mountain, invited Hanuman to rest while on his way to Lanka
- Mansoor** – (9th century) Muslim fakir; known as the Saint of Baghdad
- Maricha** – demon who took the form of a golden deer and lured Sri Rama away from Sita enabling Ravana to abduct her

- Matsyendranath, Yogi** – one of the founders of hatha yoga; guru of Yogi Gorakhnath
- Mirabai** – (1547–1614) princess; Indian poet saint; devotee of Sri Krishna
- Murari** – another name of Sri Krishna
- Nachiketa** – principal character of the *Kathopanishad*
- Nalanda** – famous Buddhist university during the Maurya dynasty; in the state of present-day Bihar
- Namdev** – (1270–1350) Indian saint of Maharashtra; devotee of Lord Vitthala, a form of Sri Krishna
- Nanda** – foster-father of Sri Krishna and husband of Yashoda
- Narada, Sage** – author of *Narada Bhakti Sutras*; devotee of Vishnu
- Narayana** – another name of Vishnu
- Nayanars** – followers of the Shaiva tradition in South India
- Nishada** – head of one of the original tribes in India; devotee of Sri Rama
- Panchavati forest** – part of the Dandaka forest where Rama lived with Sita and Lakshman during their exile
- Parashurama** – the sixth incarnation of Vishnu
- Parikshit, Raja** – grandson of Arjuna, received the teaching of *Srimad Bhagavatam* from Sukadeva
- Parsi** – follower of the Zoroastrian philosophy
- Pashupat** – follower of the Shaiva tradition
- Prahlada** – son of demon Hiranyakashipu; great devotee of Vishnu. His faith helped him withstand many trials; Vishnu saved him in the form of Narasimha, half man and half lion
- Radha** – beloved gopi of Sri Krishna
- Raidas, Ravidas** – (15th/16th century) poet-saint; born in Varanasi to a cobbler family; disciple of Kabirdas
- Rama, Sri** – the seventh avatara of Vishnu and embodiment of dharma, hero of the epic *Ramayana*; a heroic and virtuous king
- Ramakrishna, Paramahansa** – (1836–1886) Indian saint and mystic who perfected sadhanas from all religions; guru of Swami Vivekananda

- Ramdas, Samartha Ramdas** – (1608–1682) Indian saint, poet and social reformer
- Rati** – goddess of love
- Ratna** – wife of Tulsidas, inspired him to turn his worldly attachment into devotion for God
- Ravana** – ten-headed demon king who kidnapped Sita; he was slain by Sri Rama; his ten heads symbolize attachment to the phenomenal reality
- Rohini** – wife of Vasudeva and mother of Balaram
- Sandilya, Sage** – author of *Sandilya Bhakti Sutras*
- Saraswati** – goddess of knowledge, speech and learning; daughter of Brahma
- Shabari, Mata** – tribal woman and devotee of Sri Rama; she waited 60 years for darshan of Sri Rama; symbol of unflinching faith
- Shakti** – primal energy; manifest consciousness; power, ability, capacity, strength, energy; counterpart of Shiva; the moving power of nature and consciousness; in Hindu mythology Shakti is often symbolized as a divine woman
- Shankaracharya, Adi** – (782–820) name of a celebrated teacher of the Advaita Vedanta philosophy; an enlightened sage who is said to have established the Dashnami order of sannyasa and authored a large number of scriptural works
- Shatrughna** – son of King Dasharatha and his wife Sumitra; younger brother of Sri Rama and twin brother of Lakshman
- Shiva** – state of pure consciousness, individual and cosmic; original source of yoga; Lord of yogis; auspicious, benevolent one; name of the god of the Hindu trinity who is entrusted with the work of destruction; destroyer of the ego and duality
- Shodashi** – one of the names of the Cosmic Mother, Tripura-sundari
- Sita** – daughter of King Janaka and wife of Sri Rama, as recorded in the epic *Ramayana*
- Sudama** – childhood friend of Sri Krishna
- Sukadeva, Shukadeva** – son of Vedavyasa; he narrated the *Srimad Bhagavatam* to Raja Parikshit

- Surdas** – (1478–1581) celebrated blind saint and poet of India whose devotional songs to Sri Krishna are known throughout India
- Sutikshna** – disciple of Sage Agastya; devotee of Sri Rama; performed panchagni sadhana
- Swatmarama, Yogi** – (15th century CE) literally, ‘one who revels within oneself’; author of *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, a classical text book on hatha yoga
- Tara** – one of the names of the Cosmic Mother
- Totapuri, Swami** – (19th century) guru of Ramakrishna Paramahansa
- Tripurasundari** – one of the names of the Cosmic Mother
- Tukaram** – (17th century) Indian poet saint of Maharashtra
- Tulsidas** – (1532–1623) author of one of the versions of the famous epic *Ramayana* called the *Ramacharitamanas*, which describes the life of Sri Rama. It is composed in poetic form and is chanted by devotees throughout India
- Uddhava** – devotee of Sri Krishna; a childhood friend of Sri Krishna who later learned bhakti from the gopis
- Vaikuntha** – heaven; abode of Vishnu
- Vali** – monkey chief, who at the behest of his younger brother Sugriva, was slain by Sri Rama
- Valmiki** – name of a celebrated sage who meditated for so long that he became interred in a termite mound; author of the first *Ramayana*
- Varanasi** – holy city connected especially with Lord Shiva; also known as Benares and Kashi
- Vasishtha, Sage** – a celebrated rishi and seer of the Vedas; guru of Sri Rama; author of many vedic hymns, his teachings are recorded in *Yoga Vasishtha*, one of the greatest expositions of jnana yoga
- Vasudeva** – father of Sri Krishna
- Vedavyasa, Vyasa** – compiler of the four Vedas in their present form
- Vibhishana** – youngest brother of demon Ravana; devotee of Sri Rama

- Vidura** – younger brother of Pandu of the *Mahabharata*, known for his wisdom and righteousness
- Vinoba Bhave** – (1895–1982) Indian freedom fighter, social reformer and saint
- Vishnu** – vedic deity; the second deity of the Hindu trinity (Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva), entrusted with the preservation of the universe, a duty which obliges him to appear in several incarnations; Supreme Consciousness
- Vishwamitra, Sage** – literally, ‘friend of the universe’; a celebrated sage during the time of the Sri Rama
- Yashoda** – foster mother of Sri Krishna; wife of Nanda
- Yogananda, Paramahansa** – (1893–1952) disciple of Sri Yuktेशwara of Babaji’s lineage whose task was to teach kriya yoga in the West
- Yuktेशwara, Sri** – (1855–1936) saint and disciple of Sri Lahiri Mahashaya; guru of Paramahansa Yogananda

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