

Lesson 17

There was once a famous sculptor. One day he was visited by some people who wanted to see his work. He took them to his studio and showed them a number of pieces of stone that had been partly chipped away. None of the stone blocks resembled anything tangible and were far from being beautiful. The visitors were a little disappointed, for they came expecting to see aesthetic pieces of sculpture. Then the sculptor said: "This is where I start work on my creations; now let us go to the next room." His visitors went to the next room and were confronted with objects that were beginning to look more shapely. They were more impressed. Then the sculptor led them to another room and he showed them exquisite works of art. The visitors were delighted and exclaimed that they had never seen such delicate pieces of sculpture. But the sculptor explained that he had not finished work on them; they had yet to be polished before they reached the stage of perfection.

The gradual transformation that the visitors saw in the sculptures is analogous to the transformation that takes place in an individual when he practises yoga. At first his character is gross and unrefined. Something is lacking. Then in time, his attitude towards life, himself and others changes. His sensitivity increases. He starts to radiate that which is already within him. Yoga unfolds the inner being of the individual, in the same way that the sculptor slowly exposes the shape of his works. The shape is already inherent within the stone - the sculptor only cuts away the extraneous material that hides it. In the same way, the inner potential of the individual always exists - yoga merely cuts away the dross to allow it to show itself.

Swami Satyananda Saraswati

Bhakti Yoga (Part 3)

The seed of bhakti lies in the heart of every person. It is something that is hidden away deep within each one of us. It has been planted in the fertile soil of 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 of us 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 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. So 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 you have 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."

Egoless and ego-centred love

There are two distinct forms of love. Firstly, there is ego-centred love, in which one loves another person, deity, saint or whatever with the expectation of love in return. This is the most common form of love and is really a love of oneself, not of someone or something else.

Secondly, there is egoless love. This is love for the sake of love, without any expectation of love in return. This form of love is bhakti and is felt even when it is not returned. This type of love may exist for some inexplicable reason; or it may exist because of some natural resonance or compatibility; or perhaps the love exists because of the realization of the deeper nature of the other person, deity, etc. In a higher sense, there cannot be love for another person, for other people, for a deity and so forth because of the understanding that everyone and everything is really one's own self. Others do not exist. This is non-directional love; love that goes out and returns to the bhakta.

Ego-centred love will chain one to the finite, whereas bhakti, intense non-expectational love, leads to the infinite. One limits, whereas the other leads to the unlimited. Bhakti or egoless love does not depend on beauty, wealth or reciprocation of love. Bhakti should be felt even if one is rejected. This is a test of the sincerity of devotion. The great Indian bhakta Rasakhan (born a Muslim, but who worshipped Krishna) said: "Bhakti is the fountain of all sweetness. It is not dependent on youth, virtue, beauty or riches, nor is it tainted by self-interest or thoughts of personal gain."

Ego-centred love tends to quickly subside with time, whereas bhakti increases and grows with every passing minute.

One-pointed bhakti

What is the way to success in bhakti yoga? It is overwhelming devotion to your deity or guru. The greater the aspiration, the quicker you are likely to transcend and the quicker you are likely to come face to face with something beyond everyday experience. This is perfectly illustrated by the following well-known story by Ramakrishna. A disciple asked his teacher how he could see the supreme. The guru told him to follow him to the nearby lake. Beside

the lake the guru suddenly took hold of the disciple and pushed him under the water. He held the disciple under the water for several minutes, while the disciple put up a furious struggle. Then the disciple was released and he came spluttering to the surface. The guru asked: "How did you feel?" "I was panting, gasping for breath - I thought I was going to die. I was desperate!" was the reply. The guru then said: "When you have that same overpowering feeling for the supreme, then you will know that you are not far away from seeing his form (darshan)."

There must be an intense quest. There has to be aspiration. According to Swami Ramdas: "Unless you have a burning aspiration for the supreme, the mind cannot be fixed on him. Where your love is, there your mind also is. Just as the miser constantly thinks of money and money alone, so a bhakta has exclusive devotion to the supreme."

This is the way to expanded awareness. One must try to act, feel and think while being aware of divinity, the deity or the gum. Always know that it is divinity that makes you feel, do and think. You are not the doer. This recollection will reduce the hold and the power of the ego. This is called surrender, and it is the way to higher states of consciousness.

Strangely enough, it is anguish that can lead to intensification of bhakti. Distress and torment at being separated from divine communion can lead to an upsurge of bhakti and heightened awareness. But this anguish must come from the very depths of one's being. The dissatisfaction leads to this intensification. The bhakta accepts all that comes to him as a gift intended to lift him into the deeper realms of awareness. Whether it is anguish, joy or whatever, it is all intended to raise the level of awareness of the bhakta, to speed him along the path to higher knowledge. You too must feel the pain of separation and have the same intense longing for union that the gopis felt for Krishna. This is one-pointed bhakti.

Bhakti grows steadily and naturally as you become more and more aware. It becomes stronger as misconceptions progressively drop away. The greater the awareness, the greater the bhakti. One becomes enveloped in a continuous stream of bhakti. It flows unceasingly and spontaneously like the River Ganges in full flood. In the *Devi Bhagavata* it says: "When

you think of the supreme in the same way that oil is smoothly poured from one pot to another; when the thought is continuous, then there arises unspeakable love and bliss." This is intense bhakti. There are no thoughts of one's limited self, only thoughts of one's deity, one's gum, one's symbol or thoughts of one's unlimited nature.

When the aspiration and bhakti reach such an intensity, then you will automatically invoke the grace of illumination and bliss. After this point there will be a total transformation in one's whole being. This is the power of concentrated bhakti. This illumination will in turn increase bhakti and reduce the ego. The grace will repeat itself. The circular feedback will be repeated, but will include more and more. The power of the ego decreases while bhakti and understanding become greater and greater. When you have tasted the sweetness of divinity even once, you will never forget. You will become a slave, unable to do anything but remember.

Bhakti - the means to harmonize the mind

If you naturally feel some kind of bhakti, no matter how small, then you are well on the way to cleaning out the mind of conflicts and phobias etc. You 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. You will transmute a cloudy, murky personality into one that is as clear and sparkling as a crystal.

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. Everything is. Do and accept. This leads to peace of mind. Many of the tantric deities are depicted performing *abhaya mudra*. This is a mudra that indicates that everything will be all right. Everything that you are thinking now is incorrect and in time all your 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 you will find that they are 'speaking' the truth.

Bhakti 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."

This is indeed the process that each bhakta and in fact any person on the spiritual path must go through. 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 the purgation."

The aim of bhakti yoga is to channel all one's desires, ambitions, all one's 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 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 fit receiver for the grace of illumination and bliss. But first of all the heart and the mind should flow in one direction. Bhakti transforms, transmutes one's individual being from the gross to the more refined. It changes *tamas* (inertia and ignorance) into *rajas* (intense activity). Then it changes this *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. Shankaracharya points out: "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." (*Vivekachudamani* v. 119)

So there is a direct relationship between the clarity of the mind and bhakti, and here we mean 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* Krishna says: "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."

Of course this bhakti need not only be felt towards Krishna; it can be felt towards any deity, any saint or your guru. This powerful one-directional bhakti leads to wonderful things. In the *Bhagavad Gita* Krishna says: "I take great care of those devotees who always think of me." (9:22) And there it is . . . a promise. Such bhakti leads to mental harmony and more. The intense bhakta soars into the realms of higher awareness, bliss and knowledge.

Divine love allegorized

Many mystics have allegorized divine love or bhakti in terms of human love. They have done this so that people can gain some idea of the meaning of the word bhakti. Most people know about the love between a man and a woman. Therefore, it is easier to explain the path and experience of bhakti in terms of

male-female love, in terms that most people can relate to through personal experience. The problem is, however, that people forget that stories and poems in this form are allegories and they take them too literally. Many allegories of bhakti are totally misunderstood. A good example is the well-known poem *Rubaiyat* by the Persian poet Omar Khayam. Most translators of this masterpiece have interpreted it as a series of wine drinking, women frolicking escapades.

The introduction to this poem in a book in the ashram library says: "He was a poet of revolt, preaching the unbeliever's pessimism and the creed - let us eat and drink now for tomorrow we die." This misses the whole point. Omar Khayam was neither a believer nor a non-believer. He was a bhakta, tuned in with higher states of consciousness and knowledge. He was in communion. There is nothing wrong with eating and being merry; if you want to do this, then do it. But Omar Khayam is not suggesting this at all. He is depicting bhakti through divine experience. The story really depicts the life and love of a bhakta.

The poem talks much about drinking wine. But this is not the alcoholic wine. It is the divine nectar of bliss. This is the intoxicating experience of expanded awareness, known as *amrit* (nectar or immortality) in many Indian scriptures, as *soma* in the *Vedas*, and as wine in the tantric texts. In the poem the main preoccupation seems to be drinking wine, day in and day out. This does not mean that the hero of the poem is in a continual state of drunkenness or semi-consciousness through consuming too much alcohol. It means rather that the bhakta was always in a state of divine intoxication, of heightened awareness. He was in a continuous state of meditation through drinking the inner wine of bliss.

Let us illustrate what we have said with a few quotations from the poem:

*And if the wine you drink, the lips you press
End in what all begins and ends in - yes;
Think then that you are today,
What yesterday you also were -
Tomorrow you shall not be less.*

(v. 42)

The wine is the bliss of increased awareness and the poem points out that you are, always

have been, and will be exactly what you really are. This is realization of one's real inner nature.

*You know my friends, with what brave revelry
I made a second marriage in my house;
Divorced old barren reason from my bed,
And took the daughter of the vine for a spouse.*
(v. 55)

Here the narrow confines of the intellect are discarded and the aspirant becomes a bhakta, experiencing intoxicating joy (wine or the daughter of the vine).

*For 'is' and 'is not' though with rule and line
And 'up and down' by logic I define,
Of all that one should care to fathom, I
Was never deep in anything but. . . wine.*
(v. 56)

In this beautiful verse the bhakta points out that hidden in the fog of concepts and definitions is his real nature . . . wine or bliss.

*The grape that can with logic absolute
The two and seventy jarring sects confute;
The sovereign alchemist that in a trice
Life's leaden metal into gold transmute.*
(v. 59)

The conclusive certainty of one's own personal experience of transcendental awareness (the absolute logic of the grape) through devotion overcomes all contradictions and differences in life and in religious sects. Through the alchemy of bhakti, life is transmuted from a whirlpool of dissatisfaction into a magical blissful experience.

Surrender

Who wants fame? Who wants money? Who wants beauty? Who wants to be learned? Who wants any of these things when one surrenders to the divine? The only thing that is important is the surrender. Yet, and this is the strange thing, all these things come even if you don't want them.

The bhakta becomes the happiest of people. He becomes the real king of the world. Few wealthy people or kings have known real happiness, but the bhakta knows supreme happiness whenever he thinks of the nature of everything, when he thinks of his deity or his

guru. He needs nothing more. He has everything.

Who wants liberation or perfect spiritual freedom? If one is liberated then to whom or what does one surrender? It is better to remain a bhakta, for one can know the bliss of surrender. What is the point of liberation if this is taken away? If the *jivanmukta* (liberated being) is perfectly united, then who is there to feel bhakti towards? For the bhakta each second is an adventure, each second of time is the eternal moment of the cosmic play - the *rasalila*. Each moment is lived and experienced with an intensity that makes the heart pound with excitement. If one is really no longer part of this play, this adventure, then where is all the fun? This is the way a bhakta should think.

People have a multitude of desires for different things, which can never be satisfied. Because of this one becomes frustrated. Bhakti brings about satisfaction of all desires. The unquenchable thirst of desires is completely satiated. As Christ said: "But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." (*John 4:14*)

In the state of *atma nivedanam* the individual, the bhakta surrenders to the divine will. Everything that happens, whether pleasure or pain, is seen as the divine law. The bhakta is a mere puppet. He owes his existence to the cosmic will. This is following the biblical dictate: "*Thy will be done.*"

All work, actions and experiences are regarded as tests and trials of the divine process, as a means to remove imperfections. At this point, the supreme can do nothing but help his bhaktas. In the *Srimad Bhagavatam* it says: "I am under complete control of my bhaktas.

they have taken over my heart. How can I leave them when they have totally dedicated themselves to me?" Such is the power of total surrender. One becomes receptive to divine grace: the grace of knowledge and bliss. This arises automatically when there is surrender and effacement of ego.

But this surrender is not easy. How many people could say the following from the depths of their being?

*Father - I abandon myself into your hands.
Do with me what you will.*

*Whatever you may do ... I thank you.
I am ready for all. I accept all.
Let only your will be done in me
And in all your creatures.
I wish no more than this, O Lord.
Into your hands I entrust my being;
I offer it to you with all the love of my heart,
For I love you, Lord, and so I need to give myself,
To surrender myself into your hands,
Without reserve and with boundless faith.*

This was written by the Christian bhakta Frere Charles de Jesus. Very few people could honestly say these words with the corresponding intensity of feeling and understanding. First of all the momentum of egotistical tendencies must come to a halt. These tendencies have to be worked out in the course of time through practise of other types of yoga.

For the last word on the subject of surrender we refer to the classical raja yoga scripture called *Yoga Sutras* written by Rishi Patanjali. Without wasting words he says: "Surrender to the supreme (*ishwara pranidhana*) leads to samadhi." (2:45)

Grace

Grace is a much misunderstood word. In Sanskrit it is translated as *anugraha*. Grace is something that is always existent, but most people never feel it because of insufficient receptivity. It is only when the mind is calm, one-pointed and receptive that this grace can arise, bringing with it transcendental knowledge.

Grace is also that which makes us recognize our faults, mental blocks and so forth. It is grace that leads to the meeting with the guru. It is grace that causes you to begin yoga. It is grace that initiates many other events in life that lead to expansion of awareness. It is also grace when the guru helps the disciple to overcome mental conditioning. Grace means many other things, but these tend to merge into the realms of the undefinable. The important thing to remember is this: grace is ever present, but most people are rarely aware of it or tuned into it. When a person becomes open to everything, then the grace automatically flows. This receptive state of mind cannot be created merely by thinking about it or willing it. You can be told a thousand times

about the necessity of mental receptivity but this will never bring about this state. It can only arise spontaneously through yoga practices, including bhakti yoga. These practices transform the mind by slowly eliminating all the mental dust and cobwebs. When the mind attains a certain degree of purity, then grace will flow spontaneously. The greater the awareness, the more one will know and recognize this grace. Everything becomes grace.

Bhakti - the means to heightened sensitivity

The emotions heighten all experience. They intensify power in thought and action. Everyone knows this from personal experience. Normally, however, the emotions are scattered in all directions. They rarely have force, except in cases of intense anger or intense fear. They are generally expended on many interests and sentiments. On the path of bhakti yoga the emotions are concentrated on one thing. Emotions are transmuted into devotion.

This concentrated emotion leads to heightened sensitivity. One's whole mind and body becomes highly tuned, like a radio antenna. This leads to heightened sensitivity to other people, their thoughts, feelings and so forth. It leads to sensitivity to the inner environment of the mind. It leads to peak experiences.

Even one peak experience is enough to transform one's whole attitude and understanding of life. It moves through an angle of one hundred and eighty degrees. One realizes that what seemed so obvious, true and acceptable before was totally wrong. One's relationship with life undergoes a total change. It is completely reoriented. These peak experiences are on the route to perfection. They are signposts on the path.

Expression of bhakti

What does a bhakta do? Many people think that bhakti has to be expressed by wild singing or emotional prayers or utterances. And indeed this can be the case; many great bhaktas have sung the most soulful songs and created the most beautiful poems in order to express their joy, devotion and realization. Others have been famous for their joyful dancing. The Sufi dervishes are good examples. Every movement, every action is an expression of bliss and devotion. But this is not necessarily so. Many great bhaktas were less dramatic. They

continued to live their lives in a state of calmness. Each action and each thought however is permeated with awareness of the divine. Every act becomes blissful. Every act is done as worship, without a sense of limited ego, but according to the dictates of the situation, with intuition. He looks into the mirror of the world and sees the image of himself. Actions become perfect.

Many people may not seem to be bhaktas for they don't sing devotional songs, but actually they could be bhaktas blissful with the love of the totality. Bhakti need not necessarily be associated with wild, abandoned singing. It can be felt in many people without obvious outward expression. It depends on the dharma or personality of the bhakta. Some bhaktas seem to mellow with time. They become less obviously expressive. It is like someone who takes his first bottle of wine (alcoholic wine, that is). The initial intoxication makes him do crazy things. He says crazy things and jumps around like a madman. This is the expression of new experience. The seasoned drinker, who has been drinking wine for many years, is unlikely to do such things. He is more likely to sit quietly and enjoy the wine and the effects of the intoxication. The intoxication is the same, but the expression is much less dramatic.

Actually, every saint, yogi, tantric or sage is a bhakta. This applies whether they appear to be karma yogis, jnana yogis, raja yogis or whatever. They must be bhaktas, for the knowledge, the realization that they have in higher states of awareness must automatically lead to bhakti.

A Christian gospel singer, a Hassidic Jew at the wailing wall in Jerusalem, a dancing Sufi, a Hindu chanting or singing bhajans, a Buddhist of the bhakti sect of the Fair Land School reciting 'namuamidabu', a Muslim facing Mecca and praying on his mat and so forth can all be expressing bhakti. It depends on the inner feeling and attitude (bhava). In the *Srimad Bhagavatam* it says: "... the devotee loses all sense of etiquette. He moves around the world without attachment. He always chants the name and his heart melts through love. He is like someone possessed, sometimes laughing wildly, sometimes weeping; and then he sings aloud and dances ..." (2:2)

This description of the expressions and actions of a bhakta is as good as any. But a

bhakta need not conform to this pattern. He will express himself according to the dictates of his personality, dharma and the given situation.

The methods of unfolding bhakti

There are many methods which the aspirant will find out for himself through his own experiences. In the *Srimad Bhagavatam* nine modes of unfolding bhakti are given as follows:

1. *Shravanam* (hearing stories about the divine incarnations such as Rama, Krishna, Christ, Buddha and so forth).

2. *Kirtanam* (chanting the names of divinity).

3. *Smaranam* (continual remembrance of divinity in any form),

These three modes of expression - shravanam, kirtanam and smaranam - tend to harmonize the mind and remove any mental blockages, helping the mind to become more sattwic. Tension, excessive egoism, etc. all tend to drop away and the aspirant becomes more and more one-pointed. The aspiration to develop divine qualities is unfolded. Smaranam is especially powerful and has been the main spiritual practice (sadhana) of many great bhaktas, such as Kabir. It is continuous japa and continual remembrance. It is the remembrance and feeling that is important. This intensifies awareness and induces one-pointedness of mind. This topic of remembrance will be discussed shortly.

4. *Padasevanam* (service of the guru or service done in the name of the divine). This involves serving one's guru or doing work in the name of the divine. It means doing karma yoga, working earnestly to the best of one's ability. This also reduces the power of the ego and makes the mind one-pointed.

5. *Archanam* (ritualistic worship and offerings). This mode of expressing bhakti generally follows prescribed rules and formulas. It is a method of unfolding inner potential. These ritualistic forms of worship can be powerful when done with awareness and feeling. This is an integral part of most religions including tantra.

6. *Vandanam* (mental worship of everyone and everything as being the form of divinity).

This is mental worship of everything. It involves mental prostrations to every being, everything which is really the finite form of the supreme. In the *Srimad Bhagavatam* it says:

"The sky, the air, the fire, water, earth, stars, planets, all the directions of the compass, trees, rivers, the seas and all living things constitute the body of the supreme." Therefore, the bhakta should mentally bow down and worship everything, knowing that he is worshipping the forms of the supreme.

7. *Dasyam* (the feeling of being the servant of the divine). One tries to do only the will of the divine with the attitude of being the servant. This helps very much to reduce the stranglehold of egoism.

8. *Sakhyam* (the attitude of friendship). At this stage the bhakta feels as though he is on personal and intimate terms with the supreme. He treats the supreme as a close friend who is always in his company.

9. *Atma nivedanam* (total surrender). We have already discussed this under another heading. This leads to perfect union where the lover, loving and the loved become one.

This is a very comprehensive list and includes almost all methods of awakening bhakti. All other forms of yoga also unfold bhakti but these don't seem to be included. Actually they are included but in less obvious ways. Raja yoga and hatha yoga can be grouped with archanam, if you stretch your imagination and accept these forms of yoga as really forms of worship. This applies whether you are a theist or an atheist, for in both cases you are refining your body so that it becomes a perfect instrument. You may be doing hatha yoga (including asanas and pranayama) and raja yoga (including all meditational practices) for reasons of physical and mental health, but you are still worshipping. You are harmonizing your body so that it becomes a perfect part of the whole. Karma yoga is included in the mode of padasevanam, where you serve the guru, etc. It is only jnana yoga that does not easily fit in with any of the groups, yet this path eventually joins the path of bhakti.

A few important aspects of unfolding bhakti are not clearly indicated in the list. Meeting great yogis and saints is an important way of intensifying bhakti². It is implied if you serve a guru in the mode called padasevanam. This will be discussed shortly. 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 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 JayaJaya Ram.
2. Visualization of the form of the guru in your heart.
3. Identification of every object on which the mind dwells with divinity. Whatever you think of, remember that it is the form of the supreme.
4. Observation of the mind. Take the attitude of watching the processes of the mind. This is awareness.

You will note the great similarity between his sadhana and the list we have given from the *Srimad Bhagavatam*. His method was a condensed version.

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 continually remind you of the wonder of existence. Let these things remind you of the supreme.

Try to do every action as a worship of the supreme. Let every thought be an expression of devotion. Offer your actions and thoughts to your guru or to the incarnation of the supreme that stirs your heart. This is the way to perfection.

Visualize and concentrate on a picture of any great saint, bhakta, yogi, sage, incarnation such as Guru Nanak, Kabir, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, Paramahansa Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda, Ramana Maharshi, Adi Sai Baba, Sri Aurobindo, Swami Sivananda, Swami Ramdas, Mohammed, any of the Sufi saints, Christ or any of the Christian saints such as St. Francis or St. Teresa, any of the Jewish saints, Buddha, Mahavir, Krishna, Rama, Milarepa and anyone you care to choose. Or you can

concentrate on your guru if you have one. The choice is yours, but there must be devotion.

In the *Uddhava Gita* Krishna instructs his disciple Uddhava: "Having withdrawn the senses (pratyahara) from contact with the surroundings, the devotee should concentrate on my form, especially one part such as my smiling face. Then he should be aware of my all pervading self which is free like the sky. Leaving that after some time, he should feel as though he is one with me, and stop thinking of all other things. He will see me, the *antaryamin* (the inner being) in himself, and himself in me like the light that is united with the fire. All doubts about matter, knowledge and action will completely cease."

Use any symbol of the supreme. This will take you beyond the symbol itself, if you have intensity and sincerity. It is difficult for most people to feel love (*prem*) for something intangible or impersonal. It is for this reason that a concrete form is utilized. Total absorption in the limited form or name will lead to the unlimited.

Ceaseless remembrance

Sleepiness is one main reason for low awareness. During or after yoga practices many people experience a feeling of joy, whether slight or intense. This comes because of the wakefulness, calmness and awareness which the practices give them. But this feeling is quickly lost when one continues on with one's daily duties. One becomes ensnared again in the ups and downs of everyday life, but this need not be the case. Through bhakti and continuous efforts to remember the object of devotion this awareness and joy can be maintained. Remembrance helps to prevent the relapse into automated living patterns and thought.

This ceaseless remembrance is a powerful practice for expanding awareness but it is not easy without devotion. Love and bhakti make a person remember. There has to be a natural attraction to the sweetness of the name (mantra) of one's deity. Bees are automatically attracted to the nectar in a flower.

This remembrance must be spontaneous. A man who is in love with his girlfriend or his wife cannot stop thinking about her. He does not need to try, he automatically thinks of his beloved. He has no choice but to remember. A

bhakta must remember God, his guru, his mantra or whatever with the same intensity. This remembrance must permeate one's whole being twenty-four hours a day. There are many cases of great bhaktas who were unable to stop remembering even when they were killed. It is said that when Mahatma Gandhi was assassinated he said only one thing: "Ram, Ram, Ram." His ceaseless remembrance continued even when he was dying. The following story illustrates the same thing.

The Great Indian Mutiny took place in 1857. Indian soldiers revolted against the British Government, which quickly took steps to quell the uprising. When people heard that British troops were advancing, whole villages were deserted in panic. At one place the fleeing villagers saw a sadhu coming their way. They warned him that the soldiers would kill him mercilessly if they saw him. But the sadhu paid no attention and continued on his journey. When the soldiers reached the village, one of them in blind fury bayoneted the sadhu. He was fatally injured. As the soldier withdrew his bayonet, the sadhu whispered with his last dying breath: "And you also are He." Even in the agony of death the sadhu saw his murderer as a form of divinity. Such is the power of continual remembrance.

Many of the great poets have beautifully illustrated this continual remembrance. For them the supreme is a helper, a dearest and nearest friend, nearer than breath, nearer than their own mind. This is beautifully expressed by Lord Tennyson:

*Speak to Him, thou, for He heareth
And spirit to spirit can speak.
Nearer is He than breathing,
Closer than hands and feet.*

When a person has this intensity of feeling, how is it possible not to remember? And this is the express train to expanded awareness. The great bhakta Ramdas said: "The quickest and easiest way to the supreme is to remember him always by repeating his sweet and powerful name." This name is a mantra. If you chant it verbally or mentally with awareness of its meaning, then it harmonizes the whole mind. One is less influenced by the ups and downs of the tumultuous world. One becomes more aware. The whole mind becomes concentrated

and powerful. This continual remembrance will break down the ego, body and mind identification. It will lead to knowledge and fulfilment. The great bhakta Kabir sang:

*I declare to the loud beat of a drum,
That with every breath that passes,
Without remembering the name of the Lord,
Thou art losing the chance to conquer
the three worlds,
The chance to reach those spiritual heights.*

This continual repetition of a mantra is called *japa*³. Try to repeat the mantra continuously. Try to remember throughout the whole day and night. If you cannot do this then at least remember the name with devotion in the morning when you awake and when you sleep at night. This will saturate the whole mind with positive thoughts and vibrations. With intensity, aspiration and bhakti the remembrance will become natural and spontaneous. You will want to remember, for the name is associated with your prem. It is the focal point of all your emotions and feelings. One becomes intoxicated with the very thought of the *ishta devata* (personal deity). You must try to hear and feel divinity everywhere. This is what the Sufi Hafiz meant when he said:

*On the tablet of the universe is no letter save
Thy name.
By which name, then shall we invoke Thee.
Thine, Thine alone!*

You must try to see divinity in every part of the world around you without exception. You must try to feel this in your heart. This is the way to union with the inner world of knowledge.

It is not necessary to read countless numbers of scriptures. You don't need to practise one thousand and one different yogic practices. Only saturate yourself with relentless repetition and remembrance of any holy name of the supreme. Your whole being has to be submerged, soaked and overwhelmed with the continuous repetition of the mantra. There has to be complete surrender. You have to feel divinity everywhere. Love intensifies this remembrance. Love means constant awareness. And this devotion means that there will be unceasing thirst, unforgettable remem-

brance and unswerving aspiration to unite with one's ishta. This practice should not be done occasionally during prayers, but twenty-four hours a day. You should remember each and every moment, with every heartbeat, with every breath and with every action. This is the path of bhakti yoga.

It is said that when you unceasingly chant the name of the supreme, he will chase you. Kabir sang:

*I have regained my pristine condition,
It is indescribable.
My mind has become crystal clear,
like the water of the Ganges.
God himself keeps following me
and calling O Kabir.*

Only a person who has merged in the exalted state of samadhi could say this. His main sadhana was continual remembrance, but it seems that when he sang the above song he had left all sadhanas behind. His path of devotion with continual remembrance had launched him into the transcendental realms.

External and internal worship

People often wonder whether it is best to worship inside or outside, that is, mental worship or the worship of external forms. Actually one should do both. However, most people cannot practise internal worship by visualizing an inner image so they worship external forms. They go to the temple and worship. There is nothing wrong with this at all. The purpose is to lead to devotion to a particular form. If the external worship develops bhakti towards a specific form then this is a good way to begin on the bhakti path. This specific form can then be worshipped internally. The purpose of both external and internal worship is the inducement of meditation. From this will come spontaneous worship of both the inner and outer environment. It will be seen that there is not really much difference between them.

The best approach is to worship both in the outside and the inside worlds, but with awareness. One should act and worship in the outer world through detached work - karma yoga. At the same time one should try to introvert awareness through hatha yoga and raja yoga. This is the integral approach.

Bhakti and the guru

If you have a guru then bhakti is essential. It is the essence of the relationship. Without bhakti the guru-disciple relationship cannot exist. If you have a guru and you feel no devotion, then he is not really your guru. It is better to find another one. Without bhakti, the disciple is not receptive to the instructions and vibrations of the guru and the guru is not able to transmute the gross nature of the disciple into a more subtle form. At first this devotion may be unconscious; you may not recognize it, but it must exist. There has to be a natural attraction.

The path towards perfection is difficult and hazardous. It has been aptly described as the razor's edge: if you go too far to one side or the other you fall into the chasm of delusion. The path is straight and narrow. It is the guru who shows the disciple how to avoid or overcome obstacles and blocks. It is easy to become lost in false, unrealistic thoughts and feelings. This applies not only to bhakti yoga but all other paths as well. It is easy to become side-tracked into blind alleys. The guru must lead the way. As Kabir said ecstatically: "If the Lord and the guru were to stand in front of us at the same time, at whose feet should we prostrate ourselves? The answer is definite - we should prostrate at the guru's feet, for it is he who has shown us the Lord. This would never be but for the guru's grace." Such was the feeling of bhakti that Kabir had for his guru.

In the *Kularnava Tantra* it says: "The fire of devotion to the guru burns away all taint of bad thought." "As steady devotion to the guru grows, so does one's self-knowledge." (ch: 8) Such is the power of bhakti towards guru. But this bhakti must be spontaneous. It cannot be created. In this respect it is the same as bhakti towards a deity - it must arise directly from the heart. It cannot come from mere logical analysis.

So if you have a guru, surrender all your actions and aspirations to him. Actually he does not need anything from you, but you have to offer all to him. Attend satsang with the guru². This has been praised by scriptures throughout the world. Whenever a wise man, a saint, a yogi or any person with higher awareness is in your area, go and visit him. Or when you have time make a point of travelling

to any great spiritual master. This is a method of breaking down and throwing out false concepts and dogmas. It is a method of channelling your thoughts and aspirations in new directions, often at a tangent with current aspirations. It is a method of being saturated with powerful vibrations and inspiration. Such is the power of satsang.

And when you sit with any wise man or your guru, be quiet and listen, for it is he who will pull you out of the quagmire of delusion. You may be a famous person, a noisy person, a clever person, an argumentative person or whatever, but be quiet, be still and listen. Every word that the guru says is full of meaning and significance.

Bhakti and music

Thoughts are the language of the mind. But music is the language of the heart. Wherever there is bhakti there must also be music. They are inseparable. There is no more exhilarating way of expressing bhakti than through music.

Music implies rhythm and harmony. And in this sense everything in the universe can be considered to be music. The sun and the moon rise and set according to fixed rhythms. This is music. The birds sing beautiful melodies. This is music. In fact, the birds are so anxious to express themselves that as soon as dawn breaks, or even earlier, they all burst into song. There seems to be a build-up of intensity in the early morning before this time and then all the birds joyfully express their feelings of bliss. The crops and the climate change cyclically according to the fixed rhythm of the seasons. This is music. The body functions in accordance with fixed rhythms. This too is music. Everything in life is really a form of music. The life of each individual should also be like beautiful music, with perfect harmony and spontaneous

joy. But usually this is not the case; most people live a life that is like a bad composition or a discordant song. Life is disharmonious instead of harmonious. As a result there is unhappiness, discontent and disease. You should try, or at least aspire, to conduct your life as though it is a perfect piece of music. This can be achieved through bhakti yoga and other forms of yoga.

For a bhakta life should be a continuous symphony whether he is high or low, whether he is working or sleeping, whether he is happy

or angry. All the ups and downs of life are mere ripples on the river or ocean of bliss. Everything is an expression of inner joy, whether it is anger or laughter. The whole life of an intense bhakta is like beautiful music. And in fact vast numbers of bhaktas have expressed this inner bliss with their internal singing and music. Other people have been thrilled with the devotion and joy that pervades and resonates with every note and every word that they sing. But for the bhakta, music does not only mean music or singing - it means the whole flow of life. Life is one continuous song.

There is an inner music of the heart which is functioning ceaselessly, no matter what the outside events. One should follow the dictates of this inner symphony. This inner music should guide your life. It should decide your actions. But it can only come when you are receptive, when your mind and heart become sufficiently tuned.

Most people don't perceive this inner music, but it is clear if you care to listen. If you perfectly tune a radio to a broadcasting station and turn up the volume to full blast, then there is no mistake in perceiving the sound. It is the same with the inner music. When you hear it, then there is no doubt. This inner music is the music of knowledge, the music of bliss.

People of modern times have been seduced into always being in the audience. People watch television, cinema, sports and many other festivities without ever taking an active part. This is a great pity, for the most enjoyable part of life is participation. It is the same with music - people tend to listen rather than take part. And in this way the exhilarating experience of involvement is lost. If possible, try to join a collective group of singers. In India this is called *kirtan*. Try to be there in the middle and become totally involved. You don't need a good voice, it is the enthusiasm that is important. This kirtan generates an upsurge of group feeling. It is wonderful for removing stress and inducing relaxation. It helps to purify the mind and gives an outlet to emotions. It helps to unfold bhakti. One's feelings (bhava) are heightened. This leads to heightened bhava on a more permanent basis.

Devotional music is powerful. In the right environment it can generate such intense devotional vibrations that even the least

devotional type of person will be moved to feel bhakti, no matter how little. So next time you find time, join any group of people that is concerned with collective singing. Or alternatively start your own group. If you cannot do these things then start singing to yourself, whether aloud or mentally. What is the difference?

We don't want to say anything more about the subject of music, whether inner or outer, for music is not to be discussed. It is definitely to be experienced.

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 12, Topic 1

² Book III, Lesson 33, Topic 1

³ For further details on japa refer to Book II, Lesson 14, Topic 5 and Book II, Lesson 15, Topic 6

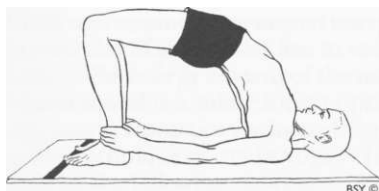
⁴ Book I, Lesson 10, Topic 1

Asanas: Practice

The asana that we will describe in this topic is not widely practised, yet it has a number of distinctive benefits. It is called *kandharasana* (shoulder pose).

KANDHARASANA (SHOULDER POSE)

The Sanskrit word *kandha* means 'shoulder'. Hence this asana is usually translated as 'the shoulder pose'. It is so called because in the final pose most of the weight of the body is supported on the shoulders.



Technique

Lie flat on your back.
Bend your legs at the knees and place the feet so that the heels are near or touching the buttocks.
The feet should be flat on the floor, slightly separated.
Grasp the ankles with your hands.
Relax the whole body.
Then breathe in deeply.
While holding the breath raise your buttocks and arch the back upwards.
try to push your navel and chest as high as possible but while keeping the feet flat on the floor.
Accentuate the flexion of the back by pushing the chest in the direction of the head; this can be done by trying to further straighten the legs.
Don't strain.
This is the final position.
The body is supported by the feet, arms, shoulders and head.

Remain in the final pose for a short comfortable length of time while holding the breath.
Then slowly lower the body to the starting position on the ground.
This is 1 round.
Rest for a short time and then repeat the practice.

Breathing, awareness and duration

Retain the breath inside while raising the body and staying in the final pose; exhale while lowering the body to the starting position.

Awareness should be on the movement and breathing. In the final pose one should be aware of accentuating the flexion of the back.

The asana can be practised as many times as you wish. For general health purposes five rounds is reasonable. For specific treatment of ailments one can practise the alternative method to be described shortly for prolonged periods of time.

Sequence

This asana can be utilized as a counterpose for forward bending asanas.

Limitations

Women in advanced stages of pregnancy should not practise kandharasana. However, after childbirth practise of this asana will help the abdomen resume its normal shape.

People with peptic or duodenal ulcers or abdominal hernia should also not practise this asana.

Alternative method

If you wish you can remain in the final pose while breathing slowly and deeply. This is particularly useful for treating some of the ailments we will discuss in the next heading.

Benefits

This asana is very useful for correcting spinal defects. If there is a displaced spinal disc then

this asana will help to push the disc into proper alignment. It is also useful for removing backache and for eliminating round shoulders or any tendency to stoop. It tones the nerves of the entire back.

It applies a good massage to the abdominal organs and so improves digestion. It also applies a strong pressure in the region of the pelvis, especially if the legs are utilized to accentuate the flexion of the back in the final pose. This massages and tones the nerves, muscles and organs of the reproductive system. This applies mainly to women. It is an excellent asana for helping to alleviate sexual malfunctions and to prevent any tendency towards miscarriage in childbirth.

The asana makes the whole back more flexible in a backward direction. For this reason it is an excellent preparatory asana for the more difficult chakrasana¹.

Notes

¹ Book III, Lesson 26, Topic 4

Pranayama: Practice

From the primal sound all creation arose in the form of prana. Scientifically sound is caused by vibrations of a particular quality. The effect of sound is to produce physical change in an organism. Sound is energy. It has been concentrated to such degrees of intensity that objects have been shattered and destroyed. From the knowledge that sound has certain subtle qualities the rishis heard and formulated the mantras and bija mantras.

Principles of sound and the ability to use sound were known to ancient peoples. The great stones of Stonehenge, Easter Island and the Mayan monuments were moved into place using principles of sound now lost to modern civilization. The energy content of the mantra or revealed sound is a subtle form of prana.

Pranayama is a practice for intensifying the meditative technique of nada yoga¹. This is indicated by the following quotation: "Proper retention of breath activates the digestive fire and magnifies the astral sounds (nada)..." (*Yoga Chudamani* v. 99)

Pranayama makes one more sensitive to the inner environment. In this way one is more able to perceive the subtle nada. For this reason try to practise nada yoga immediately after pranayama practice, if it is possible.

Integration of jalandhara bandha with nadi shodhana stage 4 (continued)

The practice from the last lesson is quite advanced². Therefore, we suggest that you continue to practise using the ratio 1:8:6:2:1:8:6:2 combined with jalandhara bandha at both the phase of inner retention and outer retention of breath. If necessary you can integrate ashwini mudra with the practice³. Don't strain.

Notes

¹ Topic 4 of this lesson

² Book II, Lesson 16, Topic 4

³ Book II, Lesson 16, Topic 3

Topic 3

Meditation: Nada Yoga (Part 1)

Nada yoga is a distinct path of yoga. It is closely related to mantra yoga, japa yoga, music and any other path that is concerned with sound. In fact, nada yoga is often used as a collective term to describe all yogic practices which utilize sound. However, in our definition nada yoga is regarded as having one characteristic feature. In the other paths a specific sound is created as a vehicle of awareness. That is, one chants a particular mantra in mantra yoga and japa yoga, and makes a fixed pattern of sound in music and singing. In nada yoga, as we teach it, one does not create a specific sound as such, but listens to internal sounds allowing the perceived sound to arise spontaneously. This is an obvious though fine difference. In later stages these paths join with each other, for they are all concerned with merging with the reservoir of sound - the underlying substratum.

Nada yoga is a simple yet powerful practice. It is a method of tracing sound back through its psychic and more subtle manifestation to the source.

Nada yoga is an important sadhana of many sects. These include Radha Soami Satsang, Kabirpanthis and many others. Nada is known by many different names. It is called *shabda* (sound), *sural* (sound), *nam* (name), *akashvani* (sound of the ether), *dhun* (tune), *Nad-i-asmani* (the heavenly harmony), *vani* (word), the word, holy spirit, the holy ghost, logos and many other names. In Zoroastrianism it is called *sraosha*. It is widely discussed and praised in the holy scriptures of the Sikhs, the *Adi Granth Sahib*. It is also the 'music of the spheres' described by the Greek mystic Pythagorus. He conceived the whole universe and each individual as a monochord, with its single string connected at the lower end to gross matter and at the upper end to pure consciousness. In between were all the different layers of subtle energy or nada. This relates directly to nada yoga, for the aspirant first perceives gross

sound at the lower end of the string and gradually moves along the string with perception of progressively subtler sound. Eventually this sound leads to the upper end of the string or pure consciousness. This is the path of nada yoga. Incidentally it is said that Socrates and other Greek mystics used nada as a means to transcendence.

According to traditional yogic scriptures, *nada brahman* (transcendental sound) is the seed of the manifested world from the gross to the subtle and from the visible to the invisible. Nada is flowing in the living and the nonliving, in the trees, grass, animals, everywhere. This concept is an integral part of tantra and Hinduism in general. It is also mentioned in the first verse of the Gospel according to St. John in the Christian Bible where nada is called 'the word'.

Modern science is also starting to postulate that everything in the universe is composed of wave forms at all levels of subtlety and vibratory rates. This applies to light, X-rays, radio waves, material bodies and so forth. It includes the vibration of the atoms, molecules, stones, flowers and the human body and mind. They are all vibrating at a multitudinous number of different frequencies. It also includes colours that can be seen and colours not seen, sounds that can be heard and sounds not heard, odours that can be smelt and odours not smelt, things that can be felt and things not felt and substances that can be tasted and those which cannot be tasted. They are all formed from vibratory wave form. All materials that you see can be regarded as solidified vibration. A good way to illustrate this is to consider a humming-top. When it spins very fast it appears to be stationary. Any person who has seen a stroboscope in action will have seen a similar phenomena: a body vibrating at high frequency appears to be stationary. These analogies illustrate how nonsolid bodies appear to be solid. Here we are not trying to prove anything,

only that the outside world is not really what it appears to be at normal levels of awareness. In the early stages of the practice, the aspirant hears gross, loud sounds. Gradually more subtle sounds are heard. The sounds are like those of the ocean, clouds ... " *Nada Bindu Upanishad*

This outside world composed of vibration is called the *mahakasha* (great ether). In nada yoga we are specifically concerned with the inner ether, the *chidakasha*. Nada is the sound of the *chidakasha*, but this sound means far more than the sound we hear in the external world. This inner nada operates on different levels of subtlety. The aim is to use this inner sound as a vehicle of awareness so that one can transcend normal limitations and dive deep into the mind. Complete absorption in the inner sound makes one oblivious to outside sounds and disturbances, and this leads to *pratyahara* (withdrawal of awareness from the sense organs and outside world). When the mind flows towards the sound then it becomes very concentrated. Nada yoga is the link to expanded awareness. It leads directly to meditation.

Nada yoga is a part of *laya yoga*, the path in which one becomes totally absorbed in one thing. In the case of nada yoga one becomes totally aware of inner sound. In the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* it says: "Countless methods of *laya yoga* have been described but amongst them *nadanusandhana* (discovery of inner sound) is the best", (4:66) This clearly indicates the importance of nada yoga.

Definition

The Sanskrit word *nada* means 'to flow'. In this context it means a 'flow of consciousness'. The word is closely related to the word *nadi*, which means a pathway of pranic flow within the human framework. Generally the word *nada* is understood as sound, for it is the inner sound that is used as a focal point of awareness in retracing the flow of consciousness back to the source.

Scriptural references

There are countless references to nada in ancient scriptures throughout the world. Of the Indian texts, it is fully discussed in the following: *Nada Bindu Upanishad*, *Dhyana Bindu Upanishad*, *Shiva Mahapuranam*, *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, *Yoga Taravali*, *Gherand Samhita*, *Granth Sahib* and many more. The following quotations are merely a selection:

"Nam (nada) is the true nectar (divine bliss), but nothing can be said about it. Only he who merges with it can drink and know this nectar." "In the same way that the fragrance is in the flower and a reflection is in a mirror, so the nam (nada) is within you. Seek it in your own being." *Granth Sahib*

It was Kabir who said: "The nada is within. It is music without strings played within the body. It pervades inside and outside and leads you away from illusion." And also: "Close your eyes, ears and mouth. Listen to the subtle inner nada."

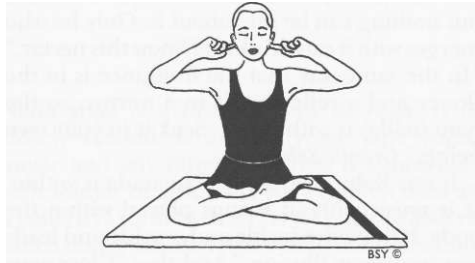
There is also a well known and often quoted allegory in the *Bhagavata Purana*, which is well worth giving here because of its beauty: "Lord Krishna left his place at midnight and went into the jungle. It was a full moon night in the first month of winter. He began to play his flute. The echo of the flute permeated the calm and undisturbed atmosphere. The music was heard by the gopis (cowherd girls). They immediately left their houses and their husbands and forgot all their duties and past life. They ran straight to the place where the nada of the flute was being played. They started to dance around the flute player. After some time each of the gopis discovered that she was dancing with Krishna."

This story is symbolic and illustrates the path of nada yoga. The nada from the flute is heard at midnight, which is the best time to practise nada yoga. Krishna is higher consciousness. The sound of the flute is the nada that arises from the underlying consciousness. The gopis represent the aspirant and the senses, both of which are normally overwhelmed and distracted by day to day worldly life. But when the inner nada (sound of the flute) is heard then the awareness is directed inwards towards Krishna (pure consciousness). Eventually the gopis merge with Krishna - they tune in with pure consciousness. This is the path of nada yoga.

NADA YOGA-PART 1

Sitting position

There are two good sitting positions in which to practise nada yoga. These are as follows:



1. Any of the *traditional meditative asanas*¹. In this position the ears should be plugged with the index fingers of each hand. The other fingers should be lightly clenched and the elbows held sideways and horizontal. This position is shown above. The only disadvantage of this pose is that the arms quickly become tired. Of course with practice one can hold the arms in the fixed position for prolonged periods of time, but there is always a limit. This problem is diminished with sitting position number 2.

2. *Nadanusandhana asana*. You should squat on a rolled up mattress, cushion or thick blanket in the way shown. Adjust the height of the mattress so that the sitting position is comfortable and the back reasonably straight. The mattress must be sufficiently firm and round so that it presses the area of the perineum, that is, the area between the anus and the sexual organs. Rest the elbows on the knees and place the palms of the hands on each side of the head so that the fingers rest on the side and top of the head. The thumbs should be



gently but firmly pushed into the ears. Make sure that this position is comfortable before starting the practice, if necessary further adjusting the height of the mattress. The feet should be flat on the floor.

Alternatively, if you wish you can close the ears with the index fingers.

Technique

There are two stages as follows:

Stage 1: Bhramari Pranayama

Though this practice is called a pranayama, it is really more of a meditational practice. It is not directly related to controlling prana as are other forms of pranayama. The word *bhramari* means 'bee'. The practice is so called because a sound is made which imitates the sound of a humming bee. It is a method of harmonizing the mind and directing awareness inwards in preparation for the second stage.

The method is as follows:

Sit in any of the poses that we have already described, with the ears plugged.

It is important to make sure that the ears are firmly closed for best results.

If necessary adjust your body to make sure that you are perfectly comfortable.

Face forwards and hold the spine as straight as possible.

Close the eyes. Relax the whole body.

Keep the teeth slightly separated and the mouth closed throughout the entire practice.

This allows the vibration to be heard and felt more distinctly in the brain.

Breathe in slowly and deeply.

Then while breathing out make a humming sound. The humming sound should be smooth and continuous, and should be done for the duration of the exhalation.

The humming sound need not be very loud; the important thing is that you hear the sound vibrating within your head.

The exhalation should be slow and controlled. At the end of exhalation, stop the humming sound and breathe in.

Again repeat the humming with the next exhalation.

Continue in this manner for a few minutes.

You should be aware of the humming sound and the breathing process throughout the practice.

Then proceed to stage 2.

Stage 2: perception of subtle inner sound

In this stage there is no loud humming sound, only listening to the inner sound.

Continue to keep your eyes closed and your fingers gently, but firmly in your ears; this is necessary to block out external disturbances. Try to hear a sound in your head.

At first you may find this difficult, but try.
 As soon as you become aware of a sound, any sound, try to fix your awareness on it to the exclusion of other sounds.
 Go on listening.
 After some days or weeks of practice you should find that one sound is very distinct, becoming louder and louder.
 Be totally aware of that sound.
 This is your vehicle of awareness; let your awareness flow towards this sound leaving all other sounds and thoughts.
 Gradually through practice your sensitivity will increase.
 Eventually you will hear another sound, a faint sound, in the background; it will almost be obliterated by the main, louder sound that you are hearing, but you hear it nevertheless.
 You should now listen to the new faint sound, leaving the other louder sound and continue to listen to this new sound.
 It will become more and more distinct.
 This is the new, more subtle vehicle of your awareness.
 Let this sound occupy your whole attention.
 This will further increase your sensitivity of perception.
 Eventually you will hear another faint sound emerging from behind this louder sound.
 Fix your awareness on this new sound, discarding the other sound.
 Continue in the same manner as already described allowing the sound to occupy your whole awareness.
 When it becomes loud try to perceive a more subtle underlying sound and fix your awareness on this sound.
 In this manner your perception will become progressively more sensitive.
 It is in this manner that you can dive deep into your being.

Note: this needs to be practised over a period of weeks and months to bring results. Time is required to perceive these progressively subtler sounds. For many weeks you may be unable to hear even the first sound. All that is required is time and effort. It is a very simple but powerful technique that will bring results if you persevere.

Awareness and duration

In stage 1 awareness should be fixed on the vocalized humming sound and the breathing.

In stage 2 the awareness should be fixed on subtle sounds. If you cannot hear anything in the beginning then you must merely be receptive and try to hear any sound that arises.

Practise for as long as you have time. In the beginning try to devote at least fifteen minutes to the practice.

Time of practice

The best time to practise is late at night or early in the morning, because at this time there are fewer external noises that would interfere with internal perception. However, this time is not convenient for most people; therefore, you can choose any suitable time when the surroundings are peaceful. You must use your discretion in this respect. If you practise beside a blaring radio or in a room full of talking people, don't expect much success in your practice.

Incidentally, a good time to practise nada yoga is after a long spell of kirtan (collective singing and chanting).

Preparation for other practices²

Bhramari pranayama is an excellent method of settling the mind and removing gross tensions. It can therefore be used as a method of preparing the mind for other meditational practices, or simply as a method of gaining tranquillity during times of stress.

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 7, Topic 2

² For part 2 of nada yoga refer to Book II, Lesson 18, Topic 5

Daily Practice Program

In this lesson we have given a long discussion on bhakti yoga. Remember: it is a powerful method of channelling emotions so that they become one-pointed, but only to be practised if you are devotionally inclined.

Try to integrate nada yoga, kandharasana and pranayama into your daily practice program as follows,

| Practice | Rounds | Minutes |
|---|--------|---------|
| Program 1: duration 2 hours | | |
| Surya Namaskara | — | 10 |
| Shavasana | — | 4 |
| Shalabhasana | — | 4 |
| Shashankasana | — | 4 |
| Paschimottanasana | — | 4 |
| Kandharasana | — | 3 |
| .Ardha Matsyendrasana | — | 4 |
| Yoga Mudrasana | — | 4 |
| Sarvangasana | — | 4 |
| Bhujangasana | — | 4 |
| Shavasana | — | 3 |
| Nadi Shodhana Pranayama and Jalandhara Bandha with Antar and Bahir Kumbhaka | — | 20 |
| Nada Yoga | — | 20 |
| Japa | — | 20 |
| Chidakasha Dharana with object visualization | — | 12 |
| | | 120 |
| Program 2: duration 1 1/2 hours | | |
| Surya Namaskara | — | 10 |
| Shavasana | — | 3 |
| Shalabhasana | — | 4 |
| Shashankasana | — | 4 |
| Paschimottanasana | — | 4 |
| Kandharasana | — | 3 |

| | | |
|---|---|----------|
| Ardha Matsyendrasana | — | 4 |
| Yoga Mudrasana | — | 4 |
| Sarvangasana | — | 4 |
| Bhujangasana | — | 3 |
| Nadi Shodhana Pranayama and Jalandhara Bandha with Antar and Bahir Kumbhaka | — | 15 |
| Nada Yoga | — | 15 |
| Japa | — | 12 |
| Chidakasha Dharana with object visualization | — | 5 |
| | | <hr/> 90 |

Program 3: duration 1 hour

| | | |
|---|---|----------|
| Surya Namaskara | — | 7 |
| Shavasana | — | 3 |
| Shashankasana | — | 4 |
| Paschimottanasana | — | 3 |
| Ardha Matsyendrasana | — | 3 |
| Yoga Mudra | — | 3 |
| Sarvangasana | — | 4 |
| Bhujangasana | — | 3 |
| Nadi Shodhana Pranayama and Jalandhara Bandha with Antar and Bahir Kumbhaka | — | 10 |
| Japa | — | 10 |
| Nada Yoga | — | 7 |
| | | <hr/> 60 |

Program 4: duration 1/2 hour for general health

| | | |
|---|---|----|
| Surya Namaskara | — | 5 |
| Shavasana | — | 3 |
| Paschimottanasana | — | 3 |
| Ardha Matsyendrasana | — | 3 |
| Sarvangasana | — | 3 |
| Bhujangasana | — | 3 |
| Nadi Shodhana Pranayama and Jalandhara Bandha with Antar and Bahir Kumbhaka | — | 10 |
| | | 30 |

Try to find some time during the day to practise kandharasana.

