

Sounds of Love

Bhakti Yoga

I am going to today talk to you today about Bhakti yoga, the traditional yoga of love and devotion as practiced in the east for thousands of years. In the ancient epic of Mahabharata, Lord Krishna speaking to Arjuna on the battlefield says, “O Arjuna, there are three ways in which one can find the truth, in which one can realise God. The first is Karma-yoga, the yoga of action. The second is the Gyan-yoga or Sankhya-yoga, the yoga of knowledge and the third and the most superior is Bhakti-yoga, the yoga of love and devotion. Arjuna says, “Krishna, explain to me what is the difference between these three kinds of yoga” and Krishna pronounces the differences between the three yogas. Before I go into the distinction between the three types of yoga, let me make it clear that the word Yoga as used in the eastern tradition is not confined to bodily postures or exercises or just breathing in a certain way. Yoga literally means union and the term yoga in eastern mysticism has been used to signify the union of the self with the overself; the union of the individual with the total; the union of man with God. Therefore, yoga is a method of experiencing oneness; experiencing a going back to the original home from where there is no separation. So yoga has been used in the deeper sense in all these discussions.

To come back to the distinction between the three types of yoga, let me take up Karma-yoga first. Karma means action, Karma-yoga is the yoga of action. Krishna teaches that if you perform your action skillfully and do not expect any reward for it, except the reward of performing the action skillfully, you are a yogi and you are a Karma-yogi. You are a yogi of action and you are performing the yoga of action. What does it really mean? If you can perform action skillfully and not expect a reward, this means you are willing to surrender your action to the will of a total self which is not any individual supervising your work, assigning work to you; not your employer, not your supervisor in the business, not somebody teaching you something. You have agreed to surrender your will to the total will. Therefore, the effect of Karma-yoga or the effect of yoga of action is to inculcate a sense of surrender to the highest total consciousness.

Next, what is Gyan-yoga or Sankhya-yoga or the yoga of knowledge? This second form of yoga requires that we contemplate with our intellect, with reason, with thoughts and we carry on this kind of consideration and contemplation till we find the limits of knowledge; till we find the limits of intellect; till we find that there are certain things which cannot be answered by intellect alone. Many people who rely heavily on reason, logic and intellect fail to understand that there are many experiences in human life which the intellect cannot comprehend. They believe that a sharp intellect should be able to comprehend almost anything and therefore they frequently ask questions regarding the limitations of the intellect. I remember my own teacher, the Great Master, was once asked this question by a group of intellectuals which included some attorneys, barristers, some judges of the courts who were using intellect and reason all the time in their professional work. They came up to the Great Master and said, “Master, you keep on telling us that intellect has a limitation; that intellectually by reasoning and by using logic you cannot get all the knowledge. But we practice

intellect and logic and reasoning every day and we find that if we are sufficiently sharp and clear in the use of intellect, we can comprehend anything. Can you give us an example of some human experience which defies intellect and cannot be explained in reasonable or logical terms?" The Great Master smiled and He said, "Yes, I can give you one simple illustration. It is very difficult. Nay, it is impossible for the intellect to understand that the whole of God can come only without breaking up, without becoming a part into each one of us and still remain whole and yet He will remain whole totally from where He came." Statement like that cannot be understood by the intellect and yet it is an experience of truth which one can go within, transcend the mind, transcend the intellectual apparatus and find out to one's own satisfaction. Such truths defy the laws of logic and reason and therefore are beyond intellect. But intellect can grasp that there are certain things beyond itself and as the intellect logically builds up an understanding of what is available within the framework of time, space and causation and therefore available to mental comprehension, then there must be some things that are beyond time, space and causation and therefore do not fall into mental comprehension. This ability of the intellect to gain knowledge of its own limitation and to accept that there is something that goes beyond that knowledge is the knowledge that we speak of in Sankhya yoga or gyan yoga, the yoga of knowledge. In this kind of knowledge we are able to find out that there is something beyond knowledge and therefore the intellect plays an important role in pushing us beyond the intellectual limitations to real knowledge. This yoga eventually gives us the same feeling which Karma-yoga gave that we have to surrender to a power, to an overwhelming conscious existence which goes beyond our own intellect and therefore is beyond our mind. This ability of the human intellect and the human mind to discover that there is something beyond the mind and which is more real and is acceptable to the mind, this knowledge is what helps and gives great impetus to going up towards a higher knowledge beyond the mind. Krishna says if one has secured knowledge of the mind, intellectual knowledge, one can step onto spiritual knowledge.

But the third type of Yoga, Bhakti yoga, the Yoga of love and devotion has always been considered the highest. What is the yoga of love and devotion? The yoga of love and devotion is the yoga or the union experienced through love or through identification with the beloved. What is this experience of love we speak about? Love is an experience of identification with another, losing one's own consciousness of the self or the ego and becoming coterminous with the consciousness of the beloved. This ability to identify with another and thereby have an experience of oneness is the experience of love and when one performs an action or lives a life which entails love and identification with another, where one can forget oneself and remember another, where one remembers another to such an extent one does not know who is remembering but only the one who is remembered. This kind of devotion, this kind of service, this kind of offering to the beloved is called the yoga of love and devotion. When one is practicing the yoga of love and devotion, what happens? One is able to overcome the same ego, the same self and surrender to someone else.

The net effect of all the three yogas is the same. That is, there is a self beyond the egoistic self, the individualistic self and that self is real. If you perform Karma-yoga or the yoga of action, you reach the same point which is that there is a higher self to which you can surrender. If you practice gyan-yoga or the yoga of intellectual knowledge, you can come to the conclusion that there is something beyond one's own individual self, beyond one's own intellect, beyond one's mental

grasp and one can reach that and therefore it is again a surrender of the individual self to a accepted, intellectually accepted higher self whom we might give any name. We might call it the over self, the higher self, God, totality, oneness, whatever we like. So the intellectual process also leads to the same conclusion. And finally, Bhakti-yoga, the yoga of love and devotion, directly takes us to the same stage of forgetting oneself and relying more and more on the knowledge created by love of the beloved, not of one's own ego.

In meditation, people want to go within and experience the transcendental; something that transcends the mind. They want to experience something that is not physical, something that goes beyond body awareness. They want to withdraw attention to go into another world, into another dimension. How does one do it? What are the real ingredients of meditation? We find that in meditation we try to concentrate our attention on one's own self. Every process of trying to go within entails trying to concentrate attention on one's own self. What is the self? We do not know. Therefore, an attempt is made to close the eyes and take some kind of a posture by which we can roll attention that has been scattered around the world back to our own self within and we want to sit in peace and quiet, so that this particular experience of withdrawing consciousness to one's own self can be not only felt but can be experienced within. This meditation or the experience of one's own self within oneself is hampered by our own ego and our own mind. People who have tried to practice meditation have found that when they try to sit within their own self, the mind utilizing memories, utilizing associations outside, utilizing the pull of desires outside, utilizing the pull of attachments outside continues to drag the attention outside and therefore one cannot peacefully sit within oneself. Therefore, meditation fails. Therefore, the main obstruction and the main obstacle to successful meditation is one's own ego and one's own mind. This individualised mind that sits inside and says, "I can do it," this "I can do it," this "I" that claims to do it becomes the obstacle to doing it. And that is why the successful meditator requires some means by which he can overcome the obstacle created by his own ego and his own personal self.

This particular distraction that the individual ego can create in meditation cannot be overcome except by something that can take attention away from the ego. People have tried to find many ways. People have tried to see if this negativity of the mind that prevents us from finding peace within ourselves can be overcome by more positive thinking and they have tried to substitute this negativity and negative thoughts by more positive thoughts. But the end result is that the positive thoughts are also thoughts emanating from the same ego and even if a person can positively make a determination, it is prefaced by I can do it and that I becomes a stumbling block again to the successful achievement of yoga.

People struggle hard, they make a big effort to overcome the "I" but they see the contradiction pretty soon that if you struggle very hard and make a big effort to get something, you are boosting the same "I" that you are trying to overcome. How can you beat your "I" with the "I" ? How can you beat your ego with the ego? The ego can give you knowledge that it is becoming an obstacle. It cannot remove you from the awareness or experience of that ego merely by reasserting that ego.

Some people say we should do meditation effortlessly in order to overcome this, therefore they try

very hard to become effortless thereby creating a contradiction in their own meditation. This is a serious question which a serious student and practitioner of meditation puts to himself. What is the answer to this distraction, this obstacle which does not let me have successful meditation? How do I overcome the problem of my ego? Is there any way in which I can find a simple method, a mechanism, a mechanical way of doing things which will overcome the ego? As one goes over the list of possible alternatives to overcome the ego, one finds most of them are structured, most of them are mechanical, most of them involve effort and therefore they are merely the same ego coming back in a different form. Therefore, any kind of structured effort, any kind of structured methodology defies this problem of finding a solution to the obstacle created by the ego.

If there is a way, a real way, which can take us away from the distraction of the ego that's love and devotion. Love is the only known human experience which makes one forget one's ego. You can look at many experiences in life but you will find that when you are in love with somebody, when you are identifying yourself with somebody, when you care so much for somebody that you forget yourself that is perhaps the only moment when you lose sight of ego and put it in second place. In all other human endeavours, the ego is given first place. Therefore, for successful meditation one has to put the ego in second place and that is only possible if you combine meditation with the experience of love and with the experience of devotion. Love and devotion are the necessary adjuncts of successful meditation which can take you beyond the realm of the ego and therefore, eventually, beyond the realm of the mind into pure spirituality.

But love and devotion are not merely terms that we can use. One cannot sit within oneself and say, "I am now practicing my meditation with love and devotion." Saying so brings you back into ego. Making an assertion that, "I love someone. I love someone very deeply. I really love someone." These assertions don't make it real love. They only make a restatement why the ego of something desirable? It only means the ego wants something that is desirable and is given the name of love. Most of the time when we look at this world and we want to find out what are they talking about when they speak of love, we find they are talking of attachments. They are talking of togetherness. They are talking of I and you. They are talking of he and she. They are talking of he and he; she and she. They are talking of two beings and love is considered to be a relationship of two beings in which both of them seem to occupy an equal place.

But in real love it doesn't happen like that. In real love, you don't have an experience of two. In real love, when I love you, I cannot have an experience of I and you. If I am really in love, I can only have experience of you. My consciousness, my awareness should be so much transferred to you, should so much occupy you, that it should really become you, be identified with you. That is called love. Therefore, when we use the word love in everyday language, we are not referring to love as we define it in spiritual practice. We are using the word love for attachment. An attachment is a mental activity in which the division of I and you still exists and persists till the end. Whereas in spiritual love or in the love of the spirit, one transcends that division and identifies with the beloved and can really experience oneness. Attachment, at best, can give us the experience of togetherness. Love gives us the experience of oneness.

But love is not such a simple thing to find. One cannot make up one's mind and say, "Now, from tomorrow, I am going to practice love and tomorrow I am going to have a new style of living where I will give up my ego and practice love." Because a decision of this type, a plan for tomorrow made like this, itself is a plan of the ego; itself is a plan of the individual consciousness and, therefore, defies the experience of love. Love doesn't come from mental planning. Nobody can plan for love. Just like nobody can plan to have an intuitive flash; nobody can plan to have a sudden flash of gut knowledge giving information on what to do.

These subtle experiences of love, intuition and, equally so, beauty and joy, they come to us suddenly. They come to us from nowhere. We can't explain them. We can't say how they came, where they came from. They come from an area which defies even time and space. They have no cause, therefore they are not mental. Intuition, love, beauty, joy and happiness, which are associated with spiritual awareness, they come from the soul, the spirit and not from the mind. And, therefore, they belong strictly to a spiritual experience. Any kind of experience of love and devotion is a spiritual experience. But when it is related to something real, it is called spiritual yoga and, therefore, Bhakti-yoga, or the yoga of love and devotion is the highest, pure, spiritual yoga. It transcends the mind and gives us an experience beyond the mind.

The mind can only perform functions within its own framework. The mind cannot go beyond time. The mind cannot go beyond space. The mind must invariably follow the laws of cause and effect. Consider, what are the functions of the mind that we deal with every day? The mind is interpreting sense perceptions. The mind is reasoning and arguing within itself, using logic. The mind is in a creative mood and creating new patterns. In any of these activities, whether it is sensing or reasoning or thinking or creating, the mind is using time and space and follows the law of cause and effect. It is this framework of time, space and causation which binds the mind together to a certain level of experience that cannot be reached except through this framework and therefore it divides the total spiritual experience from the mental experience.

All this talk of a universal mind, all this talk of a higher universe in which the mind becomes one, all this talk is confined to only that part of the human consciousness which is mental. But above the mind we have the spirit and the spirit defies this framework. The spirit goes beyond time, space and causation. When we have a spiritual experience, we do not need any time. Indeed, it does not perform itself in time. A spiritual experience does not come in time. Take love. You have all experienced love, sometime or the other. It came so suddenly. Before that, it was not there and suddenly it was there. Was any time taken in the experience? Can you compare it with thought? Even the smallest thought can be measured. It took one minute or half a minute or five seconds or one second or half a second or a millionth part of a second. Every thought can be measured in terms of time and every thought can be associated with some space. Every thought has a cause and an effect. But not so the experience of love; nor the experience of intuition. These transcend this framework of time, space and causation. When true spiritual experiences are above time space and causation, surely no amount of mental effort and no amount of mental struggle can give us that experience.

The real spiritual experience comes through this new dimension, which is beyond time, space and causation. This is that dimension I have been talking of all the time, the Bhakti-yoga; the yoga of love and devotion; the yoga in which one can transcend this mental framework; go beyond time, space and causation and find the truth that is non-mental; find the truth that does not come in our day to day effort; to say, “I can do it, I can do it,” something that I cannot do it, but my totality can do; something for which I can be ready; something which I can accept; something that comes from my own totality, but not from the individual will. This particular experience of the highest spiritual experience comes through Bhakti yoga, the yoga of love and devotion, the yoga that does not require thoughts, the yoga that only requires love and service of love, which is devotion. That is, in truth, the real yoga, the Bhakti yoga.

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