



BHAKTI YOGA

Bhakti is found in the scriptures and is a topic with various shades of meaning depending on the context. So we want to clearly understand what Bhakti is. The word Bhakti is used in the scriptures in two different meanings.



First Meaning of Bhakti - Devotion to God

One is Bhakti as in devotion towards God. Devotion is nothing but a love directed towards a higher principle. Whenever love is directed towards some principle which we revere, which is sacred, that love is called Devotion. Reverential love can be called devotion. We talk about Mātrū Bhakti, Pitru Bhakti because in our tradition we look upon our parents as superior, holy, deserving respect, worthy. Similarly we talk about Guru Bhakti and Desha Bhakti and Īshvara Bhakti. This love has been very elaborately analysed in our scriptures both in its general form as love and also in its specific form as in love of God.

All forms of love that a human being entertains are directed towards only three things.

1. **Love towards Goals. Madhyama** The first is whatever goals that we want to accomplish in our life, whatever ends that we want to accomplish, all are ends that we love. And it is because we love them



that we want to acquire them or accomplish them. This is called Love towards various ends or goals.

2. **Love towards Means. Manda** Later we find that to accomplish the ends, we have to use various means. Only through the means can we accomplish the ends, and since the means are useful to accomplish the ends, we begin to love the means also. This is because it is useful to accomplish the ends and hence the second direction of our love is love of the means.
3. **Love towards oneself. Uttama** The third thing the object of love is the love of oneself. Everyone loves himself or herself. It is also called self love.

Then the scriptures point out that there is a gradation in the intensity of love in the above three forms of love. Love of the means is the least in its intensity, love of the end is mediocre and love of oneself is the highest form of love wherein the love has got the highest intensity.

The reason is that love of the means is not for the sake of the means itself but for the sake of the end. Once the end is accomplished, then the attitude towards the means is completely different and often not loved. E.g. Rich people are more loved than poor people. That is because the rich are the means to an end called Wealth. And as long as the end called wealth can be accomplished through the rich, they are loved. The moment money goes away from them, thereafter the rich are not loved. Most of the time love for people is love for the means to accomplish the end and often money is the end. Between the love of the end and love for the self, the love of the self is superior. I love various ends hoping that they will give me various comforts, safety and happiness. The moment I see that particular end does not give me joy, then the end is either changed, or even after accomplishing the end, it is disposed of. If we have to grade, Means love is called Manda, End love



is called Madhyama and Self love is called Uttama because that is the highest in intensity.

Love Towards God

Let us apply this in the field of God. If we have Bhakti or if a person loves God, what will be the intensity of that love ? The scriptures point out, the intensity of the love depends upon how you look upon God.



1. Manda Bhakti – “Dull” (selfish)

bhakti Majority of people look upon God only as the means for various worldly ends. As long as you look upon God to attain means, love is called Manda Bhakti. That is why people get angry with God also. This is a conditional love, and only if the condition is fulfilled will the person love God and if the condition is not fulfilled I reject God.

2. Madhyama Bhakti– Middle bhakti The next set of people who are still rarer, who look upon God not as the means to various ends. They are matured enough, their understanding of God is clear enough that they are able to choose God as the goal of life. Because they know God represents security, peace, and happiness. Once I understand God as the symbolic representation of peace, love, and happiness then I know that everyone in life is seeking security, happiness and peace alone. And once I know God represents these, I know that God is the end of my life and naturally my love of God is at the end and therefore it is more intense than the previous one. **This Bhakti is called Madhyama Bhakti.**

3. Uttama Bhakti – Best bhakti Uttama Bhakti is the even rarer form of love, the most intense form of love in which I look upon God not as the means nor even as the end, but God as non-different from myself. Soham



Asmi – means that that Lord is essentially not different from me and therefore the Lord and the Self being identical, **God love will become equal to self love.** And since self love is the most intense love, that form of love is called Uttama Bhakti. For Manda Bhakta God is dear, for Madhyama Bhakta God is dearer and for the Uttama Bhakta God is the dearest. Krishna beautifully elaborates in the 7th and the 12th chapter of Gītā. Thus love of God in the form of Manda, Madhyama and Uttama Rūpa is called Bhakti. This is the first meaning of the word Bhakti. Now we will come to the second meaning of the word Bhakti.

Second Meaning of Bhakti - Course of Discipline

The second meaning is Bhakti as a course of discipline to achieve the spiritual goal, the ultimate goal of liberation. To convey this idea of Bhakti as a course of discipline, generally the word Yoga is added. So when Bhakti means a course of discipline, we use the word Bhakti Yogaha meant for accomplishing the goal. The 12th chapter of the Gītā is titled Bhakti Yoga itself.

What is Bhakti Yogaha?

What course of discipline is indicated by the word Bhakti Yogaha. Earlier we dealt with our threefold course of discipline for attaining the Purushārtha – the human goals. We talked about Karma Yoga, Upāsana Yoga and Jnāna Yoga. We didn't talk about



Bhakti Yogaha. So the question is what is then meant by Bhakti Yogaha as a course of discipline? Is it a fourth Yoga? Our answer is Bhakti Yogaha is not an exclusive or separate course of discipline at all. Bhakti is the name of the entire group of discipline consisting of all the three.



It is not a fourth one, but it is the name of the entire threefold course of discipline known as Karma Yoga, Upāsana Yoga and Jnāna Yoga. The first stage of Bhakti Yogaha is Karma Yoga. The second stage of Bhakti Yoga is Upāsana Yoga and the third stage of Bhakti Yoga is Jnāna Yoga.

All encompassing The next question is why do you call all these three commonly known as Bhakti Yogaha? How come Bhakti Yogaha is the common name for all these three ? Why don't you treat it as a separate fourth Yoga?

Bhakti Yogaha is the common name for all three because, Bhakti is the common atmosphere in which all these three Yogas are practiced. **It is not that Bhakti is separately practiced in a separate time but Karma Yoga, Upāsana Yoga and Jnāna Yoga have to be pervade in Bhakti.**

In Karma Yoga, the attitude that one enjoys is dedicating all actions to the Lord and accepting without resistance all the consequences of my actions. Therefore how can there be Karma Yoga without Ishvara Arpana Bhāvanā and Prasāda Bhāvanā. Therefore a Karma Yogi should necessarily have Bhakti all the time because every action is dedicated to the Lord. In Upāsana Yoga, I have to meditate upon the Lord for developing mental discipline and integration. How can I meditate upon the Lord if I don't have Bhakti – **these include Mānasa Pūja, Mānasa Pārāyanam, Mānasa Japa.**

Therefore Upāsana Yoga must also take place in the atmosphere of Bhakti alone. Jnāna Yoga also involves Bhakti. Before any study of scriptures, we start with a prayer and end with a prayer. In Jnāna Yoga we are enquiring into our own real nature, discovering the identity of our real nature with the nature of God. Therefore self realisation or discovery is nothing but God discovery. Jnāna Yoga also involves Bhakti. At no time is the person away from Bhakti and all three Yogas put together are called Bhakti Yogaha. This is the second meaning of Bhakti.



Principle of God

When we talk of Bhakti, it is love or devotion towards God. Without understanding the principle of God, how can we discuss the topic of devotion? Because, an integral part of love is the object of love. In fact you cannot develop love towards anyone without understanding what it is. How can anyone love an unknown thing or person? That is why Jnānam of God becomes a necessity. Scriptures give three definitions of God depending on the maturity of the seeker and the intellectual caliber of the seeker.

1. Jagat Kartā Īshvara God as creator of world

First definition for the beginner is – God is the creator of the world. In Sanskrit - **Jagat Kartā Īshvara**. And we present the simple and easily understandable reasoning – any well designed product, any purposeful well designed product must have an intelligent being to design. And the more well designed the product is, the more you appreciate the designing intelligence. So if the ordinary product requires an intelligent being behind the creation, what to talk of the most wonderful universe which is well designed and very purposeful? **Nothing is purposeless in this creation**. If this creation is purposeful and well designed there must be an intelligent creator behind it and **that intelligent creator is the Jagat Kartā or Īshvara**. And once I define Īshvara as Jagat Kartā, you will visualise God as a person because we are used to intelligent beings as human beings or persons. Therefore we imagine a very intelligent God who is omniscient, omnipotent, and since we don't see him around safely place him above the clouds. This is Lord as a creator, personal God with a special form as Raama, Krishna, Vishnu or Shiva. **This is called Eka Rūpa Īshvara**.

2. Jagat Kāranam Īshvara God as cause of world



And once you have grown up sufficiently, the scriptures present the next level of Īshvara. God is the cause of the world - **Jagat Kāranam Īshvara**. Suppose I understand God as the creator of the world, invariably the question comes – what is the raw material out of which the world is created? Nothing else is available because before the creation of the world, God alone was there – none else, even space was not available. That is why scientists say, before the Big Bang, we cannot even conceive of time and space. Even before the creation of time and space and objects, when God alone was there, where is the raw material? Scriptures point out that God himself happens to be the very material also out of which the world is shaped.

God is the Kāranam – the very material out of which the world is created- just as a spider finds the material for the web out of itself. Similarly God is the material cause of the universe and from this the scriptures extend, the raw materials alone becomes the product – manifold products, and since God is the raw material God alone has become the universe. Therefore the whole universe is nothing but God alone. So where is God?

The whole universe is God.

Since the whole universe is God, every form I see is the form of God. Hence God does not have one form but all forms are God's forms. So He is no more personal God, He is universal God. **He is no more Eka Rūpa Īshvara but is Aneka Rūpa Īshvara or Vishva Rūpa Īshvara and to have the Darshanam to God he is available everywhere.** Hence first we said, God created the world, and now we say, God has become the world.

3. Jagat Adhishthānam Īshvara God as substratum of world

Once you are ready for the next level, the scriptures give the third definition – **Jagat**

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Adhishthānam Īshvara. This is the highest and the culmination. In this we say, God did not become the world. This is because the next question will be – *Are the ugly things God as well? How can I accept bad also as God?* If such a question comes, you are ready for the third definition. God does not become the world. God appears as the world with different forms not affected by any form in which he appears.

To put the other way around – God is the very substratum of all the forms or the entire creation, which he transcends. God is the ultimate reality, God is the ultimate substance behind the creation yet not affected by it. **This is Jagat Adhishthānam Īshvara.** And since God transcends all the superficial forms of the creation, no particular form belongs to God. Therefore, God is Adhishthānam Īshvara is **Arūpa Īshvara – formless God.**

When I am in the initial stage, I have Eka Rūpa Bhakti. When I am in the middle stage, I have Aneka Rūpa Bhakti. When I am in the final stage my Bhakti is Arūpa Bhakti. And remember, when we talk about the three stages gradually, the latter ones do not displace the former ones. It only is of a different dimension. The one who has come to Arūpa Bhakti has not lost Eka Rūpa and Aneka Rūpa. Arūpa Bhakti includes the other two. That is why the greatest Advaitin can worship God in any form also. They could happily appreciate Lord as the beautiful nature also and they could transcend both of them and arrive at the formless also. So the higher one does not displace the lower one but adds another dimension. This is the understanding of God that develops in the mind of the seeker as he studies the scriptures.

To consolidate, we have discussed nine forms of Bhakti.

a) The first three are Manda Bhakti, Madhyama Bhakti and Uttama Bhakti where Bhakti is based on Love of God – Bhāvanā Drushtyā Bhakti Trayam



b) Then we saw Karma Yoga Rūpa Bhakti, Upāsana Yoga Rūpa Bhakti and Jnāna Yoga Rūpa Bhakti where Bhakti is from the standpoint of Sādhanā - Sādhanā Drushtyā Bhakti Trayam

c) Then we saw Eka Rūpa Bhakti, Aneka Rūpa Bhakti and Arūpa Bhakti depending on my understanding of God – Devatā Drushtyā Bhakti Trayam So anytime we talk about Bhakti, we should understand the context and grasp the meaning.

*Summarized from Classes with Shree Swami Paramarthaananda Sarasvati