

# Different Stages & Fruits of Bhakti

by  
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## Different Stages of Bhakti<sup>1</sup>

In our tradition, offering obeisance and performing *puja* to an idol is part of our religious upbringing. Arjuna starts off the 12<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Gita asking Krishna as to whether worshipping God with form is superior to worshipping the formless God. The Lord says, “One is the means and another is the goal and there is no comparison.” From then on HE patiently explains – and Krishna is teacher exemplary, for Arjuna is really a dumb student and Krishna explains the same thing countless times till even he grasps it!!! – and what follows is the backbone of this chapter.

Here *Bhakti Yoga* is seen as a staircase for personal evolution. The objective of a human life is *MOKSHA* – freedom from wants of any kind. “I am free here and now and I am complete and I need nothing to validate my existence” is one simple definition of *moksha*. For example, if I lose my eyes tomorrow, I must have the strength of mind to say, “So what? I will learn to live without sight from now on.” We are talking about this kind of attitude, where sorrow can never intrude in my mind. Only a mind soaked in *Advaita* can reach this state of mind.

### The 5 different stages of Bhakti

#### 1) Karma yoga – Level one – Prayerful life: invoking God

I lead a prayerful life and invoke God: the first thing on waking up, even while

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1 Inner freedom – freedom from dependence on objects external and internal.

bathing and eating, working, and at the time of retiring to bed. At this stage, I have a lot of materialistic needs (son to get admitted in IIT, daughter to get married, a sick mother etc.) and I invoke God for his grace to alleviate me from my problems.

Most of us pray and remember God either for alleviating pain or for seeking prosperity (better car, better job, better pay etc.). The primary attitude of a seeker at this stage is Ishwara Arpanam – dedicating all the actions to the Lord, and Prasada Buddhi – I accept any situation that is happening in my life as a GIFT from the Lord (particularly the negative ones). The logic is simple. God can never be partial and whenever I suffer in life, it is on account of my *prarabdha karma* [the impulses of my past actions that will fructify in the present life].

## **2) Karma yoga – Level two – Prayer for mental strength**

Here at this stage, I don't appeal or beg the Lord to change my worldly situation. Instead I pray to the Lord for mental strength in facing up to my situation.

I will not ask God to change my *karma* and learn to be dispassionate to either success or failure. I increasingly have the maturity to realize that each experience in life has a lesson for me and my primary goal in life is to STRENGTHEN/TOUGHEN and PURIFY the mind. The mind needs to be nourished and be fit enough to learn the spiritual truths.

We see people take vows: wrapping a coin and praying for relief or fasting or swearing to go to temples if certain things happen. These are all immature behaviours and fall in a lower category. Hinduism is NOT a problem-solving or wish-fulfilling religion as much as a guide for liberation (*moksha*).

If God were to appear before you and asks: “What do you want?”

Be smart and say, “*Jñānam* and *Vairāgyam*” [Knowledge & Dispassion] and nothing else should come out of the mouth!!!!

## **3) Upasana – Level 1: Saguna Upasana (Meditation on God with form)**

Now, we will ask ourselves this question: what is more real? Body or Mind?

The latter obviously, for body has an expiry date while the journey of the mind is as old as *Shrithi* [creation]. So, isn't it important to STRENGTHEN and PURIFY the mind?

The first stage of being on the “path” is to reduce our dependence on worldly things and start the “internal journey” of exploring the mind. A human life is at best a hundred years and so it makes sense to LEAN more on God with whom our relationship is endless.

Why can't the world give lasting pleasure? Because, it is:

- ◆ Unpredictable (can you predict how your darling wife today will behave tomorrow?!!)
- ◆ Uncontrollable (World is nothing but external events and can anyone control the outcomes?!!)
- ◆ Unsustainable (Bill Gates despite all his billions will have to die one day!!!)

Our scriptures advise us that for “emotional insurance” only devotion to God is the

sole recourse. So, spend quality time and energy in worshipping God in solitude and may you grow stronger in the mind.

#### **4) Upasana – Level 2: Nirguna Upasana (Meditation on formless God)**

As our dependence on the world decreases and as faith in God increases, there is one immediate benefit: our *bhayam* [FEAR] comes down.

The purpose of meditation is to be at PEACE with oneself – find CALM, CHEER, and CONFIDENCE (3 Cs) in oneself.

The “*Ishta devata*” [chosen deity] of the earlier stage is now meditated upon as “*Viswa Ishata devata*”. Meaning, if you were meditating on Lord Rama, now expand it to Rama in which the entire creation rests.

Learn to see divinity [the light of consciousness] in plants, animals, human beings including our tormentors. The payoff is that you begin to reduce your likes and dislikes [*raga / dwesha*] as everything emanates from the same Lord and nothing can be bad or superfluous in HIS creation. Quite simply, the mind EXPANDS and one becomes more tolerant of oneself and others.

#### **5) Jñāna Yoga**

Only such a mind is fit to study Vedanta under a *guru*. It can easily assimilate, “I am Brahman and in me the whole universe rises, rests and resolves”, for the essential nature of God and ME is similar.

From a superficial viewpoint, a wave is small, fleeting, short-lived while the ocean is infinitely large and almost permanent. But the reality is that the nature of both, the wave and ocean is WATER and from that viewpoint there is no difference between them. Wave is only a name and form [*nama* and *rupa*] and does not have separate existence of its own. For isn't it WATER in another form?!!

For *Jñāna Yoga* to sprout in one's mind, one must be engaged in *Sravanam* [consistent and systematic study of scriptures under the guidance of a competent Acharya], *Mananam* [mental reflection] and *Nidhi-dhyasanam* [assimilate the teaching].

In my next post (see below), I will endeavour to describe the *Bhakti phalam* [fruit of *bhakti*] as the mind struggles in its evolution to find peace and security.



Posted by A.Sathyanarayanan at 8:03 PM



## *The Fruits of Bhakti*

In the last lecture we saw the 5 stages of *Bhakti*:

- Karma Yoga -1
- Karma Yoga -2
- Saguna Upasana -1
- Nirguna Upasana -2
- Jñāna Yoga

Here I will describe the fruits of such a sustained practice.

### **Benefits: Freedom Raga/Dvesha & their offspring**

The first benefit is FREEDOM FROM INTERNAL MENTAL DISTURBANCES

Why? Because, I have learnt to handle *Raga* / *Dvesha* [likes / dislikes]. Once the source is taken care of, then its offsprings – *Kama*, *Krodha*, *Loba*, *Moha*, *Mada*, *Mat-sarya* – will no longer trouble us!!!

### ***What are Raga and Dvesha?***

#### **Raga — Strong likes**

**RAGA** is strong likes caused by an emotional dependence on the external world: on relations, events, and circumstances.

Once *Bhakti* is well established in an individual – i.e. HE has faith in the 5 stages of appreciating GOD – that person will never lean on others emotionally for support.

Remember, leaning on others is only ATTACHMENT,

While giving SUPPORT to others is called LOVE.

So, a true *Bhakta* GIVES SUPPORT and DOES NOT TAKE SUPPORT.

#### **Dvesha — Strong dislike**

**DVESHA** is a strong sense of dislike and aversion to a person or event. Some of us even hate personalities from television news or even soaps. Or you might hate your cricketers or film stars even when they have had nothing to do with you personally – a sign of a weak and immature mind.

A true *Bhakta* can never hate for he sees the entire world as *Viswarupa Iswara* [Omni-form Lord]. If that be the case, where will hate spring from? The Lord is all-knowing and wise and who am I to question or hate any of HIS creations?... bit hard to take if you have a nagging wife or Hitler boss at work!!! But the solace is: GOD is giving you the bitter medicine for your internal growth.

So, a true devotee never complains about his lot in life and sees them as learning opportunities. He is incapable of hating anyone including a poisonous snake. He is smart enough to keep away but mentally has goodwill for one and all. Best wishes for every single thing. No exception.

## **What are the offsprings of Raga / Dvesha ?**

### **Kāma — Strong desire**

**KAMA:** The true *Bhakta* does not have any strong desires or passionate attractions. For he has discovered the fountain of joy and bliss — *Santoshah* — within himself and having tasted internal fulfillment, the outside holds no more fears. He has in a way unraveled the “concealing power” (in Sanskrit, *avarana shakti*) of *Maya* and for him the entire world is nothing but a play.

He works for “*Loka Samagrah*” [fulfillment of other’s desires] and this is a non-binding work and in no way affects his internal equanimity.

### **Krodha — Anger**

**KRODHA:** When do we get angry? It is an emotional response to something that does not tally with one’s intellectual norm.

For a man of realization, he sees the entire drama of life around him as a sport and the strings of *Prarabdha Karma* [presently fructifying *karma*]. When one is emotionally stable, then there can be no more violent emotional responses. Any intellectual disagreements are seen as different points of view.

### **Lobha — Greed**

**LOBHA** is mentally holding on to things — attachment. Typical example is the mother-in-law holding the keys of the house tucked in her *saree*. That is a source of power!!!

Isn’t that sense of LOBHA destructive and futile when I realize that I (the *jiva*) do not own anything including my body. “I am not here to own but to serve” is the attitude of a true *Bhakta*.

Handing over the keys of your life to Bhagawan is a prudent move.

Dropping the sense of OWNERSHIP & CONTROLLERSHIP is a very important milestone in mental development.

For those grieving from loss of relatives, there is one comforting thought — GOD gave you a loved person and has now taken them away. Having enjoyed the gift so long, thank the Lord and go forward.

### **MOHA — Delusion: inability see right from wrong**

The greatest delusion is that the external world of people and events will give me happiness. The external world can only provide PLEASURE and PAIN; happiness is a far cry.

The world is characterized by Beauty, Variety, and Novelty (so many different people and all shapes and temperaments). But they can never offer STABILITY for all these elements keep changing with time. Watch the events and allow them to pass through without attaching any importance.

Only knowledge of Atman/Consciousness/Bhagawan is the ONLY security.

### **MADAM — Pride / Vanity**

A true devotee is never arrogant or envious for he knows the truth: all glories belong to the Lord.

When I see someone more gifted than me, there is no envy but pleasure that GOD is better manifested in that medium.

### **MATSARYA — Competitiveness**

An ignorant fool works all his life in one-upmanship, or Owner's pride and neighbour's envy.

Here the attitude of a *Bhakta* is, "I am fine as I am".

He can get along with anyone and others too take content in his company. The devotee is "considerate to others and himself".

"I will not disturb any setup...

And no setup will disturb me"..... that state is called *SAMATVAM* [equanimity].

So, as anyone can see, there are benefits to being a true *Bhakta*. It is definitely worth trying for, and one day we will get there. Better this *janma* [birth] or carry forward to the next, but there is no escaping.

All the best!!!!



Posted by A.Sathyanarayanan at 8:02 PM - Thursday, October 13, 2011

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Welcome Message

*This blog contains the **TRANSCRIPT** of lectures of Swami Paramarthananda of Madras. Please note that there is no substitute for Guru Mukha Dvara Shravanam [Personally hearing the Teacher], which is the best way to appreciate the beauty of the topics and relish the clarity of delivery. But for the benefit of others, these lectures are available in text format. Every attempt has been made to transcribe the lecture as accurately as possible. Any inadvertent errors are purely attributable to the blog owner. Hari Om*

About Me  
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I am a student of Vedanta. Through this blog, I want everyone to benefit from the wonderful teachings of Swāmi Paramārthānanda.  
Hari Om

[View my complete profile](#)



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