



Svaroopa® Vidya Ashram

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Multi-Dimensionality #12

## Devotion

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Devotion is the sweetest, easiest and most intoxicating of all the yogic paths. Yoga has multiple branches, like other sciences. Most well known are the physical aspects, with meditation now becoming more widespread in the West. As a comprehensive science of spirituality, yoga includes your heart along with your body and mind. Bhakti yoga is the yoga of devotion, with practices that grow your love for God and Guru.

Bhakti yoga practices include chanting and candle flame ceremonies along with traditional fire ceremonies. Formal rituals often include the ringing of bells and beating of drums. Fragrant incense wafts through the air and people bow as well as experience quiet communion with the Divine.

You see all of these in any Ashram, in every temple in India and in most Christian churches worldwide. Why? Because doing these things opens your heart to the Divine.

A seeker asked my Baba, "I don't feel very devotional, so I don't wave the candle flame in front of your picture. Should I be doing this?" Baba answered, "If you don't wave the flame, when will you begin to feel devotion?" This means you may have to prime the pump. If you want to feel love, do things that open you to experiencing love.

Chanting opened my heart more than anything else. I certainly needed the help. I was very shielded. I had tried love in many of its forms, including romantic love, love for family and being a devoted fan of musicians who expressed my emotions in their songs. I loved pets, special places, certain foods and specific kinds of weather. But none of it really satisfied me.

I yearned for a greater love, though it was something I couldn't describe and didn't know how to find. In the Bible, the Greek word *agape* means both your love for God as well as God's love for you. One word has both meanings. That is because, when you feel your love for God, it's the same as feeling God's love for you. There's no difference. Divine love is bi-directional.

Thus, bhaktas (devotees) strive for Divine love. The ancient sage Narada describes it:

On attaining Divine Love, the seeker becomes perfect, immortal and is deeply satisfied.

Yal labdhvaa pumaan siddho bhavaty-am.rto bhavati t.rpto bhavati. — Bhakti Sutra 4

Yes, this is what I was yearning for! I had sometimes experienced this exalted state. It had come with another person or by being in nature, listening to music or attending religious ceremonies. Not knowing it was a spiritual goal, I put tremendous pressure on everyone in my life, wanting them to give me this experience. But they could not give what they didn't have.

Then I found someone who had it — my Baba. And he shared it freely. One of the reasons I lived and studied with him is because I felt loved like I had always wanted. I do recommend spending time with an enlightened master. My Baba explained how it works:

Without the grace of such a Guru, there is no knowledge and no state of meditation.

Without the Guru's company, it is difficult to contemplate the Self.

While I had yearned for God, I couldn't find God because I didn't know where to look. Yoga explains that the human mind needs a focal point. The all-pervasive formless reality is too nebulous for the mind to capture and hold.

I tried thinking of God like fog, pervading all, or like the sky, bigger than everything. Yet the fog doesn't penetrate inside. And the sky is merely Earth's atmosphere in the vastness of space. Then I tried thinking of space, but learned that space is expanding. Into what? What is greater than the space that contains the universe?

Yoga gave me name and form, *namarupa*. The formless is being all forms and is known by all names. This includes you and me as well as the many Divine Beings in the celestial realms. Now my world is

populated by God, Gods and Goddesses in a Divine multiplicity. It's easy to love them all, just like loving all children.

I got all this from Baba. It was easy to be devoted to him. His wisdom, his sense of humor, and his insight into the everyday complexities of life were mesmerizing. Best of all was the bliss energy that radiated off of him. Like sitting in the sun for a few minutes, you'd get warm inside. His inner state was contagious.

He described the same about his Guru. Even now, more than sixty years since Nityananda left his body, sitting in his home in Ganeshpuri gives the same result. He imprinted the place with his energy, the continuing flow of Grace.

My Baba told stories of his Guru. Twice I saw him shed tears as he spoke of his Guru. Yet Baba explained, "When people ask me if I miss him, I say, 'Yes and no.' I do not miss him, because he is alive within me as a very real presence; yet I do miss him because these physical eyes can no longer behold his exquisite form."

My Baba embodied all the qualities cited in the Advaya Taraka Upanishad:

A qualified Guru is knowledgeable in the texts, a devotee of God, free from jealousy, an expert in yoga, does yoga practices, is always in a pure yogic state. He is devoted to his own Guru and is a knower of the Self. Only one with these qualifications may properly serve as Guru. — Verses 14-15

My Western mindset was surprised that an expert in anything would still be devoted to their teacher. But enlightenment doesn't mean you lose love. It is deepened and expanded as you discover your own inner depth and vastness.

Getting there is a process. *Svaroopā*<sup>®</sup> yoga is a maha-yoga, meaning it is all encompassing. Thus you work with your body (hatha yoga), use your mind (jñana yoga), transcend your mind (raja yoga) and maximize your capacity to love (bhakti yoga). As you progress, different practices take the fore depending on your interests and current needs.

People turn to God for different reasons. While all do the same practices, their motivation is individual:

- the distressed turn to God when worldly methodologies do not relieve their pain.
- the seeker of knowledge goes to God for answers to the great questions, as well as for the insight and inspiration that solves mundane problems.
- the seeker of worldly blessings asks God for health, wealth, relationships, power, possessions and happiness.
- the wise turn to God for the sake of knowing God. No other reason.

I have found myself in each of these categories. The progression began with pain. As it lessened, I sought knowledge and worldly blessings. I found them useful but superficial. I felt a constant deep inner ache. The underlying theme of my life was the yearning, turning to God for the sake of God.

I am among the most fortunate of human beings, for my Guru gave me God. I have received the blessing of finding God within, which gives me God on the outside as well. My Guru proved the truth of yoga's teachings, that your own Self is the One Self, who is being all while being you.

Yes, I am devoted to my Baba. That is because God, Guru and Self are one and the same. There is only one, being all. There is only one thing left for me to do. Again and again I bow.

THIS IS AN ARTICLE IN A YEAR-LONG SERIES, "MULTI-DIMENSIONALITY"

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