



Bhakti – the Yoga of Love

by Lila Conway

Bhakti yoga is worship of the sacred essence of life; it is the path of devotion, adoration and loving service to the divine. The beauty of Bhakti yoga lies in its simplicity. There is no need to stand on your head or master a technique, all you need is faith and pure unconditional love.

It is said that Bhakti yoga is essential today because we have forgotten our blissful transcendental nature. We have lost appreciation for the wholeness of life, which is essentially divine. Many have become trapped and lost in the illusion of life and material existence has become our reality.

Love is the fundamental drive of every living entity, it is our true essence, and without love we are empty. We all need to love and be loved. We cannot be happy without satisfying this desire and we will not fulfill this desire without permitting its expansion to the highest level. The spiritual discipline of love first purifies the heart

and then fills it with pure unconditional love for all beings. It turns the mind inward and allows us to look at ourselves honestly. Bhakti yoga destroys negative qualities such as egoism, greed, anger, jealousy, and fills the heart with divine virtues of love, compassion, honesty, understanding, forgiveness and joyfulness.

There are nine main forms of worship within Bhakti. Kirtan (devotional chanting) is rapidly gaining popularity in the West and is said to be the easiest path to liberation. Chanting sacred words and mantras elevates, purifies and resonates directly with the heart, you don't need a 'good voice' to chant, just an attitude of pure love and devotion. No matter what subtle shades of Bhakti one practices, an essential factor remains - the devotee will constantly be in remembrance of, and seeing himself as, nothing but a servant of the divine. The ultimate goal in the practice of Bhakti yoga is to reach the state of rasa (essence), a feeling of pure bliss achieved in the devotional surrender.



Humanity has failed to create a peaceful and harmonious society; 'unity in diversity' has no meaning without true love and affection for the Supreme and, ultimately, for each other. Life becomes successful, happy and peaceful when love is directed towards the divine root of creation. Through the yoga of love, all our hearts will be cleansed, we will love all; hate none and become eternally happy...



Vrikshasana: Tree pose

The Tree, or **Vrikshasana** in Sanskrit, is a balance that develops not only physical strength but mental focus and concentration (dharana). The challenge of this posture is to maintain a firm balance on one leg. An unsteady pose often indicates a restless or distracted mind. With regular practice the mind becomes one-pointed (ekagrata), calm and concentrated. Achieve the firmness of a tree... be rooted, strong and balanced in life.

Step by Step

1. Stand tall with your feet together and arms by your sides.
2. Firmly ground your left foot and mentally prepare to balance.
3. Bend your right leg at the knee and raise the right thigh. Assisting with your hand, place the sole of your right foot as high as possible on the inside of the left thigh.
4. Press the right heel into the left thigh and point the toes towards the floor.
5. To maintain balance, focus your gaze on a steady point in front of you. As you exhale, bring your palms together in prayer position at the centre of your chest.

6. Inhale as you stretch your arms overhead, keeping the palms together and lifting through the fingertips. Straighten your arms.
7. Hold for as long as comfortable. Return to the standing position and repeat on the opposite leg.

Practice Tips

- ☀ If this pose is easy for you, try closing your eyes
- ☀ If you are unsteady, use a wall for support

The Complete Illustrated Book of Yoga by Swami Vishnudevendanda comes highly recommended for deeper study. For details on Lila's yoga classes and retreats, go to www.yogaprema.org or email: yogaprema@live.com

