

Bhakti & Karma Yoga

**The Science of Devotion
and
Liberation Through Action**

Yogani

From The AYP Enlightenment Series

Bhakti and Karma Yoga

—

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and
Liberation Through Action

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“I have lived on the lip of insanity, wanting
to know reasons, knocking on a door.

It opens.

I have been knocking from the inside!”

Jelaluddin Rumi – 13th Century Sufi Mystic

Introduction

Desire is the root of all action, and action is what produces change in human life, for good or ill. Therefore, informing our desires with a chosen high ideal and implementing our intentions accordingly in spiritual practices and daily activity will have a profound influence on many outcomes in our life.

Bhakti and Karma Yoga covers the systematic application of the essential principles of desire and devotion to aid us in achieving our goals and spiritual aspirations. Through inspired action we can transform our life experience to one of ecstatic bliss. In combination with an effective daily routine of yoga practices, the principles of bhakti and karma yoga elevate the relationship of our desires and actions to divine expression, greatly hastening our progress toward enlightenment.

The AYP Enlightenment Series is an endeavor to present the most effective methods of spiritual practice in a series of easy-to-read books that anyone can use to gain practical results immediately and over the long term. Since its beginnings in 2003, *Advanced Yoga Practices (AYP)* has been an experiment to see just how much can be conveyed in writing, with

much more detail provided on practices than in the spiritual writings of the past.

Can books provide us the specific means necessary to tread the path to enlightenment, or do we have to surrender at the feet of a *guru* to find our salvation? Well, clearly we must surrender to something, even if it is to our own innate potential to live a freer and happier life. If we are able to do that, and maintain regular practice, then books like this one can come alive and instruct us in the ways of human spiritual transformation. If the reader is ready and the book is worthy, amazing things can happen.

While one person's name is given as the author of this book, it is actually a distillation of the efforts of thousands of practitioners over thousands of years. This is one person's attempt to simplify and make practical the spiritual methods that many have demonstrated throughout history. All who have gone before have my deepest gratitude, as do the many I am privileged to be in touch with in the present who continue to practice with dedication and good results.

I hope you will find this book to be a useful resource as you travel along your chosen path.

Practice wisely, and enjoy!

Table of Contents

Chapter 1 – Desire and Action	1
Chapter 2 – Bhakti Yoga	13
Bhakti – Up Close and Personal	16
Ishta – The Chosen Ideal.....	19
The Systematic Transformation of Emotion.....	27
Bhakti and the Limbs of Yoga	44
Chapter 3 – Karma Yoga.....	53
Action and its Consequences	55
The Spiritual Evolution of Action.....	65
The Role of Service	75
Chapter 4 – Passionate Living.....	87
A Journey from Here to Here.....	88
The Dance of Unity.....	94
Further Reading and Support.....	103

Chapter 1 – Desire and Action

Desire is fundamental to our existence. But desire does not stand alone. For what is a desire if it is not acted upon? Nothing but an unresolved hankering. Indeed, desire without action is like a driver without a vehicle. And action without a clear desire to guide it is like a machine running hither and yon without rhyme or reason.

There has sometimes been criticism of the presence of desire on the spiritual path, even to the point of calling for the end of desire. This is because desire does not always lead to results that may be considered positive. Negative desires can lead to negative results when acted upon, while positive desires will most often lead to positive results. The laws we have in society, while they may seem to be about limiting harmful actions, are really about limiting the effects of negative desires.

Because the precautions of the law are necessary in society, does this mean that all desires are bad? Obviously not. If we have a positive intent to limit the effect of negative desires, then the final outcome will inevitably be positive. This is the classic struggle

of “good over evil.” It revolves around our desires, and the actions they inspire.

To say that all desires are bad is to say that all human endeavor is bad, and that we should not do anything. It is a foolish proposition. Much better to face things as they are and see how we can make something good out of it, something useful. The dynamics of desire and action offer endless possibilities for good, including our ultimate enlightenment. It is a journey of divine attraction and love for our own highest ideal, culminating in the transformation of experience in all aspects of our everyday living. This has profound implications for us, and for everyone around us. By changing ourselves, we can change the world!

But before we talk about enlightenment and how desire and action can open our life up to it, let’s examine how the basic principles of desire and action relate to our everyday life. Then we will look deeper and see how these same principles can take us far beyond the ordinary to the extraordinary, even as we continue to live a normal life much as we did before.

Everyone wants something. We are each born with inclinations – the seeds that germinate within us

to become our desires in life, influenced by the environment we grow up in.

There is another influence on the shape and direction our desires may take, and that is the cycle of our desire and resulting action, leading to more desire and action, in kind. It is the natural cycle of desires and actions leading to more and more. Once we are in this cycle, action leads to desire just as desire leads to action. Round and round it goes, and we may lose track of which came first, the desire or the action. It is the proverbial question: “Which came first, the chicken or the egg?”

As we all know, this endless cycle of desires and actions can lead to what seems to be a treadmill in life. Or it can lead to remarkable achievements if we have an underlying vision, or central theme, guiding our desires and actions. With a clear vision in place, the endless cycle of desire and action can be used with great effectiveness. This is the key to all achievements by successful people, whether it be the local shopkeeper, or one who is able to enhance the quality of life for all of humanity. It is a clear vision of possibilities that can lift desire and action to a

higher purpose, and there is no limit in this. It is limited only by our imagination.

The relationship between a vision and the mechanics of desire and action is well known by those who strive to great achievements, and we can see it in action everywhere around us. It can be seen as *cause and effect*, which puts it into the realm of science, whereby the application of known principles will produce predictable results:

Vision + Desire + Action = Achievement

...with *persistence and consistency* being underlying qualities found in all of the elements on the left side of the equation.

All that we accomplish in life has a vision behind it, though we may not recognize a vision because it has become automatic – programmed within our subconscious mind. The small things we accomplish have small visions behind them, like getting up in the morning, getting dressed and going out. The larger things we accomplish have larger visions behind them, like caring for our family and pursuing our career. The greater our vision, the greater the possibilities for what we can accomplish in this life.

Visions may be ingrained in us and may seem to be fixed, sometimes to our disadvantage. But visions can be changed, and new and greater ones can be created if we are willing to put in the time and effort to reprogram our inner habits. Desire is always seeking more, and that more is found in the form of an expanded vision, which will focus desire like a laser beam, yielding miraculous results. There are powerful tools available to aid in this, which we will be discussing in this book.

If we have a clear vision of what we want, and are willing to act on it every day for as long as it takes to see our vision fulfilled, then there is no limit to what we can accomplish. When desire has been raised to this level of constancy in a particular vision, then it is called *devotion*. In the language of Yoga, this is called *Bhakti*. Those who live their life in constant devotion to their vision find support coming from all sides, and are able to overcome seemingly insurmountable obstacles.

Handicaps are not able to hold back a person who persistently acts on desires that are rooted in a clear vision. In fact, handicaps can provide an advantage to the person persistently acting on their vision, because

handicaps are clear obstructions which must be overcome on the way to fulfillment. Handicaps provide constant reminders that there is more to be done.

Just so, a poor man with a strong desire to become rich has an advantage over a rich man who does not have a vision for his life. The obstacles the poor man must overcome are milestones on the way to fulfillment of his vision. Likewise, if a rich man wishes to grow, he too must overcome obstacles on the way to a truth of greater significance than his current bank account. Is that greater truth a bigger bank account? It might be. It all depends on the vision that is chosen.

In the long run, the visionary choices we make that inform our unending cycles of desire-action-desire-action will determine the degree of happiness and fulfillment we find in life. Our vision, our desire and our actions will have consequences. In spiritual language, the actions we undertake and their consequences are summed up in the phrase, “As you sow, so shall you reap.” This is what we mean by *Karma*. As we become increasingly sensitive to the

results of our actions, our vision of life, our desires, and our actions will be affected accordingly.

The principles of vision, desire and action operate the same in spiritual life as they do in material life. In fact, these are at the core of spiritual life, just as they are at the core of anything we may undertake in this world. If we are looking for fulfillment that reaches beyond the limitations of our material world, even while we are still living fully in it, then sooner or later we will come to consider the spiritual dimension. It is a natural thing, because everyone is wired inside for a greater destiny than may meet the eye, much greater than we may have imagined so far.

It is not a coincidence that desire for and devotion to a higher vision of truth is at the core of every religion in the world. It is the inherent longing for this in human beings that has created the religions, and not the other way around. In fact, the realization of our innate human spiritual potential can occur entirely without the trappings of religion, and often does. Religion is there to remind us of what we already are in seed form. Once we have sensed our potential, it is up to us to make the necessary choices to move forward according to our own vision, rather

than anyone else's. The institutions will call us to their fold, but the real fold is in us. It is an inner opening into a fullness that is beyond worldly considerations, even though worldly considerations will go on, illuminated from within. We are fortunate to be living in a time when this kind of inner renaissance is happening at an ever-increasing rate. It is through the rise of individual enlightenment on a mass scale that our society is gradually being transformed. It is a choice that we are in a much better position to make than in centuries past, because of both inner and outer events. We are all interconnected in that. The rise of spiritual desire goes far beyond the individual. It is a global phenomenon that we all have a stake in.

On the inside, the obstructions to the natural divine flow in the human neurobiology are becoming less, and the possibilities are thus becoming clearer to everyone. Spiritual experiences that seemed impossible not long ago are becoming common among many. What before may have been a faint inspiration of our divine possibilities is now becoming a loud inner trumpet that can be easily heard. It is inspiration that leads to realization. A core

component of this inner awakening is ever-increasing spiritual desire. The energy rising in us now is so great that it cries out to be acted upon. It is vision, desire and a call to action, all in one. We are each experiencing it in our own way.

On the outside, the availability of spiritual knowledge is increasing, and the vehicles for its delivery are becoming more efficient and readily accessible, thanks to modern communications and more practical scientific approaches. We are in the midst of a spiritual knowledge revolution. While there can be some confusion in this, there is also the opportunity for systematic integrations and applications of knowledge in ways that were not possible in the past. This is particularly true of powerful spiritual practices that have long been held in secret in fragments around the world. Now, for the first time, the secrets are dissolving and the fragments are being joined and applied in ways that serve the need of our time. Causes and effects in spiritual practice are being examined systematically much more so than in the past, and adjustments are occurring to optimize results, lifting the field of spiritual practice to the level of real science. So it is a

new era of spiritual knowledge, practice and experience. This is having a profound effect on spiritual seekers everywhere, and on their actions flowing from the accelerating surge of spiritual desire coming from within.

Together, increasing internal spiritual desire and increasing external resources for spiritual knowledge, are producing a dynamic that has not been seen in human history. Never before has it been so easy to fulfill the promise of salvation found in the ancient scriptures, summed up in the Christian maxim:

“Seek and you will find. Knock and the door will open.”

Many are eagerly knocking, and many doors are opening ... being opened from the inside!

This remarkable phenomenon is not limited by culture or religion, and is, in fact, occurring in millions of people living in all of the world's cultures and religions. Change is in the air...

Now let's look at the specifics of how the underlying principles of vision, desire and action

function on our spiritual path, and what we can do to enhance the process for maximum results.

Chapter 2 – Bhakti Yoga

The classical definition of bhakti yoga is *union through devotion*. By devotion, we mean the continuous flow of desire in accordance with a vision. We can also call the vision an *ideal*, and it is chosen by each of us in a very individual and personal way.

Bhakti is the primary engine of all spiritual progress, and of all spiritual practices we may undertake to enhance our spiritual progress. It is our longing that must be stirring before we can take the steps necessary to grow. Longing is an emotion, a need. We don't even have to know what it is we are needing. The feeling is enough to make things happen, assuming we are willing to act. The desire comes first. Then comes action. And from action we see more that we can experience and know, and our longing is further stimulated by that.

The simple process just described is an organic one, and is at the heart of every spiritual journey and of every religion. It is human longing for answers about our ultimate purpose and destiny that drives the mechanisms of spiritual experience and realization everywhere on the earth. And so too does human

longing for truth drive the religions that serve this great purpose to the extent they are able to transcend their political agendas and institutional limitations. It is not so complicated.

While we may have been taught that our salvation is in the hands of this or that god or religious institution, our salvation is in our own hands according to our own longing and willingness to act upon it. The human nervous system is the center of all spiritual progress, not any authority outside us. This isn't to say we will not be devoted to the deity or ideal we have known since childhood, or to any other we may be drawn to in our life. There are innumerable sources of spiritual inspiration and energy in the world. But it is we who open the valve for that energy to flow into our life. When we are ready, the spiritual energy will flow. When the valve is continuously open by our own desire and action, then we will find ourselves living in a state of grace. Ongoing bhakti and grace are two sides of the same coin.

We may give all that we have and do to our god or our chosen ideal. It is our own devotion that creates the freedom and happiness we are living. That

is grace. It is a fascinating dynamic, giving credence to the phrase, “The more we give, the more we receive.”

It is in our own hands. But only to the extent we are ready. Fortunately, it is not all or nothing. We can inch our way into the increasingly powerful dynamic of bhakti. Contrary to what we may have been taught, there are no absolutes in the field of devotion. We can begin with the simplest of inquires, like, “Who am I” and “What am I doing here?”

If we ask with longing, the answers will begin to come, and we can move forward from there. This is the wonder of bhakti. It is very systematic and can function with the effective use of any emotion we may be experiencing here and now. The results of applied bhakti are predictable and repeatable, leading us to call bhakti *the science of devotion*.

The journey of bhakti and of human spiritual transformation is a continuum, not an instant event. It is occurring right here, right now, and our realization of truth can evolve naturally within the life we are living. No need to run off to the mountain top, or trade in our family and career for robes and exotic gurus. These veneers are insignificant in relation to a

longing heart expressing itself in ordinary life. Enlightenment is not about place. It is about desire and its expression in effective spiritual practices, and how that overflows into the conduct of our daily life.

Bhakti – Up Close and Personal

Traditionally, bhakti is considered to be *love of God*, which usually places it in the realm of religion. This well and good, but there is another side of bhakti that is not necessarily religious. Bhakti may also be regarded as *spiritual* without any religious affiliation.

There are many forms of bhakti, as many as there are *ishtas* (chosen ideals) and attributes that we can imagine. Unlimited! Here, we will not get into well-known traditional expressions of bhakti very much. It is the province of the religions. For those who love to worship in their religious tradition, that is very good. For those who are not inclined that way, it is not the end of the world. Yoga and spiritual development can progress very well with or without formal modes of worship. It can work either way.

The kind of bhakti we will explore in this book is the *up close and personal* kind. It is a non-sectarian approach that does not require any specific religious

belief. For this kind of bhakti, you only need to become devoted to the possibilities within yourself.

Here, bhakti is about you, your nervous system, your desires, your practices, your spiritual experiences, and how it all plays out as you go out and engage in action in daily life. When we talk about bhakti as *love of God* here, what we mean is: What is our highest truth? What is the highest ideal we aspire to for ourselves? So far, maybe it is only a question we want to answer, like, "Is there more than this?"

If we ask the question in our heart with sincerity and give our emotions to it, we will have some good bhakti going. Real bhakti is very personal. It is about our innermost desire to become something more in our life. It is about wanting to know the truth, and using our emotions to move toward it. It can be a bare emotion – a deep hunger and wanting to know. It can express positively or negatively, and we can use either kind of emotion to propel our journey. This is bhakti.

Bhakti can also be very involved in a relationship with the icons and ideals of our religion. This is bhakti too, the kind we may have been exposed to and wondered about since childhood. For those who

are inclined, there may be formal worship, prayer, invocation, chanting, ritual and other traditional devotional activities.

In whatever way it is occurring, the process of bhakti is the same – our emotions are willfully harnessed toward an ideal, which moves energy through our nervous system, purifying and opening it.

When longing is strongly expressed and then released in stillness deep within us, things happen. Answers start coming. *Practices* come to us. Then we begin to open and want to go higher. Then there will be more opening, more answers, more practices. Like that. Bhakti works like magic as it spirals up. It corresponds with the opening of our nervous system. The human nervous system is the gateway to the infinite.

We can see out into the infinite through our nervous system as it becomes purified. And God/Truth will manifest in our nervous system as increasing bhakti in our heart. God, the guru, and bhakti inside us are all the same thing. It is the infinite responding to our inner cry, coming in through the gateway of our nervous system.

Spiritual desire comes up naturally as our nervous system opens, and as our practices are married to our expanding desire. It is a personal process for each of us, yet it is quite easy to recognize in its different stages. Not abstract or nebulous at all.

Directed desire is the essential ingredient in all spiritual practices. It is bhakti that gets us to our meditation seat each day. Then we easily favor the procedure of our practice. Daily yoga practices are designed to open us up steadily over time. Then we have a constantly purifying and opening nervous system, a growing desire for truth and enlightenment, and we are always hankering to go to the next level of unfoldment. So it goes, up and up.

Ishta – The Chosen Ideal

While we know that desire leads to action, we also know that desire left on its own without the benefit of an underlying vision will be pulling us in many directions at the same time. Our emotion is a powerful fuel, but if it is not provided with a reliable channel for its expression through desire, not much good will come from it. The mind is also involved in this, because it is our emotions expressing as desires

that inform the mind. From there, it is onward to action. So, you see, it all begins with how we point our emotions. It is about what we favor with our emotional energy. Desire is always seeking more, and it is up to us to provide that more in the form of an inspired vision.

In the first chapter, we used the word *vision* to represent the channel for desire leading to action. This implies that desire can be focused through a fixed lens. While in theory this is true, especially in worldly endeavors, it is a simplification when we consider the much broader scope of *human spiritual transformation*. In that case, we are not seeking a particular material outcome, but the purification and opening of the human nervous system so it can express its full potential.

In considering a systematic approach to bhakti, the cultivation of unending desire for spiritual realization, the concept of *ideal* provides the necessary flexibility. The Sanskrit word *Ishta* means *chosen ideal*, and offers the range of expression we need to travel the continuum of bhakti from where we are today to the highest reaches of devotion, and the

resulting outpouring of divine love coming from within us.

What do we mean by *chosen ideal*? Our well-meaning religious institutions may interpret it to mean the god or ideal of our religion: Jesus, Krishna, Buddha, Allah, etc. This may be so if that is what resonates in our heart. But our chosen ideal can come in other forms also.

It can be a dedicated inquiry, such as, “Who am I, and what am I doing here?” Or the simple question, “Is there more than this that I am living now?”

It can be an affirmation, such as, “I will know the truth and the truth will set me free.”

It can be an ideal of discrimination, such as, “This is truth, and this is not true.”

And so on...

A chosen ideal is chosen by us, no one else. It is entirely personal. It can be a blend of ideals, such as the icons and ideals of our religion mixed with inquiry, affirmation and discrimination. And we will carry these through life, even as our ideal expands as we undergo the inner purification and opening associated with the ongoing process of human spiritual transformation.

Personality will play a role in one's chosen ideal. Those who are demonstratively devotional by nature may be inclined toward outer forms of devotion like worshipful conduct, singing, spiritual dancing, etc. Others who may be more analytical may be inclined toward introspection in stillness, self-inquiry and other less visible devotional acts.

Regardless of the choice of ishta, there will be devotion involved as we become committed to the course we have chosen. As our commitment deepens, our chosen ideal will evolve and change over time, according to our rising realization of truth. The more clearly we see what is emerging within us, the more concrete it will become, and our ideal will continue to evolve toward progressively more advanced stages.

Before the openings occur, there can be a tendency toward a more rigid view of the chosen ideal. This is certainly the case in most of the religions, where the ideal is often chosen for us rather than by us. And even in the individual there can be an inflexibility in the relationship with a chosen ideal. It is the difference between an icon representing a fixed view, or the same icon facilitating steadily expanding inner experience. Spiritual practices such as deep

This is the end of the reading sample. Thank you for taking a look. To obtain a complete copy of “Bhakti and Karma Yoga,” please visit:

<http://www.aypsite.com/books-bky.html>

A list of other books by Yogani can be found on the next page...

Further Reading and Support

Yogani is an American spiritual scientist who, for forty years, has been integrating ancient techniques from around the world which cultivate human spiritual transformation. The approach is non-sectarian, and open to all. His books include:

Advanced Yoga Practices – Easy Lessons for Ecstatic Living (Two Volumes)

Two large user-friendly textbooks providing over 400 detailed lessons on the AYP integrated system of practices.

The Secrets of Wilder – A Novel

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- *Bhakti and Karma Yoga – The Science of Devotion and Liberation Through Action*
- *Eight Limbs of Yoga – The Structure and Pacing of Self-Directed Spiritual Practice*
- *Retreats – Fast Track to Freedom – A Guide for Leaders and Practitioners*
- *Liberation – The Fruition of Yoga*

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