

Seva, The Spiritual Practice of Selfless Service

Seva (spiritual service and also called karma yoga) is one of the best ways to prepare a person to receive divine grace. It is not possible to fill pot full of mud with pure water without first dumping the mud. People suffer and face obstacles and dis-ease on account of their own karmas (their actions). To be free from the plight of karma and to create punya (merit) needed to receive good things, seva is the best remedy. Spiritual service offered to a Guru is very powerful to free a person from the situations that bind them in the world because by the Guru's grace the practice of Seva works inwardly on them as they work to complete certain outer tasks. It is said that if a person desires something in the world, that they must work to give what they desire to others. This is the only lasting path to fulfillment. Spiritual service offered with compassion and selflessness frees a person from all ills.



Seva is also the best way for a student to prepare himself to receive spiritual initiation which flows to the student through the Guru once the student has become prepared. Karma Yoga is a great way to enhance the spiritual life of a person. The skills acquired through selfless service help a person to find peace and success in their lives. But more importantly the process helps a person bring up and resolve the subconscious seeds of karma. It is a process of revealing and releasing what is impure within so that the pure qualities of Love and Compassion remain. Only when these qualities have been firmly established through the practice of selfless service, can the process of Yoga truly begin. Seva is a requisite step for seekers on the spiritual path, because it conditions the mind to respond without attachment or ego. When the ego is reduced, then the deeper practices of Yoga facilitate the release of dark thought and feelings and open the door to transcendental peace and bliss. Without the qualities of Love and Compassion, it is not safe to practice the higher practices of Yoga, because without these qualities it is not possible to release the inner karmas as they arise. When people try to practice Yoga before they are ready, the process will increase attachment, ego, suffering, and dis-ease, because the soul is not prepared to face the negative impression of the subconscious mind with detachment as they invariably arise through practice. It is quite possible in this case to act on the impressions as they arise and to create much more difficult karma to be face in the future. This is why a traditional Guru will always test a student over time offering volunteer opportunities, before he gives initiations or deeper spiritual teachings.

For those who have not done service for a Guru before, it is a unique experience, which can have profound effects to help a person overcome their karmas. Service opens a person to the shakti of the Lord which flows through the Guru, because it opens an energetic channel from student to teacher. It is a truly magnificent opportunity for sincere seekers to intensify and speed up their spiritual practice. As a Guru assigns tasks to the student, the student works on the karmas which bind them. The Guru may offer specific outer tasks, but the real work being done is always within. As a student works, many challenges will arise from within (doubts, fears, attachments, confusion, etc.). A wise student realizes that this is how Seva works to benefit them and perseveres with faith that the Guru is leading them toward greater realization and great abilities. Those who persist and see the tasks assigned by their Guru to successful completion, also begin to overcome the inner qualities which had bound them. By the grace of the Guru, the karmic patterns are revealed to the devotee and overcome in time. Though there may be physical work at hand, a karma yogi should always remember that the inner work is what is important to the Guru. In karma yoga, it may not possible to have external success in tasks unless inner transformations are had.