

Seva is a Sanskrit word meaning selfless service, and perhaps considered the most important part of any spiritual practice. It lies at the heart of the path of karma yoga—selfless action—and asks us to serve others with no expectation of outcome.

It is a challenging task. While many of us feel drawn to help others, our thinking mind, or the ego, tends to drop in and voice its own thoughts. Perhaps we secretly hope for recognition or acknowledgment for our good deeds. We may long for others to think better of us based on these good actions. Regardless, the ego steps in, and the brain gets muddy.

The ego can also judge how we serve others. It may tell us that some types of service are more noble than others. *“Oh, you help your neighbor once a week with her groceries? Well, I run events that serve 500 people...”* This is the kind of mind chatter that may encourage us to search for glory, and prevent us from serving where we are most needed. And if we don't receive that external validation, we may be disappointed that our efforts didn't culminate in the life-changing results we wished for. Either way, our thoughts are often ready to tell us that we have, in some way, failed.

But when we serve with the essence of seva in mind, we begin to see the myriad of ways the ego is standing in front of the heart. This lends way to the opportunity to step over the former and listen more deeply to the latter. Seva ultimately becomes a practice of purification.

It is also in listening to the heart that we begin to understand that our innermost nature is a giving one. While the ego mind may tell

Seva - continued

us we need to force ourselves to serve, it's when we shift into the spirit of seva that we realize we are *naturally* kind. In other words, we are *naturally* moved to serve others. In this way, our service becomes less contrived and more authentic and purposeful.

How can it not? The path of karma yoga and seva put us in touch with our svadharma, or **individual purpose**. When we start to ask for guidance from within, we are moved to act from the depths of the greater dharma.

“Svadharma is something completely natural to you, that you could do to benefit others,” says **Sri Swami Satchidananda**. “Feel the unseen hand directing you every minute. Know that [what comes from that place] is always unplanned by you, and is for the good of everybody.”

Helping Other Through Yajna

In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Krishna tells Arjuna, “Dedicate all your actions to me. Then your mind will rest in the Self, free of the wishing and selfishness fever.”

Yajna means selfless sacrifice. Practically speaking, yajna is the dedication of all the fruits of our actions to the well-being of all. It is a beautiful way to practice seva in daily moments, and reminds us that we can spend our whole life in service—not just those moments the mind deems appropriate.

For example, before we begin our work, we can dedicate our creative output to be directed towards serving others. Before we eat, we can ask that the benefits of the nourishing food be shared with all. Before we sleep, we can ask that our rest make other lives better. These moments can be found everywhere. Throughout our entire lives we can perform yajna, reminding ourselves that we are all interconnected, and that we are committed to serving others.

Asking Within

Seva - continued

The only way to sidestep the ego and serve selflessly is to go within and listen for guidance on how to serve—this is easier said than done if we've yet to recognize that inner voice. While that voice becomes clearer in times of **meditation**, stillness, or **prayer**, sometimes the best thing to do is simply to start serving wherever we can. Often times, when we show our willingness to the universe to listen through our actions, she will answer us in ways we can't help but hear.

Letting Go of Attachments

The ego-mind loves to judge. It can tell us that we are not serving enough or that we need better results, and all of this quickly leads to exhaustion. The ego may also say we deserve more recognition, or that we should post about our deeds on social media. This is the job of the ego—to maintain a sense of "I" and "me." Instead of waging war on our judgement, we can simply notice the thoughts that arise about our desire to serve, contemplate why they are arising, and bring our awareness back to the heart, which we can trust to lead us in the way of seva.

Through the practice of seva, we are able to implement service into all areas of our lives. How will you share your heart?