

Use a Symbol to Convert Emotions

Ram (James Swartz)

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Cathy: Hi, Ram. I have been listening to your *Bhakti Yoga* DVD. The part where you mention turning love to devotion by choosing a symbol was really interesting. What came to mind was trees. They are rooted on the earth (grounded), they are always reaching for the sky (God), they withstand the weather (emotions), they stay on course, they stand tall and proud and they come in all shapes and sizes (like us). I have always had a special spot for them, even once commenting that they have genders, as I could see distinctly which ones were the males and which the females (and no, I was not on drugs then!!). Is this a good idea? I know you mention to start a little altar. I'm not sure how this would apply, but your feedback would be appreciated.

Ram: This is an excellent idea. Get a very nice picture of a tree or a small bonsai, and make an altar around it. Burn a candle, incense, put flowers on it. See it as a symbol of yourself. Get on your hands and knees and prostrate before it. Do it with real feeling and ignore the thoughts about how crazy it is to do this. Your tree symbolism is excellent. I really love it. Then try to find the self symbol in other natural objects because everything here can serve as a self symbol. Why? Because it is the self. Why? The self is the essence of every form. Be sure to include your own body in this meditation – and the body of all humans. Another fact about trees that you can contemplate and adore is the fact that they purify the air that we breathe. With them and their other plant cousins we cannot live, just as we cannot live without the self.

Another idea that just came to me is that you like your work. If it is because you like helping people, meditate on the feeling of helping and see it as devotion. Then try to extend the feeling when you think of John or your family, i.e. when the desire and anger comes up. If you had a helping, serving attitude toward these people, not just old sick people, you could not get angry and that anger *vasana* would burn up.

See John and your family as helpless sick people who cannot help being the nasty people that they seem to be to you. So like that you build a positive *vasana* and feed it until it crowds out the negative *vasana*. If you were totally negative, there is nothing you could do. But you are only occasionally negative. You are also positive. So build up the positive.

Cathy: By the way, I have prepared my altar. I am very excited. It was so interesting seeing it unfold. I had no spare cash until next Thursday (pay day) but I did not necessarily want to wait till then (today is Saturday), so I put the idea out there and waited to see it unfold. I suddenly saw this Japanese gardens calendar I have on the wall and it dawned on me that it might contain a nice picture. Voila! I found one with some beautiful trees on a mountain with a path in the middle going upwards. Very significant and appropriate, I thought. So I stuck it on a corner of my bedroom, which is actually perfect for my little altar. Then I remembered that I have given my son a cane basket which he is not using, so I got that, put a nice white scarf on it, got some candles and incense and all I need is to find some fresh flowers and I'm done! All in one afternoon. God is good... So when I meditate and pray tonight before I go to sleep, I am going to ponder the self idea from your DVD and see the trees as symbols of the self.

