

## 18. The Lord and the Devotee

*All animals have a modicum of intelligence*

*To secure their needs and enjoy life;*

*If man remains at the same level*

*He is not a man but an animal.*

*The intelligence that reveals God is all sufficing;*

*Of what avail is a mass of nondescript knowledge?*

*The knowledge that does not reveal God is no knowledge at all.*

*It merely serves to feed the belly.*

EMBODIMENTS of love! Every man is a creature of likes and dislikes, of attachment and aversion the pairs of opposites described in Vedanta as *Dvandva*. In Vedantic parlance, these are called *Sannikarsha* and *Viprakarsha*. *Sannikarsha* refers to the quality which attracts to oneself a distant object or being; *Viprakarsha* makes a near person or object remote. Making use of these two qualities, man leads his life.

*Bhakti* (devotion) is the highest expression of *Sannikarsha*. The term *Bhakti* is derived from the root *Bhaj*, which means "to serve". Another meaning of *Bhakti* is "friendship coupled with fear". But true *Bhakti* is not based on service or a mixture of friendship and fear. True devotion stems from the consciousness that *jivatma* (the individual soul) is a spark of the Divine. *Bhakti* can be rightly understood only when this basic relationship is fully recognised and accepted.

As long as God is regarded as different from the devotee, the true nature of *Bhakti* cannot be understood. It is this feeling of difference which ultimately leads to loss of faith in God, despite the practice of *bhajans*, *japas*, *dhyana* and *yoga*. One who regards himself as different from God can never become a true devotee. He must consider himself divine in substance, even as a spark is not different from the fire from which it came.

### **Purity of heart**

God is the embodiment of Love. Man, who is an image of the Divine, should have love as his basic quality. Why, then, is man infected with qualities like hatred, envy, pride and self-conceit? The reason is man's heart gets polluted by his love being turned towards external objects.

The image of the Lord cannot be imprinted on a heart that is impure. It is only when man realises the omnipresence and omniscience of God that he can comprehend the nature of Divinity. Only then will he recognise the Divinity within him.

To experience the joy that springs from a devotee who has developed *Sannikarsha Bhakti*, one has to show love and reverence towards elders and serve them with humility and respect. Towards equals, one should show love and friendliness. Towards the young, one should extend sympathy and loving care. By these means, we demonstrate our love and regard for the divine that is in each of them and in us.

### **Example of the *Gopis***

*The gopikas* of Brindavan knew devotion in this exalted form and 'exemplified it in all their actions. They experienced the divine every moment of their lives and showed to the world what bliss is got from pure devotion to God.

*The gopikas* looked upon *Bhakti* as greater than *Mukti* (liberation). They regarded the love of God as sweeter than anything, and so nectarine as to confer immortality. The bliss experienced from *Bhakti* is ineffable. *Bhakti* does not call for arduous spiritual practices or severe disciplines of any kind. There is no need to perform *yagas* or *yajnas* (religious sacrifices). The path of *Karma* or *Jnana* is rigorous and hard for common folk. The only easy and sure means for ordinary people to realise God, without regard to their caste, nationality, sex or any other qualification, and without their having to practise various austerities and penances, is intense devotion and love of God. *The gopikas* experienced the continuous presence of God within them and outside them. They showed that such sublime love was possible for ordinary persons with little knowledge of the scriptures or spiritual disciplines. They demonstrated the inextricable link between the Divine and the individual.

Where there is deep faith, there is intense love. Where there is love, there is *sraddha* (earnestness). Through earnestness, the *Jnana* (higher knowledge) is gained. This knowledge enables the practice of *Sadhana*. Hence, without faith and love, it is not possible to realise God. The *Gopikas* were prepared to face any trouble and go through any ordeal to obtain the grace of Krishna.

### **Divinity is present in all objects in creation**

Uddhava, who went to Repalle to teach the *gopikas* the path of yoga for God-realisation, found that their single-minded devotion to Krishna did not permit them to think of anything else. They saw Krishna in every plant, tree, hill or dale and were immersed in Krishna Consciousness. They experienced the unity underlying all creation. Today, instead of unity, we have divisions of every kind. Forgetting the divinity that is present in everything in the universe, man is promoting differences and barriers between man and man, and nation and nation and subjecting himself to numerous difficulties.

Divinity is present in every object in creation, from the ant to *Brahma*. Ignoring this basic truth, man is involving himself in endless problems. God is treated as a convenience, to be sought when in trouble and forgotten at other times. The Divine is not to be sought in some far off place. He is the indweller in our heart. When this eternal, divine light is shining within us, it is a mark of ignorance to seek for illumination elsewhere outside.

### **The Krishna Avatar**

*The Krishna avatar* has been described as a *Purna Avatar*---an incarnation with the plenitude of divine attributes. All *avatars* are equally divine and it is pointless to describe one incarnation as partial and another as full. The form and role of each *avatar* are dependent on the circumstances and the needs which led to the advent. *Avatars* are not to be judged in quantitative terms. Qualitatively, they are all essentially one. All *avatars* are "full" in fact. Only their forms and names differ according to the circumstances in which they appeared.

For the *Krishna avatar*, for instance, the pundits have offered different interpretations from the name alone. The letters in the word Krishna *Ka, ra, sha, na* and *a* -- have been interpreted as signifying the glorious attributes of Krishna. 'Ka' represents "*Kamalakantha*," the Lord of Lakshmi. Other meanings given to the letter are: "*Kamaleswara*" and "*Kamalagarbha*"--the lord

of the lotus and the one from whose navel the lotus has issued. He is also known as "Kamalabandhavudu" the Kinsman of the lotus. The inner significance of these interpretations is that when divinity manifests within us, the heart blooms like a lotus before the sun. "Ka" thus symbolises the sun principle also. "Ra" represents the principle of delight. "Sha" represents Vishnu, the source of all wealth and prosperity. "Na" signifies the *Narasimha avatara*, the combination of man and animal in an integral unity. "A" reveals the *Akshara swarupa* of the Lord, His imperishable and eternal quality.

Going by the letters in the name alone, scholars have derived the divine attributes of Krishna as *avatar*. Some others have regarded Krishna as the very embodiment of *Ananda* (bliss).

### **Paramatma and Jivatma**

The nature of the Divine, however, is not to be determined by the name of a particular *Avatar*. Names are related to birth, and any meaning may be attached to a name. But the Divine is birthless. It is present at all times and everywhere. Men may describe the Divine in innumerable ways according to their experience and understanding. These are subjective expressions and do not reveal the real nature of the Divine. Each individual's description is limited by the nature and level of his experience. "The mind and speech turn back, unable to grasp the nature of the Divine", says the Upanishad.

What is important is to recognise that there is no basic difference between the human and the Divine. They are integrally-related to each other like the object and its image. Take, for instance, a seed. There are two halves in it. It is only when the two halves are unbroken, that the seed can sprout when planted in the soil. Likewise the tree of Creation comes into existence when the *Paramatma* (the Omni-will) and the *Jivatma* (the individual soul) come together. Without God, there can be no devotee. Without devotee, there is no God. Even as God creates devotees, devotees also "create" God. This is known as *Dhyana* (meditation). Meditating on the name and form of God constantly, the devotee strives to have the vision of God in the chosen form. Man alone is endowed with this capacity to give a name and form to God and to realise it.

But how many are conscious of the preciousness of this human birth? Few have any gratitude for the blessings they enjoy from Providence. In this respect, even dogs are better than man. The dog's gratitude towards one who has given it a few crumbs lasts all through its life. The dogs may well ask: "Oh man! How are you better than us? You are lacking in elementary gratitude. All your knowledge, power and position have no meaning if you have no character and have no sense of gratitude. You are consumed by selfishness. Even your worship is tainted by selfishness. It is not done out of pure love of God."

### **Unity in diversity**

Selfishness will not go as long as man identifies himself with the body and does not realise the divinity in him. Diversity in creation is an obvious fact. No two human beings, not even twins, are identical. But diversity should not lead to differences and conflicts. We must learn to see the unity that underlies the diversity. This unity is based on the divinity that is present in everything in the universe.

The realisation of this unity can come, only through firm faith in God. Prahlada, even as a child of six, was filled with love of God and could teach even his father profound truths. For God-realisation, neither age nor caste, neither power nor position matters. Valmiki was not a man of high birth. Nandanar was an outcaste. The Gajendra (Lord of the elephants) was an animal.

Dhruva was a child. Sabari was an illiterate old woman. All these realised the divine by intense devotion and achieved spiritual eminence.

Hanuman was a monkey. But his devotion to Rama was such that when the *Rakshasas* asked him who he was, he was content to declare himself a humble servant of Rama. Today if some one is asked who he is, he proclaims the string of degrees to his credit. Some advertise their past achievements as ex-ministers or ex-something else! All these are ephemeral attainments. One's true worth is his *AtmaSwarupa* (divine essence). One should strive to realise it and manifest it.

Today we observe the birthday of Krishna as *Avatar*. In his own time there were many who did not recognise the divinity of Krishna. Kamsa and Sisupala underrated Krishna's powers. There have always been from age to age detractors of the *Avatar*. Krishna is described as *Navaneetha Chora* (One who stole butter). What is the butter that Krishna stole? It is the heart of the devotee. The devotee offers his heart to Krishna and Krishna accepts it. How can this be described as stealing? Only when a person takes away something from another without his knowledge can he be called a thief. But Krishna asks for your love, receives it from you when you offer it. The term "thief" has been applied to Krishna by devotees out of the fullness of their love. It has no pejorative significance at all. According to the level of their understanding and devotion, devotees describe God in different ways. These are expressions of subjective experience. The Divine transcends all limitations and attributes.

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