

17. Bhaktha Sakhaa Bhagavan!

Many call themselves devotees, but this claim means nothing by itself. It is like addressing a letter to someone. Unless it is acknowledged by the recipient, you cannot be sure whether the letter reached the addressee and how he reacted to it. Likewise, whether one is a devotee or not should be declared by the Lord Himself.

This is what Krishna declared regarding Arjuna. He told Arjuna: "You are my devotee and you are my friend." Arjuna did not declare to Krishna: "I am your devotee." Krishna was not content to declare: "Arjuna, you are my devotee." Why did He go on to say: "You are my friend?" Would it not have been sufficient if Krishna had declared, "you are my friend"? Why should he say, "you are my devotee"? In this declaration, there is a profound spiritual significance. This will be clear only when we practice the spiritual life.

If merely the Lord were to say to Arjuna, "you are my friend" his ego will get inflated and he will take undue liberties with Krishna. If He were to say, "My dear, you are my devotee," he will be extremely submissive. A kind of fear will be instilled in him. Fear should not be instilled; nor should he be encouraged to take excessive liberties. Hence, the terms devotee and friend, were used by Krishna. "You are my friend. You may be free with me up to a point. You are my devotee. So observe certain restraints. Exercise control over yourself in your devotion."

Ramakrishna Paramahansa, the master

In dealing with devotees, the Lord has to maintain a balance. Here is an example from the life of Ramakrishna Paramahansa.

Whether in olden times or nowadays, there have always been some persons who indulged in calumny against good men and derided the good actions done by them. Ramakrishna's disciples had to go by boat across the Ganga to get whatever was required for his *ashram*. Ramakrishna used to assign different tasks each day for the young disciples in the *ashram*. One of them was a gentle youth known as Brahmananda. Vivekananda was an aggressive and short-tempered youth. One day Brahmananda went by boat to bring provisions for the *ashram*. As soon as they saw an ochre-robed person in the boat, the other passengers got very indignant. They started abusing Ramakrishna Prahmahamsa in various ways. They remarked: "He is a *pseudo-sanyasi*. He is spoiling all young men," and so on. Brahmananda silently shed tears, remembering the teachings of the master. During the trip he was apprehensive about what might happen. On the return trip, the earlier story was repeated. He listened silently to the abuse levelled against Ramakrishna and did not venture to quarrel with them. After his return, Ramakrishna asked him to narrate what all had happened. After listening to Brahmananda's pathetic story, Swami Ramakrishna burst out: "How could you remain silent while your *guru* was being reviled? You have committed a sin. You are not fit to remain in the *ash rain*." Narender (Vivekananda) who was standing nearby, listened to the angry words of the Master. Brahmananda fell at the feet of the Master and pleaded for forgiveness.

Vivekananda's reaction on the criticism of his *guru*

The next day, it was Vivekananda's turn to go by boat to buy provisions. As soon as they saw an ochre-robed youth in the boat, the other passengers started abusing Ramakrishna Paramahamsa. One rich man accused Ramakrishna of spoiling young men by his teachings. Narender remembered what the *guru* had said the previous day, rose from his seat and gave a slap on the

cheek of the reviler. Narendar was a strong, powerful person. He told the traducer: "Will you keep your mouth shut? You may have your likes and dislikes and we have ours. What right have you to condemn us? If you do not keep silent, I shall hurl you into the Ganga." Everyone in the boat got alarmed that the irate youth might actually carry out the threat. All of them became silent. Vivekananda brought the provisions and returned by boat to the *ashram*. On the return journey no one ventured to open his mouth.

Ramakrishna asked Narendar to relate what all happened during his boat trip. Narendar related what all had happened and said: "All of them kept their mouths shut after I had slapped one of them for criticising the *guru*." Immediately Swami Ramakrishna observed: "Chi! Chi! How unbecoming of you to dishonour the robe you are wearing by losing your temper, exhibiting hatred and causing hurt to a person. You are unfit to stay in my *ashram*. What does it matter what anyone says? How does it affect us? Their praise or censure will not touch us.

Narendar pleaded: "Swami! I was listening yesterday to what you had said to Brahmananda. Because of that, I behaved in this manner. You took him to task for remaining passive. You take me to task for retaliating. I am unable to understand what is the proper thing to do."

To each according to his needs

Ramakrishna explained his divergent reactions by an example. He said, "There are four tyres for a car. What should be the pressure in the front tyre and the rear tyres have been laid down. If there is excessive pressure in some tyres, it should be reduced. If some tyres have low pressure, they have to be inflated. Only then the car will run smoothly. Narendar suffers from excessive pressure. He requires to be deflated. Brahmananda is excessively weak, so he has to be inflated." The teachings of the masters vary according to the condition of the disciples.

Likewise, in the *Bhagavad Gita* or other scriptures, statements might appear which seem to contradict each other. These differences relate to differences in circumstances and requirements of the person concerned. You should not contrast one statement of the Swami with another and ask why there is a contradiction between the different statements. In the *Gita* itself, in one place, Krishna stresses the need for action, at another the adherence to *Dharma*, and in another place commends renunciation of all *Dharma* and urges complete surrender to the Lord. These apparent contradictions are not contradictions. The teaching varies according to the state of spiritual development of the person concerned and the situation in which he is placed.

The inner significance of the great teachings of the *Avatars* and sages should be properly understood before any criticism is attempted. No room should be given for logic chopping or verbal controversies. You have to observe only two things: Adhere to Truth. Cultivate Love. Develop the feeling-"Love is my Supreme Lord. Truth is my sovereign. I do not need anyone else." You have to recognise that these Divine attributes, Truth and Love, exist equally in all beings. Develop the sense of equal-mindedness and equal regard for all. This is the true *sadhana*. Cultivate love for the Divine and share that love with all beings.

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*Those attached to God, aspiring for God, aware of God, adoring
God have certain distinct marks by which they can be identified.
Such people have a compassionate heart. If a person turns the*

rosary on the fingers, and is intently engaged in watching the tip of his nose unmindful of the distress that dances around him, we can at best name him a sloth, that is all. Get up, place the rosary in its bag, and activate yourselves in relieving distress--that is the true spiritual path. Do not waste all your years with stone images, pictures or idols. Learn to see in every living, vital, active person, the embodiment of all energy, all beauty, all beneficence, namely, God. God is subtler than ether, filling the smallest crevice with his majesty. Know this and serve his manifestations, wherever you meet them.

Sathya Sai Baba