

19. Prema and Bhakti

DEAR STUDENTS! God is the embodiment of Love. The Cosmos is permeated by the Divine. Hence, the Cosmos is enveloped in love. Men in their narrow-mindedness are unable to recognise the nature of this infinite, all-embracing Love principle.

Man views love from three stand-points and experiences it in three ways. (1) Love relating to the body; (2) Love in relation to the mind; (3) Spiritual love.

Love assumes three forms according to the three qualities, *Tamas*, *Rajas* and *Satwa*. All the attachments and differences arising in the world, and the processes of birth, growth and dissolution, are based on love.

When you examine the nature of love, while coming together or experiencing separation, or in happiness and sorrow, the need for cultivating equal-mindedness in the different situation becomes apparent.

Love based on physical relation is considered by the *sastras* as *Tamasic* and as the lowest of the three types of love. It manifests itself as attachment to one's own kith and kin or possessions and is confined to a narrow circle.

The second category of love combines self-centered love with love for others for the purpose of gaining one's ends. These persons pretend to have love for their superiors or people in power and thereby seek to achieve their aims. They adore men of affluence or power and by their obsequious service to them they try to win favours from them. This is *Rajoguna prema* (love that is prompted by self-centred urges.)

People with *Satwic* love are fearless

The third category is pure *Satwic* love. In contemporary conditions, this type of love is rare. People filled with *satwic* love recognise that the same Divine is present in all beings, and consider that without love towards all beings life is meaningless. By their universal love, they proclaim the truth about the omnipresence of the Divine. Their vision is spiritual, as they see the Divine in all beings. Such persons are fearless like lions, which roam about without any apprehensions of danger from any source. The person with bodily vision behaves like sheep, steeped in fear. The one who has acquired the spiritual vision has all his senses, mind and intellect under the control of the *Atma*. There is no harm in pursuing one's worldly duties while having Self-realisation as the goal of life. Young people must cultivate this spiritual attitude from their student days.

In the pursuit of the spiritual, one should not have any rewards in view. One who has mercenary motives becomes a wage-earner. He cannot be a master. One who works for wages will not have a deep interest in the work and what he does will not be pure or perfect. He will only be a clock-watcher. He considers himself an outsider in relation to his job. On the other hand, in his own house see how his wife and children work. They receive no wages. Their work is filled with love, purity and earnestness. They are masters of themselves and work in freedom. One who prays to God for something in return is like a wage-labourer. The devotee who regards God as his own kinsman and serves the Lord is like a master of the household. Conduct yourselves as masters and not as mercenary employees.

Three paths of discipline

To develop this kind of devotion, three kinds of disciplines have been indicated. They are' (1) The *Matsya* (fish) path. (2)The *Mriga* (animal) path. (3)The *Kurma* (tortoise) path. The fish can live only in water. It cannot survive on land. The animal can live only on land and cannot survive in water. The tortoise is an amphibian and can survive both in water and on land. The devotee following the fish path practises his *sadhana* with concentration for the sake of himself and his family. The devotee adhering to the animal path can practise his *sadhana* in solitude and not in a crowd. One individual, for instance, who had a large family, sat down for meditation in his home. As one child or another was disturbing him, he locked himself in a room and started meditation. But he was disturbed by frequent knocks on the door by some one or other. He betook himself to a forest and began meditating under a tree. But his meditation was disturbed by the dropping from the birds on the tree. Disgusted with the disturbances at home and in the forest he felt: that: the best thing was to end his existence. He was unable to realise that God was present in everything and cultivate forbearance. He exemplifies the devotee with the *Rajoguna* predominant.

To be able to concentrate wherever one may be is the mark of the devotee with *satwic* quality. Whether in the midst: of a crowd or alone, he is able to practise concentration. If anyone disturbs his meditation, he looks upon the disturbance as coming from God and accepts it.

It is necessary to understand the deeper meanings of Vedantic injunctions. Today people tend to go by the letter of the scriptures. The words of the scriptures should be interpreted and understood in the context of the prevailing time and circumstances. Then their real meaning will be clear.

Precept and practice should go together

For instance, persons who take a pledge to observe certain disciplines in all circumstances, fail to do so when the circumstances are not congenial.

There is a story to illustrate this. Once all the deer in a forest held a conference. They argued as follows: "Do the dogs have as much strength as we have? If we use our antlers against the dogs, they can be disembowelled. If we kick them with our legs, they will collapse. We are more fleet-footed than the dogs. While running we can jump over ditches and obstacles, which they cannot. We are in every way superior to the dogs. Why, then, should we be afraid of them? Henceforth we should not be afraid of dogs. We should face them courageously." All the deer came to this decision.

Hardly had they come to this resolution when the distant bark of a dog was heard. Immediately, not one of the deer stayed on the spot. All of them took to their heels and fled.

What was their resolution at their conference and what was their action later? The behaviour of those who preach Vedanta these days is very much on a par with that of the deer in the stow. No one adheres to what he says or preaches. More than listening to spiritual discourses, one must try to practise at least a part of .what one learns. Vedanta is being expounded at many places, not to speak of the discourses on the Gita. But how many understand the real spirit of the Gita and act up to its message?

Maintain unity in thought, word and deed

There was a pandit who was expounding the Gita to a king. When the pandit was explaining the *sloka* in the Gita in which Sri Krishna says that He will look after the welfare, both here and in the hereafter, of those who worship Him with one-pointed devotion, the king found that the pandit did not behave as if he believed in the assurance given by Krishna. He was expounding the Gita to the king to secure a reward from him and not out of conviction in the teachings of the Gita. When the pandit realised this he stopped going to the king.

Many scholars wax eloquent about what is said in the Gita, but how many of them practise the teachings of the Gita seriously? It is because of this dichotomy between preaching and practice that spiritual teachings have got into bad odour and are being treated with little regard. Only when the feelings emanating from the heart, the words coming out of the mouth and the actions one performs are all in perfect harmony will one's life be based on truth.

Cultivate lasting bliss of Divine love

Students! You need not make much effort to grow grass. But to grow a useful crop you have to labour hard. Likewise, it is no great achievement to experience the trivial and transient pleasures of mundane existence. It is like growing grass. You must strive to cultivate the nectarine, lasting bliss of Divine love. Those who aspire for such love are not easy to find. All appear as devotees. But one who has experienced the Divine Principle will not go after sensuous pleasures. Devotion these days appears more as a way of spending one's time rather than as the royal road to the eternal mansion of the divine.

Education is no doubt necessary for living in the world. But you should be concerned about the basic purpose of life. Education is not for earning a living alone but to acquire a way of life. Whatever you may learn, you should try to put into practice at least some part of what you have learnt. Treating life as righteous journey, you should devote at least a few minutes every day to thoughts on the true aims of life. Many hours in a day are wasted on selfish pursuits, but not even a few minutes are devoted to contemplation of God. Alas! What misfortune is this!

In the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna called upon Arjuna to regard himself as an instrument of the Divine. Every human being is indeed an instrument. As such, he should carry out his duties, leaving the results to God. Men have to do their duties; success or failure is determined by the Divine. Do not esteem yourself as the doer. Develop the conviction that the Indwelling Spirit in you is directing you and enabling you to act.

Discourse in the Prashanthi Mandir on 27-6-1989.

Bhakti is Prema, unsullied by any tinge of desire for the benefit that flows from it or the fruit or consequence of that love. It is love that knows no particular reason for its manifestation.

It is of the nature of the love of the soul for the Oversoul; the river for the Sea; the creeper for the tree, the star for the sky, the spring for the cliff down which it flows.

It is sweet, in bad times as well as good. It is not like pepper or salt with which you savour your dishes; it is the very bread and butter, the essential substance itself. It is not the pickle, which only lends a

twang to the tongue and helps you to consume a little more of the food.

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