

## CHAPTER XXI

“Arjuna! People think that the worship of God with Form and Attributes is quite enough. This discipline will only be of some help. It will guide the person along the road only for a little while. For the Lord will not condescend to grant Liberation for just this! For, he who aims at Liberation must first give up attachment to the body. Without that, the Atmic stage cannot be attained. The identification with the body is the expression of ignorance. The Atma must be recognised as distinct from the Prakruthi (nature).

“The craving for objective pleasure which is based on the unreal value attached to Prakruthi has to be removed by Dhyanam and Thapas. When that craving is lost, the individual becomes like the dry nut, inside the coconut shell, which becomes loose and unattached both to the shell and the fibre outside it. It does not germinate or sprout again. It

will remain forever without being spoilt. The individual has no more birth and consequent death. That is to say, he will be liberated. Becoming like that dry nut inside the shell is the stage called Jivanmuktha, of Liberation while alive.

“The contemplation of the Godhead as ‘above and beyond all attributes’ is necessary for the attainment of Jivanmukthi. If that is difficult, and beyond your capacity, you can do another thing. Dedicate all worship, all adoration, all Vedic rituals and other vows and vigils with all the fruits that may accrue, to Me. Take Me as the Ultimate Goal, as the Final Aim which transforms all acts into worship. Fix your mind on Me, meditate on Me. I shall then shower My Grace and take you across the Ocean of Change, of Samsara. I shall favour you with the Goal you seek. Arjuna! It is not an easy task to fix your mind steadily on Me. Not everyone can succeed in this. However long the practice, it is hard to keep the mind on Me, without deflecting it towards other things or ideas.

“You might therefore ask, ‘Have we no other means?’ My reply is, ‘Yes, there is.’ Even those who are eager to engage themselves in acts that please Me can get established in the Atmic Consciousness and gain liberation. By means of prayer, recitation of the Name, adoration of the glory, worship, etc., the sins of the past can be destroyed, the inner consciousness purified of impulses and urges. Then the light of wisdom will dawn, leading to liberation from darkness.”

There is great need for readers to ponder over this point, for it is through the weighing of pros and cons that valuable conclusions are reached. Consider for example the difference between Bhakthi, as described in popular usage and Bhakthi as declared by the Lord. Popularly, Bhakthi is described as genuine devotion to the Lord. But it connotes much more than this.

Devotion to the Lord is only a form of discipline to reach the Goal. The seeker should not stop with the acquisition of devotion. He should pay attention not so much to the devotion or love that he has towards the Lord, but to the Love and Grace that the Lord bestows on him! He must be always eager to find out which behaviour of his, what acts of his, will be most pleasing to the Lord, will fill the Lord with Anandam. Inquire about that, yearn for that, carry out the things that will secure that objective—be engaged in acts conducive to gain it. That is real Bhakthi.

But people generally do not follow this ideal of Bhakthi, nor do they think about the implications of that ideal. They pay attention only to the love that the devotee has to the Lord; and, in the process, they do not pay much attention to the Dharma and the Karma which the Lord approves or appreciates! This is why Krishna says, “Karma which pleases the Lord is superior to the karma which fulfils the yearnings of the devotee.” Whatever the devotee does or thinks or plans or observes, he should draw down the Grace of God. He should not be subject to his own will. He should

be in accordance with His Will. The devotee must test every thought and feeling on the touchstone of the Lord’s declared preferences.

The Geetha declares that though a person may have deep devotion to the Lord, he cannot be called a Bhaktha if he lives without regard to the commands of the Lord; that is, the Dharma laid down in the Sastras, which embody His orders, revealed to saints and seers. It is in this sense that Krishna uses the word, *Bhakthimaan*, when He declares in the Geetha, “*Bhakthimaan yah sa me priyah*. (The devotee is very dear to Me.)”

Again, whatever act a Bhaktha does, he should not feel that it is, “mama karma” or “My karma.” Krishna says that it must be conceived as “Karma for the Lord, by the Lord,” “Easwareeya Karma.” Usually people feel that some acts are “theirs” and others are “the Lord’s.” This is not the mark of the true Bhaktha. If all acts are felt as the Lord’s, they will not be tarnished by egoism or the taint of “mine.”

Bhakthi is to be identified as the discipline which removes egoism and the limitations of “I” and “mine.” That is the reason why the Bhaktha is defined by those who know, as one who is Avibhaktha with God, “non separate” from God. At all times and under all conditions, one’s acts and feelings must be God-centred. Instead, if you pray when overwhelmed by misery, worry and loss, “O God! Save me, rescue me from these,” and when they pass, if once again you plunge into objective affairs enslaved by worldly aims, such conduct is reprehensible.

This is the teaching of the Geetha. You should not worship the Lord, as an emergency measure. When the tongue is affected and does not relish food, people seek hot pickles. So too, when grief afflicts, people seek God! This kind of demonstrative devotion is rampant today, perhaps due to the influence of the fundamental hypocrisy of this age. Hollow devotion seeking to exhibit the strength of one's attachment to the Lord is unfortunately evident even among 'great' Sadhakas and persons who have renounced 'everything' for the sake of Him, whom they consider to be their 'All'! For many, Bhakthi is a 'burkha,' a veil, which is worn when on pilgrimage or when approaching elders or when visiting temples. Once they are back home, they discard the veil and with it, all ideas and feelings of reverence for the Lord.

These are but exhibitionist stunts. Bhakthi, however, has to be steady and full. It is the establishment of the mind in the Lord, under all situations at all times. Many assert that all their acts are dedicated to Deva (God) but their attitude shows that they are dedicating them to Deha only. Instead of dedicating them to God, they dedicate them to themselves, the bodies with which they ignorantly identify themselves. They assert, "This I offer to Krishna," but really, it is an offering to their *Puthra* (son). "This is an offering to Rama," they declare. But their urge reveals that it is an offering to their "Raga," (sense of attachment, passion). How can these acts be dignified by the word dedication or offering?

Dedication inspires the body, mind and speech. If what you speak is not approved by the mind, if what is felt in the

mind is not wholeheartedly put into action, then it becomes sheer hypocrisy. Be convinced that the doer, the deed and the doing are all He. Be devoted to Him, rather than to riches, wife and children.

Where your mind attaches itself, there your Bhakthi also stays. Bhakthi is pure as the waters of Ganga. Karma is as the water of the Yamuna. And Jnana is as the Saraswathi, flowing secretly and mysteriously underground and sanctifying itself, by merging with the other two. It is the commingling of these three that is called *Triveni* (the merger of the three). It means the disappearance of the mind, the "becoming-one" of the three Gunas. It brings about the destruction of ego.

However, there are many who are ignorant of these basic facts. They dip in water twice a day and go through the morning, noon and evening rituals, worship the household gods, draw lines of ash or sandal paste on their brows, arms and chest, put dots of saffron on their faces and wear strings of beads and rosaries round their necks and roam about from temple to temple or from one spiritual teacher to another. They circumambulate holy shrines. They attend many discourses, puranic recitals and readings of scriptures. The best we can say about such persons is that they are engaged in good activities. We cannot say they are Bhakthas.

Bhakthi has no relationship with dress and speech. On the basis of mere raiment and religiosity of expression, we cannot call a person "a devotee of the Lord." Bhakthi is a

matter of the inner consciousness, of feeling rather than external behaviour or conduct. Where there is smoke, you can infer there must be fire. But there are some types of fire which do not emit smoke, though there is no smoke which does not originate from fire. There is a possibility that acts will be done without feeling. But you cannot say that all feeling must be expressed through outer show. Even without pomp and outer show, it is possible to have sincere feeling. The pure feeling is the important thing. Mere pompous outer activity is positively harmful to progress if one aspires at all for progress!

The question that Arjuna asked drew this further answer: Of course, there are two different types of Bhakthas: the *Saguna Bhaktha* and the *Nirguna Bhaktha*, the Votary of the Formful One and the Votary of the Formless. Among the devotees, the Aartha (distressed), the Aartha-arthi (the poor) and the Jijnasu (the inquirer) are all eager about the Nameful and the Formful aspects of Godhead. Just as for every auspicious act the right foot is placed first, the right foot of Nirguna Bhakthi must be used for the attainment of Liberation. That is the “all-auspicious.” That is to say, the sadhana of the Form-less Godhead alone gives illumination. Both aspects have value and are indispensable. How long can anyone have one foot inside and another outside? Even if that were possible, of what avail is it? So, Saguna Bhakthi has to be adopted as sadhana, and Nirguna Bhakthi is the goal to be reached.

You can either see the whole universe as God, the whole Viswa (universe) as Visweswara (Lord of the universe) or, you can see Viswa and Visweswara as separate and distinct. But both are the same. You may see the cloth as yarn or you may see ‘yarn and cloth’ as separate entities. But whether you realise it or not, yarn is cloth. Cloth is yarn.

To see yarn and cloth as distinct, is the Saguna Upasana, the worship of God with attributes. To see yarn as included in the cloth and the cloth as a collection of yarn, and the two as identical, is to worship the Nirguna aspect.

This Bhakthi is not something that can be imported from somewhere. It is not something that is supplied by someone. It does not grow from the ground or fall from the skies. It wells up from oneself, it is selfless attachment to the Lord. The attachment, the love that is inherent in man, should not flow wildly in diverse channels. It should flow uninterruptedly in the direction of God; then, it becomes Bhakthi. This love is in every living being. Birds and beasts, insects and worms, all have love, inspiring them, filling them, to the extent that is appropriate to each. In short, life is love. Love is life.

Each member of all living species has many-sided love towards offspring, parents, comforts and guards its food and drink, its joys and plays. Each of these types of love or attachment has a distinct name suited to the objects on which it is fixed. It is called affection when directed towards offspring. It is named infatuation when it is directed towards

persons who are less fortunate, comradeship when flowing towards equals, attachment when extended to goods or places. It becomes fascination in some cases, friendship in others. When it is directed towards elders and teachers and parents, it becomes reverence, humility, etc.

But Bhakthi is a word that is used only with reference to love as directed to the Lord. When this love is broken up into many streams flowing in many directions and towards many points, it causes only grief, for it gets fixed on mortal things of the moment.

Instead, allow the Love to flow single-pointedly to the Ocean of the Lord's Grace; this is the sadhana called Bhakthi. Why waste life in the salty marsh of Samsara? Strive rather to reach the vast Ocean of Grace. There you realise yourself. You attain *Sath-chith-anandam* (Being-awareness-bliss). How holy is that consummation, how filled with Bliss!

The Gopikas strove and succeeded in this sadhana. Every moment, under every condition, every thought, word and deed of the Gopikas was dedicated to the Lotus Feet of Sri Krishna. That is why the Gopikas are called, "Yogis." When Lord Krishna Himself addresses the Gopis as Yogis, you can gauge the height of spiritual sadhana they had achieved.