

# I

## *The Nectar of Devotion*

*by Swami Tejomayananda*

Devotion is of the Nature of Love. It is not a mere physical attraction to a person or thing, nor is it an intellectual appreciation of their qualities. The abode of Love is the heart. Thus it is not possible to understand the nature of love through intellectual analysis or logical reasoning alone. Love is a treasure that each of us already has. A wise businessman is one who invests his money wisely and does not waste it. In the same way, we have to invest our capital of love in the Lord. Most of us invest it here, there, and everywhere. However, if we invest it in the Lord, the return will be much greater.

In the *Bhagavad Gītā*, Lord Krishna says that everyone is a devotee of the Lord. Each and every person in this world is seeking joy. That is why people run after money, power, sense pleasures, and so on. But these joys are transient. What people are really seeking is Permanent Bliss and that is only to be found in the Lord. He alone is the source of all bliss. Until we develop total love for Him, and discover this nectar of joy, our search will continue.

Without love, life is meaningless. People who have the love of a beloved, develop a cheerful attitude towards life. Just think how much loftier would be the attitude of someone who enjoys the highest love, the love of the Supreme Lord.

It is said that if spiritual life is a tree, its flowers are self-control and discrimination, the knowledge of right and wrong.

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Once these are cultivated, it culminates in the fruit: Knowledge of the Self. Just as a fruit without juice would be tasteless similarly, knowledge without devotion is dry and uninspiring. Thus the nectar of this knowledge is devotion or *bhakti* to the lotus feet of the Lord. Unless this knowledge culminates in devotion, a total Love for the Lord, it is not complete. Devotion is the fulfillment of all spiritual endeavors.

There are two kinds of love in this world, attachment (*āsakti*) and devotion (*bhakti*).

*Āsakti* is attachment to material objects such as a house, a car, or to people, such as spouse, children, parents, friends, and so on. Attachment, also known as fascination, attraction, or infatuation, is finite and limited to the objects of our desire. Excessive attachment may lead to one's downfall, as one may even perform illegal or immoral actions in order to acquire what is desired.

*Bhakti*, on the other hand, is devotion to a higher cause for something higher than ourselves. Why do we find it so hard to love others? It is because of our sense of alienation. We consider ourselves to be different from others. It is only when we begin to think of others as ourselves that we rise above our personal limitations. It also makes us see the Lord in all. So *bhakti*, the highest love, is love for the Supreme Lord, and is the means to progress on the path of spirituality.

Some people think of *bhakti* as going to the temple and singing His glories with much emotion. Therefore it may be said that the path of devotion is for emotional people. People who consider themselves to be intellectuals believe that they can only adopt the path of knowledge or *jñāna mārga*. But examples of great saints and sages reveal how they perfectly blended their education and knowledge with a true attitude of Supreme Love for the Lord.

The reason that most of us are unable to love God is that we don't know who or what God is. We can see and touch worldly objects and enjoy them, but where is God? What does He look

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like? It is difficult to love something or someone whom we do not know. Some people think of God as a judge sitting in heaven, giving out rewards (heaven) and punishments (hell). Many think of Him as a servant who is supposed to do their bidding by granting them whatever they are praying for, and they can forget all about Him the rest of the time. But God is neither servant nor grantor! He is the very Self of all beings. He is That without which nothing could exist. He is like the gold in the ornaments or the clay in the pots. He is the underlying support of the entire creation.

*Developing Devotion*

There are innumerable ways in which love for the Lord can be expressed. Just like we can express it in different ways to the people that we love. We may want to talk to them, buy them gifts, praise them, want to spend time together with, or simply want to just think about them all the time. Similarly, devotees express their love for God in various ways, depending on their aptitude and attitude. Some people think that going to the temple and singing His glories is the way to express devotion. That is one way. There are others who spend hours performing elaborate rituals, chanting numerous prayers or repeating the name of the Lord either at home, or at the temple. Others remember Him at all times in all their activities. Some meditate on the Self in order to realize God within them. While others listen to His glories and attend spiritual discourses. Then there are some who worship Him through work, they act with the attitude that they are doing God's work. This kind of worship is called *karma yoga*. All the ways of worship are good, but the most important ingredient in all is love. Worship without love is just mechanical. It is this attitude of sincere love that turns any activity into devotion for the Lord.

So how does one develop devotion for the Lord? In chapter eleven of the *Bhagavad Gītā*, Lord Krishna says, "Through de-

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votion a person comes to know Me as I am.” In reality, if we want to know about anything, be it art, music, or science, we have to develop a love for it. So what we need to do is to develop some sort of relationship with God, what kind does not matter. Some people worship Him as their master (*dāsya bhāva*), a supreme example of this is Hanumanji. Many people look up to God as father or mother. Some think of Lord as their beloved, as did Mirabai, who spent her time singing Lord Krishna’s praises. It was also seen in the *gopī* who danced Raas Lila with Him, the bliss that they experienced is indescribable. Still others see God as a child *ātsalya bhāva*, and their attitude is of giving and not wanting anything in return, as did Mother Yashoda with Lord Krishna. Some people love God as a friend, *sākhyā bhāva* as Arjuna did. Lord Krishna says to Arjuna: “You are my devotee and my friend. That is why I am giving you this Knowledge.”

The beauty of *bhakti* is that we have the freedom to worship God in whichever form we may choose; be it Rama, Krishna, Shiva, Allah, Jesus, or the formless Infinite Reality. The only requirement is that we must absorb our heart in the Lord. He can then assume whatever form we want Him to have. If our efforts are sincere He will be there for us. He will never fail a loving heart.

The unique feature of the path of devotion (*bhakti mārga*) is that no special qualification is needed to follow it. Any one can develop love. While the path of knowledge (*jñāna yoga*) requires a great intellect and memory, the nature of love is that no special qualities are required. Where there is love, nothing else is required. There is no need to learn elaborate rituals and ceremonies. A devotee is simply asked by the Lord to go to Him with a loving and sincere heart.

Through total devotion to the Lord, the devotee arrives at the cessation of mundane thoughts, and his mind is saturated with thoughts of the Lord at all times. With such a single-pointed mind, his actions are performed with an attitude of service to the Lord, so they are always unselfish. This leads to pu-

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rity of the mind. Also the devotee feels the Lord's presence in everyone, including himself. This leads to the concept of unity with the Lord and with all beings. Thus in a true devotee we see a culmination of *karma yoga* and *jñāna yoga*.

The language of love is peculiar; words are not needed to express it. Love and service is all that is required. As God's nature is sweetness, in whatever way we partake in it, the result will be sweet. God is compassionate. How much could we benefit if we remember God with love, every day and at every moment! He says, "I am like your servant, waiting for you to call Me."

He became Arjuna's charioteer in the Kurukshetra war upon Arjuna's asking with love and devotion. In the *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* the Lord says, "My devotee is greater than me." He even changes his own rules for the love of the devotee—like when Lord Krishna broke his own vow of not lifting a weapon in the Mahabharata war to keep Bhishma's words.

### *Overcoming Obstacles*

People often say, "I don't know where to start. I am not good enough to worship the Lord. I am waiting for His blessings." But wise people do not wait. They fill their heart with love for Him, and consider all their activities as worship to Him.

On this path, we may encounter some obstacles, however. For instance, a subtle ego may develop, such as: I am the greatest devotee, or I am the best disciple of my guru. This ego is often very difficult to overcome. The second obstacle is possessiveness, the feeling of my body, my family, and my wealth, and being special. The third is our sense organs, which pull us towards an object of their craving. This pull has tremendous power, and it can delude us very easily. Even great rishis and devotees have been misled.

How do we overcome these obstacles? The best way to overcome them is to be in the company of holy men and holy books (*satsaṅga*). Associate with those whose hearts are ever

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filled with love for the Lord, and listen to them. As we do so, our attachments slowly diminish, our desires reduce, we develop discrimination and more love flows. There are many examples of people who attained liberation by association with saints, the best one is Dhruva reaching the Lord through his association with Sage Narada.

When encountering obstacles, just remember the name of the Lord with love and devotion. When we feel helpless or powerless we just have to invoke His presence. He is all-powerful and He will certainly help us. Many devotees have overcome tremendous obstacles and hardships by remembering His name. The scriptures say that the name of the Lord is more powerful than the Lord Himself. His name is always with us. It will always protect us.

In the *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*, we find the child Prahlad teaching his father Hiranyakasyapu the nine ways of devotion:

a) *Śravaṇam*: Listening to his glories. b) *Kīrtanam*: Singing the glories of the Lord. c) *Smaraṇam*: Remembering Him at all times. d) *Pāda-sevanam*: Worshiping Him by serving Him, including service to the people. e) *Arcanam*: Worshiping Him by the performance of rituals and ceremonies. f) *Vandanam*: Bowing before Him, in an attitude of humility. g) *Dāsyam*: Being His servant by carrying on whatever activities He would wish. h) *āSākhyaṃ*: Seeing Him as our friend. i) *Atmanivedanam*: Totally surrendering to Him.

### *Types of Devotees*

There are four kinds of devotees. The *Ārta* is one who experiences sorrow or affliction, and turns to God for help. The *jijñāsu* is one who desires knowledge, and wants to know God. The *arthārthī* is one who wants more money, power, and worldly possessions. And the *jñānī* is one who has no desires, and just wants the Lord Himself.

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Love is measured in terms of how much we are willing to sacrifice for the object of our love. Supreme Love is that for which we are ready to sacrifice anything and everything. This raises the question, “What needs to be sacrificed?” It is the ego, our selfishness; the sense of “I” and “mine.” The wise person has no ego, no separate identity, he considers himself to be one with the Lord. He sees the Lord within and also in all of creation, therefore he sees the Lord as the very Self of all beings. He loves everyone equally. When he thus loves God, how can he hate anyone? “Love thy neighbor as thyself,” is his motto. He is constantly engaged in the welfare of all, and that to Him is service of the Lord. He cannot bear to see anyone suffer, and he considers anyone’s pain and suffering like his own. The wise one identifies with the entire creation. He sees himself in all; there is no sense of separateness. He sees the Lord in everyone, serves everyone with devotion, and considers the welfare of others at all times. A person devoted to God in this way gives up selfishness, attachment, and his ego. He has done what needs to be done and has achieved what needs to be achieved.

The nature of a true devotee is that of the *jñānī*. He has achieved *bhakti sudhā*, the nectar of devotion. “Such a devotee is dear to me,” says the Lord. We should all aspire for it.

