

SERVICE AND DEVOTION:

The Process and the Real Purpose of Human Birth



Swami Ananda

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*Published by
Dibyadham Yogashram
Chakratirtha Road,
Puri - 752002, Odisha, India*

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1st Edition, 2025



Asato mā sat gamaya
Tamaso mā jyotir gamaya
Mṛtyor mā āmṛtaṃ gamaya

Lead me from unreality to Reality
from darkness to light
from death to Immortality





Her Holiness, Maa Bhabamayee Paramahansa
Sri Guru of Swami Anandaji Maharaj

*With deep reverence, we humbly offer this work in
service to our venerable Guru.*





Pujya Swami Anandaji Maharaj

- FOREWORD -



*“Always remember Guru, remember God,
and remember the true goal of life.
If you can remember these three things throughout your life,
you will spend this life fruitfully.”*

-Swami Ananda-

The inspiring words quoted above, drawn from the deep wisdom of Pujya Swami Anandaji Maharaj, encapsulate the essence of a life truly worthy—a life of service, devotion, dedication, and unwavering focus on the divine meaning of human birth. This booklet, *Service and Devotion: The Process and the Real Purpose of Human Birth*, draws from Pujya Swamiji’s teachings and spiritual insights, illuminating the path that leads us towards the fulfilment of our life’s real purpose. It is a guide to reorient our thoughts, words, and actions, helping us to align with the higher ideals of selfless service, unwavering devotion, and God-realisation.

Pujya Swami Anandaji Maharaj’s own life exemplifies this spiritual process. At the age of nineteen, while studying at a university in Delhi, Pujya Swamiji experienced an overwhelming dispassion for worldly pursuits and an intense yearning to uncover life’s deeper meaning. This inner calling led him to leave his studies and embark on a quest across India, searching for something that would fulfil his heart.

Divine providence guided Pujya Swamiji to a small hermitage on the holy sands of Puri, Odisha, where he was blessed to meet his Guru—the Holy Mother of Dibyadham, Maa Bhabamayee Paramahansa. In one of his early meetings with the Holy Mother, Swamiji expressed a desire to go to the Himalayas to meet a spiritual Master. The Mother responded, *“But wherever you go, will you not take your mind with you? If your mind is not at peace and in harmony, you will carry your state of confusion with you, wherever you go”*. These words of profound truth shook Swamiji to his core. Humbled and feeling helpless, he pleaded for the Mother’s help. This marked the beginning of the sacred and intimate Guru-disciple relationship.

Pujya Swamiji took initiation from the Mother and began intense sadhana under Her close guidance. Through the Guru’s divine grace, he was soon blessed with extraordinary spiritual experiences and deep meditation, which paved the way to Self-realisation. After his initiation into sannyasa in 1986, during the Kumbha Mela in Haridwar, Swamiji dedicated his life to helping seekers of Truth discover the joy and light within, offering guidance not only in India but also in Europe, Chile, and Japan. Swamiji’s soul-touching messages, rooted in his Guru’s teachings and his own spiritual experiences, have inspired numerous individuals to embark on the spiritual path, and transformed their lives eternally.

Pujya Swamiji has been serving as the President of Dibyadham Yogashram since the Holy Mother returned to her divine abode in May 2002. He continues to uphold and embody his Master’s teachings and ideals as a living tradition, steadfastly guiding seekers on the spiritual path through talks, seminars, and personal correspondences.

The teachings of Pujya Swamiji—“Remember Guru, remember God, and remember the true goal of life”—serve as

the guiding light of this book. To remember the Guru is to stay anchored in dedication and devotion to the source of divine knowledge and compassion; to remember God is to open our heart to the manifestation of universal love and transform our actions into service; and to remember the true goal of life is to abandon the ephemeral and embrace the eternal, realigning every aspect of our lives with that higher purpose.

May this booklet inspire one to pause, reflect, and walk the path of service and devotion with unwavering faith.

- PUBLISHER'S NOTE -



It is with immense joy that we present Pujya Swami Anandaji Maharaj's enlightening booklet, *Service and Devotion: The Process and the Real Purpose of Human Birth*. This booklet encapsulates the profound yet accessible spiritual teachings and narratives based on a series of talks Pujya Swamiji gave to a group of aspirants at Dibyadham Tapovan Ashram, Motori, Puri District, in August 1999.

The talks by Pujya Swamiji open by welcoming the aspirants to the Holy Mother's presence in India, a land with a unique spiritual heritage. Here, the visitors have the opportunity to discover a deeper meaning of life, underscoring human existence as a precious opportunity for spiritual growth. Pujya Swamiji elucidates the intricate process of transmigration and the rare fortune of attaining a human birth. He encourages aspirants to grasp this rare opportunity of having a human body, being aware of the true nature of this world, and meeting a Master to progress spiritually.

The narrative then goes on to discuss the necessity of service as a means of preparation for spiritual enlightenment, highlighting the transformative power of selfless acts and the importance of cultivating obedience and dedication towards one's spiritual Master.

Selfless service, as illustrated through stories from the Upanishads, is presented as an important means to realisation,

offering insights into how dedicated action, imbued with faith and devotion, can lead to spiritual purification and liberation. This is further elaborated through accounts of overcoming worldly pain and suffering by transcending attachment to the material world through developing exclusive love for God.

The booklet progresses to an exploration of bhakti, or devotion to God, as a path of experiencing God's presence. It explores the dynamics of developing a relationship with a personal Deity, highlighting the transformative power of such devotional practices. Pujya Swamiji emphasises the importance of sincere longing and dedication in making the Divine a living reality. He shares inspirational stories demonstrating how earnest devotion can lead to God's tangible manifestation. Pujya Swamiji explains various forms of relationships with God in the path of devotion, detailing how cultivating a specific *bhāva*, or attitude towards God, enriches one's spiritual life and divinises one's entire activities.

The narrative also touches upon the sacred geography of India, revered as a land blessed by the footsteps of the Divine. It discusses the importance of serving in these sacred spaces as a means of spiritual growth and divine connection. The booklet concludes with the significance of gratitude in spiritual practice. It calls for an appreciation of nature's blessings that support life and the divine orchestrations behind them, promoting an attitude of gratitude as a foundation for deepening devotion to God.

Through this rich tapestry of narratives and teachings in *Service and Devotion: The Process and the Real Purpose of Human Birth*, Pujya Swamiji offers readers a comprehensive guide to understanding and practising the principles of selfless service and devotion as a way to spiritual enlightenment. Readers are given a clear guiding light for a transformative journey that combines acts of service with devotion of the heart,

ultimately leading to the manifestation and realisation of the personal God both without and within.

In humble service to our revered Guru, Sri Maa.
Dibyadham Yogashram

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- PROLOGUE -



*“In my opinion, training of the heart is true spiritual education.
One who considers himself humbler than all,
he alone is truly great”.*
-Maa-

The essence of true spiritual education lies not in the accumulation of knowledge but in the practical transformation of the heart. It is a process of gradually diminishing the ego and nurturing humility, training the heart to become selfless and pure, which ultimately is offered exclusively to the Divine. The Holy Mother’s profound words, cited above, shine as a guiding light for all spiritual aspirants seeking the highest welfare of God-realisation.

The path to spiritual enlightenment is not paved with grand achievements but with the quiet cultivation of humility, love, and selflessness within the heart. True greatness resides not in fame, status, or honour, but in the simplicity and purity of the heart. When the heart is trained to be humble and selfless, empty of all sense of ‘I’, it becomes the most suitable vessel for receiving Divine grace.

The spiritual education prescribed by the Holy Mother reveals the true purpose of sadhana: To become a worthy vessel for Divine love and grace through the training of the heart. Her words encourage us to embrace humility and shed the layers of

pride and ego that obscure the light of the Soul. The more we cultivate humility through selfless service, the more we open ourselves to the boundless joy of the Divine presence.

This booklet, *Service and Devotion: The Process and the Real Purpose of Human Birth*, is a humble offering to all seekers aspiring to walk the path of God-realisation. It guides aspirants to recognise the rare opportunity of having a human body and teaches that the purpose of human life is not merely survival or success, but to nurture dispassion and devotion for the purpose of ultimately attaining sacred union with the Divine. To this end, the teachings inspired by the Holy Mother within these pages encourage aspirants to undertake true spiritual education under a Realised Master, by obeying unconditionally and serving selflessly with love and devotion. The path of service and devotion moves us away from the self-centred life of 'me and mine' towards an exclusive love for God, ultimately leading to the sublime experience of the vivid reality of God's presence.

As you read through the chapters, may you be inspired to train your heart in the ways of humility, service, and devotion. May you find peace in the simple yet profound truth that true greatness lies in being humbler than all. Such a selfless soul, with exclusive devotion, receives boundless grace from the Guru and God, with the vessel of their heart being filled with divine nectar by their grace.

In the spirit of the Holy Mother's teachings, let us embark on this journey with open and humble hearts, preparing ourselves to receive the blessings of true spiritual education.

Hari Om.

1



Welcome to the Master's Presence

Tapovan, 3rd August 1999

For some of you, I think this is your first experience of India. Maybe there are many questions in your mind. When people come for the first time, some may wonder, “Where is the India I was thinking of?” Yes, it is true because here in India there are so many levels of existence, so many levels of thinking, and so much diversity that it can sometimes be very confusing. So, proper guidance is necessary to find the real India with the genuine spirituality that one is looking for.

Still, there is something here in this country which one cannot find anywhere else in the world. We still have a living tradition—not only cultural but also spiritual. It has been built over thousands of years and it still lives. Although presently it is struggling to stay alive, it still somehow survives. This is the home of spirituality, of dharma, a region from where many thoughts have flowed out to different parts of the globe. Here, there still exist a few who keep this spiritual tradition alive. It is like the coconut; it has covers, and one has to go beyond these covers, one has to peel off the covers to discover the pulp of the fruit or the real essence of the fruit. Similarly, here in India you

have to go beyond the covers, beyond what you sometimes see on the surface. One has to probe beyond appearances and the superficial levels. Then, if God wills, if one is fortunate, and if one has accumulated good actions, one discovers something which can add a little meaning to this mundane human life and give one a worthy purpose to live for.

Many kinds of people come to this country but there are a few who come looking for another meaning to life, for a higher purpose. Those few who do find another purpose here are the ones who have found the real India, and they are most fortunate.

Well, I can say that you are also fortunate to have come to the presence of the ‘Mother’, but you are the ones who have to feel it. And I hope you will be able to feel something within you, to receive something, for it is indeed a great fortune in the process of transmigration to have the opportunity of meeting a genuine, realised, and capable Master. It is like the warmth of the fire—it cannot be described; one has to personally feel it. The sweetness of sugar cannot be described; it has to be tasted. So I hope you will be able to receive something and feel the warmth and sweetness of the Master’s presence here.

I hope your stay here will be fruitful and that you will be fortunate enough to feel and receive something from this encounter of having come from so far to the presence of the ‘Mother’. I will try to touch upon, during the ongoing satsangs, the reasons why it is considered such a fortune to come to the presence of an enlightened Master, and what the importance of such blessed Beings is in our lives. Well, here in Tapovan, we can sometimes face some difficulties (like power cuts, etc.), and some days may not be very comfortable, like it is back home. But then you should remember the tradition of the ancient Masters and the difficulties they had to tolerate—they had no

electricity, no running water, and sometimes even no food. These great Masters, who discovered the Ultimate Truth, lived in the mountains where the winters were cold and conditions extremely harsh. So, if you all remember that, maybe your difficulties will not seem so overpowering.

When Mother made this ashram in this remote rural area, She called it Tapovan. *Van* means forest, *tapas* means austerities and it also means heat and pain. To discover our Self or our true inner nature, we have to bear some difficulties. The purpose of our stay here is to discover something more about ourselves so we should willingly accept the hardships. There are also some advantages here—the pure air, pristine nature, and conducive divine vibrations. That is why this ashram was created in this remote rural area amidst nature, trees, birds, and fresh air. I hope you will take a positive attitude, see the favourable aspects, and overlook the few unfavourable aspects of your stay here. We have been gradually trying to overcome these difficulties and obstacles, and we will try more in the coming years. I hope we can overcome these few physical difficulties that we presently have. I really hope that your stay here will be productive. May the blessings of the Divine Mother be showered on each of you so that you will go back with something inside you.

Hari Om. I praise your efforts in making this long journey and coming so far to this new country and to this seemingly strange place.

2



Human Body—A Great Fortune

Tapovan, 4th August 1999

The Guru and the real Masters are those who remove the blindfold of illusion or ‘maya’ which covers our eyes and prevents us from knowing ourselves and the true purpose of this human life. Illumined souls and the scriptures say that this human life is indeed very precious. They say that the human body is very hard to obtain and it is a great opportunity and fortune to have one.

Now, let us discuss a little why obtaining a human body is such a great fortune and why human life is such a great opportunity. Is it because we can dress better, eat better, educate ourselves, and have other enjoyments much better than animals can? Or is there another reason why this human body is more precious? Usually, people think that this human body is of value because we can lead this material life in a much better fashion than other creatures in this world. No, it is not only because of that that this human body is considered valuable and human life an invaluable opportunity. It is a great opportunity because there are many souls who are waiting to incarnate in a human body but cannot. When one reads about the difficult process

of transmigration described in the Chandogya Upanishad, one clearly understands why it is a great opportunity to obtain this human body.

So, let us touch on this process of transmigration a little. When the soul departs from this body, the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita both say that there are two paths open to the soul. One is the northern path, *devayāna*, which means the divine path or the path of the devas or gods. This is the solar path. The other is the southern path, *pitryāna*, which is the lunar path.

One who has led a life of renunciation, aspired for Knowledge, and understood the subtle principles of Creation ascends through the northern path. Borne by the fire deity, the soul is taken to the higher realms till it comes to the solar sphere. From the solar sphere, it is led on by a Cosmic Being to the *brahmaloka*, and there it waits for final liberation, or absorption in the Ultimate Reality. For these souls, there is no return again to this world. They have ended the necessity of coming in a physical body and have broken this vicious cycle of births and deaths.

What concerns us actually is the second path—the southern path—because those who proceed by this path reincarnate again. The soul on this path is carried by smoke and gradually proceeds through degrees of darkness till it reaches the lunar spheres. There, it has enjoyments according to the charitable, selfless, and good actions it has done on earth. It lives there, enjoying the fruits of its good actions till the force of its merits is dissipated. If the soul is fortunate enough to reach the lunar spheres, it goes through the spheres of the *pitr*, that is the forefathers who have passed away. It goes to the *pitrloka* and then comes to the lunar sphere—the heaven world—and there it enjoys the pleasures of heaven for a certain period. The soul is

eligible to go by the lunar path only if it has done good actions here. Otherwise, it doesn't even reach the *pitrloka* and the lunar spheres. It goes to the lower worlds—that is another path. The soul is like a visa holder in the lunar spheres—in the heaven worlds, the worlds of supernatural pleasures and enjoyments—but it cannot stay there permanently. It is said in the Upanishads that it becomes food for the devas (astral beings). Food for the devas means it becomes subservient to these devas who are permanent gods. It is not exactly a permanent deva; it is there only for a temporary time. It has certain privileges; for example, when you are a second-class citizen in a foreign country, you have all the privileges, you can work, you can have a house and all this, but you don't have certain rights which are reserved for permanent citizens only. But what is important is what happens after this period of enjoyment is over. After the forces of its good actions or merits are dissipated, the soul again goes through the process of manifestation and is born again in this phenomenal world of transmigration. This is very interesting and when one reads about this, one understands how difficult it is to have this human body.

You see, the soul identifies itself with the elements when it comes through the stratosphere. It comes through the atmosphere and identifies with smoke, then with ether, air, fire, and then water. It becomes rain, then it comes down and enters into cereals. You see, the process of transmigration has been very well studied by our Rishis who had divine sight—*divya cakṣu*. Today, science is trying to solve so many mysteries about nature, but the greatest mystery is what happens after death and where the soul goes after the body has passed away, what happens to it, and how it comes back and is reborn. It is not just an accidental biological process that a human being is born as Western material science has been teaching.

Apparently, a child is born because of the union of a man and a woman. That is the most superficial cause of manifestation. Actually, there is a whole intricate process behind it, starting right from the celestial levels and coming down to the human level of the union of man and woman. There is a complicated process of descent of the soul from the higher spheres, coming down through the elements, entering into the vital fluid of the man, uniting with the woman, becoming a foetus, and then a child. As I said, there is a mysterious process before the birth of an individual. There is a law behind how each soul manifests, and the law is the law of 'karma'. The soul is put in a specific womb according to the karma it accumulated in past lives. You see what a matter of chance it is. The soul through rain enters the cereals that man eats. This cereal has to be eaten by someone, converted into the vital fluid of that man, enter into the womb of a woman, and then become a foetus. What you see is the end product—a child is born.

The process of birth is a great mystery. Only God probably knows what laws are at work: How a particular soul enters a cereal, and which cereal is eaten by which person. So do you understand why it is by great fortune that a soul finds a human womb and then manifests as a human being? It is also possible that it enters an animal body or is even born from lower wombs than those of animals such as insects. After having heard the complicated process of a soul manifesting in a body, you will understand why getting a human body is such an opportunity.

Secondly, this human body is a very special and developed mechanism. With this extremely developed instrument or mechanism of a human body, it is possible for a human being to transcend all the limitations by which it is bound and to free itself from the cycle of birth and death in which it

is revolving helplessly. Even in the body of a deva—an astral being—it is not possible to transcend the limitations of a body because a deva does not have the choice of action. The body of an astral being is only for the enjoyment of the merits he or she has already earned; it does not have the privilege or choice of doing new actions. It is only for spending the force of good actions. In the Bhagavatam, the human body has been compared to a boat by which one can cross this ocean of samsara.

Thus, there are two things. First, with this human body it is possible to improve one's karma of the past by doing better karma in this life. Second, in this human body it is possible to transcend all limitations and attain liberation through sadhana, renunciation, and one-pointed devotion. This is neither possible in an animal body nor in these temporary deva or astral bodies. That is why having this human body is so precious; it is such an opportunity to be born in one.

Though it is a great fortune and a great opportunity to get a human body, if one is not aware of the real or main purpose of this human life, then it will be a great loss. So, it is very necessary to be aware of the true nature of this world and the transitory nature of this body. We may cherish many things in this world, but they are all transitory and temporary. Everything that one may have here is also not perfect. You may have some joy, but you also have a lot of sorrow and insecurity; you have pleasures due to your past lives' merits, but there is also a lot of pain. You have meetings but also partings. That is the nature of this material world and this gross body. It is *anitya*, which means not eternal or transitory; it is temporary and fleeting. Life here is also *asukham*, which means it is joyless; joy is mixed with sorrow in this world. No joy is perfect. *Sukham*, combined with 'a', means that all the joy that you have, all the pleasure that you have here is combined with some pain. It is not perfect,

and it is not pure. Another important point: What appears as joy may not actually be so because these pleasures, in consequence, may be preparing the path for your downward journey after death. That is why so many people are so reluctant to leave the body even though it may be worn out and diseased. Their attachment to these imperfect pleasures creates a fear of letting go, despite the suffering that comes with them.

When you are aware of the impermanent nature of this body, aware of the imperfections, the pain, and the sorrow of this world, what do you do? You have to find someone who can show you the way out of this. The Upanishads describe that *jivas* or finite beings like us are like people with blindfolds. We have been taken away from our true homes blindfolded and left in a dark and dense forest and because of the blindfold of ignorance—*avidya*—we cannot find our way. We do not know where to go, which is the right direction to move in, and how we should get out of this perilous state. We stumble and fall. That is what we are doing in this world. Many times we have stumbled, we have fallen, and have still not found the way. We are groping and wondering where to go and what the right direction is. So, this is our true state—we are lost. The only hope in this deplorable state is the appearance of One who does not have a blindfold—not only without a blindfold but also with the ability to remove ours and show us the way. Thus having contact with such an enlightened and free soul is the greatest fortune in this human life.

There are three great fortunes. The first is to have a human body. The second is to be aware of the imperfections and limitations of the human body and the transitory and painful nature of this world. And the greatest fortune is to come to the presence of One who can show one a way out of this impermanence and lead one towards That which is permanent and eternal.

*Asato mā sat gamaya
Tamaso mā jyotir gamaya
Mr̥tyor mā āmṛtaṃ gamaya*

Lead me from unreality to Reality
from darkness to light
from death to Immortality

You all are blessed because you have a human body, you also have some awareness, and you happen to have the opportunity of meeting someone who has the knowledge, ability, and compassion to show you the path to the highest blessedness.

Hari Om.

3



Service—A Necessary Preparation

Tapovan, 5th August 1999

Yesterday, we stopped our discussion at the point of this third great fortune: Having found someone who can open our blindfold, give us direction, and show this jiva a path to transcend its limitations and the impermanence of this phenomenal life.

Having realised that one is caught in the web of one's own collective actions from many lives, one is most fortunate if one finds someone who has solved this mystery of life and death—the mystery of transmigration. Having found a Realised Master who has the answer to this mystery of life and death, what does one do? What one actually does depends on the maturity of that soul and how intensely he/she has realised the pain of transmigration—of life, birth, and death. Being caught in this vicious cycle of birth and death, bound by the law of karma—which cannot be changed—does he realise his state of utter helplessness?

If one does realise, to some extent, one's true status as a bound jiva, the questions that will naturally arise are, "What should I do? What should be the real goal of my life? From

where have I come and where will I go?” When he/she feels the urgency of answering these questions, he/she will humble himself/herself, taking shelter under a Master who knows the real answer to these questions. This is the significance of the words, “*Tadviddhi pranipātena paripraśnena sevayā*” (Understand That by prostrating, by questioning and by rendering service) from verse 34, chapter 4 of the Bhagavad Gita.

With the aim of finding the answers to these questions of life, he/she will start a course of preparation, which at first will consist mainly of ‘seva’ or selfless service. Service consists not only of doing physical actions but also of developing an attitude of complete obedience. It is indeed a great fortune to have found a Realised Master who can guide one towards Liberation, but it is also the greatest misfortune not to make the proper efforts to follow His/Her instructions. Really fortunate are those who, having realised the pain of transmigration, make efforts to free themselves by serving and obeying the Master.

It was a long-established tradition in India that a Brahmin or Kshatriya boy, after a certain age, went to the *gurukula*, or the family of the Guru. There, observing the strict rules of *brahmacharya* or continence, he did seva simultaneously with some secular learning of those times. Through this, he prepared himself and developed the receptivity for higher knowledge.

Today, many young men—educated young men—are lost. They do not know the way. They definitely need something more than what the bread-and-butter education has given them. They are groping in the dark and asking what the way is. Today, we hear many beautiful things concerning spirituality. We have a lot of readily available information about it, in the form of books, computer websites, etc., but still the question remains: What is the practical way to lead a higher or divine life?

The system has to be the same as it was thousands of years ago, maybe a little modified because of the times: Practice of *saṁyama* (self-control) and service of the Guru. In those days, they served the Guru by looking after the fields, taking care of the cows, and doing the day-to-day domestic duties of the ashram. Maybe it will not be possible to do exactly what they did, maybe we would have to work with a computer and that too not in the ashram but in an office, but it has to be for the ‘Guru’, thus these secular actions should be offered to the Divine.

You may ask why this is so. “What is the purpose of doing all this service? What is the purpose of taking shelter under a Master? Why self-control and *brahmacarya*? We have the facilities of attending courses, reading books, and hearing lectures; there is no necessity of a Guru, no necessity of service, no necessity of self-control”. Well, in those days, they could have also just listened to the Master and become wise.

Why did Lord Krishna tell Arjuna in the Gita, “*Tadviddhi praṇipātena paripraśnena sevayā*”? Through the practice of *brahmacarya* or continence and service, one is prepared physically, mentally, and spiritually to receive that transcendental knowledge, to hold onto it, to understand its true significance, and finally, to experience the truth directly. The normal jiva does not have the ability or the receptivity for this transcendental knowledge.

Secondly, through service, the rajas that is inherent in all and that generates desires and propels one into restless action is transformed in a natural way. This force of action or rajas, which is inherent in nature, by being directed towards a higher purpose, and by being made selfless, is gradually transformed and finally transcended. The more this force of activity built up from previous lives is transcended, the more one gets

established in the tranquillity of the Pure Self. *The cleaner the mirror, the clearer the reflection on it.*

The whole purpose, as I've understood, of spiritual life is to develop two things. One is dispassion and the second is devotion. Dispassion for worldly pleasures and devotion for God. But at the base of both of these is 'karma'—proper action. In order to prepare yourself to develop dispassion and devotion (bhakti), the first step is to perform actions for that purpose. You must be wondering, "Well, we cannot live in an ashram all the time, and that was a system in the past. We are living in the practical world, so how does it apply to us? How can we do karma yoga?" When selfishness and self-interest are overcome, and the sense of agency or "doer-ship" ("I am the doer") is removed from action and work, then any kind of work becomes worship.

The Lord says four things. First, "Fix your mind on Me alone, let your intellect rest in Me, you will live in me alone hereafter; there is no doubt about it" (Gita ch.12 v.8). Well, if you're not able to do that and the mind doesn't get concentrated on God, do *abhyāsa yoga*—yoga of practice. Practices such as doing yoga, doing *japa*, and writing mantram, all these are practices—"If, however, you are not able to fix the mind steadily on Me, then through the Yoga of practice seek to attain Me, O Dhananjaya". (Gita ch.12 v.9). But even if you are not able to do that, somehow it's not possible for you to practise due to lack of time, lack of motivation, or whatever other cause, God gives a third alternative. He says, "If you are unable even to practise, then be solely devoted to doing actions for Me; even by doing actions for My sake, you will attain perfection" (Gita ch.12 v.10). Do actions, such as worship, living in an ashram, or doing activities like what I said. If you're not able to do that, He gives another alternative, "Whatever actions you are doing,

offer them to Me”. “If, however, you are unable to do even this, then taking refuge in Me and being self-controlled, renounce the fruit of all actions”—even mundane actions (Gita ch.12 v.11). So, that is what is probably possible in today’s world and that’s why I am discussing this topic of seva or karma yoga today.

How can we transform our actions? This is an important issue because it is the base of spirituality. What can we do to transform our actions while living in this world? The Lord says, “Offer your actions to Me. Whatever actions you are doing, offer them to Me. Maybe you are not able to worship Me; it’s not possible for you to wave incense in front of Me; it’s not possible to give flowers to Me; it’s not possible for you to enter the temple; or do activities just for My sake. So, whatever actions you are doing for your survival, or for other purposes, whatever you may be doing, do them for Me, offer them to Me”. Then your actions will get transformed, and they will not produce adverse after-effects. That is what our Paramgurudev, His Holiness Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj, meant when he said, “Become a divine teacher, become a divine engineer”. Whatever you may be doing, you do not have to leave it; probably you cannot leave it, so transform it by offering it to the Divine, by working for the Universal good. The essence of divinity is vastness, expansion, and selflessness, so by surrender and offering, your heart will gradually get purified, and your vision will expand.

So, you can practise this technique of offering. Whatever you may be doing, say to yourself, “O Lord, I am doing it for You. O Guru, these actions I offer to You”. Someone was asking me, “What shall I do? I cannot do anything; I cannot do my practices; I do not find so much time as before to do my meditation for hours”. What you can do is just think, “O Lord, whatever I am doing, these actions are for You”.

Secondly, you can practise removing the sense of agency by thinking, “I am not the doer or the agent; I am just an instrument”. That’s why we have a verse in Sanskrit; the gist of it is, “O Lord, who is seated in my heart, whatever You impel me to do, inspire me to do; whatever I am doing, You are the real doer; I am just an instrument in Your hands”. This is a practice; this is a form of sadhana, for which you don’t have to sit down in your room for hours—no, you can do this while you’re working in your office. It is a method of changing your old attitude and transforming it. It will not happen immediately, but if you constantly remind yourself, “I am not the doer”, then one day it will be spontaneous. As I said, when you remove your self-interest from your actions, work becomes worship.

So, gradually, as you remove the sense of agency, you become an instrument of God, a channel for the Universal Spirit. Your actions become an offering. If you are teaching, your teaching becomes a divine service. If you are a doctor and treating people, then a Higher power will work through you. You would have integrated the spirit of the *gurukulas* into these present conditions, and then you will also become little sparks of light in this world, giving joy to others, giving warmth to others, and at the same time being prepared for the Ultimate Realisation.



Selfless Service as a Means to Realisation – Two Stories from the Upanishads –

Tapovan, 6th August 1999

Selfless service, dedicated action, is a clear stream bathing in which one is purified of the impurities of karma and selfishness. Karma becomes yoga when it is performed with an attitude of faith and worship. When these actions are done for a higher cause than just for our little self, then this karma or action becomes yoga, and also becomes a means of purification and liberation. Karma done sincerely with dedication and faith can itself lead to realisation. Today I will give you two examples of this kind of dedicated service from the Chandogya Upanishad.

These are two small stories, but they are not fiction. They are based on facts and actually happened and are real. The Upanishads sometimes contain these small stories to illustrate certain points, and today I will be telling two of them: One is about Satyakama Jabala and the other is about his disciple who was Upakosala, the son of Kamala. In Vedic times, most boys, particularly Brahmins at a certain age, went to learn *Brahma Vidya*, the science of the Ultimate Reality from the Master. They left their homes, went to the *gurukula*—the home of the Guru—

took shelter under the Guru, and became part of his family, doing service and slowly being initiated into the mystery of Brahma.

When Satyakama, whose mother's name was Jabala, came of age, he asked his mother, "O mother, I want to go and take shelter under a Master. Can you tell me what my lineage is and what is my *gotra* or the lineage of my father?" His mother said, "My son, I do not know the lineage of your father because then I was a maid, and I used to serve many people so I am not sure of your lineage". What had happened was not that she was unfaithful or unchaste; it was just that she used to be busy and also was not such a learned woman, so she had not enquired about the *gotra* of her husband and he had probably died when she was still young. So, she said, "My son, I do not know your *gotra*; I do not know the *gotra* of your father or your surname". In those days, Masters were very strict about whom they accepted before they imparted to them the mystery of *Brahma Vidya*—they had to be of proper lineage. That is why this little child wanted to know his lineage. But the mother said, "My son, I do not know the lineage of your father. My name is Jabala, so go and tell your Master that you are the son of Jabala, and your name is Satyakama Jabala".

The boy left for his Master's house with firewood in his hands. He had chosen the Saint, Rishi Haridrumata Gautama, as his preceptor, so he went to take shelter at his feet. The Master asked him, "My child, what is your name and what is your *gotra*?" Satyakama said, "O Revered Master, I do not know my lineage. My mother said that when she was a maid, she bore me, and she never inquired about my father's lineage, so she does not know the lineage I belong to. I am Satyakama, the son of Jabala". The Rishi, having heard his answer, said, "My child, no one but a Brahmin could have answered so truthfully.

So, I accept you as my disciple”. He accepted Satyakama as his disciple, and he gave him four hundred lean and weak cows and told him to take them to the forest and take care of them.

Satyakama left with these cows and a bull into the forest to find good pasture with lush grass for them, and he decided in his mind, “When I have made a thousand cattle out of these, I will come back to my Guru”. Satyakama lived in the forest and took sincere care of the cows.

Many years passed. One day, the bull in the herd spoke to Satyakama and told him, “Satyakama, there are already a thousand cattle; now let us go back to the *gurukula*”. The bull also said, “I shall teach you one quarter of the *Brahma Vidya*, and later the Agni or Fire will teach you more”. The next day, he lit the sacred fire, sat by it and put wood on it. Then the fire manifested in front of him and said, “Satyakama, I shall instruct you about the Ultimate Reality”. The fire gave him instructions and then said, “Satyakama, the swan will instruct you more about this”. Suddenly a swan came flying and taught Satyakama the third quarter of the *Brahma Vidya*. The swan told him, “A water fowl will teach you the last quarter of *Brahma Vidya*”. Thus Satyakama was instructed by the bull, by the fire, by the swan, and by the water-fowl.

The next day, he reached the Guru’s ashram with a thousand cows. When the Master saw Satyakama, he said, “You are shining with the knowledge of Brahma; someone must have instructed you”. Satyakama said, “Yes, O venerable Master, I have received instructions about the Ultimate Reality” and he told him about his four teachers. “But I beg you for further instructions, because without the Guru’s instructions, this knowledge will not be complete and perfect and thus cannot lead to salvation”. So Rishi Gautama instructed Satyakama about the Ultimate Truth in detail, and later Satyakama himself

became a great teacher.

What I am trying to stress here is that Satyakama's truthfulness, his sincerity and dedication in doing the Guru's work itself became the medium for attaining the Ultimate Truth. The *śraddhā* and *niṣṭhā* with which Satyakama performed Guru-seva purified him and he began to see the spirit in all things. The spirit of the bull spoke to him, the spirit of the swan spoke to him, the spirit of fire spoke to him, and the spirit of the water fowl also spoke to him. So this is the tradition of attaining realisation—sincere Guru seva and Guru *kṛpa*.

Well, you may be thinking, "How does this apply to me? I am doing these activities of the world. I have no time, what can I do? I have no time for sadhana or meditation". One may not have time for sadhana or for doing Guru-seva directly. So one has to convert those very activities one is doing through dedication into service, and this service can become a means of purification.

What prevents us from knowing the Self is our impurities, so action is a means of cleansing the mirror of our *citta*. When that cleaning is done, then the light manifests. It has always been there; it is manifested when the impurities of karmic deposits are removed, and the veil of *avidya* drops. That light which manifested in Satyakama was reflected in all beings, and these beings became alive. How did he hear? Not with his ears. There was an interaction between the spirit within him and the essence of Truth that is in everything.

If this was only one instance then we would say, "Well, it's just a story". But there is another instance in the same Upanishad of a disciple called Upakosala, the son of Kamala. He was also a young student, a pupil who had taken shelter under the Master Satyakama, and had served him for twelve years. When all the pupils had completed their course, there was

a kind of graduation. The Guru told them that now that they had received instructions, they should leave the *gurukula* and go their ways in the world. But to Upakosala, neither did the Guru impart the knowledge of the Ultimate Reality nor did he tell him to go. All these years, this young disciple had tended the fire and taken care of the sacrificial fire with sincerity and dedication.

The Guru Mata (the consort of the holy Guru) pleaded for the disciple, “Why don’t you instruct this disciple of yours into the Truth? If you don’t, it will be an injustice, and the fires will curse you. He has served you with sincerity, and he is a sincere inquirer of Brahma Vidya. Please instruct him”. But the Master acted as if he had not heard and went away on a journey. It was mealtime, and Upakosala had not come for his meals, so the Guru Mata went and called Upakosala and said, “Why don’t you come and have your meals?” Upakosala said, “O Mother, today I have no desire for food because my mind is full of impurities”. So he did not have his food, and he lay down in the place where they made offerings into the fire. Every ashram had a place where there was a sacred fire into which they used to make offerings.

As he lay in sorrow, the fires manifested themselves and took forms. I say fires because they made offerings into four fires which had different significance, and all these four fires manifested themselves in visible forms. And each one began to instruct Upakosala about the Ultimate Reality. The fire said, “The earth, food, fire, the sun, all that you worship are forms of Brahman. The spirit that dwells in them is Brahman. All the directions are Brahman. The being that dwells in the moon and nourishes the vegetation and the herbs is Me. I am manifested as the sky and the lightning”.

Finally, they told him, “Dear child, we have instructed you about the knowledge related to us and the Spirit. The rest

your Guru will instruct you and tell you about the fruit of that knowledge”. After sometime, his Master returned and when he saw Upakosala he said, “I see the light of Brahman shining in you; who has instructed you?” So Upakosala said, “O venerable Master, I have not received any instructions from anyone that was human, but these fires that you see now—they took different forms and instructed me about the Ultimate Reality”. His Master said, “What were the instructions that were given to you about the Ultimate Reality?” Upakosala recounted what he had heard and said that this fire told him this, the other fire told him that, and in this way, he recounted the instructions the fires had imparted to him. The Master was very pleased and he said, “Yes, they have given you proper instructions and now listen to the rest of it which will lead you to emancipation”. And the Master instructed him and gave him that Realisation which leads one to liberation.

I wanted you to listen to the stories of the Upanishads firstly because, although they are from another age, they are so captivating. Secondly, I wanted to illustrate my point that sincere service is a means to Realisation. Dedicated service combined with a life of purity can lead one to that ultimate wisdom that emancipates one.

Hari Om, Guru Narayana.



How to Transcend the Pain and Suffering of this World

Tapovan, 7th August 1999

Man seeks joy, wants happiness, and likes to avoid sorrow and pain. He also wants that this happiness, this joy will not end, that it will be never-ending and perfect. Every being wants to be happy. No one wants to be sad; no one wants to have pain. When someone is happy, no one is concerned about him. If a child is happy and playing, no one bothers, but if the child cries, then the mother is concerned, and others are also concerned, and enquire, “What has happened?” Because it is natural to be happy, to have joy, and it’s unnatural to have pain and sorrow. That is why everyone in this world is struggling, making efforts not only to survive but also to have joy. But with all one’s efforts, no one is actually successful; no one finds that ideal joy that he or she is looking for. In reality, there is pain, suffering, fear, and frustration. So, why is it that when one has made all these efforts and accumulated abundant material assets, he or she is still not content and happy? We do not want pain, and all human efforts are directed at removing pain and disease. We try to get rid of suffering and have a perfect life, but

in consequence it is not so; from day to day, human suffering is increasing.

The wise, the Realised Masters, and the Scriptures say that the nature of this material world itself is not perfect; it is transitory and imperfect. Even if there is some joy, it is not one hundred per cent so, and it is mixed with sorrow. Pleasure is combined with pain. It seems the very nature of all created things is transitory and evanescent. It is written in the Shastras that in this human body, everyone suffers three kinds of *tapas*—which means heat or pain. These are *adhibhautika*, *adhidaivika*, and *adhyātmika*. One is the pain that we receive from other creatures. Well, in the cities you do not have that now; scorpions do not bite you, there are no snakes around, there's no fear of tigers, or suddenly a bull doesn't come and push you with his head—these things don't happen. All these things have been taken care of. But even then, we are receiving pain from our fellow beings, *bhūtas*. Even if we are secure and all is taken care of, somehow we still receive pain from other creatures, children, wife, friends, etc. There is pain in interacting with others. That is *adhibhautika tapas*—‘*bhūtas*’ means beings.

Now we have a very advanced society, everything is well organised, everything is taken care of, but even then, suddenly there is a deluge, there is a flood as big as what happened somewhere in Latin America, and it is an ongoing thing. There is an earthquake, a typhoon, or there is no rain and farmers have no crops, or there is too much rain and the harvest is ruined. Well, we see that in these situations, we are helpless against the force of nature. These natural calamities are *adhidaivika*—or elemental. The elements like the sun, rain, and fire which support life also destroy life and cause pain. If there is too much heat, there is pain; when it is too cold, one suffers. We need water, but if there is too much water, there is destruction of life

and property. All humans suffer from some pain or the other from the elements.

The third is *adhyātmika*—those pains which are generated inside us, such as diseases of the body and the mind—complex mental problems. You see, in very progressive societies what happens is they have everything. They say, “We have taken care of everything, we have organised everything for a comfortable and trouble-free life. We have a very good economic programme; everything from the womb to the tomb is taken care of”. Someone told me that in Japan nowadays they are organising things in such a way that the new generation will not even know what pain is. I do not know how successful they will be. But the reality is that they find young people suddenly getting so frustrated that someone is jumping out of the window, another is committing suicide, and some cut their own bodies with blades and knives. The suicide rate is very high, but these things are not reported in the news. They are discreetly kept away from the public so that others do not get disillusioned, and their societies—with their scientific and technological progress and material abundance—appear perfect, and people live in an illusion of self-contentment and satisfaction.

When some diseases are taken care of by medical science, other incurable ones appear. These are generated from within us by our own karmas, by our own actions, which have been accumulating over many lives. We do have some pleasures also in this world. It is not that we are always having pain, or always having *adhidaivika* and *adhibhautika* problems. Sometimes we are healthy; other creatures also give us joy, and it is not that we are always having lightning and earthquakes. But these pleasures, which we get from the senses, have a beginning and an end, and also a consequence—that is, they leave imprints on the mind. The Bhagavad Gita says that these

sense pleasures are “generators of pain”, but I did not want to mention this, because the medicine I am giving you might become too strong. But without knowing the truth, you will never make the effort to get out of this illusion and the trap of ‘maya’ into which you have fallen.

Why is it said in the Bhagavad Gita that these sense pleasures are “wombs of pain” or “generators of pain”? You do not see what is inside the womb till it has come out. Similarly, these sense pleasures are sugar-coated till they begin to produce pain as a consequence. Well, this is the reality and we cannot run away from it. Can we go away and leave all this, or can we even just sit quietly? No, we cannot. So what do we do about this? How do we avoid this pain and have pure joy? We may not get only joy—pure unadulterated joy—unless and until we have realised the Self or connected with God, but at least we can make efforts to avoid pain and problems. How can we do that? Is it possible? Is there a way? Yes—the Masters have made us aware of the painful and imperfect nature of this world. Sometimes it is depressing to hear about it, but they have also given us ways to rise above it. They have not only made us aware of this condition, but they have given us some means to overcome it. As long as there is duality, as long as you are seeking pleasures, you will have some pain with it. As long as you are at this base level of consciousness and have not trained and educated yourself, you will have pain; you cannot avoid pain and suffering. If you want to taste the sugar-coating, then you have to taste the bitterness within.

The way is to raise your consciousness. Lift your consciousness above the mundane pleasures and pains. You may physically go away to some place which you think is perfect, but still you cannot avoid pain and suffering because the seed of suffering is in the mind. So, if you can raise your mind to a

higher level, you can detach from this duality of pleasure and pain. Even if you go away to the mountains or on a vacation to the beach, you may think you can leave the pain behind, but you cannot. Because the same conditioned mind will be there with you, you will have pain and suffering there also. You may run away somewhere during the vacation; perhaps for the first two days you will feel happy. But when the novelty of the place wears off, you will face the same problems. In the case of a couple, this is what happens after a few days; again, the same problems, the same quarrels, and the same ugly things begin to come up. Then what happens is that the mountains that appeared so beautiful a few hours ago, the sandy beaches, and the sea do not seem so beautiful anymore. As long as you are at this low level of consciousness, and as long as you are under the control of the conditioned mind, wherever you may go, wherever you may take this body, you cannot avoid pain. When the mind is not properly trained and it is out of your control, it will create problems. Wherever you go, it will be the same.

So, taking this body away somewhere will not solve your problem; keeping it shut in the most comfortable house or hotel will not do it either. The wise say you have to lift up your consciousness and take it to a level where it will be undisturbed by this flux of pain and pleasures which is natural in this ever-changing and imperfect world. But when you initially try to lift your consciousness up, it will be very difficult; it will seem almost impossible because the mind is uncontrollable and adamant. We are held firmly, or rather we hold very firmly to things here, to things of this imperfect world. As long as your attachment to worldly things and pleasures is strong, you will find this process of sublimation of consciousness or mind very difficult, even painful. Suppose I am tied down; it will be very difficult for me to rise up. I say, "Suppose I am tied down"

because, in reality, we are not tied, we ourselves hold on tightly to things.

Once, a Master was walking with his disciple, and his disciple asked his Master, “Revered Master, I have a question”. “Yes, what do you want to know?” “What is this ‘maya’?” The Master heard it, kept quiet, did not give him an answer and kept walking on, and the disciple followed. They had gone some distance when suddenly the Master ran towards a big tree, got hold of the tree, held onto it very tightly, and called to his disciple, “Come! Come! Come! Pull me, pull me”. The disciple said, “Why?” “Because the tree has got hold of me”. The disciple pulled, but the Master was holding on very strongly. The disciple tried his best, but the Master kept holding on. The disciple said, “Let go!” But the Master kept holding on. He was as if stuck to the tree. The disciple kept pulling. After some time, the Master let go of the tree, looked at the disciple and said, “Now, this is what maya is”. We are the ones who are gripping on to ‘it’ because of our desires. It is not actually maya which is clutching onto us; the maya that binds us is our own mind.

The solution to this problem of pain and suffering in this world is to let go, to rise up, to transcend. We should slowly rise from this basic level of awareness to a higher level of consciousness, but we are not able to do so because we are holding on tightly to these worldly things. So the first thing is to loosen our hold on things, detach ourselves from them, and only then will we start to rise up. The first step then is detachment. That is why the Gita says, besides *abhyāsa*, that is practice, you should try to develop *vairāgya*, or dispassion, for the ephemeral things of this world; learn to see the fleeting and illusory nature of this transitory world and everything that is worldly—this body, husband, children, wealth, name, fame, etc. I said in one

of my previous talks that real spirituality means developing two things: One is *vairāgya* and the other is bhakti or devotion. *Vairāgya* means dispassion, desirelessness, or detachment. In Spanish, they call it *desapego*—pegs which keep you fixed, pegs which keep one down at one level. *Desapego* means removing these pegs. We are tied by these pegs. Now, unless we pull out these pegs, we cannot loosen ourselves and move upwards; our consciousness cannot evolve to higher levels, and thus we cannot become free.

So, the first thing is to learn to let go a little of the things you are clutching onto. I am not saying you should let go immediately; you should do it gradually. And how can one do that? It is through right understanding and awareness about the pain of this world, awareness about the bondage, the transitoriness and the impermanence of this world. But before this understanding, there is one more thing.

How will this understanding and awareness come? Always, there are two things that are necessary—effort and grace. The two have to be combined. The right understanding will come by the grace and the guidance of Someone who has completely Realised the nature of this world. Such a realised one we call a Master or a Guide, who will give us an understanding of the true nature of this world and will also reveal, or at least make us conscious of, another Reality, and maybe give us a taste of that other Reality. Only when we have an understanding of the true nature of this temporary world and also get glimpses of another Reality, of a more perfect life, a more complete joy, will our efforts to attain it be more sincere. That's why they say, "A Master makes you aware and also puts a little taste in your mouth". It is like putting a little honey on the feelers of an ant. The ant will keep running ahead because of the smell; because it thinks the smell of the honey is coming from somewhere

ahead. So, a Master makes you aware that there are things much sweeter, happier, and greater than those you can find in this world. If there is something greater, surely we will make efforts to get that.

Because you have a mistaken notion that everything is here in this world, in these material objects, and there is nothing more or nothing beyond, you are making all these efforts to get them. Due to the Lord's maya and through many lives of auto-suggestions and the habit of sense-indulgence, you have convinced yourself that all that you are seeking is out there in the world. Even though one has so many frustrations and receives innumerable blows, still the mind is adamant in its supposition that everything is outside of us. We are convinced that the complete and perfect joy we are actually seeking is present in these objects that the senses perceive. It is very difficult to get rid of this conditioning which has been put into the mind, because many, many lives of efforts have gone into convincing us that all is here, the ultimate is here, the alpha and omega of things is this perceivable world.

So, how will this conditioning go? By sincere efforts to decondition ourselves, to dehypnotise ourselves; through the instructions of the Master, who will make you aware of your true condition. That is why a Self-realised Master is inevitable on this path. By the power of His Realisation, He will cast light on this darkness of conditioning that has veiled your understanding completely. What you have convinced yourself of will gradually get washed away through the instructions of the Master and dedicated service to Him, and then you will have another understanding, another perception.

Then comes effort. The process of spiritual development and self-improvement requires effort and struggle. We cannot sit in the armchair and think that all these spiritual attainments

will drop into our hands. Some effort is necessary—not only some effort; quite a lot of effort is indispensable to loosen these pegs of attachment. Sadhana is a fight—a fight with ourselves, an inner fight, a fight against preformed habits and accumulated conditionings of many lives. That is why the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita were imparted on a battlefield. The real battlefield is the inner battlefield. The Bhagavad Gita is an allegorical presentation of the inner battle through which a spiritual aspirant, especially a yogi, has to go through in the process of sadhana. When you decide to go on this path of spiritual development, of gaining wisdom by transcending the limitations of a human birth, you are like a warrior standing with his bow and arrow in the midst of a battlefield, fighting with your own conditionings of many lives, your own habits, your own creations, your own attitudes, your own false conceptions, your pride, your attachments, and mainly your ego-sense. All these stand in front of you when you want to proceed on this path to liberation. When you want to reach that highest blessedness, these are the actual enemies that stand in front of you.

That is why spiritual life has been compared to a war—a struggle. I think the spiritual process is also represented by Zen philosophy as a little war. If you are prepared to fight a little bit, there will be a Great Force behind you to help you in this fight. You will never be alone. That is why, first, before entering into this fight, you have to take shelter at the feet of Someone who will give you support, strength, and guidance, and tell you the techniques of this inner warfare. At each step, He/She will proclaim, “Don’t worry, don’t be afraid. I am there as Real as you are”.

As the aspirant, the disciple, keeps practising and following the instructions of the Master, he begins to develop

more *viveka* and *vicāra*—discrimination, purer intelligence, proper judgement, and also strength. Pure judgement and discrimination enable you to discern what is actually real and what is unreal, as well as to recognise the forces that bind you and separate you from your essence or from God, and the forces that will release you. Gradually with sincere sadhana and grace you will develop all those positive qualities which will enable you to loosen the strings that tie you. These divine qualities will give you the strength to fight. And as you keep struggling, you will also begin to rise higher and higher, leaving behind the ground or lower level to which your consciousness had been tied by strings of attachment and false expectations.

Now there is also another aspect which I will be touching on tomorrow, and that is devotion. For some, devotion comes first, and then comes dispassion. For others, dispassion comes first and then maybe devotion develops. For a few, both dispassion and devotion come at the same time. So, do not worry if you do not have dispassion; try to cultivate devotion. Both are means to rise above the pain and sorrow of this temporal existence and arrive at the highest blessedness. At whatever speed you may choose to proceed, as long as you are moving in the right direction with the right guidance, and as long as you know towards what you should channelise the efforts and activities of your life, you will not get completely submerged by the waves of this ‘samsara’—this world of duality and becoming in which one lives.

Hari Om. Guru Narayana.

6



Bhakti—Loving a Personal God

Tapovan, 8th August 1999

There is a God who walks, talks, loves, and listens to our pleas. He not only listens, but even takes pains to help us, showers His compassion on us, and uplifts us by His Grace. It is said that if you can really love Him, surrender to Him, and become His devotee, He will go to any extent to help you. He even goes so far as to say, “I will become the servant of those who have really given themselves to Me or, in other words, completely surrendered and taken exclusive shelter in Me”.

This is not just belief or fiction. There are instances to support this belief; things have really happened here on earth to people like you and me. There is a tradition here in India of loving God and taking complete shelter in Him. We call this tradition ‘bhakti’.

Yesterday, I spoke to you about dispassion and desirelessness, and about cutting and loosening the strings that tie you to this world. Dispassion sounds very difficult and fearful when one is tied by many strings of desires and affections to the people and objects of this world. It seems almost impossible to cut these strings. We hear about detachment and desirelessness,

and we feel, “Yes, they may be very nice and good. They are no doubt true; but they are not very practical, at least not for me”.

The path of renunciation is for those souls who have already come a long way and are really strong, firm, determined, and evolved. Those who are already qualified and possess a great deal of restraint over the senses and mind can start on this path of negation. For others, who have not completely resolved their attachment to this world but still feel an attraction for the Divine, ‘bhakti’ is the way.

Bhakti does not demand the immediate negation of one’s emotions and attractions. It shows a way to channelise one’s emotions in a single direction—towards a Personal God with form and qualities. This path seems easier to follow, or at least it does not seem as difficult and austere as the path of negation and renunciation.

The practice of bhakti involves directing one’s emotions towards a Personal God, who has a form and is endowed with the qualities of compassion and grace. Hence, He can be seen with the eyes, His teachings and sweet names can be heard through the ears, the offerings made to Him can be tasted with the mouth, and the hands can work for Him and be engaged in loving service for Him.

Dispassion is to empty yourself of your desires and attachments. Devotion is to direct your desires towards God and fill yourself with love for God. It is of course necessary to be empty before you can be filled, but it is very difficult indeed to be empty of one’s self completely. The advocates of the path of devotion tell you to start by cultivating love for God. Even if you have mundane attractions and desires inside, do not wait to be totally empty. Start with devotional practices, and they will naturally be transformed.

For example, if there is dirty water in a bottle, and you

start filling the bottle with clean water, at first, the clean water will get mixed with the dirty water in the bottle and will also become dirty. But after some time, if you keep on filling it, the dirty water will gradually flow out, and finally, only clean water will be left.

Bhakti is like filling yourself with clean water; it gradually transforms your base emotions and desires and makes them ‘sattvic’ and divine. If you cannot deny, then divinise. If you cannot deny your feelings, attractions, and attachments, divinise them and transform them. That is what the path of bhakti is; it is to divinise your relationships, attachments, and attractions.

In the process of divinisation, what will happen is that these attachments or strings which bind you to this world will gradually get loosened and finally break. It is a way of attaining dispassion by developing a single strong passion—the passion for a Personal God.

A Saint once told me that the way to develop real *vairāgya*—dispassion—is not by discarding passion, but by channelising it in one direction, that is, by developing *rāga* or attraction and love for God. When you have one strong passion, one aim, one desire, and when you can build up that desire, the other desires are sure to fall away. If you are determined to attain one thing, the various other desires you have will become complementary to this one desire on which the mind is set, or they will get naturally discarded.

An effective way of transforming your attachments is to think of the object of your attraction and attachment as an aspect of God. Suppose you are attached to children, then think of those children as manifestations of God. If your mind easily dwells on someone, think of that person as a manifestation of God, and when you think of that person, you will naturally think

of God also. This is how in the Hindu tradition they divinised every aspect of life and relationships.

In this way, you are not giving up your attraction or desire, but you are superimposing God on the object you desire or the person you love. Thus, what you are trying to attain through great pain and struggle—by concentrating your mind and making your mind one-pointed through meditation and Yoga—will happen easily and naturally. If your attraction is for a lover, think of God as a lover, think of God as your Cosmic Beloved. Direct all your feelings towards that Divine Lover.

This is a unique way. You do not adore God only as someone who is there high up in the heavens, only as a transcendent principle, but also as an immanent Being. You can love Him as your child, your friend, a lover, a master, or a father. Whatever relationship you want to develop, it is all possible with God. You can develop all kinds of relationships with one God. ‘He’ can be your friend, your father, and your master at the same time, whereas you can develop only one form of relationship with a human being. A friend cannot be your son, and your son cannot be your father, nor can your beloved be your mother or mother your wife.

However, you can develop any relationship you choose with God—that Universal Being. If you can really love Him intensely, it is said that ‘He’ will reciprocate that love and there is nothing that ‘He’ cannot grant you. Liberation is a natural outcome of loving God exclusively; no separate effort has to be made for it. To develop this kind of bhakti or exclusive love takes time. It is a new attitude which you have to cultivate through devotional practices. It is a sadhana, but the way is one of divinisation and transformation, not just denial and renunciation.

So, these strings of emotions which seem so difficult to

break, these attractions which tie us to this world, and which make us come back again and again to this world of becoming and prevent us from attaining higher existence or Liberation, get gradually channelised, purified, transformed, and divinised. Also, the restlessness which prevents the mind from being calm, collected, and concentrated, slowly gets transformed through bhakti.

Let us discuss a little about the practice that is followed to develop bhakti. When you love someone, you would like to do things for that person. Here in India, we have a system in which we dress, feed, and bathe our God, and put Him to sleep. These Gods also like to listen to our songs, so we sing and dance for them, and we get ecstatic. Every activity can be directed towards these Gods and can be done for them. I say “Gods” because we accept that there are different manifestations of God at different periods of Time. One can choose a particular manifestation one wants to adore as his or her Personal Deity, an aspect of God such as Ram, Krishna, Siva, or the Divine Mother—even Guru can be your ‘*iṣṭa-devatā*’ or personal deity of your choice.

Through this method of worship or adoration, the *raja guṇa*, which generates restlessness and activity and prevents the mind and body from being still, gets transformed. Through devotional songs and service, the mind naturally attains stillness and also ecstatic states called ‘*bhāva*’.

You might ask, “But what about those things that I like in this world? I like good food, I like good smells, and I like to hear nice music”. For instance, someone was asking, “What about the good things in this world? Do I have to give up all that? It seems so difficult”.

You can have them and still be spiritual. If you cook well and like good food, you can offer this food to God and then eat

the food as prasād. Thus, you do not have to give up eating good food; you just have to offer it to God and then eat it. Suppose you like good dresses, then you can dress your Lord with good dresses and relish the joy of seeing ‘Him’ well dressed. Or, suppose you like good smells, then bring beautiful flowers and perfumes and offer them to your God. In this way, you can also enjoy the fragrance of these beautiful flowers and perfumes. And through offering you will be able to transform your desires and simultaneously develop love for God.

All these activities of the senses can be offered to the Lord and thus be divinised. That is why eating here is not considered as an activity for filling the belly only; it is a sacred act of worship. When we eat, we say it is an offering to the *vaiśvānara* fire, the fire of life within us. God says, “I am there inside you as life’s energy, as the fire of life”. You can see that it is all a matter of attitude. When you change the attitude of eating, eating itself becomes worship and a sacrifice. In this way, every activity can be transformed and divinised.

So, through this process of bhakti, all these attractions you have towards what you call the “good things” can be transformed. Yesterday, when we were talking about the impermanence of sense objects, we said that they have a beginning and an end. It is true; we understand all that, but what can we do? We want to eat good food, and we want to enjoy other things.

In the path of bhakti, it is said that if you cannot give up these activities, then involve God in them. Do not do it only for yourself; instead, shift the centre of everything, direct and channelise them towards God. When you resolve to do this, to direct all your activities towards God, what will happen is that all your habits will change because there are certain things that you cannot offer to God. Here in India for example, you do

not offer meat to God, except in certain cases such as Mother Kali. So what will happen, if you really want to please God, is that you will also not accept meat, you will naturally become a vegetarian.

Likewise, many other things will change. Your nature will go through a transformation for the sake of your God. From being tamasic and rajasic, your nature will become sattvic; and one day even the desire for anything apart from God will vanish and you will naturally be liberated from desires.

If you love singing and dancing, you can sing and dance; but sing and dance for God. Singing and dancing are an integral part of devotion. A devotee does remembrance of the Lord by singing His names and by dancing for Him. What do you think will happen when you sing and dance for God and do the remembrance of the Lord's name? It will gradually create ecstasy, a divine mood or *bhāva* in you, and this *bhāva* will focus your mind on the Lord's divine form. You will begin to relish the joy of His presence in your heart, and naturally you will forget the body. What you are trying to do through contemplation and meditation will happen naturally through remembrance of the Lord. By singing and dancing, you will achieve the same thing you are struggling to do through yoga and meditation.

So, on this path, you do not have to be afraid of leaving anything; you just have to direct them all towards God. But will God respond? Yes, there are instances of God responding. If God is omnipotent and omnipresent, He can manifest Himself wherever He wants, whenever He wants, and in whatever form He wants. You just have to have intense love for Him and surrender to Him, and He will manifest—like how, at the right temperature, water becomes ice. What you see as inanimate statues will speak, pictures will become alive, and stones will

become animate. The inanimate will become animate. This is the power of bhakti and divine love.

A question may arise, “Well, let’s say I will love God as my child; but will He be like my child?” The answer is, He will not only be like your child, He will be much more. There are instances where God has manifested Himself in flesh. He interacts with His devotees exactly like a human being. I will give you some instances of this tomorrow. The love and attraction for God, unlike our attraction for the world, does not bind; instead, it liberates one.

Hari Om.



God Becomes a Reality sthrough Sincerity, Longing and Dedication

Tapovan, 9th August 1999

Longing is a manifestation of love for something. The more intense the love for something, the greater the longing for that. So, in this path of love, which is bhakti, longing is very important. To get something, we have to long for it; we have to want it, and we have to be intense in that wanting. In order to contact God, we have to have a very intense longing for Him.

A prophet of this age said, “If you can only cry for God, if you can cry continuously for two days and two nights, God will appear to you”. We long for the things of this world; we shed so many tears for them, and we feel so sad for material things which we do not have. Yet, we do not long for that essential aspect of ourselves which gives meaning to everything. We do not long for that most intimate part of our being—that eternal and most intimate companion—who was always there, who is there now and who will always be there, within and outside, in everything we perceive and interact with. We long for things that are transitory and ephemeral, and things that pass away, but we do not long for that which will remain, which is

permanent, eternal, which has always been with us and will always be there even after this body drops off. We do not seek to know That Eternal, we do not seek to contact That Permanent, and we do not seek to unite with That which is Complete.

We feel the lack of many things which are really meaningless—meaningless because they pass away. We feel a separation from creatures that are also transitory. All relationships that we have in this world are temporary. There is no seal of permanence on anything in this world; we have not come to this world with those with whom we develop relationships, nor can we leave this world with them. Each one comes by the force of his or her own ‘karma’ and departs also by the force of his or her own ‘karma’. We are like pilgrims or travellers who gather under a tree or take shelter somewhere, and when one’s time has passed, each one goes his/her own way, in his or her own direction, towards his or her own destination. How we grasp on to things that will definitely pass, but do not feel the lack of that which will really remain!

Bhakti is to feel the sorrow of separation from That Eternal Being and to long for unity with ‘Him’. When one has true devotion, one will gradually find everything else apart from God meaningless, and only God meaningful. Devotion is to feel the pangs of separation from God, to cry for Him, and to long for ‘His’ contact.

As long as we are playing with the toys of this world, the Divine Mother will never come to us. In this play, we might sometimes cry and sometimes laugh; but as long as we are enjoying the play of this world, as long as there is something of this world to desire, the Mother will not worry about us. It is only when a child throws away all the toys and begins to really cry, sincerely waiting, that the mother comes to pick up and hold that child on her lap. So, as long as we do not really long

for God, and feel the separation from Him intensely, He will not come to us. That is why you have to learn to long and cry in this path of devotion so that God can no longer resist coming to you.

Now, how will you be able to cry in that way? Only when you love God exclusively and make Him the only meaningful object of your life. Only then will you cry with intensity. You will really cry for God only when you realise the pain of transmigration—the pain of birth and death and the uncertainty of life. When you realise that every pleasure of this world is mixed with pain and realise the meaninglessness and pain of this game of life, only then will you doubtlessly long for that Eternal Companion from whom you have been separated in the process of becoming and losing your state of primal being.

I will give you an example of a prophet of this age who lived not long ago. This is an illustration of intense longing for the vision of God and how this intense longing manifested the Divine. The prophet's name was Sri Ramakrishna. He was a young priest in the temple of the Divine Mother Kali in Dakshineswar, which is located very close to Calcutta. He was in this big temple as the priest and he used to worship the Deity. Worshipping the Deity was supposed to be his job.

But there was something very unique about this priest. He did not just worship formally or mechanically. When he worshipped, he felt the depth of the rituals he was performing and the real inner significance of them. There was a question in his mind: Was the Deity real? Was the Mother he was worshipping real, or was She a myth and fiction of the human mind? And if She were real, why could he not see Her? He longed to have a vision of the Divine Mother he worshipped.

After performing his duties as a priest, which he sometimes did in an unorthodox manner because he did it according to his natural feelings, he used to retire into a grove

of trees in a little forest nearby and spend the rest of his time thinking, contemplating, and crying for the Divine Mother. He used to cry and pray, “O Mother, appear unto me”.

This longing to see the Mother became so strong that he would sometimes roll on the ground and rub his head. People who saw him in these moods—crying for the Mother and sometimes talking, praying, and rolling on the ground—thought, “Well, he has probably lost his mother” and sympathised with him. But it was not the biological mother for whom he was crying so intensely. It was that Divine Mother for whom Ramakrishna was crying, rolling on the ground, and sincerely calling, “O Mother, appear unto me”.

Days passed, and with the passing of the days, his longing became more and more intense. The longing to see the Divine Mother, to have the vision of the Mother grew very intense. He began to get desperate in his longing, and people thought he was mad. There was a burning in his body, and he began to lose his patience also. Some days he would say, “Probably You do not exist! And if You do not exist, what is the point of living?” Or he would say, “O Mother, You are probably just stone, and people just worship nothing. You don’t exist. If You do exist, why don’t You appear unto me? If You don’t appear unto me, then this life is meaningless”.

One day, while he was in the inner sanctum of the temple for worship, his longing became very intense. As he was praying and crying, he suddenly saw the sword in Mother Kali’s hand, and in his madness to have the vision of the Mother, he jumped and took hold of this sword and was about to cut off his head. He said, “Let me end my life because this life is meaningless if You do not appear in front of me”.

When he was about to put the sword to his throat, he was suddenly transported to a different state, and everything

around him—first the walls of the temple, then the tops of the houses and trees, etc.—suddenly began to disappear. There was nothing in his vision but a great vastness, a mist which hid everything, and a sense of intense ecstasy. Then, when the mist cleared, gradually the form of the Divine Mother began to manifest within the vastness. The stone statue suddenly became alive. That was his first experience of the Divine Mother, who is existent but does not appear unless there is such intensity of longing as that of Ramakrishna—just as water does not become ice unless the temperature is cool enough.

This path of love, the path of directing one's emotions towards the object of one's worship, naturally takes one to a state where the love intensifies to such a degree that everything else becomes meaningless. All material things, this body and this existence lose meaning. The only thing that is meaningful is the object of one's love and worship. This was practically demonstrated in the modern era of the nineteenth century by Sri Ramakrishna, who said, "If you can cry for Him, if you can really long for Him, then surely God will become a reality for you". In India, there have been quite a few such illustrious devotees in recent centuries who have found God through their intense devotion.

Well, the example of Sri Ramakrishna will probably make you think, "These things happen only to prophets". So today I will relate to you an instance of a small boy. But before I come to that, I will tell you something else because it happened to someone here amongst you. Recently, I was listening to someone who was having an interview with Mother, and she was relating an experience in which there was a manifestation of our Mother there in Japan. It was neither an image nor a picture, but in reality.

This person said, "I had seen it clearly, but I want to ask

Mother, I'm sure I have seen it, but still I want to ask Mother". And Mother said a very simple thing. Mother said, "Yes, when there is sincerity, when there is surrender, it does happen. Such things do happen". So before I come to the instance of the little boy, I want you to know that these things can happen today to anyone who has sincere devotion. Wherever there is sincerity, a sense of surrender, and simple longing, Divinity will manifest itself in form.

A few kilometres from the temple town of Puri, there is a temple in the countryside. When pilgrims and devotees visit this temple, the priests of this temple sometimes remove the cloth from the Deity and show certain stains or marks that are on the chest of the Deity, relating a story.

They say that these marks are blisters on the chest of the stone Deity. Well, it all depends on the eyes you are looking with. If you are looking with your flesh eyes, it is a Deity of stone; but if you are looking with your inner eye of devotion, then the Deity is living. They say, "You know these marks that are there, they are blisters". What blisters? "Blisters that were created by hot milk". How? "It was when the Lord was drinking hot milk, and He had to finish drinking it quickly, some of it fell on His chest and left these marks or blisters on His chest". There is a whole story about how this happened—why the Deity wanted to drink the milk quickly.

Long ago, there were families of Brahmin priests who used to worship this image of God. Each family had a certain quota of days to do the worship, and they had to perform it because that was their family profession. In one of these Brahmin families, there was a priest, his wife, and his child, and it was the turn of this priest to worship the Lord. So, every day he used to go to the temple and offer the Lord food, flowers, incense, and do the whole procedure of worship.

But one day, he had to leave due to some urgent matter he had to attend to. His little son, who was also a Brahmin boy, was now ready to perform worship because he had grown up, received his sacred thread, and had been initiated into the rites of worship. So as the father was absent, the mother told him, “My son, take this milk for the Lord and offer it to ‘Him’, and after the Lord has drunk the milk, you come back”.

So, this boy took the milk and followed the procedure of offering. He put the flowers and the basil leaves, lit the lamps and the incense, took the milk and offered it to the Lord. Then he said, “Now Lord, drink the milk. My mother has told me that after You finish drinking, I will go”. So he closed the door and waited. He told the Lord, “Please drink it”, and he began to pray.

He began to say from the depth of his heart in a very simple way, “Please Lord, drink the milk which my mother has sent. I can only leave after You have drunk it”. He then opened the door. But the Lord had not drunk the milk. It was still there in the bowl. Again, he closed the door and began to cry and plead with the Lord. Finally, when he opened the door, he saw that the bowl was empty, and he said, “Now I can go”. So, he took the bowl and went home.

When he returned home, his mother said, “Why are you so late?” He told her, “The Lord took some time to drink the milk, so I’m late”. The mother said, “Drink the milk?! Where is the milk?” He replied, “The Lord has drunk it”. Usually, “drink” means that the Lord accepts it, and then the milk is taken home. The mother asked again, “The Lord has really drunk the milk?” “Yes, the Lord has drunk the milk”, replied the boy. The mother thought, “Well, this little boy must have drunk the milk”, so she did not worry about it.

The next day, the father had not returned, so the mother

sent the boy again, saying, “Now take the milk and offer it to the Lord”. The boy went, did the same thing, closed the door and waited for the Lord. He saw that the Lord had not drunk it, so he cried, “Lord, please drink the milk quickly, I have to go, I’m feeling hungry”. After some time, he saw that the Lord had drunk the milk. He took the bowl and returned home, and again the mother asked for the milk. The boy replied, “The Lord has drunk the milk”. The mother thought, “So this little boy drinks the milk every day”.

When the father came back, the mother told him, “The boy takes the milk, and he says the Lord has drunk it”. So, the father asked him, “Do you drink the milk every day?” The boy was very sincere and said, “No, I don’t. The Lord drinks the milk”. “The Lord drinks the milk?” the father said, “No, no, you are drinking the milk”. But the boy said, “No. The Lord drinks the milk”.

There was something in the boy’s voice that was very sincere. The father felt that there was some truth in the boy’s words and thought, “The boy sticks to his words. Even after I have threatened him a little, he still says, ‘No, the Lord drinks the milk.’” So the father said, “My boy, I am very tired from my journey. So you take the milk again today, go and do the worship and offer it to the Lord”. So the boy went with the milk, did his worship and the offering, and closed the door.

The father said to himself, “Today I will go and see what is really happening there”. So just after the boy had offered the milk, the father suddenly appeared and opened the door. He had thought, “Today I will open the door and catch the boy drinking the milk!”

But instead of catching the boy drinking the milk, the father saw that the Lord was drinking the milk. Because of the sudden interruption, it is said that the Lord began to drink

quickly. Due to the haste, the milk spilled over onto His chest. When the hot milk fell on the Lord's chest, it scalded the skin and left blister marks.

The priests point to these marks on the Deity and say, "These are the imprints of those marks, the blisters that were created when the Lord drank the milk". Till now they have a special offering of milk preparation for the Lord, which they say is a tradition related to this instance of the Lord drinking milk.

I am tempted to quote an example of simple and sincere devotion and complete trust which I myself experienced during a trip to Himachal. That summer, I was staying in a cottage on the mountainside, temporarily let out to me by a wealthy gentleman from Chandigarh.

There was a small spring just behind the cottage. Actually, it was not a regular spring, just a little water sprout where water oozed out of the rocks on the mountainside. It was summer time, and when there is no rain it can be quite hot during the daytime, even in this place in Himachal.

One Sunday morning in May, when I was sitting in the sitting room, I saw some local women and children gather near the small spring behind my cottage. They had a pot and were breaking some dry twigs. They placed three rocks, put a pot with water on top of the rocks, and were trying to light a fire. After a while, a woman who was supplying milk to us came and asked Premanandaji to request me to accept the prasad they were going to prepare. Well, Premananda refused, but then they brought a packet of 'dalia'—particles of wheat similar to bulgur—some sugar, and a little money, and told Premananda that it was an offering for me. Premananda was about to refuse, but I restrained him and told him, "They are simple people, and this offering is from their heart, so accept it and thank them". After Premananda accepted their offering, they were extremely

pleased and said, “Today we will certainly be successful, and it will rain heavily”.

When I heard this, I was really curious because the sky was completely clear, and there was no sign of rain. I sat there and watched them. They cooked some ‘dalia’ in the pot, made a ‘khechedi’ out of it, and made an offering. Immediately after they had made the offering, dark clouds began to gather in the sky, and in no time, there was a heavy shower of rain. I was really amazed because I had seen that they had followed no rules of purity or formal worship. I called the woman who used to give us milk and enquired, “Which God did you worship?” and she said, “Khwaja Bhagavan”. As far as I know, there is no such God in the Hindu pantheon. These were simple women; they had followed no formal rules of worship and worshipped no God I knew of, and the word “Khwaja” sounded Persian. But they had done the whole thing from the heart, with sincerity and doubtless trust, and rain had come down.

So, simplicity, sincerity, surrender, dedication, longing, and love make the unmanifested manifest. It compels the formless to become form, the transcendent to become immanent, and the inanimate to become animate. That is what devotion is. Let us pray that the Mother will bless us with a little of this sense of longing or *śraddhā*, which is essential on the path of devotion and also on the path of knowledge. In the path of devotion, the longing is for one’s Personal God, and in the path of knowledge it is the sincere desire for Liberation or *mumukṣutva*. Unless there is sincerity, dedication, and longing, you cannot be successful on the spiritual path or even in your material pursuits. You have to sincerely long for a certain thing and make sincere and determined efforts. There has to be sincerity and true dedication, and then everything comes.

Hari Om.

8



Love God through Developing a Relationship with Him

Tapovan, 10th August 1999

Devotion is to love God as a human and to develop a relationship with Him. The path of devotion is to think of God as immanent, as a being and a person, and to love Him as such, gradually evolving through this practice of devotion to the state in which one can also love man as God by perceiving the innate Divinity in all—just as the ‘gopis’ who saw their Krishna wherever they cast their eyes.

When one truly experiences God, He is no longer confined to an image or a deity. When God manifests Himself in the consciousness of the devotee, He manifests as the all-pervading consciousness—a being that pervades everything, a Universal Being from whom all have come, in whom all rest, and into whom all disappear and finally dissolve.

So from loving God as a man, one rises to the level of seeing Him in all beings and all things, and in the whole of this creation. By merging oneself in Him and becoming united with Him, there is the wedding of the finite with the Infinite and the wedding of one’s consciousness with that Supreme and

Universal Consciousness. In this union, the creation, the creator, and the created become One.

How can we love God so that ‘He’ can become real for us? I mentioned that all types of relationships are possible with God. So, in order to love Him, one has to first develop a particular relationship with Him. That is the way of bhakti or devotion.

The first of these different kinds of relationships that one can develop is *dāśya*, which means the attitude of the servant towards the master. The devotee thinks, “God is the Master, and I am His servant”, and starts to serve the Lord as his Master through all his activities, being obedient and humble as a servitor. We see this attitude amongst Christian devotees: God is the Master and the Lord. They address God as Master. This form of devotion is the way of humble service, obedience, and respect. *Dāśya bhakti* is also the attitude of the disciple towards the Master—he or she is the obedient servant of the Master and follows Him or Her with unconditional reverence. Hanuman is a perfect example of *dāśya bhakti*.

Then there is *sakhya bhakti*, which means to love God as one’s intimate friend and companion, and to develop an attitude of close friendship with Him, like that of the Gopalas towards Lord Krishna. *Sakhya bhakti* brings God closer to oneself. He is no more just a Transcendent Being somewhere high up in heaven where one cannot reach Him. The transcendent Reality, which is incomprehensible and unreachable, becomes reachable through one’s *bhāva* or attitude of love.

By developing a relationship with God and one’s *bhāva* of intimacy with God, God becomes immanent and manifest—a living reality, a personality. The more intense, genuine, and sincere one can become in this attitude, the more God will manifest Himself. In *sakhya bhakti*, you interact with the Lord

as an intimate friend and contemplate ‘Him’ as your friend. There is no distance between you and Him. He is your close confidant and playmate. The Gopala friends joked and played tricks on Krishna. Although He was Godhead, they did not regard Him as such; they regarded Him as their most intimate friend, another ‘gopala’ or cowherd boy like them. They played with Him, joked with Him, even called Him names and ate with Him.

You can choose to direct your love and devotion towards whichever aspect of Godhead you feel an attraction to. As individual tastes differ, there are many aspects of the One Godhead that manifest in different forms: His loving aspect, His compassionate aspect, His knowledge aspect, His valour aspect, and so on. The Hindus worship Krishna, Rama, Siva, and the Divine Mother, knowing that they are different manifestations of that One Absolute Reality.

So, one develops a relationship with Godhead, and the more one gets absorbed in developing this relationship, the more God becomes a living reality. Let us look at the logic behind this. The wise say that this world has no reality: The objective world is only a projection of the subject of the mind-stuff. Because of one’s intense desires, this projected world appears as reality. In reality, it is only mind-stuff.

Now, suppose we concentrate our awareness and feelings on a certain form of God or a certain aspect of Him. Can consciousness not take on that form? Schools of Indian Metaphysics say that God has no form and is pure and limitless consciousness, but ‘He’ takes a form because of the love and devotion of devotees. So, serving, loving, and contemplating God as a friend does manifest God as your friend and your most intimate companion.

Dispassion is emptying oneself and becoming empty. But

what meaning does this emptiness have? What meaning does nothingness have? The cup is empty so that it may be filled. *So, the purpose of this emptiness and dispassion is not an end in itself; it is the preparation to receive the “everything-ness”.* Devotion is to attract that everything-ness which is God.

The other relationship which one can cultivate with God is *vātsalya*, that is, to love God as one’s own child. Well, you all hear of loving God as your father, that is, thinking of oneself as the child of God. In Christianity, one thinks of God as the Heavenly Father. In India, we think of Godhead as the Divine Mother also. You think of God as the Divine Mother and yourself as the child and develop this attitude of being the child of the Divine Mother.

But what is really unique in the Hindu school of ‘bhakti’ is to love God as one’s child and to develop exactly that attitude, that relationship which one has for the child. Devotees are not reluctant to give a little spanking also to God when they have attained that state of perfect *vātsalya bhāva*. We have the example of Yashoda Mata; she even bound God who has bound the three worlds by His indomitable ‘maya’. So you see one develops this *bhāva* towards the Deity one serves and loves. In *vātsalya bhakti*, you dress Him, you feed Him, and take care of Him. You are the protector of your little child God, Gopal, and in turn, ‘He’ actually protects you. I will later relate to you an instance of this *vātsalya bhāva*.

Finally, there is what is called *mādhurya*, which means to love God as one’s Cosmic Beloved, as the Cosmic Lover and as one’s most intimate partner. The most intimate of all forms of bhakti is this *mādhurya bhāva*. It is the culmination of all the other *bhāvas* because this is the most intimate of all relationships. There is a mergence of one into the other in the relationship of the lover and the beloved. They say this is the

highest of all *bhāvas*, the final consummation and the final culmination of devotion.

You are probably not acquainted with the tradition of the Gopis. When we sing of Radha and Krishna, we are eulogising this *mādhurya bhāva* between the Cosmic Beloved and the Cosmic Lover—Krishna. So to follow the way of the Gopis is to give oneself completely to God, to love God as the Cosmic Lover or Beloved in the way the Gopis loved Krishna selflessly and unconditionally. That is *mādhurya bhāva*.

These are the four main *bhāvas*—four kinds of relationships and attitudes which one cultivates on the path of bhakti. It is said that there is one more called *śānta bhāva*, which means the way of the contemplatives who contemplate on God's infinite peace and vastness and merge their minds in it. That is also a *bhāva*—the contemplation of the formless, the infinite, and peaceful aspect of God. But there are mainly four *bhāvas*: *Dāsyā*, *sakhya*, *vātsalya*, and *mādhurya*.

I told you that today I would give you an illustration, an example of *vātsalya bhāva*. Not long ago, in the nineteenth century, there was a devotee of Sri Ramakrishna. Her name was Gopaler Maa, which means the mother of Gopal. That was not her original name, but she came to be known as Gopaler Maa or Gopal's Maa because of her devotion and love for the child Krishna.

She was a devotee and disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, whom I was speaking about yesterday. In those days in India, girls were betrothed and married at a very early age, even before puberty. Sometimes it so happened that the one with whom their marriage was fixed expired, and then they had to lead the solitary life of a widow, as they were not supposed to remarry. This Gopaler Maa was one of them who had been married early but had never had the opportunity of leading a conjugal life

because her husband had died.

So, from that time, she began to lead a solitary life, do *japa* and serve an image of Gopal. To fulfil her natural maternal tendency, she chose this aspect of Godhead. Gopal is a name of baby Krishna. Gopal means one who takes care of *go*, which means cows, so a cowherd boy. As Lord Krishna had taken care of cows in Vrindavan, He came to be known as Gopal. But there is also a deeper meaning to it. *Go* means the senses, so the One who takes care of or controls the senses and is the Master of these senses is called Gopal.

This woman began to worship little Gopal and take care of Him as her child. She had one little room in a garden near the Ganga. Her only possessions were her bag of beads, a Ramayana, and a few little belongings—a pot to cook food and perhaps something to keep things in. In those days, they used to put things in a pot and hang the pot from the ceiling. These were her only possessions, and she spent many years, maybe thirty years or more, leading such an austere life.

One day, she visited Sri Ramakrishna along with a few people. She had heard about this Saint, who was living in the temple of Mother Kali at Dakhineswar, and she had wanted to visit him. When Sri Ramakrishna saw Gopaler Maa, he apparently behaved in very strange ways. In their first meeting, he asked her, “Have you brought something for me to eat?” Well, she was a little surprised, but she had some very common sweets which she had put in her bag. So she said, “I have brought only this”, and gave him the sweets. Sri Ramakrishna ate and relished these little sweets very much and told her, “Next time you come, bring some hand-cooked food for me”.

When Gopaler Maa was returning after this visit to the saint, she thought to herself, “I will not go back again. What a strange saint he is! He is supposed to be a Master, but he asks

for eatables and tells me, ‘Next time you prepare some things and bring them for me’. No, I will not go to that saint again”. And she came back home.

However, although she had decided never to go again, there was an irresistible pull, an indefinable attraction, and again her steps were somehow guided towards Sri Ramakrishna. This time, she had cooked something and put it in her bag. Thus, there developed a relationship of a child and mother between Sri Ramakrishna and Gopaler Maa. Sri Ramakrishna, a Realised Master, behaved just like a little child in front of Gopaler Maa. Whatever Gopaler Maa took for him, he ate like a child, never sharing it with anyone.

Gopaler Maa visited Sri Ramakrishna quite a few times, and her *vātsalya bhāva* for Sri Ramakrishna developed, and each time she fed him like a mother. When this relationship had reached a certain state, suddenly one day, while she was in her little room—where she led a life of poverty, but of absolute purity and simplicity—the little Gopal whom she used to worship became alive. He became like one with flesh and blood and crawled towards her and sat on her lap.

Gopaler Maa was definitely not in a normal state; she was in a high state of ecstasy. This little Gopal, who had become flesh, did not leave her. ‘He’ became her family. He asked to be fed, sat on her lap, and slept beside her like a little child. Then one day, she took little Gopal and went to Sri Ramakrishna. Well, no one else saw little Gopal in her arms, but in her mental world, it was a reality. She carried this Gopal and went to Sri Ramakrishna. Sri Ramakrishna saw Gopaler Maa and approached her as if he knew about the whole thing. When she came close to Ramakrishna, little Gopal melted into Ramakrishna and got merged into him.

This is not a story. These are recorded incidents

that happened not so long ago. Gopal began to merge into Sri Ramakrishna and again manifest from him because Sri Ramakrishna was not a simple Master. He was a Premik Guru, an *avatāra puruṣa*. Whatever divine experience happens, happens by such a Guru's grace, and the Guru is the medium through whom Divinity manifests Himself. We have experienced this first-hand with Holy Mother. That is why we worship the Guru as the Ultimate Divinity itself.

Gopaler Maa came back home, and this state of ecstasy continued. Gopal kept living with her, and she spent her whole life with Gopal. In this way, what we consider to be an inanimate idol became animate. Through a life of purity, simplicity, devotion, and sincere service and love for the Guru, the formless had become form for her; the transcendent had become immanent. By Sri Ramakrishna's grace, the *vātsalya bhāva*, which Gopaler Maa had been cultivating throughout her life, reached its perfection and culmination through the manifestation of Godhead from the idol that she had worshipped her whole life, to whom she had dedicated her life, and for whom she lived and spent every hour of her life.

So, this is an instance of how the Infinite Being, the formless Being, becomes form for the sake of devotees. True sincere devotees can make the abstract Truth manifest in real flesh and blood through their *bhāva*. It is like water that becomes ice when a certain temperature is reached. So also, this Infinite vast Being becomes form when certain mental states are reached by the devotee. Intense *bhāva*—or feelings of love, dedication and sincerity—manifests the Transcendent Reality in form. This is the power of sincere bhakti or devotion.

Hari Om.

9



Holy Land and Loving Service

Tapovan, 11th August 1999

I am telling you all these stories because incidents and illustrations make spiritual life not imaginary and legendary but something real and concrete, something that can be achieved through proper effort and the grace of Guru and God. Men have found the Transcendent Being by their love, affection, dedication, and devotion. That is why these stories are so important. The living examples of such God-realised beings are a great inspiration for us. They encourage us to walk on this path.

In India, there are many places that are considered sacred. Out of these, there are a few which are considered extremely sacred and favourable for the practice of spiritual disciplines and for leading a spiritual life. This is because these places have been purified, sanctified, and charged with the vibrations of those who have aspired for God, contemplated 'Him', thought of 'Him', and had visions of 'Him'. There are places where it is believed that God's presence has not only been felt but 'He' has also manifested in concrete form.

These lands and places have something of that vibration

which inspires those who seek God. Someone said that India is a country where the rivers, trees, mountains, and rocks all seem to contemplate God. That is why here, in this country, there is a tradition of worshipping the Spirit in rivers, trees, mountains, and even rocks.

This is not fiction. Through thousands of years—ageless time—this land has gathered those favourable spiritual vibrations because God and Buddhas or Realised beings have manifested here on this land. Buddhists consider this land holy because the Buddha was born here and Buddhism originated from here. In an ancient and authentic document about Jesus, written in the Tibetan language and preserved in Lhasa, it is documented that in his thirteenth or fourteenth year, Isha, or Jesus, journeyed to the land of God, which is India—particularly Puri is mentioned. Hidden and suppressed facts about Jesus are gradually surfacing, and there are many books written on these hidden topics, such as “The Missing Years of Jesus Christ” and “Who Moved the Stone?”. Many Buddhas, Christs, and saints have been born in this holy land, and not only saints but also human manifestations of God Himself have left their footprints on this sacred soil surcharging the atmosphere with their divine vibrations. Though now this land is covered with ashes, somewhere within those ashes is this living fire of divinity.

Some years back, I was in Germany, and I was living in a very beautiful countryside. In Germany, they still have very beautiful nature with trees and rivers. The place where I was staying was beautiful with farms, mountains, trees, beautiful houses, and a peaceful life, and everything was very nice and beautiful.

But I had written to Mother in a letter which I had sent from there, “Mother, everything here is very well organised and very beautiful to the eyes but all this does not touch the heart,

the inner core of one's being; why is it so?" The Germans by nature are very organised; they cut their hedges, they wash their cars very well, and everything is taken care of in a very orderly and organised manner. All was very proper, especially where I lived.

I had felt that something vital was lacking. Everything was beautiful to the eyes, but it didn't touch the inside—that was my perception and my feeling. When I returned to the ashram, Mother told me in very simple words what was lacking in those lands. She said these lands had not received the touch of the feet of God, which means God had never manifested in a human or other form in those lands. It is only in India that God manifested in a form and did His lilas. That is why '*avatāravād*' holds such significant importance in Indian spiritual tradition .

Many people come here from abroad, and I have heard of their experiences, and they say there is something special about India. Why is it so? It is because of what Holy Mother mentioned to me—the Ultimate Reality, the Supreme Being, has manifested in human and even other forms here.

However, outward conditions are very unfavourable, especially for a visitor from abroad. So, when people come here, they either want to run away the moment they arrive, go back on the next flight, or they stay on and come back again and again. Outwardly, many things are unfavourable here; there is a lack of material and physical comforts compared to other countries. The situation here is also a little chaotic sometimes, and the standard of hygiene is low. There are many factors which we cannot really be proud of. But the fact that this land has received the touch of God's feet through different *avatāras* or incarnations, and that God has manifested to countless people here, distinguishes this land from others and makes it very special. In other places, things can be very beautiful outwardly,

and materially everything may be extremely organised, but there is something very vital that is lacking, and that something cannot be aroused and awakened unless there is the touch of God and God beings.

In this land of Aryavarta which has received the touch of God, there is a living spiritual force—an aspect which we cannot really understand easily or logically, but we can feel it. That is why Swami Vivekananda once said, “If you go to India and you look with these two flesh eyes, you will not find anything. You will be disappointed. You have to go there with other eyes, and you will discover everything”. What he meant was that here, spirituality is covered with things which are misleading; moreover, you have to have some spiritual sensibility of your own to discover what really is there in India.

Let us go back to talking about holy places. There is a place here in India which is called Vrindavan. *Van* means forest, like Tapovan. Once it was a lush green countryside, with forests and pastoral scenery with a river flowing through it. This land is considered sacred because we believe that Godhead manifested there as Lord Krishna.

Presently in Vrindavan, there are many temples dedicated to Lord Krishna. There are places where He sported, places connected with His pastimes when He was incarnate. Many devotees of Lord Krishna go there to reside and to contemplate Him, hoping that one day He would give them ‘darshan’. There are also many widows who go and live there. They go and live sometimes in poverty, dedicate their lives to God, do service to God, and do remembrance of God. Now I will relate an incident that occurred there.

Once, there was a woman who lived in Vrindavan and served the Deity of Sri Radha and Krishna in a temple. Every day, she collected flowers, strung them together, and made

garlands for the Lord. Her whole day's activities were directed towards serving God. She lived near this temple of Sri Radha and Krishna—the Divine Couple. She cleaned the temple, made garlands, offered these garlands to the Deities every day, and did remembrance of the names of the Lord. She waited for the day when the Lord would manifest in front of her and she would have the 'darshan' of the Lord and receive His divine grace. She dreamt of the day when the Lord would appear to her in person, and with this secret wish she kept on doing service in the temple.

Many years passed and she became old. One day while she was stringing the garlands, a thought suddenly crossed her mind, "I have done this service all these days, but what is the point in doing all this? Maybe I have wasted my life. Maybe I have served a God who is not real, or if He is real, He is not compassionate. I have spent so many years serving 'Him' and I have become old now". And she kept thinking, "There is no point in staying here any longer. My wish will never be fulfilled. Today I will not give the garlands I have strung to the Deities. I will go away from this land of Krishna. Lord Krishna has not heard my prayers. He has not been compassionate enough, so today I will leave".

Thus, she sat there thinking. She was crying, as she was very sad at the thought of leaving, but she resolved to do so. By the time she had decided to leave, she had already made her garlands. The two garlands which she had made were very beautiful because she had been making garlands for many years and had become an expert. She knew which colours and flowers to use, and how they were to be arranged. She really made them with much care and love.

But that day, after she had finished the garlands, she decided not to offer them to the Deities and leave. Since she had

made the garlands, she could not throw them away, so she took the garlands and left the temple. As she started walking, tears were rolling down her eyes and wetting her cheeks. She had stayed in this place all these years with only one aim: That she would one day have a vision of the Lord. The frustration of not having had the vision of the Lord, whom she had served for so many years, made her cry.

She was very sad to leave, but she had decided on it, so she started walking away from the temple. As she kept walking, she saw two children—they were following her and kept pulling her and asking, “Where are you going, O mother? Where are you going?” in the colloquial language of Vrindavan, which is called Vrajaboli.

The boy was even teasing her a little. She told him, “Leave me alone. Go away”. The boy kept saying, “Where are you going? Why do you want to go away?” She said, “Go away, don’t bother me”, while clutching her bag with the garlands. “Don’t ask me”, she muttered and kept walking, but the children did not leave; they kept following her.

Before she could cross the boundaries of Vrindavan, suddenly these two children said, “Alright if you are going, why are you taking the garlands with you? Give them to us”. She was trying to hide the garlands because she had made them with all her love for the Lord. The children told her, “Give the garlands to whom you made them for; don’t take them”. And they snatched the garlands from her.

The moment they touched her, she lost her outer consciousness and got merged in ecstasy—in devotional bliss. She became completely unaware of the surroundings. She lost body consciousness, and she got merged into an ocean of bliss. While she was in this state, suddenly from this ocean of bliss, there manifested the forms of the Deities she had been serving

all her life. And she saw that they were wearing the garlands that she had made.

After some time, she regained her consciousness, and she began to run back to the temple. She came rushing back when the temple doors were about to close, and she pleaded with the priest, saying, “I want to have a little darshan. I want to see the Lord”, and she was not in an ordinary state. The priest said, “You have already given the garlands, and you have finished now. Why do you want to see them again?” She said, “No, no. I want to see them for a moment”. So she went in and seeing Radha and Krishna wearing the garlands she had made, she again went into ecstasy, and she probably left her physical body. As a result of dedicated loving service and true longing for the darshan of the Lord, the Lord had manifested in human form to this devotee and taken her to His divine realm.

The Vaishnavs say that the purpose of doing all our sadhana and service is to develop ‘*bhāva netra*’ by which one can see the Lord. Service is not only a means, but it is also the goal of a devotee. He or she wants to be the eternal servant of the Lord, serving the Lord in whichever realm or condition He decides to put them in.

Hari Om.

10



Devotion—the Attitude of Gratitude

Tapovan, 12th August 1999

As we come to the end of these few days we have spent together in Satsang and discussions, let us finally touch on another aspect of devotion. It is about the attitude of gratitude.

I have said that longing is a very essential part of bhakti. I have talked about longing for God, crying for God. But suppose we do not feel any love for God; then how can we feel longing for ‘Him’? It is only when we feel some love and devotion that there can be longing. So first of all, how can we feel this devotion?

Gratitude is a way of feeling devotion. There are many things in our lives and in this world for which we should feel gratitude. Think about life, think about the principles that support life—such as air, water, etc., nature as a whole, the changing seasons, our parents, friends, and many other things. When we think about all these things that support life and the fact that we have not really created these essential things which support life, we will naturally think about the Creator who has manifested these principles that support life, and a deep sense of gratitude will naturally arise in our hearts.

When we see these beautiful sunrises and fading sunsets, these twinkling stars in the skies, and all this beauty of life and nature, do we ever think that there may be a Creator behind all this? When we think in such a way, we will naturally feel thankful for all these beautiful things that we have taken for granted.

I always tell people, “Have you ever thought what will happen if you have all the money, but you do not have any air or water?” Think of this: There is no air, but you have money. Now, suppose the sun does not rise for some days; you have all the money in your house, but you do not have water. Have you ever thought about this? Would life be possible? We think that money is the only thing that makes life possible, but how many other factors actually contribute to life?

When you develop such a way of thinking, and you think of the One who has given you all this, the feeling that will be aroused in the heart is what is called ‘gratitude’.

All this can be dismissed by scientific explanations: Water is formed by so much hydrogen combining with so much oxygen, so where is the Creator behind all this? Well, that is one way of thinking, but somehow these are not complete explanations.

Suppose you take a flower, tear it all apart and analyse it. There are so many stamens, so many petals, this and that. You would have analysed everything about the flower, but there would be something subtle about the flower which would have escaped all this analysis. The beauty and the fragrance of the flower, which is its essence, would have escaped your analysis. How can you analyse that?

In this way, these analyses about the principles of nature are a very material kind of analysis and are also about superficial things that can be perceived by the senses, while there is something very subtle that cannot be perceived and analysed.

That is why, before all these scientific investigations, man was filled with a sense of mystery and wonder. From this sense of mystery and wonder he felt the presence of a Spirit, of a Creator, of something Great, of a mystical Principle that surrounds and supports us.

The primitive man saw these principles of Nature—the roaring winds, great waves of the oceans, vast deserts, storms and lightning, stars in the sky, ethereal lights—and was filled with a sense of fear, wonder, and mystery. And thus he thought that there was a Force which was beyond comprehension.

This sense of mystery and wonder is necessary. Today, we think we understand creation. So, we do not have this sense of mystery or wonder anymore because we think we know everything. We feel science has given us explanations for everything, and we have lost the sense of mystery and wonder. Also, because of this all-knowing mentality, which one develops due to the present system of education that has originated in the West, one loses the quality of humility.

Humility is a most essential quality on the spiritual path. Humility is a quality most essential for developing devotion, and it helps in attaining true Knowledge or Wisdom that leads to Self-realisation and ultimately to the higher worlds. But today, our heads are held so high due to the pride and vanity of our secular knowledge and academic achievements that it is difficult to bow our heads to real Masters and to God, the Creator and sustainer of this creation. With all this secular and scientific knowledge, we have achieved a lot, but we have also lost something very essential and beautiful, which enriches the heart and fills one with inspiration. With the loss of this sense of wonder, mystery, admiration, and appreciation, we have also lost that other aspect—the spiritual and the devotional. We have become material, mechanical, logical, very competent, and efficient

beings, but also very superficial and hollow beings, without essence—men of straw, or we can say super-efficient machines.

Primitive man saw the sunrise over the mountains. When he saw the sunrise after a dark night, he knelt down and prayed. When he saw the moon reflected in the waters, he knelt down in gratitude, and probably from that prayer and gratitude developed devotion. Man prayed to these principles of Nature as manifestations of a Higher Power. After a really dry and sultry summer when the rains came down, he danced with joy and sang in praise to God and the principles of Nature. That is what the initial hymns of the Vedas are—praises to the sunrise, to the rivers, the seasons, etc.

Even today in Rajasthan, they have festivals when the rains come down. They dance, sing, pray, rejoice, and praise God. Rajasthan is mainly a desert where they have very arid and dry hot summers, and there is no water. So they are filled with gratitude for the rain that comes down, fills, soaks, and gives life to the dry earth and enables them to cultivate and grow the crops that sustain them.

So, behind this worship, prayers, and devotion to God is a deep sense of gratitude. This gratitude is a very important factor in Sanatana Dharma. I think behind many practices that are there, there is this feeling of gratitude. Dharma means a way of life. It means certain principles which support man and life and maintain a balance. Dharma means to uphold. Unless someone is supported, what happens is that he or she falls. So dharma means that which upholds humanity. Just as a mother upholds the child on her lap, dharma upholds humanity and does not allow it to go down, to deteriorate to lower levels.

There are certain practices in Sanatana Dharma which one follows and that have become a tradition in India, such as worshipping rocks, trees, and animals. Well, this worship of

rocks, trees, and animals can be explained very logically. Most religions say that the spirit pervades everything. Science also says all is energy. Worship is done to re-establish this fact in daily life. That is why, here in India, they worship the mountains, rivers, trees, and animals. However, it is very difficult to find a logical answer to why particular animals and trees are considered more sacred. But when one thinks more deeply one can find an answer to this seemingly absurd practice.

Many wonder why Hindus worship the cow. They wonder why they do not eat the cow. But suppose, as an answer to that question, I ask, “Why don’t you eat the cat?” You could only say you do not relish it, have not yet developed a habit to do so, or something like that. You have not been eating the cat for a long time; so in the same way, Hindus have not been eating the cow for a long time.

But why do Hindus worship the cow? One wonders why people should worship the cow since it is an animal. It is actually not only the cow that is worshipped. The banana tree, the coconut tree, etc., are also considered sacred and auspicious. Hindus also consider rivers to be sacred. Do they have any real logical basis or sane thinking behind this, or is it some odd eccentricity?

I have also wondered why the cow is worshipped, and one thing that has struck me is that it is because the sense of gratitude was very strong among the followers of the Sanatana Dharma. There was a sense of gratitude for the cow because it gave milk with which we were fed when we were babies and could not eat any solids, like the mother who breastfeeds her child. So we regard the cow as a mother; we say ‘*gaumātā*’. We have a tradition of respecting the mother and father who fed us, held our hand when we could not walk, and taught us how to take our first steps. There is an ingrained sense of gratitude for all those things which support life—gratitude towards the parents, gratitude

towards the various principles of nature—that is why the sun is worshipped as a god, fire and water are also gods. This sense of gratitude has taken the form of worship. Worship generates devotion, and devotion also manifests itself through various forms of worship.

The Westerners do not understand why, in the East, the younger ones have to respect the older. They do not understand why there has to be obedience and respect, why children have to support their aged parents, and why old people have to be looked after. There is one factor behind all this: It is out of a sense of gratitude.

Respect born from gratitude is not only a necessity for developing devotion or spirituality; it is also necessary for smooth interaction, proper organisation of society, and harmonious and peaceful existence. That is why the wife should respect her husband and the husband should support the wife, and students should respect their teacher and the teacher should willingly give his knowledge to the student.

These values are no longer present in this world; there is no sense of gratitude or respect for anything, and as a result, we have such a tense situation in the world—an extremely sick and decadent society. Students do not respect teachers; you know the nonsense they do in schools and universities, and the life of householders has become hell. But love and respect born of gratitude were accepted facts in Indian society. When we see the opposite situation in our society today, due to Western influence, it seems strange to us, and we see how a well-ordered society is being ruined and breaking apart.

I am explaining this so that you can understand the logic behind this sense of gratitude, the logic behind obedience and respect, as well as singular dedication towards the Guru. These are vital and essential ingredients of spiritual life. It is a factor

through which we can develop devotion, and it is also a factor which is necessary for the smooth running of society.

Think about it. I have just touched on a few aspects. When you ponder over it, you will realise how necessary this sense of gratitude is. Then you will find the logic behind many things that you have not understood, such as why you have to help and respect others, why you have to care for others, and not do things only for your own self-interest. When you understand gratitude, all this will have a deeper meaning.

When you feel gratitude for the principles of nature that support life and for the gifts that we receive from it, you will be filled with gratitude for the Creator. There will be born within you the desire to glorify, praise, serve, and love Him. That is what devotion is—to glorify, praise, serve, and love God, '*bhaja sevayā*'.

This is the last talk we will have before you all depart from here and go back to your daily lives where you have to carry many burdens on your shoulders and do your duties. But if you dwell on what I have been speaking about today, or what Mother has spoken through this humble instrument, your burdens will become lighter. You will develop another attitude towards the duties you have to do in life—duties which you sometimes have not liked, but have had to do. If you can keep in mind what I have said, the burden of your duties and responsibilities and the burden of this life will become lighter. When you dwell on this aspect, the heart will also be filled with love and devotion. A sense of gratitude for all that supports life and towards fellow beings, and devotion towards the Creator will help you to progress on your path of spirituality.

May the blessings of the Mother be showered on all of you.

Hari Om.