



FAITH AND DEVOTION (BHAKTIYOGA)

Those who follow the Divine path, and remember God, develop a relationship of love with that infinite, though unknown, power. Here is a very interesting thing, when you love God, you love a stranger, and love for a stranger is very pious, very beautiful and full of curious adventure. Because God can never be known through mind, God remains, in that sense, always a stranger.



Devotion is a factor since without it no one can develop spiritually.



One of the great factors of life is faith. The element of trust and faith is more important than reasoning.



The reason why the path of devotion is considered by many saints to be the highest path, is that in no other path can it be said that a person becomes virtuous so speedily.



Why is the path of devotion (*Bhakti*) said to be more effective than others? I will tell you an inner secret. In both the other two paths, the path of selfless service and the path of knowledge, one depends upon one's own strength and effort. That means ego is working there. But one's own power is always limited and the ego is still present. However, when one relies totally on God, it is Divine power that starts working in the individual.



In some matters the heart is more dependable than the mind. Often you are deceived by your thoughts but your heart does not deceive you.



Prayer from inside arises when a person finds out he is unable to solve his own problems by his own energy or strength.



Prayer occurs in the life of a person after he has discovered his individual limitations. What should be done? One has the problem; one knows the problem; one has tried one's best to solve the problem; but the problem is not solved. What else except prayer remains now?



Real prayer arises only by God's grace. All our efforts to remove weaknesses and to achieve purification are worthwhile, but prayer has the greatest effect.



Pray to your own Self, because it is your own Self that is the infinite energy, you are not separate from it. But ego and Self are different.



Pray to Him, Her or That in whom you have faith. You should try to discover in whom, or in what, you have faith. If you feel that there is some universal, infinite, eternal energy, and that this energy helps, then you should pray to it. If you feel there is none, do not pray. The energy of the Lord will not enter your room, wake you up and say: "Pray! Pray to me!" No! That energy of the Lord will also not have any bad feelings against you if you do not pray. But if you pray, than the ever-existing energy will start flowering in you. If you use the opportunity, as a human being, then at once the energy will respond. To whom should you pray? In whomsoever you have faith.



Eventually a stage will come in everyone's life that, whatever efforts are made, one will find it impossible to lift oneself up by self-effort only. One will come to this conclusion, and then arises the real prayer within. The real prayer from inside arises only when real helplessness is experienced, when we feel: "It is not possible for me. O God, be kind to me; O Gurudev, be kind to me."



Prayer gets its expression in words, but words are not really necessary. In fact, when prayer is expressed in words, it becomes less pure. It becomes adulterated by the mind, by our thinking. Prayer arises from the heart, and the heart needs no words. Genuine and sincere prayer is found within.



Real prayer 'happens'. Real prayer is not 'done' as such, it just happens. Whenever prayer is 'done', it is the creation of ego. When ego is defeated, prayer happens.



The ego of knowing things in human life has no limits but it is very shallow. There is no doubt, that knowledge has its utility, since practical life goes on through knowledge of practical methods. But for deeper philosophical subjects, having belief, faith and love are more important and more profound.



We are losing time by worrying about tomorrow. Everyone of us is a fool who thinks too much about tomorrow! Of course, if you plan to travel tomorrow, you will have to check your ticket, see what time the flight goes and arrange for the taxi. But it is a waste of time to worry about all the details of your tomorrow's programme.



One of the problems that seekers have is that the tendency of the mind for focusing on worldly things continues in the spiritual field also. In worldly life we achieve something by making efforts. Then we think that in the spiritual field also Truth will be achieved through the same sort of effort - by knowing the Truth, by knowing God and by knowing the Self. No! God can never be known in the same manner as we know the objects of the world. Knowledge does not work but faith works and faith is greater than knowledge. Faith and love are greater.



God is available to everyone, to the learned, to the illiterate, the the beautiful, to the ugly, to the rich, to the poor, to the yogi and the non-yogi. God is available all the time, 24 hours a day, to everyone. However, there is one requirement - one must become and remain receptive. An example of receptivity is a cup in the rain. If rain is falling and the cup is upside down, then the cup will not fill with water, it is not receptive or open to what is being offered. However, if turned the right way up the cup will collect water. This is the same with humans, if we turn our back on God we will not be receptive, so we need to remain open and not behave like an owl that remains in a dark cave in the daytime.



In the path of devotion there is no use for analysis and understanding. In this path the seeker says: “I do not know who You are but I believe that You are there and I belong to You. And You can solve every problem so please solve my problems also. I am at Your feet. I do not know even myself so how can I know You? You are infinite, and how can I, the finite, know You? I am your child so please be kind to your child.”



About the path of love and devotion, there is so much said and written. But people are not clear what is meant by devotion, what is meant by surrender, how it happens and what is the relationship between the individual soul and the infinite energy, God. One thing regarding this path is important – love is not created, it happens. If it is there, it is there, it is inbuilt in the personality of some people.



The three paths are, firstly, the ‘path of analysis or meditation’, also known as the ‘path of knowledge’, *jnanayoga*; secondly the ‘path of self-less activity’, *karmayoga*; and, thirdly, the ‘path of devotion’, *bhaktiyoga*. In fact, the first two are the only real paths, although many people say that there are three paths. In my opinion there are only two paths – the path of knowledge and the path of self-less activity. Why should we not say that there is a path of devotion? The reason is that love or devotion is also needed in both the other two paths. Devotion is an essential part of spiritual evolution and nobody can evolve without it.



Even in ‘*bhakti-marg*’ (path of devotion), which one can call the greatest path, there is a background of *karmayoga* (path of action) in one’s present life or in a previous life. *Bhakti* or devotion does not evolve in life just automatically. It evolves only after someone has become *sattvic*, and nobody can become *sattvic* without following the path of *karmayoga*.



Transformation means ‘transformation of all levels of your existence.’ While all techniques and methods have their value, the greatest help is found by having faith in God.



You must feel that you are limited, but that at the same time you are a part of the unlimited Divine, and, as His part, there is always His protection for you. This faith needs to develop inside.



Faith is a matter of feelings. Faith is deeper than reasoning, more valuable, a matter of the heart. In the scriptures of all religions it is written that God exists in the hearts of human beings, not in their heads. It is there in every religion. God exists everywhere. The real meaning is that, for Realisation the experience happens in the heart through love, not through the head. Finally the head and the heart become one. There remains no difference between the two - but this is in the end.



Whenever the feeling of devotion arises in you, if you have the opportunity, go into your room and lock the door from inside. If you have the urge to cry, you should weep and pray and tell the Divine that you are His child and ask Him to be kind to you and purify you.



Real faith is very simple: have no ego, love everybody, try to serve everybody, be kind, do not be angry and try to transcend lust. Simple but difficult to achieve. There is no need of any ceremony, church, temple or mosque, because what temple, church or mosque can be more beautiful than this temple of the Lord here - the open sky, the earth, the light and the sun? Where could we find a better temple? The Lord is already there in your heart. This is the path that was shown to us by Him.



It is not through reasoning that you obtain wisdom, but finally it is through faith. Reasoning is not valueless and has its own role but after the role of reasoning is finished, there comes the stage in the life of a person when faith develops. When faith develops, the seeker starts experiencing an amazing transformation even without any efforts on his or her part. Reasoning is not as important as we often consider it to be. Reasoning is necessary in the ordinary affairs of life, but in the most important aspects of life, reasoning is not so valuable.



Intelligence and cleverness do not help us in experiencing God. To clever people, God does not come easily. Become a simple person! Simple people find God easily.



The attainment of complete faith requires the attainment of other essential qualities. One essential requirement is the mastery of the senses, without it, the stage of faith will not come. Such mastery is achieved through discipline and withdrawal from the outside world. 'Exclusively devoted to his practice' - this is the quality. Gradually you have to turn your face from the activities of the outer world and give more and more attention to the practice of your inner growth. Exclusive devotion comes later. You have to start from the stage at which you are in your situation and then faith comes. A time comes when one sees the folly of wasting time and energy in useless outside pursuits, and wants to devote oneself wholly to one's inner growth.



The seeker may say: "I have surrendered everything to God but..." When you have surrendered there should be no 'but'. If the 'but' continues, there is no surrender. Surrender is that great inner phenomenon which is never partial. Either there is surrender or there is no surrender. There is no such thing as partial surrender. Partial surrender means deception: "I am yours but...." Surrender does not come very soon in life.



The saints have described two paths, the Long path and the Short path. I can give you some advice about them. I prefer to say that both paths can be used. What is known as the 'Long path' is improvement through your own efforts, by seeing your weaknesses and faults, and then trying gradually to eradicate them. The 'Short path' means that you connect yourself directly to God through love. If you really connect, then you forget everything else. You forget the body and you forget the weaknesses. As I have just said, help maybe taken through both the paths, but ultimately, it will be surrender to God. The final event happens through His grace.



One may ask whether a person, in a state of complete surrender, becomes completely free from any activity in the world. The answer is that one does not and should not, but the motive for the activity changes. Previously the motivation for all activity was ego – the satisfaction of the urges of the lower self. Later on the motivation is the Divine prompting inside, and the guidance one gets for serving others. Love becomes a great motivating force in life.



Everybody has some good qualities. However, the ego of good qualities is the greatest danger on the path. In a way, this pride in possessing good qualities is the mother of all evils. So, at the right time in the life of a seeker, this pride also has to come to an end, and then a partial surrender starts. Like this, one gradually realises that what one thought was one's own effort also contained a hidden element of God's mercy. It was hidden there: "Some force was moving me, even without my knowledge." Then there is a complete surrender to God, the infinite energy.



On the subject of surrender, one of the greatest men of our times, Shri Aurobindo made an interesting remark. In one of his works he wrote: 'It all begins with surrender, and it ends with surrender.' What does it mean? According to him, real progress does not start unless one bows down and surrenders – that means that one has to realise the limitations of the ego and efforts. So it begins only when one realises that. Without bowing, without becoming humble, without surrendering to whatever power you believe in, one cannot start to grow. It starts from that time. Before that it is mostly a play of ego.



We do so many nasty things, and God knows this, and only He knows what we deserve. God wants to make us clean. Beating with a stick is the only way to remove the dust from the carpet. God does this to all of us in order to remove the dust of sensuality and immorality. But when you have faith in God, you will only be disciplined and not punished. He wants to reform you. He does not want to punish you. God never punishes anybody. Never. Punishment is a creation of human mind. From God's side, it is always a reformation through difficult circumstances, it is never a punishment.



What does 'surrender' mean? To begin with, surrender is what you are yourselves doing at this moment. It can be called surrender that someone sits listening or reading for one hour! Before this your inner stage was: "What discourse do I need to hear from him? I have already read so many books." After that a time comes when, for

various reasons, a person decides that he should listen or meditate and he surrenders for at least one or two hours. It is a surrender because he has to sit in a particular discipline and behave in a particular manner. So surrender starts in the form one chooses and continues like that until it becomes complete surrender and perfection comes into being. 'Complete surrender' means the total eradication of the ego and, when there is no ego, there is 'what is' and that is God.



When you start having faith in the omnipotent, the omnipresent and the omniscient power, God, at once protection for you starts coming from that power. An interesting point, is that, when we have this relationship with the Divine through love, he never fulfils all of our desires, because we have bad desires that should not be fulfilled. God works with us just like a potter. A potter makes pots from clay. Two hands are used. One hand is always there supporting, otherwise the pot would lose its shape. The other hand pats the clay with a wooden stick. The clay needs support but it needs patting also. In the same way God does both these functions. He pats you for removing dust and dirt from life. But remember that the supporting hand is also there because He loves you.



You love Him, and if you ask: "Where is He?" The answer is: "He is in your heart, in the form of love - that also is God - everywhere".



Prayers purify more than words. When a child cries for his mother's milk, the mother cannot resist giving it. In the same way, the Divine very quickly receives your prayers. Sometimes a child may just cry, and may not be hungry, but the mother knows if his cries are genuine. In the same way the Divine knows if our cries are genuine or contrived. Our mind can be very cunning and will often cause us to make requests which are not genuine. We think the Divine can do anything, so we ask Him to grant prayers which have no substance. But if you are kind, and full of compassion and love, He will help you.



No mother notices what type of clothes a child is wearing. If the child cries: "Mama!" the mother will embrace the child, forgetting that its clothes are dirty. If the mother notices the clothes of the child first, well, she is not a real mother. The real mother never sees the outward bearing but just hears the cries. More than this is the greatest mother, God, full of love. The only requirement is to call him with love.



The last point is that, if someone starts to develop deep faith or love for God, then God starts doing miracles in life. Real miracles start happening. The transformation is that suddenly one is able to do what one has been unable to do by one's own efforts for years. When one starts surrendering to God, one gathers more and more eternal, universal and infinite energy around one's self – then one starts to realise the kindness and compassion of the Lord, who is always with us. These thoughts about God start to work miracles, and they start to change us. Remembrance of God starts doing things that cannot be done by our own efforts. In our efforts there is always an element of ego. When we surrender to God and pray to him from the depths of our heart: "O Lord, I have tried my best for years, but nothing has happened. Now, please be kind to me." In such moments, purification happens, by God's grace.



The problem is solved only when surrender happens and prayer comes from inside: "I cannot do anything but You can! I am at Your disposal and I do not know what You are going to do with me. I am here and I do not even care what is going to happen to me. It is more than sufficient that You have allowed me to come to You and be at Your doorstep. I do not want anything more than that! No knowledge, no wisdom, no Enlightenment!" This stage comes from inside, and then there is dance! It is for that reason that elsewhere in the Bhagavad Gita the Lord says that finally it is by devotion (*bhakti*) that everything gets solved.



Everything comes from God. There are innumerable facts about God, and one of the important facts is that God is not a business man! The attitude of a business man is: "How much money are you giving me! What should I give you in return?" But God is not a salesman with his eyes on the profit! God is love. God never sees anybody's virtues or vices. God is not concerned with how pious or how guilty you are. God is always with you when you have love for Him. He only sees love, not your qualities, or your imperfections.



Why should you doubt that you will experience God? Why do you doubt it? So much has already been done by God Himself. You were given a human body, education and money to support the body, and then you became acquainted with someone who said that there was a path. Everything is being explained and even then you doubt whether you will have the experience! It is only a weakness! Why should you not have the experience of that Truth which exists everywhere, all the time, in everybody. It is only a question of turning your eyes from the external to the internal and you will find there that He and you are both there, and the bond between you and Him is that of love. He is love, and you want love, and you are love and He wants love. And love knows no boundaries.

