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The Role of Philosophy in Devotion

Many devotees think that philosophy has no role in devotion. They believe that studying philosophy may be harmful as one advances in devotion. However, this idea is not supported by the scriptures and previous acaryas for the following reasons:

- Philosophy helps us to preach effectively and convincingly.
- Philosophy helps us to discriminate between illusion and reality.
- Philosophy helps us to fix our goal of life, which is love of God.

Philosophy and Preaching

In his books, letters, and conversations, Śrīla Prabhupāda has repeatedly emphasized that everyone should understand the philosophy of Krishna Consciousness in order to preach. He said, "Without philosophy, preaching has no substance" . Preaching is one of the most important aspects of devotion, as it pleases the Lord and His devotees, and benefits the conditioned souls. Without philosophy, we will not be able to present our message in a convincing and attractive way, and we may lose the opportunity to make others into devotees.

Even the most advanced devotees and liberated souls, such as Śrīla Narottama Dās Ṭhākura, Srinivasa Ācārya, and Śyāmānanda Paṇḍita, were also instructed by their guru to study Krishna Consciousness philosophy under Jīva Gosvāmī .They wrote many books and songs based on the philosophy they learned, and they spread the message of Lord Chaitanya Mahāprabhu all over India. If such great devotees needed to study philosophy for preaching, then what to speak of us?

Philosophy and Discrimination

Without understanding the philosophy, it is impossible to distinguish between illusion and reality, and thus one will eventually become a sentimentalist. Sentimentalism means to have a superficial or emotional attachment to something, without knowing its true nature or value. Sentimentalism is dangerous for devotion, as it can lead to deviation, imitation, or degradation. Chaitanya Mahāprabhu said,

siddhānta baliyā citte nā kara alasa
ihā ha-ite kṛṣṇe lāge sudṛḍha mānasa

Do not be lazy in understanding the siddhānta of Kṛṣṇa, as the proper understanding of siddhānta makes one's mind firmly fixed in Bhagavān.

Siddhānta means the conclusive truth or the established doctrine. By studying the siddhānta of Krishna Consciousness, we can develop a strong and steady faith in Bhagavān, and we can avoid being misled by the illusions of the material world, avoid being influenced by the opposing doctrines of atheists, impersonalists, or other sects.

Philosophy and Goal

The goal of life is to attain love of God, which is the highest perfection of devotion. Philosophy helps us to understand what love of God is, how to attain it, and why we should desire it. Philosophy produces the desire to attain love of God for the sake of service, and not for our own sense gratification.

Some people argue that since they cannot read or are not much interested in reading books, can they not attain God? They can, but they should hear from those who have understood the philosophy, and then Krishna will provide the necessary intelligence to advance in Krishna Consciousness. He says in the Bhagavad-gītā,

teṣāṁ satata-yuktānāṁ
bhajatāṁ prīti-pūrvakam
dadāmi buddhi-yogaṁ taṁ
yena mām upayānti te

To those who are constantly devoted to serving Me with love, I give the understanding by which they can come to Me.

Some fools think that by understanding philosophy, one will become a jñānī (a philosopher) and not remain a devotee. They feel that one should have bhāva or emotions for Krishna, while philosophy is only meant for jñānīs. However, this is a misunderstanding of the nature of philosophy and devotion. A true devotee seeks jñāna or philosophy to attain love of God, and this philosophy becomes a part of devotion, rather it is devotion. Philosophy does not dry up the emotions, but rather enriches them with knowledge and realization. Philosophy does not make one proud or arrogant, but rather humble and submissive. Philosophy does not make one indifferent or impersonal, but rather affectionate and personal.

Mahāprabhu instructed Rūpa Gosvāmī, Jīva Gosvāmī, and Sanātana Gosvāmī to write philosophical treatises on bhakti for us to understand, and not for wasting theirs and our time. Similarly, all the purports of Śrīla Prabhupāda are based on philosophy. So, we should read books and hear lectures to learn the philosophy of Krishna Consciousness. And if we do not have enough intelligence to understand the philosophy, then we should pray to God to give us intelligence, and He will make us intelligent.

Conclusion

Philosophy is not only useful, but also essential for the development of pure devotion. We should not neglect or avoid studying the philosophy of Krishna Consciousness, but rather embrace it as a means of enriching our love and service to God and His devotees. As Śrīla Prabhupāda said, "Philosophy without religion is mental speculation, and religion without philosophy is sentimentality." We should aim for the perfect balance of both, as exemplified by Lord Chaitanya Mahāprabhu and His followers.

The Business of Devotion!

vyavasāyātmikā buddh irekeha kuru-nandana

bahu-śākhā hy anantās cabuddhayo 'vyavasāyinām (BG 2.41)

The verse is historically very important for the members of ISKCON, as it inspired Śrīla Prabhupāda to dedicate his life to his guru's mission of preaching in English. When Śrīla Prabhupāda read Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura's commentary on this verse, he was convinced that he must go to the USA for preaching, regardless of the risks and challenges. He understood that his sole business was to fulfill the orders of his guru, and that this was the key to success in Krishna Consciousness.

The Practical Perspective: Follow and Preach

The practical perspective of the verse is based on the word *vyavasāyātmikā*, which means business-minded intelligence, or one who has made business his heart and soul. According to Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura, a devotee's business is to follow and preach the message of God. This perspective highlights the following points:

- The most important activity in devotion is to follow the instructions of the guru with faith and enthusiasm. The guru is the representative of Krishna, and he knows what is best for us. By following his guidance, we can progress in Krishna Consciousness and please him and Krishna.
- To follow the instructions of the guru means to also fulfill his mission, which is to spread the message of God worldwide. Preaching is the essence of devotion, as it benefits both the preacher and the listener. By preaching, we can purify our hearts, increase our faith, and attract the mercy of Krishna and His devotees.
- To preach effectively, we need to have a clear and logical understanding of the philosophy of Krishna Consciousness, which is based on the scriptures and the previous acaryas. Philosophy helps us to present our message in a convincing and attractive way, and to answer the doubts and objections of the people we are trying to convince.
- We should not wait until we become pure or perfect to preach. We should preach according to our capacity and qualification, and depend on the mercy of Krishna and the guru. By preaching, we will become purified and perfect, as Krishna will give us the intelligence and realization to advance in Krishna Consciousness.

The Mellow Perspective: Serve and Love

The mellow perspective of the verse is based on the word *vyavasāya*, which means effort or trick. According to this perspective, a devotee's effort is to serve and love Krishna, and the trick is to increase one's eligibility for higher levels of devotion. This perspective reveals the following secrets:

- The kind of effort required to please Krishna is not a donkey-like effort, but an effort with intelligence. We need to use our intelligence to understand the scriptures, the philosophy, and the process of devotion, and to apply them in our lives. We also need to use our intelligence to avoid

the pitfalls of material desires, false ego, and ignorance, and to seek the association of advanced devotees.

- The word *vyavasāya* also means trick, because we don't have to endeavor for millions of years like yogis and jnanis to attain Krishna. The Bhagavad-gītā teaches us the trick of gradually increasing one's *adhikār* or eligibility for higher levels of devotion. We should cultivate *adhikār* to advance from one level of devotion to another, such as from *vaidhi bhakti* (devotion based on rules and regulations) to *rāgānuga bhakti* (devotion based on spontaneous attraction), from *rāgānuga bhakti* to *bhāva bhakti* (devotion in ecstasy), and from *bhāva bhakti* to *prema bhakti* (devotion in pure love).
- We should understand that we are presently not qualified to enter into the higher levels of devotion, but at the same time we should also know that we have to apply effort to raise our *adhikār* to higher levels of devotion and ultimately attain love of God, *prema bhakti*.

- How do we raise our *adhikār*?

- The words *eka iha* in the verse mean *seva bhāva*, which means service attitude. By applying efforts to increase our *seva bhāva*, our *adhikār* will increase and our faith will rise to higher levels of devotion and then transform into *prema*.

Conclusion

Understanding these two perspectives of the verse will surely lead one to the ultimate goal of life - love of God. We should not neglect or avoid studying the verse and its commentaries, but rather embrace them as a means of enriching our devotion and service to God and His devotees. As Śrīla Prabhupāda said, "Philosophy without religion is mental speculation, and religion without philosophy is sentimentality." We should aim for the perfect balance of both, as exemplified by Lord Chaitanya Mahāprabhu and His followers.

How to Be Enthusiastic in Devotion

The Secret of Pleasing God

Be enthusiastic when you have the least enthusiasm. That is the way to please God!

Dogs happily wag their tail when a treat is offered. When things are nice and profitable, even a dog is enthusiastic. But who can remain enthusiastic in unfavorable circumstances, especially when everything is lost? Dogs will begin to bark as soon as the treat is snatched from them!

Similarly, an immature devotee becomes bewildered in a disturbing situation when bliss is snatched from him. Do not therefore be in dog consciousness. Stay enthusiastic even in failure. That is human. That is the order of God.

Having awakened faith in the narrations of My glories, being disgusted with all material activities, knowing that all sense gratification leads to misery, but still being unable to renounce all sense enjoyment, My devotee should remain happy and worship Me with great faith and conviction. Even though he is sometimes engaged in sense enjoyment, My devotee knows that all sense gratification leads to a miserable result, and he sincerely repents such activities. (Srimad Bhagavatam 11.20.27,28)

The Power of Repentance

Do not become depressed and unhappy in times of failure and fall-downs, since it hurts God when He sees His children unhappy. You made a mistake and fell down, now why do you want to make another mistake by giving pain to your Lord?

Instead, repent for the mistake. Feel the guilt within the core of your soul. Use that guilt to get up renewed and recharged, just as a fighter feeling the guilt rises up to fight. The fighter's eyes are fixed on the opponent, but his heart is fixed on his King. How much happiness and thrill the King will experience on seeing the soldier get up and fight again, to maintain the glory of his King.

Those soldiers who become depressed when they are defeated are traitors and not surrendered to the King. They fight for their own glory!

The Art of Perseverance

So, never give up. Never be depressed. Keep trying. Again and again and again. Only a lover will keep trying to meet the beloved even after failing thousands of times.

Fall-downs are the test of your dedication and commitment. If you keep going with full enthusiasm even in the dark night of your devotional life, you will become qualified for the extraordinary mercy of the Lord, which will then suddenly make you pure and strong. Then you will no longer fall down.

Keep trying not to fall down. Apply practical solutions. Do not just keep wishing and praying. Still, sometimes you will succeed and other times you will fail. But if your enthusiasm does not fail even after many years of practice, know that you are very, very near to the Goal.

The Joy of Chanting

Enthusiasm destroys inattention, disinterest, and laziness while chanting. Enthusiasm is the life of devotion. Enthusiasm is devotion!

Discussing philosophy in good association generates enthusiasm. That is the secret teaching of Bhagavad Gita.

The thoughts of My pure devotees dwell in Me, their lives are fully devoted to My service, and they derive great satisfaction and bliss (the word ramanti translated in the verse as bliss can also be translated as enthusiasm) from always enlightening one another and conversing about Me.
(Bhagavad Gita 10.10)

Always keep good association. But remember, the ultimate secret to remain enthusiastic is:

Be Enthusiastic!

Rule of all the Rules!

The Purpose of Rules

There are rules on the path of devotion that can show you the way. Use them. But they will not satisfy you.

Rules can liberate you, or bind you further. It depends.

A kite flies higher and higher, up in the sky, only when tied to the string. You too can rise higher only when tied to the rules. At times, however, following mere rules can bind you, just as a musician who plays only by the rules often fails to produce sweet music. Music needs feelings and emotions more than any rule!

Understand the purpose behind the rules, and they will liberate you. Blind following of the rules will only bind you.

The Pointing Finger

Do not focus on the pointing finger, lest you miss all the heavenly glory to which the finger points. Rules on the path of devotion are like that finger. The heavenly glory that the rules point to, is the longing to serve and attain God.

Keep wanting that connection with God with all your energy. That longing, that greed for divine connection, that will take you further than any thinking.

The Rule of All Rules

Do not therefore be ruled by the rules. Rule the rules.

Follow the rules sincerely for they are your guides in the utter darkness of ignorance, but then be prepared to leave them if the longing demands.

All the rules on the path of devotion must lead to one goal – longing for God. That's the rule. The rule of all rules!

Note: The above write up is an explanation of the principle of Niyamagarah given by Srila Rupa Goswami. Niyamagarah means either accepting the rules or rejecting the rules without understanding the purpose of those rules.

That's why I have used the expression 'longing for God' as the rule of all the rules. A genuine longing is produced by following rules and regulations with the aim to produce such longing for God and is marked by an intense desire to first serve God and then to have the association of God.

In Bhagavad Gita 12.9, purport, Srila Prabhupada writes, "The first applies to one who has actually developed an attachment for Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, by transcendental love. And the other is for one who has not developed an attachment for the Supreme Person by transcendental love. For this second class, there are different prescribed rules and regulations one can follow to be ultimately elevated to the stage of attachment to Kṛṣṇa."

The purpose of all rules as mentioned by Srila Rupa Goswami is Smartavyo Satatam Visnu, Vismrityo na Jatu cit, which means, as Srila Prabhupada translates this verse in his book the Nectar of Devotion, "When the order is that one should always remember Kṛṣṇa, the prohibition is that one should never forget Him. Within this simple order and prohibition, all regulative principles are found complete."

The important point is what does 'remembering Krishna' mean. In literal sense, it means to simply remember the name, form, pastimes, and qualities of Krishna.

But in a deeper sense, remembrance of Krishna means to have a longing to serve and attain Krishna since remembering God and not having any feelings to attain Him is no remembrance, or at best, a shadow of real remembrance. Real remembrance is always accompanied by a longing for the object. A boyfriend said to his girlfriend that he remembered her all day long, but does not want to meet her. What? Absurdity!!

In his talk on Śrī Īsopaniṣad Mantra 4. – July 9, 1971, Los Angeles, Srila Prabhupada, therefore, says, "Suppose if you want to see the president, oh, you cannot see. If you are an ordinary man you cannot see; he is not exposed to the ordinary man. There must be some arrangement, or you must be qualified to see him. Similarly, to see God, to understand God, you require qualification. But the qualification... What is that qualification? It is very simple and very cheap. What is that? Lauyam ekam: simply you should be mad after God. That's all..... If you [are] actually eager to have Kṛṣṇa, then you will have Him."

Humility in Devotion

What is Humility?

Humility is a simple word, but it has a deep meaning. Humility is not just being polite or modest, but it is a state of mind that recognizes one's own limitations and dependence on God. Humility is the foundation of devotion, because without humility, one cannot surrender to God or serve Him with love.

But what does humility mean according to different saints and scriptures? Let us try to explore their opinions and insights on this topic.

Sūrdas: The Blind Poet

Sūrdas was a great poet and devotee of Lord Krishna. He was born blind and faced many difficulties in his life. He always spoke the truth, even when it caused trouble for him. Once, he revealed his father's black-market money to the government officials, and his father became angry and wanted to throw him out of the house. His mother stopped him, but Sūrdas decided to leave home and go to Vṛindāvan, where he could do his devotion and become a saint.

Sūrdas wrote a book called Vinaya-patrika, which means "The Book of Humility". In this book, he composed many songs on humility and praised it as the highest virtue. However, Vallabhācārya, another saint, pointed out to Sūrdas that he was trapped in humility, because he had glorified humility more than glorifying God in his book. Vallabhācārya said:

1. Humility without glorifying God is not pleasing to God.
2. Humility that does not give remembrance of God is useless.

Sūrdas was a great devotee, so he understood his mistake and corrected it.

Vallabhācārya said, "Humility is when asādhana becomes sādhan". Generally, we think that by doing sādhanā (practice of devotional rules and regulations) we can attain God, but that is not the reality. When one understands that by doing sādhanā one cannot attain God, then one becomes asādhana (loses false ego that one can attain God by one's sādhanā) and then one asks for God's mercy.

This is the meaning of "when asādhana becomes sādhan" or in other words, when one is free from false ego of sādhanā, only then God will be happy and He will bestow His mercy. Therefore, it is said that if one is really humble, he starts crying for God.

Śrīla Prabhupada mentions in Nectar of Devotion that when one thinks that his sādhanā is insignificant to attain God, then God will uplift him or her by awarding him His mercy.

This atman is not to be attained by a study of the Vedas, nor by intelligence, nor by much hearing, but the atman can be attained, only by him who seeks to know it. To him, this atman reveals its true nature. (Katha Upanishad 1.2.23)

Śrīla Bhakti Siddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura: The Lion Guru

Śrīla Bhakti Siddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura was a powerful preacher and teacher of the Gaudiya Vaishnava tradition defined humility as follows:

“Absolute submission to the will of God is humility. Accepting the words of God is real humility. One who cannot fulfill the desire of God is not humble.”

He also stated, “Mahājanas did not instruct us to show our humility to everyone. Those who show humility to everyone, particularly those who are hypocrites, envious and Rāvaṇa-like are not humble.”

*Mahājana (महाजन) refers to “spiritual authority; one who truly understands religious principles; the twelve principal Mahājanas are identified in the Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam (6.3.20) as Lord Brahmā, Bhagavān Nārada, Śivajī, the four Kumāras, Kapiladeva, Svāyambhuva Manu, Prahlāda Mahārāja, Janaka Mahārāja, Grandsire Bhīṣma, Balī Mahārāja, Śukadeva Gosvāmī, and Yamarāja”.

He said that Hanuman burnt Lanka and tortured the envious and the hypocrites, because he was humble, since he did it for Lord Rāma.

That is why the great saint Madhvācārya stated that humble is the one who is hari-kārya-sādhaka, i.e., one who becomes an instrument in the work of Hari.

Vṛndāvana Dāsa Ṭhākura: The Vyāsa of Caitanya Līlā

Vṛndāvana Dāsa Ṭhākura said, “One who does not accept Caitanya Mahāprabhu and Nityānanda Prabhu, I will hit on his head with a stick.” Is this humility?

Yes, this is humility, because he was not speaking out of anger or pride, but out of love and compassion. He wanted to awaken the sleeping souls and make them realize the supreme mercy of Lord Caitanya and Lord Nityānanda.

Raghunātha Dāsa Gosvāmī: The Cry of Separation

Raghunātha Dāsa Gosvāmī was one of the six Gosvāmīs of Vṛndāvan, wrote a book entitled Stavāvalī, where he brings a fully developed conception of humility.

He says that humility is the search for Kṛṣṇa, the feeling of helplessness and the hope against hope. He gives the example of Lord Caitanya, who used to cry, “Where is Kṛṣṇa? What should I do? Where should I go?” This is humility. One who is humble feels helpless and searches for Kṛṣṇa just like a child who feels helpless searches for the mother. If we feel that we are

incapable of doing anything on our own without Kṛṣṇa's help, then we will search for Kṛṣṇa. This hope against hope is a feeling of humility. In other words, the feeling of separation from Kṛṣṇa is humility.

Saint Teresa of Avila: The Grace of God

Saint Teresa of Avila was a Christian saint and mystic, who wrote many books on spirituality and prayer. In her book, 'The Interior Castle', she writes, "If you have humility, then the merits you get are not earned by you but given by the causeless mercy of God. There is some lack of humility if we think that in return for our meager service, we obtain anything so great."

In other words, whatever grace we receive, be it happiness, control of senses, association of devotees, etc, are all by the causeless mercy of God and not by our insignificant service. If we think that we are receiving these graces because of our service, then it is not humility. God is great and awards us all these gifts because of His unlimited causeless mercy.

Kāmaṇḍakiya Ṛṣi: The Practice of Renunciation

Kāmaṇḍakiya Ṛṣi was a sage who composed the Kāmaṇḍaka Niti śāstra, a book of moral and political maxims. In this book, Lord Brahma states, "Humility is not in thought only, but it is practiced as vairāgya (renunciation)."

Kāmaṇḍakiya Ṛṣi says, "Real humility is control over senses. By practicing this, one understands the meaning of the scriptures, and by imbibing the meaning of the scriptures, one realizes the scriptures." When one feels that he is useless, then he will not think that this world is meant for his enjoyment, but it is for the pleasure of God.

Visnu Sharma: The Wise Teacher

Visnu Sharma was a scholar and teacher, who wrote the Hitopadeśa, a collection of fables and stories for the moral education of young princes.

He says, "*A charitable person does not value money, a brave person does not value death, a renounced person does not value woman and a humble person does not value this world.*"

The above quote implies that devotees who are humble think that since they are fallen, useless and an offender, this world is not meant for their enjoyment. Rather, this world is for the enjoyment of God, who is great and is imbued with all good qualities. Therefore, their senses are under control. Thus, Hitopadeśa also says that humility means controlling the mind and senses.

Srila Prabhupada: founder of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON)

He said, "Be like a lamb in the temple and as a lion outside the temple." That is humility.

He meant that devotees should be humble and respectful in the temple, where they worship and serve the Lord and His devotees. But they should be bold and fearless outside the temple, where they preach and distribute the message of the Lord to the ignorant and suffering souls. They should not be proud or arrogant, but they should be confident and courageous in their service to the Lord and His mission.

Conclusion

Humility is not a superficial or sentimental quality, but it is a deep and dynamic state of consciousness that leads to the highest perfection of devotion. Humility is not a weakness, but a strength. Humility is not a hindrance, but a help. Humility is not a burden, but a blessing. Humility is the essence of devotion.

Conviction and Patience

Conviction (Niścaya)

Conviction in Sanskrit is niścaya, which means to have the understanding that one is Kṛṣṇa's eternal servant and will always serve Him and never leave His service. This understanding is called niścaya. There are three ways of cultivating niścaya:

1. By developing faith (Śraddhā)

*'śraddhā'-śabde — viśvāsa kahe sudṛḍha niścaya
kṛṣṇe bhakti kaile sarva-karma kṛta haya*

The word śraddhā means confident, firm faith that by rendering transcendental loving service to Kṛṣṇa, one automatically performs all subsidiary activities. Such faith is favorable to the discharge of devotional service. (Ref. CC Madhya 22.62)

When one engages in devotional service, it is understood that one has performed all his responsibilities in the material world. And such a person does not need to fulfill his responsibilities separately.

The example of a cātaka bird is given in this context. A cātaka bird does not drink water from any source other than the rain cloud. It eagerly waits for the Swati constellation, because it only drinks the raindrops that fall during that constellation. It would rather die than drink any other type of water. Similarly, a pure devotee would rather die than serve any other deity than Kṛṣṇa.

2. By giving up doubt (Aviśvāsa-tyāga)

A devotee must be firmly convinced that Kṛṣṇa will give one all protection and that no one else can protect. In this way, Kṛṣṇa is merciful to His devotee and gives him all protection from the dangers on the path of devotional service.

The example of Hanumān is quoted in this context. When Hanumān was captured by Brahmāpāśa (the weapon of Lord Brahma) and taken to Rāvaṇa, Indrajit doubted if Brahmāpāśa could capture Hanumān. Indrajit, not having faith in Brahmāpāśa, tied Hanumān with an iron chain and the result was that the power of Brahmāpāśa was nullified as it was an insult to Brahmāpāśa. Like Indrajit, one should not doubt the efficacy of the Hare Kṛṣṇa mahāmantra.

3. By offering selfless service (Nirmama-sevana)

Kṛṣṇa says in the Bhagavad Gita, *nirmamo nirahaṅkāraḥ* (BG 2.71), which means that one should be free from the sense of me and mine and false ego.

Since everything belongs to God, a devotee should accept everything in the service of the Lord without the conception of me and mine.

Vallabhācārya used the term *nirmama-sevana*, which means that everything belongs to God and everything should be used in the service of God. The feeling of ‘me and mine’ decreases the sense of *niścaya*.

Patience (Dhairya)

Patience in Sanskrit is called *dhairya*. One should become a *dhīra* and have *dhairya*. Everything can be understood by having patience, including love.

Dhīras tatra na muhyanti means that one should not be bewildered by the dualities of life. One should have patience in unfavorable circumstances, be it internal or external. Losing patience means losing discrimination.

According to the book *Vivekāśraya* of Vallabhacarya, there are three ways of cultivating patience:

1. Tolerance (Titikṣā)

The phrase ‘*kim adya takram*’ is quoted here, which means ‘Now what to do with the buttermilk?’ This example is well-known among scholars. Mahāprabhu, in Rādhārānī’s mood, quoted this example in *Caitanya Caritāmṛta*.

Some ladies were carrying buttermilk pots on their heads. A man riding on a horse broke their pots, and the ladies started crying except one lady. On being asked why she was not crying, she said that she was a queen and was in love with some other man, and both of them killed the king. Her son also died from a snake bite. She was kidnapped by some bandits and they made her a prostitute. She had another son who came to see her. Being attracted to him, she married him and later on came to know that he was her son. She was so distressed that she tried to commit suicide, but could not as a washer-man saved her. Currently, she has been staying with him as his wife. So how much does it matter if a buttermilk pot breaks – *kim adya takram*. If we understand the pain that we have gone through in various lives, a little pain in spiritual life should not really matter.

2. Renunciation (Tyāga)

Tyāga means renunciation. The example of Jaḍa Bhārata is given here. Jaḍa Bhārata used to lie in a farm and did not bother whether he had food and clothes. His capacity to renounce material things made him an emblem of patience.

3. Humility (Asamarthata)

Asamarthata means understanding that one is incapable of attaining God by his or her own endeavor. The *gopīs*’ example is given in this connection. The *gopīs* used to go to Kṛṣṇa only when He called them. When Kṛṣṇa went to Mathura, the *gopīs* did not request Him to return but they kept patience (*dhairya*) and waited for Kṛṣṇa to return. *Dhairya* comes from *asamarthata*, i.e. *dhairya* comes when one feels incapable of attaining God and only God can help to attain Him.

From the feeling of asamarthata, one gets dhairya and becomes a dhīra, a sober person. We are incapable of attaining God by our own endeavor and it is only by the mercy of God we can go back home, back to Godhead.

However, we need to do devotional service to become pure.

Śravaṇādi śuddha-citte karaye udaya (CC Madhya 22.107) means that by hearing and chanting the glories of the Lord, the heart becomes purified and the Lord manifests Himself there.

When niścaya and dhairya are nourished, viveka becomes strong. If one of them is broken, then viveka is also broken. When viveka is broken, enthusiasm is lost, and devotion is destroyed.

Buddhi-nāśāt praṇaśyati (BG 2.63) means that when one loses intelligence, one falls down from the spiritual path. So one should very carefully develop and nourish niścaya and dhairya.

Vivek: The Power of Discrimination in Devotion

What is Vivek and why is it important for devotees? Vivek is a Sanskrit word that means **discrimination**. It is the function of intelligence that enables one to distinguish between two contrasting things, such as **eternal and temporary, real and false, right and wrong**.

Some people may think that Vivek has nothing to do with devotion, because devotion means **bhāva** or emotions or sentiments. They may cite the example of Śrīla Prabhupāda, who named our movement **Kṛṣṇa Consciousness Movement** (Kṛṣṇa Bhāvanāmṛta Sāṅga) based on Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura's book named 'Kṛṣṇa Bhāvanāmṛta'.

However, this does not mean that Vivek is irrelevant or unnecessary for devotees. In fact, Vivek is essential to attain the **spiritual platform** where bhāva can manifest from the soul. Bhāva is not imaginary and is not related to this world, as it originates from the **ātmā** or soul. However, we are currently at the platform of the **body** and not ātmā or soul. Therefore, we need Vivek to transcend the bodily conception and access the pure love of Kṛṣṇa.

How Vivek Helps Us in Devotion

Vivek is not only a theoretical concept, but a practical tool that can help us in our devotional service. Here are some ways that Vivek can assist us in our spiritual journey:

- Vivek helps us to **execute our endeavors with intelligence** in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, which is called **utsāha**, or enthusiasm. Śrīla Prabhupāda writes in Nectar of Instruction, verse 3, "Endeavor executed with intelligence in Kṛṣṇa consciousness is called utsāha, or enthusiasm."
- Vivek helps us to **understand the siddhānta**, or the conclusive truths of the scriptures, which can make our mind steady and fixed in Kṛṣṇa. Lord Caitanya says,

"siddhānta baliyā citte nā kara alasa, ihā ha-ite kṛṣṇe lāge sudṛḍha mānasa"

(Ref CC Ādi 2.117),

which means "Do not be lazy in understanding the siddhānta, for by doing so you will become firmly fixed in Kṛṣṇa consciousness."

- Vivek helps us to **realize that Kṛṣṇa is the source of everything** and that everything emanates from Him. This can inspire us to worship Him with love and devotion. Bhagavad Gita Chapter 10 verse 8 confirms this,

"aham sarvasya prabhavo, mattaḥ sarvaṁ pravartate, iti matvā bhajante mām, budhā bhāva-samanvitāḥ",

which means "I am the source of all spiritual and material worlds. Everything emanates from Me. The wise who know this perfectly engage in My devotional service and worship Me with

all their hearts.” Śrīla Prabhupada writes in the word-to-word meaning of this verse that **budhā** means intelligence and **bhāva** means determination.

- Vivek helps us to **discriminate between śuddha (Svarūpa-siddha bhakti) and aśuddha bhakti (miśṛita bhakti or mixed devotion).**

Śuddha bhakti is pure devotion that is free from any material desires or motives, while aśuddha bhakti is mixed devotion that is influenced by karma, jñāna, yoga, or other processes. Śrīla Bhakti Vinoda Ṭhākura comments in his book entitled ‘Bhakti-tattva-viveka’ that if one practices mixed devotion in the name of pure devotion, he will never attain love.

The Role of Vivek in Different Sampradāyas

Vivek is not a new or novel idea in the history of Vaiṣṇavism. In fact, all the Vaiṣṇava ācāryas have stressed the importance of discrimination in devotion. Here are some examples of how Vivek is emphasized in different sampradāyas:

- Śrīla Bhakti Vinoda Ṭhākura has written a book ‘Bhakti-tattva-viveka’, which means **The Discrimination of the Truth of Devotion**. In this book, he analyzes the nature and characteristics of pure devotion and mixed devotion, and shows how to practice the former and avoid the latter.
- Madhvācārya has written ‘Tattva-Vivek’, which means **The Discrimination of the Truth**. In this book, he establishes the difference between the Supreme Lord, the individual souls and the material nature, and refutes the monistic philosophy of Advaita Vedānta.
- Śāṅkarācārya, although not a Vaiṣṇava, has written ‘Vivekacūḍāmaṇi’, which means **The Crest Jewel of Discrimination**. In this book, he teaches the method of discriminating between the self and the not-self, and attaining liberation from the cycle of birth and death.
- Vallabhācārya, an ācārya of puṣṭi-mārga or rāga-mārga, has written ‘Vivek-dhairya-āśraya’, which means **The Shelter of Discrimination and Fortitude**. In this book, he explains the principles and practices of spontaneous devotion, and how to cultivate the mood of the eternal associates of Kṛṣṇa.

The Types of Mixed Devotion

Śrīla Bhakti Vinoda Ṭhākura says that mixed devotion is of three types: (1) chala bhakti, (2) pratibimba bhakti ābhāsa and (3) chāyā bhakti ābhāsa.

- Chala bhakti means **pretentious devotion** where the goal is not Kṛṣṇa but something else. For example, some people may pretend to be devotees to gain fame, wealth, power, or followers. They may use the external signs of devotion, such as dress, tilaka, beads, etc., to deceive others and themselves. They may also misuse the scriptures to justify their ulterior motives. Such devotion is very offensive and detrimental to one’s spiritual progress.

- Pratibimba bhakti ābhāsa means **a reflection of devotion**. The image has no contact with the actual object. In this mixed bhakti, it appears that one is engaged in bhakti although one is very far from real bhakti, i.e., there is no connection with the actual bhakti. For example, Māyāvādīs fall in this category. Sometimes Māyāvādīs are seen shedding tears on hearing Vaiṣṇava Bhajans. They don't have any concept of bhakti as they want to become God. They shed tears on hearing Vaiṣṇava songs because of pratibimba ābhāsa bhakti. Similarly, Karmakāndīs and Yogis also have pratibimba ābhāsa bhakti, although Karmakāndīs follow rules to please demigods and Yogis seek mystic powers. They may perform some rituals or practices that resemble devotion, but their goal is not to please Kṛṣṇa, but to enjoy the fruits of their actions.
 - Chāyā bhakti ābhāsa means **the shadow of devotion** which manifests in aspiring devotees as their goal is to cultivate bhāva. A shadow is linked to its object. In this mixed bhakti, there is some connection with the actual bhakti, but it is not fully developed or matured. For example, chaya ābhāsa bhakti is also manifested in pious bhogīs who come to the temple and pray to God to give them some benefit. Sometimes they also shed tears on seeing God and they feel very happy. They have some faith and attraction for Kṛṣṇa, but they are not ready to surrender to Him fully. They still have some material attachments and desires that prevent them from experiencing pure love.

One should protect oneself from all these mixed devotions by using vivek. Vivek can help us to identify and avoid the pitfalls of mixed devotion, and to cultivate pure devotion that is pleasing to Kṛṣṇa.

How to Develop Vivek

Vivek is not a natural or inherent quality of the conditioned soul. It has to be developed by the mercy of Kṛṣṇa and His devotees. Here are some ways to develop vivek in our devotional life:

- By studying scriptures like Bhagavad Gita and Srimad Bhagavatam.
- By praying according to the scriptures to please God. Prayer is a powerful way to communicate with Kṛṣṇa and express our gratitude, repentance, surrender, and love. We should try to understand the prayers offered by devotees mentioned in the scriptures. There are many prayers in Srimad Bhagavatam meant for reading and understanding.
- By practicing anukūla-pratikūla (what is favorable for practicing bhakti and what is not) one can develop vivek. Anukūla means favorable and pratikūla means unfavorable. We should accept whatever is favorable for our devotional service, and reject whatever is unfavorable.
- By giving up sense gratification. This is the most important aspect for cultivating vivek. If one is engaged in sense gratification, his intelligence is destroyed and vivek that he had accumulated is also lost.

The point is, the term Vivek is present in all the sampradāyas. The question is not whether Vivek is important or not, but how to apply it in our devotional life. Vivek is not a dry or dull intellectual exercise, but a dynamic and joyful spiritual adventure. Vivek can help us to **understand, appreciate, and love** Kṛṣṇa more and more. Therefore, let us cultivate Vivek and enhance our devotion.

Why Pray?

God Knows Everything, But He Loves Us

Why pray, if God knows everything? Why give Him anxiety by bothering Him with the complaints of our pains and sorrows? The answer to the first question is easy. God is all powerful, omniscient and most high, but still He loves us, who are most corrupted and most low. Out of His love, He does not wish to interfere in our free will and snatch the happiness of freedom from us. Only tyrants do that! He is like a loving father who lets his children make their own choices, even if they are wrong, and guides them gently.

God Wants Us to Pray for Our Own Good

If He is so loving, can't He fulfill our desires without praying to Him? Yes, certainly He can. He is God. However, if He does that, then it would harm us. That's because we all have dreams, and God of course knows that, but He also knows if those dreams are actualized instantly, then we might later offend Him for some bad consequences that might follow. He thus desires that we pray to Him and only then would He, if He thinks it to be beneficial for us, fulfill our desires. This will help us learn responsibility and give us the wisdom of right and wrong. He is like a wise teacher who does not give us the answers, but helps us find them ourselves.

Pure Devotees Pray Only to Please God

However, the prayers offered by the pure devotees are of a different flavor. Pure devotees do not pray to relieve themselves of their anxieties and bodily pains. They pray only to please God. They pray for purity, for more service, and for being accepted as servants. They do not burden God with their material problems and the sorrows of their lives. Rather they accept all of the problems and sorrows as His sweet mercy. They know these problems and sorrows will prepare them for the final meeting with God by infusing in them the divine qualities of tolerance, surrender, and determination. They are like loyal friends who do not ask for anything, but give everything.

God is Addicted to the Prayers of His Devotees

Who in the world listens to the cawing of a crow? It is the nightingale that is listened to for its sweet song. The prayers of pure devotees are like the songs of a nightingale to the ears of God. He wishes to hear those sweet prayers eternally, and perhaps, that is why He does not fulfill their prayers for the fear they will stop praying. Or perhaps, He has already fulfilled their prayers but does not let them know, for He is addicted to listening their prayers! He is like a lover who enjoys the sound of his beloved's voice more than anything else.

God Teaches Us the Power of Repeated Prayers

This then is the secret of repeatedly praying. The devotees not only know the all-powerful God, but also His addiction! The devotees become that nightingale and keep singing for the pleasure of the Lord of their life, even if it means that their desires will not be fulfilled! If God is pleased, then, tell me, what other desire needs to be fulfilled? Is there anything greater than His pleasure? God has not just one reason for any of His actions. He, in His deep wisdom, has yet other deep reasons to not seemingly respond to the prayers of His devotees. He knows that their souls are capable of diving yet deeper in His divine mysteries. By not responding, He intensifies their prayers. Intense prayers in turn can dig deeper layers of reality and unveil deeper mysteries. God thus teaches His devotees the power of repeatedly praying and the wonders it can do! He is like a master who tests his disciples and reveals the secrets of the universe to them.

God Increases the Love of His Devotees

Repeated prayers are also an expression of love that devotees feel in their heart, and the workings of love are mysterious and beyond logic. The more the love remains unfulfilled, the more it swells. Why would God not want to increase the love of His devotees? After all, that is the ultimate purpose of the entire creation. Is there anything more beautiful than love? Therefore, by not responding to their prayers, He fulfills their prayers! Or, He responds but in the form of the longing they feel when they repeatedly pray! Either way, you think, our God is a just and good God! Ever merciful and ever attentive to the prayers of His devotees! He is like a mother who knows what is best for her children and gives them what they need, not what they want.

Is God accepting My Prayers?

The Mystery of God's Ways

Mysterious are the ways of God. The omniscient God hears the prayers of everyone, but everyone's prayers are not accepted!

One way to know that our prayers are being accepted is when we receive a response from God, but often God delays responding for His own reasons, or at other times, He responds in a way which is not easily recognized by the devotee. So, in such cases, how do we know that God has accepted our prayers?

The Signs of God's Acceptance

Srimad Bhagavatam mentions signs by which we can be sure that our prayers are accepted by God.

vāsudeve bhagavati bhakti-yogaḥ prayojitaḥ janayatyaśu vairāgyaṁ jñānaṁ ca yad ahaitukam
SB 1.2.7

By rendering devotional service unto the Personality of Godhead, Śrī Kṛṣṇa, one immediately acquires causeless knowledge and detachment from the world.

The first sign is that the devotee will develop 'vairagya'. Vairagya has a two-fold meaning. The first meaning is detachment from material enjoyment. This detachment can be practically checked by how much we are undisturbed in any situation. The more we are detached, the more we will be undisturbed.

The second or internal meaning of vairagya is attachment to the Name, forms and pastimes of God. This can be practically checked by how much we can remember God every moment.

The second sign is 'gyana' or the knowledge of God. By knowledge of God, we mean the concepts and the sweetness of the philosophy of Krishna Consciousness. God will reveal this knowledge in the heart of His devotees, whose prayers He happily accepts.

The Purpose of Praying

Thus, by the above two signs a devotee can be sure that God is accepting his prayers. But what is the purpose of praying? Why should we pray at all?

The purpose of praying is not to change God, but to change ourselves. Praying is a way of expressing our gratitude, love, and surrender to God. Praying is a way of aligning our will with God's will. Praying is a way of opening our hearts and minds to God's grace and guidance. Praying is a way of transforming our consciousness and character.

The Acceptance of God

When we pray sincerely and selflessly, we are not asking God to do something for us, but we are asking God to do something in us and through us. We are not seeking God's approval, but we are seeking God's presence. We are not trying to manipulate God, but we are trying to cooperate with God.

Therefore, the sign of whether our prayers are accepted or not is not in the external results, but in the internal changes. The sign of whether our prayers are accepted or not is not in the material benefits, but in the spiritual growth. The sign of whether our prayers are accepted or not is not in the worldly achievements, but in the divine realizations.

So, instead of worrying about whether God accepts your prayers or not, focus on whether you accept God or not. Accept God as He is, not as you want Him to be. Accept God's will, not your own will. Accept God's plan, not your own plan. Accept God's love, not your own love.

When you accept God, you will find that God has already accepted you. When you accept God, you will find that God has already answered your prayers. When you accept God, you will find that God has already given you everything you need.

Heart of Steel!

The Softest Substance in the Creation

Ask those lovers what is the softest substance in the entire creation? Without a doubt they all will say, ‘the heart!’

The Alchemy of Offenses

Most of us, in this age, are expert in the alchemy of transforming that soft substance into a hard material. Our expertness is due to our art of committing offenses.

Srimad Bhagavatam 2.3.24 states: “Certainly that heart is steel-framed which, in spite of chanting the holy name of the Lord with concentration, does not change when ecstasy takes place and tears fill the eyes and hairs stand on end.” Offenses at the feet of the Holy Names make the heart hard like a steel frame, and that is why there is no change in the heart even after repeated chanting of the Holy Names. How and from where did we learn this art of doing offenses?

The Origin of Offenses

Expertness in this art is not one lifetime’s business. We spontaneously commit offenses, just as great devotees spontaneously serve and love God. We learnt these offenses from materialistic association in previous lifetimes and thus we are born with hard hearts.

The Remedy for Offenses

But by service to God and association of devotees, these offenses can be liquefied and again our hearts can begin to melt, but one must be careful to avoid these offenses so that we do not fall down from the path of service and commit more offenses. Srila Prabhupada says the whole process of spiritual devotion is to change the heart of living beings.

The Meaning of a Soft Heart and a Hard Heart

What is the meaning of making the heart soft, and what is a hard heart?

A heart full of lust, anger, greed and envy is a hard heart. Whereas, a heart free from these vices and full of emotion and love for the Lord is a soft heart.

The Symptoms of a Soft Heart

Since emotions for, and love of God can be faked, the main symptoms of true emotions for God are given by Rupa Goswami in his book Bhakti-rasamrta-sindhu. True emotions for God can be characterized by these nine symptoms:

- cessation of material desires (kṣānti),

- utilization of every moment in the transcendental loving service of the Lord (avyārthakālatvam),
- hope against hope to attain the Lord (āsa bandha),
- enthusiasm for service (samutkantha)
- eagerness for glorifying the Lord constantly (nāma-gāne sadā ruci),
- attraction for living in the land of the Lord (prītis tad-vasati sthale),
- a natural attachment to describe the Lord's most sweet qualities, pastimes, and so on (asaktis tad-gunakhyane)
- complete detachment from material happiness (virakti); and
- pridelessness (māna-sūnyatā).

The Attraction of the Butter Thief

It is only when our hearts melt and become soft like butter will the butter thief, Kṛṣṇa, enter there and stay forever!

What is the Love of God?

This is a very profound and complex question, and different people may have different answers. But only those who have it can reveal what the love of God is

Scriptures call it the path of Service.

Only service can truly please God. And when God is pleased, He pleases His devotees by revealing unto them the mysteries of love.

But like a child, love needs nourishment. Just like milk nourishes the child, love is nourished by troubles.

But no ordinary troubles can nourish this extraordinary love. Extraordinary love demands extraordinary troubles, like the power and glory of a lion is nourished by defeating ferocious elephants and not by killing coward jackals.

What are those extraordinary troubles?

They are the worst and most painful troubles that come from one's own beloved and from one's own people whom we trust. Even in this world, the pain of being cheated by the beloved and being betrayed is the greatest pain. There is no remedy for it. Similarly, when God neglects us and gives us troubles, then that pain nourishes our love more than anything else.

This is the way to know the difference between lust and love. Lust suffocates and dies when faced with such troubles but love of God increases a million times when rejected. When love pretends to be lust, God achieves a million times more pleasure. But when lust pretends to be love, God can immediately recognize it as false love.

Love of God i.e.true love is all-powerful. Even if lovers wish to abandon love, they will be utterly unable to do so. That is the test of true love. In truth, it is love that attains the lover and not the lover that attains love.

Love of God has many characteristics. One possessed by love desires to meet God. True love does not demand but serves. True love does not ask but gives. True love does not offend but protects. This is true love.

Therefore Bhaktivinoda Thakura announced: love is not merely the aim of life, but the very need of the soul!

Krishna Prema: The Highest Goal of Human Life

In this article, we will explore the concept of Krishna prema, or pure love of God, as described by Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu, the founder of the Gaudiya Vaishnava tradition. We will also look at some of the characteristics of love that distinguish it from lust or selfishness.

Possessiveness: Transferring All Affection to God

One of the features of love is possessiveness, or *mamatva* in Sanskrit. This means that one transfers all one's affection and attachment to the Supreme Godhead and considers Him as one's own. This is different from the lust that is directed towards material objects or persons, which is based on the false concept of kinship. As Lord Caitanya says:

kṛṣṇa-viṣaya-ka-premā — parama-puruṣārtha-yāra-āge-tṛṇa-tulya-cāri-puruṣārtha

Religiosity, economic development, sense gratification, and liberation are known as the four goals of life, but before love of Godhead, the fifth and highest goal, these appear as insignificant as straw in the street. (CC Adi 7.84)

To attain love of God, one has to give up all other so-called loves, including one's own self. This is not easy, as we are attached to many things in this world. Therefore, God tests our sincerity by putting us in difficult situations, where we have to choose between Him and our material desires. For example, Draupadi, the wife of the Pandavas, was disrobed in the assembly of the Kurus, but she did not pray to God for protection. She only prayed for His love, and He came to rescue her. Similarly, Gajendra, the king of the elephants, was attacked by a crocodile, but he did not ask God for relief. He only asked for eternal liberation from ignorance, and God came to save him. These examples show that where there is even a trace of selfishness, there cannot be even a trace of love.

Selflessness: Serving God for His Sake

Another characteristic of love is selflessness, or *hrdi marsnita* in Sanskrit. This means that one serves God for His sake, not for one's own sake. It is God who is important, not I. One does not serve God to get something from Him, but to please Him. This is different from the sentimentality that is based on one's own emotions or expectations. As Lord Caitanya says:

na-dhanam-na-janam-na-sundarim-kavitam-va-jagad-isa-kamayam-mama-janmani-janmani-svare-bhavatad-bhaktir-ahaituki-tvayi

'O Lord of the universe, I do not desire material wealth, materialistic followers, a beautiful wife or fruitive activities described in flowery language. All I want, life after life, is unmotivated devotional service to You. (CC Antya 20.29)

To attain love of God, one has to surrender one's ego and serve God without any motive. This is not easy, as we are conditioned by our false ego and material desires. Therefore, God helps us by giving us the association of His pure devotees, who teach us how to serve Him selflessly. For

example, the six Gosvamis of Vrindavan, who were the direct disciples of Lord Caitanya, renounced everything for the sake of God and dedicated their lives to His service. They wrote many books, established temples, excavated holy places, and preached the message of love of God to everyone. They showed us that love of God is not a matter of words, but of actions.

Addiction: Being Trapped by Love

Another characteristic of love is addiction, or bhava eva sandranatma in Sanskrit. This means that one is so captivated by love that one cannot escape from it, even if one wants to. This is different from the lust that binds us to material things or persons, which is based on our false identification. As many poets say, love is like a prison, where one is not handcuffed or locked, but still cannot leave. When one is trapped by love, one's mind goes to God even when one is inattentive, just like our mind goes to material things when we are trapped by lust. That way, we cannot give up lust, and similarly, those who want to give up love cannot do so, because they are addicted.

Conclusion

Krishna prema, or pure love of God, is the highest goal of human life, as taught by Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu. It is characterized by possessiveness, selflessness, and addiction which are the opposite of lust and selfishness. To attain love of God, one has to give up all material attachments and serve God for His pleasure. This is possible by the grace of God and His devotees, who guide us on the path of devotion. By following their instructions, we can hope to achieve the ultimate perfection of life, which is to love God and be loved by Him.

