

Bhakti – The Divine Love

Bhakti is love divine. It is that love which brings the *bhakt* (devotee) close to his beloved, the Almighty and reduces the gap between the two. Age, caste or creed, richness or poverty, manhood-womanhood – none of these can become a barrier between the two. When love is on the spiritual path it is termed as Bhati. When it is directed towards the materialistic world it is termed as lust.

Time and again we have had many great bhakts as seen through history. Great, because their love was pure and divine. We have seen true bhakts like Prahlad and Dhruva who were children with utmost bhakti. It was total confidence and trust in the Lord that Bhakt Prahlad was unmoved by his tyrant father, Hiranyakashyap. The power of bhakti brought the Lord himself in the form of Narasimha to the aid of the little devotee, Prahlad. Krishna's dear friend and bhakt Sudama offered the Lord a handful of pounded rice (poha) when he met Him after a long time which was happily accepted by Lord Krishna.

True love is that where there is no lust. It is Dhruv-Vishwas. Revered Guruji explains that there is no demand or complaints in bhakti. Bhakti cannot be explained without reference to all the Bhaktas of Gokul and Mathura, the sakhas and gopis of Lord Krishna. Radha's bhakti had culminated with becoming one with the Lord. All of them were pure in their hearts and souls as far as their love for Lord Krishna was concerned. Their surrender was total and their demands none. Total surrender through 'tan-mann-dhan' is what brings the bhakta close to his Parmatma.

In bhakti the bhakt (devotee) is totally focused on his Parmatma and hence his own existence becomes zero (shoonya). 'It is You and only You'. Whatever the bhakt experiences in his life, his very existence, becomes a kripa of the Parmatma.

Bhakti makes the bhakt strong. His complete trust in Lord gives him confidence and a sense of security – so vital in life. With the Lord in his thoughts, and His name on the lips, the bhakt is ready to face any situation in life. In this era, a lot weightage is given to 'naam-smaran', chanting God's name. It is said that the Lord can hear even the sound of 'ghunguru' (small bells) tied to the leg of an ant. Then will the naam-smaran and japa of a bhakt not reach Him?

The Parmatma too loves the bhakt. He is always close to him – in all situations, good or bad. It is said that once the Lord was explaining to one of his bhaktas how He has always been with the devotee through thick and thin. This was clear from the two pairs of footprints present throughout the life journey of the bhakta. However, when the bhakta closely observed these two pairs of foot prints, he discovered that at certain places there was only one pair of footprints. He also realized that they corresponded to periods when he was going through difficult times in his life. He then asked the Lord why He had left him alone at such times. The Lord smiled and pointed out that the single pair of footprints was that of the Lord and not of the bhakt. He told the bhakta, 'During difficult times in your life, I took you up in my arms and hence there is only one pair of footprints – my footprints'. Such is the compassion and love.

In the beginning, there is duality in the sense that there is a bhakta and the Lord towards whom bhakti is directed. But gradually they move towards each other and ultimately become one, 'ek roop'. The ultimate culmination of bhakti is when the bhakta dissolves and becomes one with his beloved. Thus, gyan is attained through bhakti. In bhakti, the path is of love and the destination too is love.

Revered Guruji describes bhakti as 'bhavnaon ki gati' – transcending of feeling & emotions. It is an expression of feelings. Bhakti is expressed through bhajan, kirtan, karmakand, puja etc . One thing common to all of them is feeling of love with which they are performed. Anything done mechanically is not bhakti. The highest expression of bhakti is seva – service to the Lord. A Bhakt serves his Guru or master as he would serve the Lord. He serves his Guru with devotion, with all his capacity, without expecting anything in return – not even asking gyan or liberation for which he had come to the Guru in the first place. 'Come what may, I am yours', is his attitude towards his Guru. Complete acceptance and surrender are the signs of a true bhakta.

Another quality inherently present in a bhakt is tatparta, eagerness. Hanuman is a standing example as far as tatparta is concerned. He was always eager to serve his master, Lord Rama. His total surrender, his devotion to Lord Rama, his willingness to do anything and everything for his master are a source of inspiration for every bhakta. In spite of being a gyani himself, his services to his Lord are full of humility. He alone can tear open his chest to reveal the Lord who resides within Him.

If a bhakt, due to kripa (grace) of Parmatma, is able to attain a place at the feet of a living Satguru, what else is left for him to achieve? The acceptance by the Satguru is in itself the biggest blessing, a bhakta can hope to receive. He should therefore be happy and ever ready to serve his Satguru whenever an opportunity arises. His love towards the Satguru is bhakti and his services (seva) an expression of his bhakti.

Anuradha Sathe, Pune