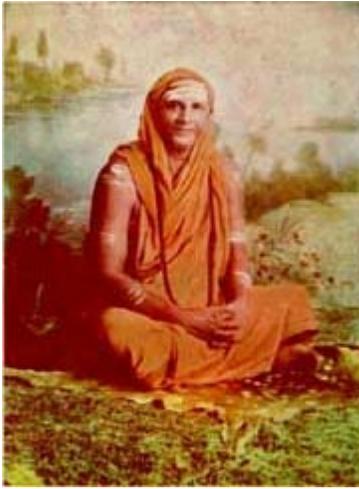


REALIZATION THROUGH DEVOTION

By

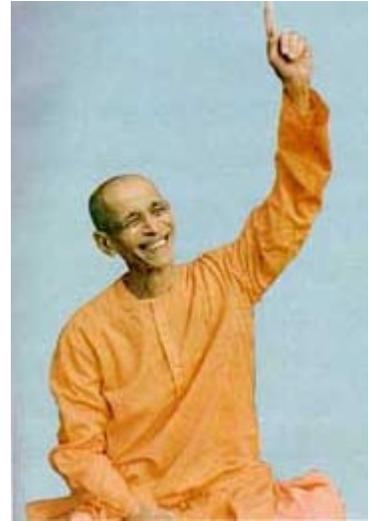
SRI SWAMI CHIDANANDA



**Sri Swami Sivananda
Founder of
The Divine Life Society**



**SERVE, LOVE, GIVE,
PURIFY, MEDITATE,
REALIZE
So Says
Sri Swami Sivananda**



Sri Swami Chidananda

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INTRODUCTION

This little booklet contains a set of three discourses given by our beloved Swami Chidanandaji Maharaj on Bhakti Yoga at the Sivananda School of Yoga, Johannesburg, S. Africa, in March 1979. The talks are as usual an excellent guide and source of material that spans the Bhakti Aphorisms of Narada Muni of ancient times as well as of other sages such as Sandilya down to the great Bhakti Saints of more recent times such as Ramanuja. The material may appear at first to be in the class of 'easier listened to than actually imbibed', but contains within it several inspiring anecdotes and guidelines which will not be missed by the keen reader and serious seeker of God and which will serve him or her well as a source of inspiration and wisdom.

The apparent distinction between the absolute monism of Sankara and the qualified monism of Ramanuja is explained. Also, the Krishna Lila with the Gopis which is confusing to many in the laity is described and it instills in our hearts and minds the sublime devotion and purity displayed in that marvellous drama. Swamiji's distinct sense of humour mixed with the crystal clear explanation is a joy to read and reread. It brings together the different methods and Yoga traditions and unifies them with Bhakti through the experience of humility, faith, devotion, surrender to the Divine and final liberation or realization of the Absolute. It is hoped that this little booklet will be well received and serve as a useful guide to all sincere seekers and devotees of God both in the spiritual family of Beloved Gurudev Swami Sivananda and the larger family of seekers the world over.

THE DIVINE LIFE SOCIETY

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REALIZATION THROUGH DEVOTION

God is the supreme Indweller of this living and moving temple of the body, in which you also reside as a resident-worshipper of the Divine within. What a great privilege to reside in the same place as the Lord Himself! Have we ever thought of it in this way, that we have the same privilege of dwelling in that same holy Abode of the Lord where He Himself dwells? May we be blessed with such a life, such a way of living, that it may endear us to Him, that we may be continuously worthy and deserving of His grace, where we live in the awareness of His companionship, of His nearness to us. What can it be to be in the same place as the Lord? If we are dwelling where God is dwelling, where else can we be, but in heaven, in the Highest Place, in the Supreme Abode! The Supreme Abode is where the seeking soul attains the feet of the Lord. We are ever abiding in absolute closeness to the Indwelling Divinity (Antaryami).

“*Isvarah sarvabhutanam hriddese arjuna tishthati*”—The Lord says, “O Arjuna, the Almighty is seated in the hearts of all beings.” “*Ahamatma gudakesa sarvabhutasaya sthitah*”—I am the Indwelling Spirit, O Arjuna, present in the bodies of all beings.” *Kshetrajnam chapi mam viddhi sarvakshetreshu bharata*—Know me to be the Knower of the field in all fields, O Arjuna. The field is this body and the Knower is the consciousness that knows this body. The truth that has been given out by innumerable saints and sages of the past and the present is that even though you may be dwelling in Johannesburg or Pretoria or any other place, yet you are dwelling in closest proximity to the Eternal and immortal Being within your body. Your body dwells in this material world, your mind functions in this phenomenal universe. But at the same time, at the very moment, you simultaneously dwell in Him who is right within you as the essence of your existence, as the basis of your being, as the very core of your innermost consciousness. Even as butter is present in milk, fire is present in wood, oil is present hidden in seed, the Indwelling Reality is present. Butter is the very essence of milk. Oil is the very essence of seed. So the Reality is your very essence.

To know Him is to become immortal. To know Him and experience Him is to cross beyond all sorrow and attain to a state of Supreme Joy, after which nothing matters, nothing can harm you. The Bliss becomes yours. Nothing can alter or remove this Joy of yours. This Joy is not dependent on any outer object, or any sense-contact, nor any experience or perception. It is there, self-existing, complete and All-full. There is no waxing or waning for this Joy. It is All-full. It stands alone. It is not the other side of the coin. It is not one of a pair of two opposites. It is not like happiness because happiness is accompanied by misery; joy is accompanied by sorrow; pleasure is accompanied by pain; health is accompanied by disease. This Joy stands by itself. It is not a relative experience. There is no question of less happiness, more happiness, greater happiness and so on. This Happiness is always Full and Absolute. That is God. That is the supreme value of this attainment, for it brings to an end all desires.

The grandeur and the greatness of human life is precisely because it is an avenue to this wondrous experience, a gateway to this Blessedness, a royal road to God-experience. Therefore,

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its value is indescribable, incomparable. It is the greatest gift that anyone can give to us. So you don't have to suffer life. You don't have to regret having come here to suffer life. You have to rejoice and start getting busy, so that no part of this wonderful gift may slip away from you. You have to stop being foolish. Be wise, rejoice and start getting busy. Then life will flower out into something indescribably beautiful. What there is around you in this world that is not important? You need not be too much concerned about that. Life is a shining highway, a golden gateway, a wide-open portal to the mansion of Blessedness, where Supreme Joy abides.

Let us know life to be what it is through a clear spiritual view of it. Don't look at life through your mind, don't look at it through your psychological self; don't try to look at it through the eyes of other people. But look at it with your spiritual vision. Look at it as a wanderer come away far from home and on the way back home. Life, therefore, is something thrillingly wonderful, something inspiringly divine. If you can feel life from your inner centre, not from your body, mind and intellect, it is just incredible. You will understand immediately that life is quintessence of spiritual grace, divine grace.

The closest proximity of God is the mystical fact about this life. If it is so very close, then why can't you see it, see God? It is so very close. Why is it that you seem to have such great difficulties in seeing it? Well, you have two eyes right in your head, so close. Can you see them? Someone has to show them to you or you have to take the help of a mirror. You have got the eyes all the time, you are seeing everything through them, but you can't see your own eyes. You have to make use of them, but even when you are making use of them and do not know that they are there, you are never aware that you are seeing through your eyes. Have you ever thought of it? Never. But this is what exactly you are doing in spiritual life. That is the position now. God is so close to you and you can't see Him. It is because of His Presence you are aware of everything outside you, because God is that principle of consciousness which makes you conscious of everything, aware of everything. Awareness of space, of your body, change of events, everything. If there is no God-principle within you, you will be like an inert stone. Now you cannot understand why even when He is so close to you, you cannot see Him. The position in which it stands in relation to you is also not known to you. Because it is the seeing principle, the feeling faculty, you cannot see it. Because it is that which sees. It is not an object. It is that which enables you to know the existence of anything. So it is the Knower.

How can you know the Knower? It is not something which is known. So unless you make an effort by some means to know your eyes you cannot know them, even so you have to reach out to touch the feet of the Divine. This reaching out and touching the Divine is called Yoga. This is called meditation. Through Yoga will you be able to become aware of yourself, conscious of your existence. You will be conscious that you possess It. You are inseparable from It. To touch your eyes you have to reach out your hands, because they are physical. You cannot do that with God, because He is not physical. So if you have to reach out and touch Him, it is a reaching out within into the depths of your being, the centre of your being. And this, therefore, cannot be a physical process. It is a mystical, spiritual process.

Reaching out and touching your inner being can be either through the power of your mind—feeling, thinking, and directing the entire stream of your concentrated thought towards the

inner Self; or it can be through your intellect—reasoning, probing, analyzing, discriminating, reflecting, contemplating; or it can be feeling, going deeper and deeper with intense feeling for Him, with great love, great devotion, great supplication, intense affection; these are the faculties through which you can reach towards the Divine.

Now we shall consider the point of reaching in towards the Supreme Being with that faculty of the intense feeling we are capable of, the love of the heart, the faculty of religious devotion, the faculty of intense feeling for the Divine. What is the special feature that makes this path of feeling for the Divine very, very desirable? What is it that recommends it to our special attention? It is this that among all Yogas this is a unique path or a unique spiritual method or practice. Unique because it calls for very little effort. It does not demand strenuous effort. All other practices demand conscious exertions, strenuous effort, whereas this is something natural, something spontaneous, because this faculty is already present and it is ceaselessly expressing itself in a hundred different ways. It is the basic raw material of human nature. Human nature loves things spontaneously. The child loves the mother; the child loves milk; the child loves comfort, and when its consciousness begins to develop it loves colourful things, shining things, moving objects. So from birth, from infancy, liking of things is there implanted as the basic principle in human nature. From that time onwards the whole of life of the individual is a countless multiplication of this urge—love. You like your morning jam and toast. You like your morning cup of tea. You like the aroma of an incense stick. You like your stereo. You like to sit comfortably in your seat. The whole life, from morning to evening, the entire wakeful moments of each day in a person's life is a continuous expression of liking, being attached. Otherwise, you do the opposite, you dislike. But liking and disliking has got a pattern also. Anything that is joy-giving, comfort-giving, that which is convenient, soft and nice, is liked by you. Anything displeasing, hard, inconvenient, uncomfortable, is disliked by you. But even in disliking, displeasing things, uncomfortable things, awkward or unpleasant situations, you are expressing only liking. Why don't you like unpleasant things, hard things and uncomfortable things? Because you like yourself. It is an expression of your love of comfort, your love of pleasant things, your love of happiness. Because you love yourself, comfortable things and pleasant things, that which contradict it or come in the way of it, you do not like. Even in the expression of dislike for something, you actually express overtly your own liking for something. So even within this apparent process of disliking you are expressing an actual liking. So this brings to us the realization that the human nature is a total mass of Raga or liking. It is spontaneous human nature, so no effort is involved in expressing its in born nature. It is continuously being expressed. There is no conscious exertion or struggle. Whether you like it or not, spontaneously this is you. Only a direction is to be given to this nature in you to make it flow towards the Supreme Reality.

Just as you like your currency, your wrist watch, fountain pen, dress, motor car, crockery at home, nice carpet and furniture, even so you direct this liking towards God. Spontaneously express this inborn nature of yours towards God. It is very, very easy if you only recognize what it means. All your sorrows will come to an end if you thus direct your thoughts towards the Lord, because you will be filled with so much joy and supreme satisfaction. A drunkard goes on drinking and drinking and drowns his sorrows, but when he becomes fully intoxicated, he no more drinks, because he is not aware that he has drunk. Already he is so inebriated that he is in a

different world. This is what happens, but in a positive way, when the Supreme Being is realized. You are not conscious that you have got any more desire, because when you attain Him everything is satisfied. There will be cessation of all desires. There is no more feeling of want. You lack nothing. When what you have is limited, you want more, but when you have attained that which is unlimited, you have no more wants. When you once realize “Oh, here is the fulfilment of all my desires,” no more running hither and thither, no more restlessness. You will find the Supreme Being, that which you seek, in hundred different little things of the world in so many directions.

This ultimate fulfilment is sought by all. This is what you actually need. You have in one place the total fulfilment of all you seek. You don't have to go on shopping for it in hundred and one places. God is the supermarket where you get everything you want. God is always calling from within, “Come, come to Me. Have anything you want.” There is one price-tag for Him. That is called love. You can buy God only through pure love and not by your currency.

So, love being your nature, it entails no exertion, no special striving and sweating and making effort in any way. Just give a direction to this spontaneous nature in you. Therefore, in this path there is not only this supreme advantage that involves no effort and struggle, at the same time it is at no stage unpleasant, or distasteful. In the case of your acquiring worldly happiness you will be sometimes disgusted with the means you adopt. But in this case, in trying to attain God, it is sweet in the beginning, sweet in step No. 2, sweet in step No. 3, sweet in step No. 4, and sweet in the end. It is sweet all the way. All the time it is full of joy and more and more satisfaction. One saint has described: “Why do you have to put on a Sunday face with moroseness? On the path to God it is all joy. Why should you have this gloomy countenance? It is all joy. Smile and dance and laugh and move towards God.”

Supposing a little daughter studies in a boarding school and stays away from home. When the vacation time comes the father takes the child home in his car. When they arrive the mother is not to be found. She has gone out for shopping. When the mother returns and opens the gate of the house, the moment the child sees her from a distance she rushes towards her mother. Every step that the child takes in rushing towards her mother is filled with joy. Until it throws itself in the arms of the mother, all the time it is experiencing ever increasing joy. Even so, this path of devotion, this path of love, is like rushing towards the mother. The moment you gaze upon God and start moving towards Him, it is like the child running towards its mother. Every step is filled with joy, because you are getting nearer and nearer to God. It is so spontaneous and joyful. It needs no effort and struggle. That is why it recommends itself. In other paths you may have to go out of your way, contrary to certain parts of your nature. In the path of Jnana Yoga, you have to do away with all your foolishness, lack of discrimination, wrong thoughts and wrong view of things by philosophical training, philosophical discourses, etc. In Patanjali's Raja Yoga you have to contradict the restless nature of your mind which is always outgoing, always full of thoughts. You have to pull it inside. You have to subdue the thoughts and focus them within. But in the path of devotion there is no contradicting of your nature, but on the contrary you have to increase this inborn nature and faculty. It is a spontaneous expression of your basic being. It is a fulfilment of your being, not a contradicting of it. That is why it is said that among all ingredients of attaining liberation, devotion towers head and

shoulder above the rest. “*Mokshasadhana samagrya bhaktireva gareeyasi*—in all the various Sadhanas to attain Liberation, devotion stands unrivalled.” Devotion does no violence to your nature. It involves no special effort. It is spontaneous and natural and every part of it is sweet and joy.

For the path of devotion the basic scripture is the aphorisms of Sage Narada, called Narada Bhakti Sutras. Similarly there is a scripture of aphorisms of Sage Sandilya, Sandilya Bhakti Sutras. The twelfth chapter of Srimad Bhagavad Gita is also another source scripture, the original text on devotion. There is a great scripture called Srimad Bhagavata of which there is an abridged translation in English. It is divided into twelve books. Of these twelve books, books 10 and 11 contain the exposition of the path of devotion, attainment of God, realization of God through love. The Guru of Swami Vivekananda, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, used to say: “For this Kali Age, the Iron Age, this is the one path that is most suitable for all people in this world, i.e., the path of divine love, pure devotion to God, expressing love in prayer, remembrance of God, praising Him, chanting His divine name, etc.” There are various translations of this path of love. The Lord in the Gita says: “Whatever thou doest, whatever thou eatest, whatever thou offerest as thy oblation, whatever thou givest, whatever austerity thou performest, do that as an offering unto Me.” God does not want us to perform somersaults. He says that whatever we are doing everyday, in our house, office or market place, offer all that to Him. Your self, your thoughts, your feelings, your words, your actions, everything you just offer to Me. Let your life be for Me. I will accept that and shower blessings upon you.

Again and again, here and there, throughout the eighteen chapters of the Bhagavad Gita this devotion is lauded. Of all kinds of Yogis who try to approach the Lord by spiritual discipline, those who worship Him with devotion are the best. They are very dear to Him. Blessed are those who have devotion in their heart, for it is the only reality in this world. All other things are false. Lead a holy life. Be bold and fearless. Never mind if you fall a thousand times. Still stand up and never give up. Devotion is the only thing that can make one happy. Through devotion you can have wonderful power. Through devotion a devotee can bring out divinity even from a stone. Devotion is a living force that can give life to a dead body. They are indeed very blessed who have devotion to the Lord. Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa says: “The goal can be attained very easily through the power of faith and devotion, and never so easily through the power of reasoning.”

God is free and not bound by any law. You cannot say: “I will do so much of meditation and You will appear before me.” You cannot lay down a law for Him. But the only thing which captures Him unawares is pure love for Him. He says: “I remain bound by devotees who love Me.” As long as we have selfish desires, so long we cannot expect to have this kind of devotion. When this kind of love awakens one becomes free from worldly ties. When real devotion comes to the devotee he grows humble. Because the Lord is all in all and he is nothing. Everywhere he sees the Lord and becomes the servant of all.

Surrender to the Divine means doing only what is pleasing in the eyes of God and refraining from doing anything contrary to His divine Will. This is stated in the Narada Bhakti Sutras as constituting a part of what is real surrender. One who loves the Lord and one who

wishes to surrender himself at the feet of the Divine would consciously strive to walk on the path of righteousness—that way of thinking, feeling and acting which will be acceptable in the eyes of the Lord and which would not go contrary to His divine Will. What His divine Will is and what that path is are expounded in the great scriptures of the living religions. The theme of these scriptures is to try to make man aware of the Will of the Divine, to make man aware what it is that makes one the recipient of the divine grace and what it is that shuts one off from divine grace.

Sutras 12 and 13 say: “Follow the scriptures even after your faith has become well-established.” Otherwise there is the risk of your falling back. Even though your faith is well-established, still you have to follow the scriptures. For, then, your devotion will be protected and secured against the likely risk of its moving away from the direction of God. Because there is a time when, in spite of all our sincerity, earnestness and genuine devotion to the Lord, the weaknesses of our human nature are such that many times those things that are unspiritual and undivine proceed from our being. Instead of our actions bearing witness to the divine, the contrary happens. To ensure against such lapses, to ensure against such sliding back or falling away from the path, follow the scriptures. There is a guarantee that you will be saved from such falls.

The vision of Indian culture, of spiritual life, of striving for God-attainment, was not regarded as something meant only for a select few, for some unique section of human society to which the normal majority of people had no access. On the contrary the vision of Indian culture clearly saw that this Supreme Goal of God-attainment was the birthright of every individual being. As a matter of fact, they declared out of this vision that God-attainment must be made the ultimate Goal of your life, no matter what you are or how you are living your life, no matter in what circumstances you are living your life. Nonetheless, by the very fact that you have been sent here as a human individual, with a power to think and to reason, you are meant to make this Supreme Experience the goal of your life. You are expected to incorporate into the various businesses of your life this process of spiritual striving also. Thus they have put before man that well-known pattern of living—the fourfold values to be striven after—ethical value, economic or money value; the vital value and the ultimate spiritual value. They gave us the pattern of living in human society which, if spontaneously adhered to, will make the individual progress towards that great Goal. Incorporating a conscious striving for all these four values helps the individual to ultimately progress towards the great Goal in a graded series of four stages. Thus, therefore, their view was that this great attainment was not something meant only for a select few, not something which was, as it were, out of bounds for the vast majority of mankind, but every human individual born as a human being on earth is heir to this divine experience which is the treasure the Universal Father is keeping in order to bestow upon us. Therefore, the goal of life is realization of God. One should make one’s normal life of that nature which harmonizes with this inner ascent towards God-realization, that does not stand in opposition to this inner life. Therefore in the process of normal living also, while you are trying for God-attainment through Divine Love, worship and practicing the presence of the Lord, at the same time you have to carry on your normal duties of life at the domestic sphere, at the professional sphere and in the social sphere.

In all these spheres of activities try to be normal. Because of the advent of spiritual quest within your life, do not bring about any revolution or change in your outer mode of living. If this is brought about there may be a reaction and it may hamper the very progress of your spiritual life. While you are thus striving towards the great spiritual Goal of God-experience, following the injunctions of the scriptures, living a righteous life, doing only that which pleases the Lord and refraining from activities contrary to the divine Will, at the same time in the outer life be normal, be natural. Don't bring about any upheaval in your sleeping, eating, in the manner of your dressing and your other activities etc., because any sudden change brought about in a normal life may so upset the whole nature that it may bring about adverse reactions and hamper your spiritual life.

The physical body has its limitations, and your psychological body has its own limitations too. It has got certain habit-patterns. Therefore, be wise, be non-violent; do not bring about any sudden revolutionary change that is likely to do violence to your nature. If you do violence to your nature it may tolerate it for sometime and afterwards it may react; then whatever you may have gained you may even lose. Therefore the Bhakti Sutras say that in all normal processes carry on the same pattern wisely. Let not the world see any drastic change in you.

There is another reason for this. The life of the Spirit is something sacred, something very, very personal, something between you and Him. It is not the concern of prying eyes, or inquisitive minds and curious people. It is something so very sacred and so very secret that it should be kept as a closely guarded secret. As far as possible try to be the same simple and natural person, so that no one even knows what is going on within you. It should be a secret between you and Him and your spiritual teacher and a select kindred souls who are just like you who know and understand you, think like you and feel like you, and who are themselves on the path. The great Guru of Swami Vivekananda, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, in his simple, homely way said: "How does a devotee behave? He behaves like everyone else. When everyone goes to sleep he also retires, but when others start snoring he sits up for meditation—but under the mosquito curtain so that no one even knows that he is sitting."

Having given these commonsense words of advice, Narada comes to the essence of the matter. What are the marks of this Divine Love? How does it manifest itself in life? First when you begin to cultivate Divine Love and when you develop Divine Love, in what way does this make itself seen in the person? In this matter different schools of thought have different opinions. They say that the marks of such development in devotion are various and are explained differently according to the different systems of thought. Vyasa, a great sage, says: "Where a person is beginning to develop Divine Love such a person starts taking great delight in worshipping the Lord." He finds peculiar joy in bowing before an altar and expressing his love in various acts of worship. He may offer some flowers, burn some incense and light a couple of candles, prostrate or stand and pray. So in various ways the inner love finds expression. Another great saint called Gargacharya said: "The mark of this inner Divine Love as it glows in the heart of a devotee expresses itself in taking great delight in the great divine activities of the Lord, in hearing, in reading about them through the various scriptures—the Bible, the Koran, the Bhagavatam etc., or talking about Him sitting with other devotees."

India is particularly fortunate that it has the concept of incarnation of God incarnating upon the human world taking the form of various divine personalities in different periods of the spiritual history of India, working out some great spiritual mission, bringing about the revival of religion in humankind and putting down unrighteousness. The scriptures in India have given accounts of such personalities as appeared in the bygone millennia and worked out certain great spiritual reformations. These accounts form a very, very important part of the scriptural lore of the Vedic religion of the Hindus. This provides a rich material for one to contemplate, to read and thus gives a wealth of ideas to dwell upon in meditation and in spiritual reflection. So when Gargacharya says that the mark of divine love is taking the form of delight in listening to the sacred stories of God, he refers to this great wealth of scriptural lore which is the wonderful spiritual heritage of the Indian people. Principal among them are life-story of Lord Krishna as expounded in the Bhagavatam and the life-story of Sri Rama as shown in the wonderful epic of Ramayana. These are the main ones, but there are many other glorious accounts of the divine activities of the incarnated divine personalities in these scriptures called Puranas.

A third sage about whom we had already referred, Sandilya, says, “Delight in worship, delight in divine Lilas, they all may be marks of pure and true love. I accept them provided they do not interfere with taking delight in the inner self, rejoicing in the inner self, the spiritual essence of your being.” So according to Sandilya this rejoicing in the inner self is, above all, the mark of divine love. For, normally, rejoicing in the Self would be regarded as a state that seems more to pertain to Vedanta or Jnana Yoga, for it is the Vedanta, the Upanishads, that speak of the Self, the inner Reality that indwells all living beings, the Supreme Self, the Eternal Reality, the Beginningless, the Endless, the Imperishable, Immortal Spiritual Principle. It has a cosmic aspect as well as an individualized aspect as the inner Self of all living beings.

Is there any contradiction? Or can we reconcile these two statements? For, it seems that Self is a concept that is impersonal, nameless and formless, whereas Bhakti is understood to be specifically a path of relating oneself in love to a personal God, a divine personality with a name and a form. This is true, nevertheless there is no contradiction in it; or in the classical path of devotion, the devotee when centering his love upon a particular aspect of the divine personality simultaneously is aware that this Divine Being whom he is worshipping is the Supreme Universal Self, not confined to this ideal form which the devotee sees before him and which he wants to worship. The Divine Being is not merely in this form, but He is also the unlimited, the eternal, universal Reality and He is immanent in this creation. He pervades everywhere, therefore, He is not confined to this form which he adores. And, what is more, this Being whom he worships in this particular form is also the indwelling Reality within his own spiritual being. He is the God within whom I adore and worship and meditate upon, and He existed when nothing was—when there was no creation, no projected creation of name and form.

So behind this emotional approach to God there is a basis of deep spiritual insight, of clear spiritual understanding. It is not something that is the outcome of superstition, or lack of knowledge. A true devotee knows that the specific form which he adores is not the ultimate, that there is beyond it the principle which is the Infinite, all-pervading primal Principle, universal Consciousness. And it is that universal Consciousness that has taken form in order to assist him in directing his love in focussing his attention, and that Being is also his innermost Self. When

the devotee worships Lord Krishna, Lord Rama or Lord Siva, he knows that Siva, Rama or Krishna is his own inner Self. Therefore, he worships Him and adores Him in a picture or a deity installed in a temple and also meditates upon Him closing his eyes, withdrawing his mind from the external and driving deep within himself. And he knows “Thou art the all-pervading Reality, immanent in this creation, pervading this entire universe, present in every speck of space, in every atom of matter. How shall I describe Thy glory.” This is the true nature of devotion, or Bhakti. Therefore Sandilya is right in saying it must not interfere in the delight in the Self.

Now Narada humbly puts forth his own opinion, giving due respect to the great seers and sages of bygone days. He says, “In my humble opinion, the mark of spiritual devotion of true Bhakti is dedicating all your actions to the Supreme Lord.” You live in a dedicated way, feeling “O Lord, this life is Thine; I am Thine. Therefore whatever comes out of me, whatever I do, whatever way my life manifests in the form of my thoughts, my words and actions, all these I verily offer unto Thee. Because they do not belong to me. My whole being belongs to you. My very life entirely is Thine.” So Narada says that this total dedication of both the inner and the outer being of one’s personality is the hallmark of love. A true lover of God lives a dedicated life. He sees that everything that he does is for the sake of his Beloved, it is just an expression of his love for God. Then Narada adds something very, very touching: “And a feeling of great anguish if one forgets the presence of the Lord.” The moment one forgets God, one should feel great anguish, “What a great mistake I have done.” So, as long as one keeps remembering the Lord one feels satisfied. The moment one forgets and then suddenly he remembers “O I forgot the Lord for five minutes, half an hour.” One feels great loss, one feels that one has lost something precious. These two, feeling anguished on forgetting the Divine and doing all activity in a spirit of total dedication, are the hallmarks of true Love, according to Narada.

Having said this, in the very next Sutra he says, “I am saying this because there have been living examples of this kind of love.” Love has manifested in the lovers of God precisely in this way. They lived, moved and had their being in the Divine, and they would not bear the separation from the Lord. They could not bear to forget Him even for one moment. Their delight was in constantly being aware of God, remembering Him, delighting in His presence, and their distress was intense when they forgot Him, like fish out of water.

Narada, while describing the nature of true love, declares in no uncertain terms that love for God in which one completely surrenders oneself to Him is not merely a theoretical idea. Such exemplary men and women of God did exist and do exist. Even this day the example of the Gopis of Brindavan is the living source of inspiration to all devotees of Krishna. Therefore, Narada quotes the examples of the Gopis of Brindavan.

Lord Krishna was born in a great city, the capital of a kingdom on the banks of the holy river Yamuna which flows by Delhi. Within a few minutes after Krishna was born His father was told by a heavenly voice: “Go to the place called Gokul and place this child in the house of a person called Nanda Gopa. There his wife Yashoda has delivered a female child. Place your son there and bring back the female child.” (This was because it was declared several years before that the ruler of that land would meet his death at the hands of a child born of that couple, hence each of their previous children had been killed at birth.) Krishna grew up in that rural

community which was made up not of agriculturists but of cowherds. Their wealth was their cattle.

Right from his infancy the child fascinated and attracted anyone who saw Him, because He was divine. The simple milkmaids of Gokul used to flock to the house of Nanda Gopa and Yashoda, and used to get captivated by Krishna. Again and again they came, making some excuse or other, to look at the child, such was His divine attraction. The description of the growth, the infancy and the childhood of Krishna is fantastic and wonderful. It forms a very big source of material for the Bhaktas of Krishna to contemplate.

As He grew, Krishna used to look after the cattle, graze them, play upon the flute and play with the other cowherd boys. And while He was playing with them the maidens of Brindavan, when they came across Krishna while going to the river to fetch water or while going to sell their milk and butter etc., used to forget everything, being overcome by the divine attraction of Krishna. These cowherd maidens were called Gopis, the cowherd boys were called Gopalas. The entire Gopi population of Gokul and Brindavan became devotees of Lord Krishna. They fell madly in love with this bewitchingly lovely incarnation.

The Bhagavatam gives a beautiful description of the wonderful relationship of these Gopis with Krishna. How they became entirely enraptured, how they forgot time and space, and even their body. Various stories have grown around this wonderful love-relationship of Gopis with Krishna. They are full of touching pathos and wonderful humour. For example there is a story of a Gopi who went to sell curd. As she was going on her way to Mathura after crossing the river Yamuna, she called out saying, "I have got for sale fresh butter and curd." While she went about calling out like this she came across Sri Krishna playing upon his flute. The moment her eyes fell on Krishna she became filled with love for Him. Krishna filled her heart and her mind. All her ideas went out and in that state of love-filled intoxication she crossed the river Yamuna, and went over to Mathura for selling curd. There she started calling "Krishna for sale, Krishna for sale. Beautiful Krishna, Wonderful Krishna, Delicious Krishna for sale." So milk and butter were forgotten. People got startled. They said, "What is it you are saying?" Then she came to her senses and blushed. Like this there are innumerable stories.

So Narada says that there have been actual examples of such wonderful love where the lover dedicated his all to the Lord and felt deep anguish and distress by even a moment's forgetfulness of Him. The great love-inebriated saint Gauranga, who is at the back of the great movement called the Hare Krishna Movement, says, "Ah, how I long for that day when an instant's separation from Thee, O Govinda, will be as a thousand years to me, when my heart burns away its desires, and the world without Thee looks like a void." When those who have once tasted this love for God pray, they ask for nothing else but for the boon of this divine love. Before love for God everything else is like a piece of glass before a diamond—worthless, essenceless. Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa used to say to his disciples, "When true yearning for God comes, then follows the sight of Him, then rises the sun of knowledge in the heart. Yearn for Him therefore with an intense love. The mother loves her child; the chaste wife loves her husband; the miser loves his gold. Let your love for God be as intense as these three loves combined together." He told his disciples how he himself prayed only for devotion during his

intense spiritual discipline. He prayed, “O Mother, here is sin, here is virtue. Take them both. Grant me only pure love for Thee. Here is knowledge, here is ignorance. I lay them both at Thy feet. Grant me pure love for Thee alone. Here is purity, here is impurity. Take them both. Grant me pure love for Thee and Thee alone. Here are good works, here are evil works. Take both of them and grant me pure love for Thee and Thee alone.” That was the prayer of Ramakrishna again and again at the feet of the Divine Mother.

In previous aphorisms it was said that this love is not selfish passion, for it is characterized by a renunciation of the self, a denial of the self. Therefore it is something totally different from the normal earthly love of an individual. Love is intrinsically divine. It finds its fulfilment when it is turned towards God. This divine love is again expressed in many forms. In the Srimad Bhagavatam we find that Sri Krishna, love-incarnate, was loved by His foster-mother Yashoda as her baby. To her the Lord was her child. So she showed her motherly love towards Him. To the cowherd boys Krishna was their beloved companion. He played games with them and even rode on their shoulders. To the cowherd girls He was their lover and companion. When Sri Krishna played his flute the cowherd girls were drawn to him like moths drawn to flame. They would become forgetful of everything, unconscious even of their bodies, drawn by this Supreme love for Krishna. In the same scripture we read, “Blessed are the cowherdresses of Brindavan. They are constantly remembering the Lord, for their hearts are forever united with Him. Even while they are milking their cows, churning their buttermilk, washing and doing their household duties, they sing the praises of the Lord with a devoted and loving heart.” Sri Ramakrishna used to go into deep spiritual trance by the very mention of these Gopis of Brindavan. Such was his spiritual sensitivity. Love was constantly present in his heart. Sri Ramakrishna said about the Gopis once: “As a tiger devours other animals, so does this tiger of intense divine love and zeal for the Lord devour all evil qualities like lust, anger and other lower passions of the devotee. The devotion of the Gopis is the devotion of love—constant, unmixed and unflinching.”

Krishna, who delights all and who is blissful, divided Himself into thousands and thousands of Krishnas in order to meet the love of each one of these countless damsels. Thus He was a companion to each one of them because of His divine power, Yoga Maya. Each girl felt the immediate divine presence of Krishna and the divine love of Krishna exclusively for herself. Each felt herself the most blessed. Each one’s love for Krishna was thus reciprocated by Him by His power. And it was so absorbing that each felt herself one with Krishna. Nay, she knew herself to be Krishna. Wherever their eyes fell they beheld Krishna and only Krishna alone.

The sport of Lord Krishna with these cowherd girls is called Gopi Lila which is the acme of religious love in which individuality vanishes by communion of identity. It is this Lila that Sri Krishna shows. That pure, most marvellous expansion of love, the most marvellous passage of His life and most difficult to understand until one has become perfectly chaste and pure, is expressed in the beautiful play of Brindavan. This none can comprehend but he who has himself become filled with this love and drunk deep of this love. Who can conceive the secret of the love of the Gopis, the cowherd girls, the very ideal of love—love that wants nothing, love that does not care even for heaven or liberation, love that does not care for anything in this world or in the worlds to come!

So long as there is selfishness in the human heart, so long this love of God is impossible. It is nothing but shop-keeping. Forget love for name and fame and love for this temporary world of ours. Then and then only will you understand the true love of the Gopis, too holy to be attempted without giving up everything, too sacred to be conceived until the soul has become perfectly pure. People with idea of sex, money and fame bubbling up every moment in their hearts never hope to understand the love of Gopis for Krishna. Here is the very ecstasy of enjoyment, the drunkenness of love, where disciples and teachers, teachings and books, and the ideas of fear and God, heaven and hell have all become one. Everything has been thrown away. What remains is the mad transport of this transcendental love for the divine. In complete oblivion to everything else the lover sees nothing in the world except Krishna and Krishna alone. The face of every being has become like Krishna. And his own face looks like Krishna. That indeed was the great love of the Gopis for Krishna.

The next aphorism is very, very significant. It has purposely been put there by Narada lest in trying to read the love of the Gopis an ordinary man who is not ready to understand may get side-tracked into human eroticism. He may start understanding the love of Gopis in terms of his own physical consciousness. Therefore he says, "It cannot be said that in their love they ever forgot His greatness and divinity." These cowherd girls of Brindavan were so graced that when they got attracted and fell madly in love with Krishna, somehow in the deep depths of their own being they knew that it was not a mere ordinary human being that they were loving. They felt instinctively the divinity of Lord Krishna, and so throughout their love-relationship with Lord Krishna every moment they were fully aware of His divinity. So in this love the awareness of the divinity was not absent even for one moment.

Once the Gopis asked Krishna, "Please give us one day the opportunity of satisfying our hearts by sporting with you, by dancing with you, by being in your company continuously for many hours." Because they were all busy with their children at home, father-in-law and husband, if they went home late they would be questioned: "Why are you late?" So they were constrained always everyday and had to satisfy themselves with just a glimpse of Krishna, just a little word when they went to Yamuna to fetch water or when they were on their way to Brindavan after selling their milk and butter. But they kept praying, "Will not a day come when you will call us to your side and we will sport with you to our heart's content?" Krishna said, "Wait, wait, wait." One day He said "Yes." It was a day of autumn, October, and it was full moon day. He said, "On that full moon day of autumn you come in the evening when the moon has risen. Come to the sandy banks of the river Yamuna. There I will organize the sport for you." So they went there. Krishna played His flute and they were entranced. They forgot everything and were drawn by that divine pull, oblivious of everything.

There Lord Krishna was sitting. Moonlight was raining down upon Him, His own divine radiance flooding all the ten directions. He was bathed in the brilliance of His own radiance. The Gopis stood there gazing at Him. Suddenly the flute playing stopped and the trance spell was broken. The Gopis came down to their normal consciousness. And then Krishna turned and said: "Hey, what is this you are doing? You are all married women. You are all ladies having husbands, children, family, house, duties to perform. Don't you know it is very wrong to leave

them and come to a strange man? This is against scriptural injunctions. This is against Dharma. This is against ethical standards. No, no, no. What will the world say? What will people say and what will your own family say? Go back.”

At last the Gopis became furious. “What is this? What are you saying? We have been praying for so many years that you should give us this wonderful experience, and you made a promise. Then you gave us a date, time and all that, You played upon your flute and drew us here. Now you say this!” The Bhagavatam explains how the various Gopis responded to His wonderful sermon on ethics and good conduct. The Gopis said: “How cruel you are! How heartless you are! How can you say this to us? What do you mean by saying this? Do you think we don’t know who you are? You are the Being who is the goal of all existence. The highest duty of every human individual is to attain you. And before that duty what other duty can ever be there? Don’t try to hoodwink us, don’t try to throw dust into our eyes. We will not be taken in by these little clever tricks of yours. We know you are the Self dwelling in all living beings. We know you are the Supreme Universal Reality.” Therefore they say that the love of the Gopis was not the human love.

Once Krishna, to test their devotion, said to them, “O ye pure ones, your duty must first be to your husband and children. Go back to your home and live in their service. You need not come to me, for if you only meditate upon me you will do service to me.” But the cowherd girls said, “O you cruel lover, we desired to serve you only. And thou dost advise us to serve our husbands and children. So let it be, let us abide by Thy teaching since Thou art all in all. By serving Thee we shall be serving our husbands and children also.” Like lawyers they turned their arguments against Krishna. They continued, “The whole universe is within you. Everything is already in you. So by serving You we will be serving our husband, our children, our mother-in-law, father-in-law, our cattle at home etc.” The truth taught here is that just as by watering the root of a tree the branches and the leaves and other parts of the tree are all nourished with water, so pleasing the Lord who dwells in the hearts of all, all beings are pleased.

Thus the Gopis of Brindavan attained their oneness with Krishna, the supreme state of transcendental consciousness, by loving their Lord as their one and only Beloved. If the Gopis did not have that knowledge that Krishna was God, then their love would have been similar to the base passion of a mistress towards her paramour. It would have been like the love of any other ordinary human being. In carnal passion there is only the desire for one’s own pleasure. One is thinking about one’s own delight, one is not concerned so much in the delight of the other person, whereas in the love of the Gopis for Krishna in Brindavan it is said that they wanted to give delight to Krishna, to make Him happy. And the greatest delight for them was to see Him happy. If He was delighted, Oh, they were thrilled with joy. That was the nature of the Gopis’ love for Krishna. This is the essence of Brindavan love.

The devotee reaches God through the power of his feeling. The entire sentiment and emotional potential of his personality is directed towards Him, the object of his feeling, intensified devotion and love. So it is a path of approaching and trying to enter into an experience of the Divine, to enter into God-consciousness and God-experience through love of one’s heart. Therefore it is called Prema Marga or Bhakti Yoga, Yoga of devotion or the path of

divine love. It is purified love, a spiritual love. The devotee has already begun to awaken to an awareness that he is not an earth creature. He is only a wanderer, a passer by in this market place we call the world, so he does not find himself at home here. He knows that his eternal abode is the Cosmic Spirit. He says, "I know That. I belong to That. I am of the, same element as That." He has begun to feel an awareness of his spiritual nature. So it is from this level that his love springs forth, not from the normal human level. It is not the so-called feeling that exists between two persons who are rooted in body-consciousness. It is a feeling upon a higher level, the purified level of the Spirit. So it is purified spiritual love, where there is no element of grossness, no element of physicality, no element of any of the earthly human passions. Therefore that is the all-purifying love and therefore it uplifts one. It is a love that at once refines one's personality and liberates the lover from the thralldom of the downward pull of his lower nature. Hence love itself becomes a powerful force to free one from the bondage to the lower physical sensations.

This approach to the Lord has been found to be not a straight ascent into a comprehension or an experience of the Impersonal Absolute Reality, but love is directed towards the Supreme Being conceived of as a great All-Perfect Cosmic Divine Personality, whom the devotee addresses as "O my Father, O beloved Mother, O beloved." The devotee addresses the Lord as any other person addresses another person, so in many of the ecstatic devotional compositions of great devotees of God we find that those expressions seem to be coming from a physical plane. The devotees speak of embrace, of ecstasy of union, but this symbology is applied upon a plane where there is neither body nor face, nor lips, nor hands nor feet. This terminology is used for want of vocabulary to express the inexpressible. That inexpressible Reality can be explained only by silence. It is like a dumb person tasting a very delicious dish for the first time in his life. What can he do to express his enjoyment? He can only make gestures and laugh and smile. He cannot describe his happiness through words. So either one has to remain silent and laugh, smile and jump in joy, or speak in terms of the physical plane.

The concept of the Supreme Being expressed in terms of human ideation, therefore, is as a person, but nevertheless as a person whom one can address as one would address any other person here upon this earth. Therefore it is an approach directed through the love of one's heart towards a personal God. This sometimes raises doubt for common people, especially people who want illumination but at the same time who feel a little bit uncomfortable, for it seems to be not quite tallying with their intellect. (I am talking of the normal modern individual, mainly western society and also westernized Indian society.) They think that spiritual union with a personal God, etc., is an old fashioned idea. Where is this personality? Is it located in some sphere or some plane in a supramundane kingdom? Is He sitting there to receive the love of His devotees on this earth; and when the devotees attain Him will He call them into His abode and make them sit there and enjoy and enjoy till the end of time? Is it not puerile, childish and silly? It seems to be meaningless to think of the Supreme Reality as some person located in some plane. How is He spending His time there? What is His occupation? Like this many questions start coming.

These doubts and questions have been very beautifully reconciled. There is no irrationality or lack of logic in these scriptural conclusions. It does not in any way contradict the sophisticated environment of the twentieth century nuclear age. The truth is that the great devotees who approached the Divine through their concepts of a Personal God ultimately

realized from the depth of their God-experience that this Cosmic Personality is Itself the Impersonal Absolute beyond name and form, manifesting itself as a divine all-perfect Being whenever It is called. It is not something that is permanently located in a particular plane or kingdom, but it is an Eternal Reality in the sense that whenever it is called for It is there. So both the Impersonal Absolute beyond name and form and attributeless, as well as the personal God with name and form, are eternally real. Just as long as we have water upon this earth we have potential for any amount of ice which is formed when the temperature goes below a certain level. By taking the form of the ice the water does not cancel its essential waterness. Both ice and water are essentially one. Swami Vivekananda compares the Impersonal Absolute to the mighty ocean and the Personal God of the devotee to the ice. He says, "Under the cooling, influence of Bhakti of the devotee, the ocean of Pure Existence which is the Impersonal Absolute—nameless, formless, endless infinite, eternal—takes a form of a personal God." Thus the lovers of God who had God-experience realized Him in the depths of their love-experience as their personal God upon whom they can direct their love, spiritualized and raised up to a higher refined level. That personal God was realized in and through all things in the entire universe and when they burst forth in their realization they called Him both personal and Impersonal God. When the Vedantins, who straightaway approached the Impersonal Absolute beyond name and form, beyond the ken of mind and the intellect—one, non-dual consciousness—realized this impersonal Absolute, they knew that that Impersonal Brahman Himself becomes all that exists. So they said, "Thou art supremely transcendental, impersonal and absolute, and yet Thou art all that exists. Therefore Thou art non-dual, one without a second and without any form. Yet, Thy forms are myriad. Infinite are Thy forms."

In classical Indian spiritual literature, ancient as well as the later works, we find this wonderful idea expressed. In the Upanishads and the Vedas the Impersonal Absolute has been described in a very thrilling way, especially in the Nasadiya Sukta of the Rigveda. It says, "At that time, when nothing was existing, who was there to comprehend and say what existed? There was neither existence, nor non-existence. Darkness covered darkness. Nothing was. There was neither light nor darkness. There was neither existence nor nonexistence. There was neither duality nor non-duality. For, who was real who could say anything about that?" Thus the Nasadiya Sukta of the Rigveda tries to give some idea of that unutterable state of unmanifest existence, the primal timeless eternity. The same Vedantic scripture made the seers to experience simultaneously that that Impersonal Absolute in His Cosmic state of being is everything that exists, for other than that nothing exists. The truth which they realized was that this great reality is not only impersonal, but it is also the personal and actual. It is beyond both the personal and the impersonal. It is only to be experienced and cannot be uttered.

It is often held that Vedanta which preaches the reality of Brahman or the impersonal Absolute and the illusoriness of the world appearance—including all the gods and other celestial beings—is intolerant of worship. This is an error. The realization of the illusoriness of the sense-perceived world is no doubt the goal of Vedanta philosophy, but a man who is under a spell of spiritual ignorance cannot deny the actuality of phenomenon. The reality behind all variety of cloth is cotton; the reality behind all variety of furniture is wood; the reality behind all variety of pottery is clay; the reality behind all jewellery varieties is pure gold. Nevertheless, though the reality is only one in all these examples, these different objects have their distinct

reality, even though they are non-distinct in their essence. So, on a relative plane, distinct reality of these different forms which the one essential substance has taken, has to be accepted. The actuality of the world of phenomenon is accepted as a valid experience by all beings until they enter into a state of higher experience where they have grasped the essence of things. Until they have grasped the essence of things in transcendental experience the actuality of all these variegated forms becomes valid and has to be accepted. When you accept the reality of ordinary forms, why not accept the reality of a divine form, a higher expression? So the actuality of phenomenon cannot be denied as long as a man remains spiritually ignorant. The world is real and so are its pairs of opposites during that time.

Only a highly evolved soul can conceive the impersonal Absolute and meditate upon Him. Such a one alone can seek Brahman or the Absolute in His transcendental aspect, and realize Him in deep Vedantic meditation. However, for the rest the approach to the Absolute Being lies through a personal God. Therefore the worship of a personal God is recommended in spiritual life. Worship and devotion enable a beginner to fix his mind on God and strengthen his power of concentration. As long as a man regards himself as a psycho-physical being, as long as he is conscious of his body, mind and intellect, and as long as he is himself not aware of his pure Spirit, he cannot effectively meditate upon the Impersonal Absolute. This is a fact one has to accept.

Conscious of his many weaknesses and limitations a man feels the need of prayer, forgiveness and grace. Therefore he approaches a personal God for protection, guidance and blessings. But eventually the worshipper in his ultimate experience and realization comes to know that both his personal God and the impersonal Absolute are one Stuff, non-different, being manifestation of one spiritual Essence. As long as a man remains conscious of his individuality and retains his little ego the distinction between himself and the God whom he worships holds good. The latter is to be regarded as the highest reality of the relative plane. From the standpoint of name and form a toy-lion and a toy-sheep, though both of them are made of clay, cannot be regarded as identical. We cannot call the sheep a lion and vice versa. They are different and not identical. Even when they are different, in essence they both are made of clay. Similarly from the relative standpoint the devotee and the personal God, though both are admitted to be identical by the non-dualists or the Vedantins, in this state of relative existence, they cannot be identical. So the devotee says, "I am Thy servant. Thou art my Master. I am Thy child. Lift me up from the state of ignorance." When both the toy-sheep and toy-lion are put under a hammer and powdered they are reduced to the same clay which is their essential nature. So also this temporary personality vanishes in a State of ecstatic union with the divine love and then a different consciousness prevails. Likewise the devotee, the lover of God and the personal God will be reduced to their ultimate Cause, the Impersonal Absolute, by losing their differentiation. The reality behind the divinity of the personal God is the divinity of the Impersonal Absolute. The reality behind blocks of ice is the endless formless water. The whole universe with all its material objects is the manifestation of the Absolute. And the personal God is the highest manifestation of that Absolute. Therefore the personal God cannot be dismissed away as a mere creation or imagination of the human mind. It is a cosmic Reality. As long as you are conscious of yourself as a separate individual being, to you the personal God is a cosmic Reality. And it is an effective Reality through the worship of whom you can ascend into an experience of that

transcendental Impersonal Being. The personal God is not the creation of the human mind. He is as real as the universe and as yourself. When through self-control and meditation the aspirant becomes less and less aware of the universe and his ego, then he sees more and more the Absolute. In the end both the worshipper and the worshipped merge in the Absolute. It is like a stream of water joining a river. After joining the river the stream as well as the river both flow towards the ocean. When both of them meet the ocean they lose their individual name and form. Then it is neither river nor the stream! It is one immeasurable mass of water.

From the realization of the personal God to the knowledge of the Impersonal Reality is but one step. If you have realized the personal God in the depths of your personality through devotion and love, then entering into the realization of the Impersonal Absolute is a matter of course. The truth is that the personal God of the lover and the devotee is no other than the Impersonal Absolute of the non-dualistic philosopher or Jnani. The personal God is a solid reality on the relative plane as long as you are in a state of relative consciousness. Therefore to Him you have to direct the love of your heart, your prayers, your glorifications, your praise, your chants.

The devotee who has thus begun to adore the Supreme Being and makes the love of his heart the path of approach to God-experience has been warned that if he wants to cultivate devotion and progress in the same, he must shun the company of those who are unspiritual, because the influence of such unspiritual person is negative. Just as in the company of the holy, your faith and piety increase, your belief grows strong and devotion is enhanced in your heart, similarly as long as you are in the relative plane of consciousness, the company of those who are worldly and undivine, coarse, pleasure-loving, egoistic or sensuous has got its own powerful negative vibrations. By such a negative influence the devotee's mind descends down into negativity. It is of course true that everyone has negative and positive qualities. The negative within you, all that is unspiritual within you, is called forth to the surface of your personality when you mix with undivine company; whereas the attempt of the devotee to keep these lower things completely in a state of inhibition until he reaches the state of love, will be possible only in divine company. One should not give a chance for the expression of the negative qualities. One should keep them in check until all the negative qualities are subjected to the fire of pure love when they become transmuted and sublimated and they are no longer there to trouble you. The contrary happens if you go into bad company. These lower passions which are already there in the form of little ripples assume tidal proportions and they will completely submerge the unwary and unwise devotee and ruin him. Therefore beware. This is what Narada says. He further says, "He who succeeds in liberating himself from the bondage world of Maya, he who shuns the company of the unspiritual and cultivates the company of those who are devotees of the Lord, gets rid of all attachments to all earthly pleasures. That devotee who takes refuge in solitude roots out all worldliness and shakes off the bonds of the three Gunas and takes total refuge in the Lord. Such a devotee liberates himself from bondage. Such a devotee renounces all desires for the fruits of his actions. He acts because it is his duty to act. He has no selfishness. He covets not the fruits of his activity. He ultimately goes beyond all desire-prompted selfish activity and revels in only unselfish activities prompted by his love for God. Such a one ultimately goes beyond even scriptures. He begins to feel the primacy of devotion to such an extent that devotion takes the first place. He is solely concerned with devotion, not even

scriptures. He loves and loves. His whole being becomes only a love for God. That becomes his only Sadhana, his only scripture, his only guide, his only light upon the path.”

The greatest gain in life is the attainment of that which is permanent, enduring and abiding, that which is not merely a transitory thing which passes away after sometime, but is eternal, beginningless and endless. For it is only through such a principle or a factor that one can get eternal satisfaction and can really and truly be happy.

All things in this phenomenal universe of ours are subject to change, disease and destruction. Things of the world are perishable, they have a beginning and an end. Therefore they give only a momentary experience. All things being relative and part of duality, they have in themselves a contrary experience also. Nothing comes singly in the universe. All things come in pairs. Where there is pleasure, there is also pain; where there is joy there is also sorrow; where there is gain there is also loss; where there is birth, there is also death; where there is health there is also sickness. In this way this world is made up of pairs of opposites—light and darkness, day and night, summer and winter, up and down, youth and old age, meeting and parting, etc., to quote some examples. Therefore, the ancient men of wisdom who probed into the mystery of life and tried to analyze the nature of things and experiences derived from them, who made an investigation into life, joy, sorrow and happiness, arrived at this knowledge that in this created universe of temporary and changing names and forms, all things are perishable, all things are subject to destruction. And therefore these things can only at best give you a momentary mixed experience which also has to come to an end. Therefore, real, true and abiding happiness and eternal satisfaction is not something which you can get in things.

Then, is there any place where you can get such a permanent joy? Is there an experience of perfect happiness, absolute happiness? The ancient men of wisdom said ‘yes’ on the basis of their own personal experience. They had attained that experience themselves. Thus they declared the presence of absolute happiness based upon their own personal experience. In this experience, in this authoritative and sure declaration, all the mystics of all times, and in all climes, all ages, all races and nations are at one. Mystics all over the world invariably stated this identical truth, that there is a supernal joy to be attained. So we realize then that God is not a cruel joker. He did not send man to this imperfect world of transitory, perishable and changeable things just to delude him with a little temporary happiness, a little laughing and much weeping. No. God is the supreme ocean of love and grace. He sent the created individual into this universe to make use of this life here for the attainment of perfect joy, absolute happiness and supreme bliss, attaining which one knows that there is nothing higher to be attained. One is simply filled with that great joy, one rejoices for ever and ever. All desires are satisfied, all wants are filled. One does not seek pleasure anywhere else afterwards. The divine destiny is the attainment of this absolute bliss. How? Through the experience of that which is permanent, eternal, unchanging and all-full.

Truth is not fragmented. A thing which is of a colour, a shape and a form can give only a little pleasure to the eye. It cannot give any pleasure to the ear. A little music can only give pleasure to your ears. It cannot give any happiness to the eye. So with all other sensory functions. They are all fragmentary. There is nothing that can give you pleasure through all the

avenues at one stretch. But there is such a thing which will give you a total joy by which sight, sound, taste, smell, touch, mind—everything—becomes filled with absolute joy and satisfaction. That thing is the eternal, the Reality. That Almighty Being we call Father in Heaven, Jehova, Ahura Mazda, Allah, Atman or Isvara, the Light of lights or the Universal Soul. You can call it by any name. It is That which is all-full. That which is perfect, That which is eternal, That which is permanent and abiding and changeless, and therefore capable of giving you total satisfaction. Therefore it is said that That should be sought after, That should be attained. For, in God, or in that Supreme Reality, there is absolute satisfaction, total joy and fulfilment, supreme joy and peace, the bliss that is indescribable to which not all the joy and pleasures of the entire universe put together can even remotely approach. Having attained this, life becomes a success. You really fulfil the mission with which you have come into this world of birth and death.

It is to help man to attain this great goal that religion came into being. In the history of the human race religions came in order to help the individual to somehow or other attain that great Reality, attain that experience which is of the nature of perfect joy, perfect fulfilment. Therefore no matter how much in the external structure—of rituals and ceremonies—religions may differ, at the heart centre of all religions is this spiritual movement of the spirit of man towards the Universal Spirit we call God. This upward ascent of the human being towards the divine—from sorrow to joy, from darkness to light, from bondage to liberation—is the universal religion, the true religion. It is the common meeting ground of all religions that differ in their non-essentials due to their historical background, the geographical location and the conditions prevailing at the time of their coming into being.

We saw that you can approach God either through your mind, your intellect or your heart, your feeling, and we also saw how the approach through feeling is most natural and spontaneous. It does not require any special effort or exertion, because feeling is natural to everyone. We found that this expression of feeling is constantly being manifested from birth to death. Always we are expressing our attraction or attachment to something or the other. This feeling has to be diverted towards God also. This feeling does not contradict your nature, it only makes your nature take a new direction, so there is spontaneity and naturalness in it and it is present from start to finish. There is no special exertion—that is its special recommendation.

Now we go into a consideration of the love aphorisms of Sage Narada. The first aphorism says, “We now proceed to expound the principle of devotion.” The word ‘Atha’ has two significances: One, it is a very auspicious word. At the beginning of any auspicious undertaking, it is usual to pronounce this word, “Atha Om.” It is like saying “Amen unto thee.” Two, it also means ‘now’. When? Now, that you have a desire to attain God, you are ready to be told this great way. So it means the one who is seeking God is already on the path and qualified, therefore he is fit to receive this knowledge by proving himself worthy of receiving it.

The second aphorism says, “Bhakti is supreme, intense love for God.” It is a spiritual love. The mind tends to move towards that which you love. The human tendency is to try to make effort and try to get what one loves, for which one has liking. Therefore if you have recognized the great desirability of somehow attaining God in this life, naturally therefore you will start seeking after it. When you know that this Supreme state of perfect joy is to be found in

God, then you conceive a liking for God and love for Him. Therefore this love is a result of recognizing that in God is the guarantee of getting what you are seeking but not getting here. Seeking for something where it is not is folly. Sorrow is the fruit of such folly. Bliss is to him who turns away from such folly and seeks the eternal.

The third aphorism says that Bhakti or spiritual love is nectarine or ambrosia. You know what nectar or ambrosia is. It is a concept to be found in almost all religions. It is the elixir of life, attaining which one becomes immortal, deathless. If you have imbibed this absolute precious elixir, then no more death, no more fear of death will there be for you. Bhakti or devotion to God is described as nectarine. It means that it makes you immortal, deathless. In Sanskrit it is called Amrita. Amrita means that which makes you deathless. Death is something that refers only to the physical body. You have death because you have birth. Because you are born there comes this thing called death. If you are not born into this state of physical embodiment then there is no question of your death. Once you attain God-experience there is no more coming into this world of birth and death, pain and sorrow. So when there is no birth, there is no death. By attaining the supreme love for God you enter into a state of God-experience and there is no more a chance of descending into the state of earthly experience. Therefore it is nectarine. All the experiences of man—worry, anxiety, frustration, disappointment, hate, suffering and dejection—are confined to this earth plane, to this physical embodiment. Therefore, if devotion confers upon you a state of immortality or deathlessness, it also means simultaneously it confers upon you a state where there is no sorrow, no pain, no suffering, no fights and quarrels, no love and hate, no worry and anxiety. All the concomitant evils that arise out of coming into a state of embodiment are transcended at one stroke and you become established in a state of the experience of perfect bliss.

The fourth aphorism says, “Obtaining this love man becomes perfect, deathless, supremely satisfied” because through such divine love one enters into God-experience. Entering into a state of God-experience one enters into a state of God-consciousness. In that state of God-consciousness one experiences the perfection of God’s nature. God is all-perfect, God is all. Therefore you experience perfection. God is a state of absolute fullness. Therefore attaining that state of absolute fullness there is no more any want. Your satisfaction becomes total. Eternal satisfaction comes to you. In that state of God-consciousness one abides for ever, and because one abides for ever, there is no return to this bodily existence. Therefore one becomes deathless.

The fifth aphorism says, “Having obtained which one does not desire anything else. Neither does one sorrow anymore.” This state of divine love is also a state of absolute bliss. If you like honey, when you open the jar and take a spoonful out of it, already your heart dances with joy. What is it in honey that makes you full of joy at the prospect of taking a spoonful of it? It is sweetness. So, sweetness is happiness, pleasure. In the same way this supreme devotion or love is at once bliss. It is absolute happiness. Therefore in this state of experience there is no more desire for anything else. When you are filled with supreme happiness, then what more do you desire? There is no more desire, no more sorrow. There is only rejoicing. You are free from hate or hostility because you are filled with love. Only when you are sour in your temperament, will you have a nature which hates others, but when you are immersed in a state of love, joy and bliss, only happiness comes to you. Then in that state of sweetness brought about by this love

that fills your heart, you are incapable of giving anything to others except sweetness! From you only joy, peace and happiness comes. Your only enthusiasm is God. You want to speak about God, hear about God, talk about God; you want to dwell upon God. You are not enticed by anything other than God. It is like cricket to a cricket-enthusiast; a stamp to a stamp collector.

The sixth aphorism says, “Having known a taste of that love..... one becomes filled with peace and hence becomes silent and rejoices within oneself.” God is bliss. When you attain God and enter into His experience, you are so inebriated that You are, as it were, filled with intoxication. A great philosopher has described this entering into a state called God: “Oh, I was like a hailstone that dropped into the middle of the ocean, and having dropped there it soon got dissolved and merged into the ocean and became one with the ocean. And that which was a little thing, now has become the immeasurable ocean. Suddenly its experience became completely changed. It rejoiced in that state.” Thus having known the taste of that love of the Divine one becomes fully enraptured and inebriated, filled with peace and silence. We are all speaking of love, love, love. All the teenagers are also speaking of love, and all the producers of movies also want to make love their only theme. So everyone is speaking of love. What is it? Is it the same thing, which you read in cheap magazines, novels and movies.

Narada says in aphorism seven, “This spiritual love is not a selfish passion because it is a form of renunciation.” Because out of earthly love you want to obtain some pleasure, to extract some enjoyment, your interest is not the person or thing, but your own self. It is all based upon selfishness, a desire to obtain something for oneself; whereas this divine love is characterized by a denial of oneself, by a willingness to give up all that is very nice and very pleasant, all that is considered to be happiness or labelled as such. One is denying all earthly pleasures and happiness etc., in this love. This divine love is not a selfish passion. It is the very opposite of selfishness.

The next aphorism goes to confirm still further. It says, “For it means giving up the coveted things of this passing world.” It means giving up the usual ways of the people of the world. The way of the devotee becomes quite contrary to the usual ways of the people of the world. People of the world seek comfort and convenience. The lover of God rejoices in discomfort, rejoices even in inconvenience. He is prepared to undergo any inconvenience, any discomfort, any pain given for the sake of the Beloved. He desires nothing else. He voluntarily welcomes inconvenience for the sake of Divine Love. Therefore the very fact that it is characterized by self-denial, and a willingness to renounce all so-called enjoyments, pleasures and happiness, it is established that it is not a selfish passion at all. On the contrary, the scriptures say that spiritual love is something whose very basis is renunciation of self and self-seeking. Therefore this love has a special significance. In this love there is whole-souled dedication to God. It is exclusively a dedication to God and God alone, putting out of one’s heart and mind a desire for anything else but God. This exclusiveness is called in Sanskrit “Ananyata.” Anya means something else. Here there is nothing else. The heart rejoices and desires God and God alone. Therefore there is in this love all-exclusiveness and one-pointed dedication.

What is the implication of such dedication? The next Sutra makes it clear. In such renunciation there is complete unification and indifference towards everything opposed to it. This all-exclusive dedication means making God your sole refuge and support and seeking no other support or refuge. "I seek no support. I depend upon you only. You are my sole refuge. I shall not consider anything else as my refuge." Then this means you cast all your cares upon Him. If there is such all-exclusive dedication, then you definitely become God's concern, His total responsibility. He will have to look after you. Where out of egoism one wants to try to have his own way and to seek support other than God, then God says, "All right. Let him support himself." But if you say, "No, I shall not seek support in anything else. God is my sole refuge. I throw myself completely under His mercy," it becomes a burden upon God. He has to respond because you throw a direct challenge upon Him. Where there is such complete dependence upon Him, immediately there is response from God. He will take care of you. This has been the experience of all true devotees of the Lord, down the ages, in the history of the human race.

The next aphorism says, "This love also means doing only what is pleasing in the eyes of God and refraining from doing anything contrary to His Divine Will." This is the sign of true love and true dedication, wanting to walk in the way of the Divine Will, wanting always to do only that which is pleasing to Him. What is Divine Will? Lord Jesus said, "Thou shalt love thy Lord with all thy heart, with all thy mind and with all thy soul. Love thy neighbour as thyself." Who is your neighbour? Any being whom God puts you in contact with, who at any given time in your life is by your side. You are expected to love that neighbour as thy own self. That is corollary to your love of God. Love of God also means love of your neighbour, because God dwells within your neighbour also. The human body is the highest tabernacle of the living God. It is the moving temple of God. So love of God is also love of man, and all beings.