

THE GOSPEL OF
LOVE

THE LOGIC OF DEVOTION

*AN ANCIENT VEDIC TREATISE
ON THE SUBJECT OF
DIVINE LOVE*

COMMENTARY BY
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INTRODUCTION

Every day roughly six billion humans wake up, have breakfast, and set out on their life's course in search of something meant to make them a little happier than the day before. Successful or not, the same six billion get up the next day hoping it will bring happiness.

A fellow gets a house. Is he satisfied? Next he needs a wife. Is that then end of it? Not on your life. Kids, grandkids, a place in the country, a trip around the world - the list goes on. Until the day he dies the sense that life still has something to offer lingers in his mind. Were he to be reborn a thousand lifetimes and garner untold experience, our hypothetical person would get up in the morning and set out on the quest to find something he or she didn't have.

So the question is, "If I felt whole and complete and unconditionally loved myself as I am, would I chase happiness outside myself?" Would I strive ceaselessly from dawn to dusk, subject myself to untold inconvenience, and take endless risks to get something - freedom from want - that seems largely unattainable? If I had peace of mind, wouldn't I ignore the alarm clock, sleep till ten, and read the morning paper over coffee and doughnuts at the cafe on the corner?

By and large most of us aren't that happy, even those who think they are. A nagging sense of insufficiency trails us wherever we go like a needy little dog. We work hard with the best intentions, do everything right, yet some small emotional grain of sand always manages to foul up the works of our clocklike lives. However, moments of true happiness, when we feel adequate and complete and our sense of self is perfect, do happen. Not frequently, mind you, but often enough to make us wonder why the feeling can't last forever.

For thousands of years a perennial spiritual culture has been saying that it can, that the very nature of the Self, like these moments, is peaceful, wise, loving, and desireless. Keeping our eyes peeled as we move along our paths, we encounter people who are completely happy, who express what

could be called pure love, Mother Theresa for instance. And it's not surprising that such souls are greatly revered, are, in fact, never forgotten, Jesus for example.

It might be argued that these people had been arbitrarily blessed by an unknown and mysterious fate, but the paths leading to peace of mind are well-trodden.

The path of action says that an abiding mind comes when the source of our discomfort, the Unconscious, is cleansed, and counsels substituting a service-oriented attitude for the selfish grasping state that motivates so many of our activities. As the Unconscious empties wholeness and peace dawn.

The path of knowledge says there's nothing to do. We're already OK. All that's lacking is the realization of the real Self which is whole, complete, and loving by nature. The work lies in teaching the mind to discriminate between those ephemeral things that bring dissatisfaction, and the eternal Self, the source of lasting satisfaction.

The path of mediation asks that we control and discipline the mind, redirecting it to the Source, God.

The path of love, the subject of the Gospel, is the easiest because Love is our nature. All that's required is that we love God.

WHO IS GOD?

God, Happiness, Love as the most universally coveted experience is never a problem, but the word "God" has become one. Originally, it probably meant "good," in the sense of that which is always good, true, and real. But now, because of centuries of accumulated baggage, the meaning has become obscured. Thinking about God, the Good, apart from our experience, is always difficult because It isn't knowable by the senses and mind, remaining an abstraction, subject for debate by theologians and philosophers. The most common way of dealing with the problem has been to create a more user-friendly abstraction by turning the nameless formless Love that is our nature, the source of all goodness, into a person.

The difference between a person and a being is negligible. In fact a person is a being. And Love, in spite of its formlessness, though not necessarily a being, is Being - what is. Our "beingness" as people derives from Love's being, or to use religious terminology, we are "cast in the image of God." So personifying the impersonal is not a problem spiritually if we actually know what the Impersonal is.

To project, the mind needs a substrate, something whose nature is subtle enough to appear when perceived under certain conditions as something it isn't. If the mind isn't completely clear when it perceives the substrate, in this case Love or God, its fears, desires, opinions and prejudices condition the perception, just as clear water seen through a colored glass appears colored. Projection is by definition unconscious, so the religious mind has unconsciously developed views of God not completely in harmony with God's nature, the wrathful jealous Old Testament picture of God, for instance. Nonetheless, the mind's impurities, not God or the word "God" is the problem.

So when these commentaries, in keeping with the text, refer to God they are not thinking of It as a jealous, vengeful, arbitrary, judgemental, authoritarian, white-bearded old man in a physical Heaven. The Old Testament was probably put together by a number of sincere religious men whose minds were burdened with concepts of jealousy, vengeance, power, majesty, and glory. In fact, the second verse, the beginning of the text proper, defines God in a completely experienciable non-conceptual impersonal way.

However, not everyone can initially realize God's nature, so concepts (words) are necessary to turn the heart inward toward God. The path of meditation, for example, refers to God as the forth "state of Consciousness," the object of meditation. Is God, Love, a state? If a state is subject to change then God is not a State. Even the Old Testament agrees, calling God, "The Eternal." Because it carries the sense of something unconscious, the word "state" probably isn't the best. The dream state, for example, is not conscious but a condition created when God shines through the dream ego. So if the forth state is not conscious, then it isn't God, because God is Consciousness. But if we define the forth state as Consciousness then it is the only conscious state, the only unchanging state. Even calling God "conscious" could be misleading because of the implication that It might become unconscious.

Different words appeal to different people. God, Consciousness, is often called the "I." In a way it's a good symbol because the "I" we know in everyday life, the ego, is a conscious being, but unlike the ego, God doesn't have a personality, suffer, die, sleep, eat, or breathe. So its non-similarity to the ego is easily greater than its similarity. "Self" is a good word too because it conveys the idea of something essential. You can get along in this world with just about everything except a self. But it's not a good word because we tend to think of the ego when the word "self" is used. And the

Self, for various reasons, especially with regard to love limitation, isn't an ego.

With each of the thousands of symbols something is appropriate, something not so appropriate, something stated, something implied. It probably doesn't matter what symbol is used as long as an important quality of God is highlighted. But, by definition, a symbol can only partially convey the symbolized. Nonetheless, contemplated with understanding and faith, religious symbols should transport us to the inner experienceable state of universal Love, not feed the mind with ideas about God.

The unauthored text that follows, which provides a long list of purified symbols, is of indeterminate origin, its ideas as old as the hills. I came in contact with it in India where it is highly revered and appears under the title, "Narada Bhakti Sutra," loosely translated as "Narada's Train of Thought on Divine Love." Narada was evidently not a "real" person, but a mythological celestial musician who flitted between the worlds of the gods and men, waking people up to Love. Although in India, where the psycho-spiritual or mythological view is highly developed, people see the gods as at least as real as humans, as a non-Indian I found the title difficult, hence "The Gospel of Love."

When I think of the Gospel I see a stately mansion on a country hill looking out over a pristine river valley, surrounded by a graceful cluster of old oaks. Time has been kind, according it the patina of lives well-spent. About twenty five years ago I came along, sat on the verandah and looked on the ever-changing world. Something happened and I received a wonderful gift. The other day I got to leave and noticed that it needed another coat of paint and some minor repairs.

Scripture is much more than words. Like the house on the hill it can undergo modification without losing value, if we stay true to the spirit of the Architect. Taking it out of Sanskrit doesn't harm it. In fact it does well in English. I like it because it doesn't stoop to dogma. Nor does it get fascinated with its brilliance, but patiently and humbly sticks to its subject. The organization bothered me a bit at first, but my attempt to rearrange the verses failed. Then I realized that it was so sure of itself it could afford to be natural and spontaneous. Like a gnarly old oak, it has sucked diverse nutrients from human devotional soil, absorbed and assimilated them into one wonderful eternally living form. It will continue to give shelter and shade forever.

THE GOSPEL OF LOVE

*Now, therefore, we shall reveal
the Gospel of Love.*

(1)

The first human to know God was probably the first human. For who has not, having journeyed into the backcountry anywhere, dwarfed by the immense grandeur of nature, noticed the civilized mind begin to gently dissolve into the silent timelessness of the elemental? And, in the face of such splendor, felt the electric arc of Divine Love flowing between oneself and the body of the Eternal? Just being there, alive and unencumbered by memory as the first of our species must have been, encompassed by the awesome beauty of life, is to know God.

In those times, unlike today, to know was the rule rather than the exception. Probably nobody made much of it. But, when civilization developed and nature became an adversary to be conquered, exploited, and manipulated, it was time for the heart, ever in search of meaning, to begin the difficult and subtle quest within.

The feeling of oneness that invariably comes when we experience identity with life is religion, spirituality. Our holy ancestors had no need of churches, synagogues, mosques, and written scripture. Life itself was seen as a vast open-air temple, nature a sacred scripture, and the body a living altar in which the flame of Love, the Holy Spirit, reverently burned in devotional purity. Wishing to preserve their vision for the coming generations, the blessed ones developed spiritual culture.

Endowing them with lofty standing, society entrusted its most promising minds to their care. In those days spiritually-inclined young people routinely spent years in forest hermitages, learning the inner way, developing spiritually before returning to the society to marry and assume their responsibilities. A number never returned but followed their hearts, wandering in search of Truth. One could find them holed up in caves on the banks of holy rivers or cloistered in monasteries practicing austerities and

devotions - living lives of contemplation, prayer and meditation, the foundation of the spiritual path.

It was a common sight then, and even today in cultures still in touch with their spiritual roots, to come upon a small group sitting in the morning sun under a tree near a stupa, temple, or mosque, or in the courtyard of a hermitage listening to a discourse by someone whose heart vibrated with love, whose mind sparkled with wisdom. And in that dynamic communion a passionate love of God was awakened in their hearts.

This text, undoubtedly heard countless times throughout the ages, is addressed to an ethical, cultured, non-attached, discriminating person with an inquiring mind who, through conscious living, has come to the conclusion that worldly happiness is not enough, and seeks to know and love the great mystery beyond.

The Gospel is not apologetics, dogma, or an evangelical polemic intended to convert the atheist, agnostic, or cynic to the religious point of view, but a meditative treatise intended to reveal God's love in moments of deep reflection and contemplation.

“Now, therefore, we..” The royal “we” suggests the lineage, the perennial tradition from which the ideas on Divine Love spring. The Gospel's ideas are neither the personal mystic theories of a prophet or the speculations of a spiritually-inclined poet or philosopher, but time-tested and universally respected truths. Such works have endured because they embody our highest ideals as revealed through an ancient yet extant culture of holy beings. The author might be conceived of as the Infinite Spirit's response to the devotional yearnings of humanity.

Devotion is intense exclusive love of This.

(2)

No verbal definition of love is given in the beginning because the Gospel knows that to define is, in some sense, to defile. The verse uses the neuter pronoun, “This” to suggest that devotion is a palpable, ever-present experience, not only to avoid sectarianism, but because to think of the object of devotion as a “God” outside oneself in a transcendental sky or faraway heaven is to turn a self-evident reality into an object of blind faith.

The God “This” is immediate and perceivable, the innermost Self, (“I am the way, the truth, and the life.”), nearest of the near, that because of which we exist, the Consciousness in whose light we “live and move and have our being.” “This” is the GodSelf, the spiritual mother-father of the psyche or self, our individuality. Devotion is love of Self, not love of self.

Devotion is both intense and exclusive. According to the Gospel, love tied up with material things or psychological states (feelings, ideas, and people) does not qualify as devotion, although usage occasionally dignifies love of objects with the term. Devotion is exclusive love of God. Lest the concern arise that loving God excludes love of sentient beings, it should be noted that all beings are embodied God - “man created in God’s image.” Therefore, love of God includes love of everything that exists. However, loving God’s forms without understanding that they are in essence God, is merely emotion, not devotion.

More than a Sunday-only attraction to religion and its forms or blind belief in an immanent or transcendental deity, Devotion is as exclusive, intense, attractive, and liberating as youth’s first love. All feelings and thoughts constantly stream inward toward the Beloved in response to the universal and compassionate outpouring of Love from the all-pervasive Heart, creating passionate attachment.

It is Immortal Bliss¹

(3)

Why, in spite of overwhelming evidence, do we consistently believe that our human loves should last forever? No matter how passionately we project immortality and divinity, no matter how hard we try to keep them pure, they always seem to entangle themselves in a finite web of circumstances - emotions, feelings, desires, fears, fantasies, dreams, the flesh rather than spirit - that inevitably lead to disillusionment and grief. How insecure we become trying to insulate love from change, protect it from the ravenous jaws of desire, salvage it from the monstrous clutches of time. Yet in spite of all our good intentions, love comes and goes, bringing ups and downs, joys and sorrows.

¹ The Sanskrit term usually translated as “bliss” is *ananda* which actually means “unendingness, or without an end. Therefore bliss is different from happiness - which is subject to change. Though not a feeling, bliss is like a feeling of completeness or wholeness that persists through all periods of joy and sorrow.

But Devotion, the immediate experience² of the innermost Self, never dies. Because it never dies, it is considered bliss. Though all descriptions somewhat miss the mark, a devotee describes it. “The exclusive love of God is real nectar, the sweetest thing that can be possessed. Whoever has it attains immortality. Desire love is equivalent to death. Within the heart of the devotee only the pure ever-growing desire to taste Love exists. He or she lives constantly in the presence of God and God lives by his or her side. This inseparable union is true immortality.”

*Attaining It, one becomes perfect,
immortal, and completely fulfilled.*

(4)

The purpose of life is to attain union with God through love, a sensible idea since searching fulfillment in an ever-changing world with an ever-changing mind is a tailor-made recipe for disappointment. God, Love, is that which endures, is true and good at all places and times, and can never be apart from us.

In fact Love can't actually be “attained” because it is us. When we haven't realized it, however, we should practice love, direct our thoughts and feelings toward God as we understand It. Consciously loving God dissolves the “getter,” the imperfect part of ourselves, allowing God to spontaneously reveal Itself.

“Be ye therefore perfect even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.” The perfection the devotee attains through rediscovery of the Godhead doesn't come from outside but is a revelation of innate identity with God and the actualization of God's perfect love in his or her life.

*Attaining it, one desires nothing else,
grieves no more, neither hates or delights in objects,
and feels no enthusiasm for the vanities of life.*

(5)

² The “experience” referred to is unlike the ordinary transaction between a subject and an object that comprises most of our experiences. A discussion of the issue is found in “Meditation, The Science of the the Self” by the author.

Satisfying desires is unsatisfactory because it only temporarily frees us from desire. The more we satisfy ourselves the more there is to satisfy. Following this path the soul becomes a misshapen and ugly caricature of itself, twisted and contorted under the pressure of its neediness. Squandering its energy by incessant craving, it eventually arrives at the point where it can no longer efficiently obtain, possess, and enjoy desired objects, ending up frustrated and grieving, a bundle of unfulfilled expectations.

We tend to think that satisfaction comes from objects, things outside ourselves, but it doesn't. If satisfaction were in objects the same object would supply the same satisfaction to everyone, suggesting that the question of happiness, satisfaction, love, is centered on me, the subject.

The Gospel states that, though seemingly coming from objects, all satisfactions come from the Self. Everyone at one time or another believes happiness comes from giving to and/or receiving love from someone. As long as the love object cooperates, gives and/or receives according to the subject's special needs, everything is fine, but as soon as cooperation stops the love withers, at which point the removal of the object is thought to make us happy. Why does the love dry up? Because the idea that it was coming from the object acted like a switch in the mind which erected a wall between the mind and the Self, effectively shutting down the feeling happiness\love.

That switch, the belief that the joy is in the object, can as well pull down the wall. Starting from lack we erect an idol, the "ideal" person, the attainment of whom we believe will remove the loneliness. When reality presents a semblance of our fantasy, the desire for love is released, the Self's love cascades into the mind, and we experience happiness. Of course the love seems to be coming from the object, or an interaction with the object, but it is only a catalyst, a trigger, activating the inner switch.

Rather than seek love indirectly the verse suggests we go to the source. To get there the devotee should purify desire for objects because as the mind empties, the Self, an infinite reservoir of pleasure, floods it with immortal bliss. A purified mind becomes a window of perception through which the soul can inwardly gaze on the heavenly beauty of the Beloved resting within. In such a state who will "hate or delight in any object?" In such a state who will feel "enthusiasm for the vanities of life?"

*Attaining it, one becomes intoxicated,
then silent, delighting in the Self.*

(6)

The state to which this verse refers is not a simple love inspired by blind belief, but an inner transformation, the rebirth of the soul out of the womb of matter into the realm of pure Spirit, a spontaneous, ecstatic expansive, dynamic, open-ended awakening that fills the heart with Love and the head with Wisdom, resolving all conflict and tension. Unlike "born-again" experiences, which quickly fade leaving the devotee caught up in the limitations of the old life, the heart merges completely into the Self.

A glimpse of this state inspires intense faith, prompting single-minded striving to enter into It. Referred to as salvation by religion and liberation or enlightenment by spirituality, it is distinct from all meditative, concentrated, absorbed, and practice-induced states of mind and lower forms of devotion.

The seeing, enjoying, and participating in the Self inspires divine madness, an overwhelming exhilaration that blows the mind and knocks ego's socks off, leaving no sense of separateness. One feels completely intoxicated, like winning the lottery and falling in love on the same day, or the mother's feeling, extended forever, when a child thought to be dead returns to her. Everything, including oneself, is seen as Love. The devotee may hug and kiss a complete stranger or enemy, accept an insult as the sweetest thing, go for days without eating, throw money and possessions away, sing recklessly, laugh uncontrollably like a child, take embarrassing liberties irrespective of proprieties, talk in tongues, roll madly in the dirt, jig shamelessly without music - anything is possible. Devotional literature is replete with accounts of the fantastic antics of devotees who attained this state.

The emotions, unable to handle the intensity for long, gradually calm down, not that the vision is less intense, the relationship less passionate. The heart, formerly constricted by selfish thoughts, becomes spacious, graciously accommodating the Divinity blazing within. Over time one's feelings rarefy, turning back toward their ecstatic Source, creating an unbroken circle of love. Before long God doesn't seem such a big deal, an incredible being, but a natural companion, tried and true, trusted, warm and maternal.

As the initial reaction to the State of Devotion winds down, one becomes aware of a deafening silence, a hushed presence swallowing all

thought and feeling, engulfing every perception. Caught in the embrace of timeless Love and realizing the absurdity of any reaction in face of God's awesome mercy, passion gently morphs into the white heat of meditation. Visible devotional signs evaporate and the devotee, content to sit quietly sipping the nectar flowing from the Heart of hearts, putting out no vibrations, becomes absorbed in the Infinite. Patterns supporting the ego crumble, the mind dissolves completely like a phantom, and the soul, in primordial nakedness realizes oneness with the Self. The cause of this transformation, the Self, is the source of great joy. Therefore the verse says, “delighting in the Self.”

Renunciation is the essence of Devotion.

(7)

Devotion is actually God loving God through the heart of the devotee, the natural state of the Self, the pristine meditation of the Self on Itself. When the Self loves Itself, as is Its nature, the world disappears, but when It apparently forgets, the world begins and Love manifests as the energy and intelligence in all forms of life. Though in fact It doesn't, It seems to get mixed up with life forms, taking on the nature of the form, just as clear water in a colored container appears colored.

Pure Love, functioning through an unawakened mind, becomes other directed and transforms into romantic or “special” love. As humans we are unaware of the spiritual origin of our feelings for each other, believing them magically manufactured from an earthy “chemistry” between bodies, a belief subjecting the “love,” like the ever-changing bodies and emotions that influence it, to endless instabilities: possessiveness, clinging, jealousy, anger, fear, desire, and anxiety - the fear of “falling out” of love. A confusing state because it contains light as well as dark elements, romantic love will momentarily rise to sublime heights, perversely devour itself in fits of stormy passion, or predictably drown itself in the dark seas of depression.

Associated with the lowest in us, Pure love ironically appears as lust. An ignorant and unremittingly dualistic state, lust is intense craving flowing compulsively through deeply-etched grooves in the Unconscious, incarcerating the soul in an addictive, hellish world.

Both romantic love and lust yield special sufferings which in the best of all possible worlds ignite the fire of seeking and set the soul on the inner path. To find true love the seeker must abandon the idea of object love and

convert special to spiritual relationships. Special relationships,³ which are compensations for the Separation from God, operate on the principle that love can only flow to an object that satisfies the lover's special needs. Spiritual relationships, on the other hand, ask the devotee to love and serve the Self in the beloved. Short of that, the devotee is enjoined to love the beloved's ego as it is, warts and all.

At a more developed stage, the devotee, secure in the knowledge that the presence and absence of objects are equal, becomes indifferent to the whole concept of relationship and cultivates a pure meditation, a relationless relationship with God.

On the God level renunciation, freedom, and Love are identical because Love is complete, depending on nothing but itself. The discovery that the devotee's and God's love are one and the same is liberation, the fruit of Devotion.

Renunciation is a sense of wholeness and self-esteem. What is more liberating than the feeling that you, not your needs, are the master of your destiny? A renounced devotee enjoys the enviable option of making decisions based on what is spiritually correct rather than expediency, a luxury few enjoy.

*For renunciation to occur all
activities must be consecrated.*

(8)

From ego's point of view life is a futile attempt to satisfy an inexhaustible stream of desires and pander to an unending procession of fears. To thwart the unconscious recycling of fear and desire the Gospel recommends converting desire into devotion by dedicating all actions to God. Dedicated activities, rather than creating attachments, purify them, turning the heart into a luminous channel through which pure Love flows. Since God dispenses the fruits of consecrated action, the ego needn't dissipate energy in needless worry, investing it instead in devotional practice - loving service, for example.

The more we're attached to things the less we're apt to experience Divine Love, and conversely, fewer attachments make it more likely selfless love will develop. Material philosophy, on the other hand, defines happiness

³ The term "special relationship" originated in the Course in Miracles and is exhaustively explained there.

as love for and attachment to things and beings, and supposes that more of everything produces more happiness. Whether the desire for ever-increasing joy springs from our unenlightened material self, or God in us trying to realize Itself, the desire for object love must be dismissed if devotion is to flower.

Of course the devotee can't banish the objects themselves because they belong to God. However, the misunderstanding that associates love with objects should be renounced. Sublimated into devotional practice, impurities wither and die. God consumes any thoughts and feelings, positive or negative, offered in a spirit of surrender and sacrifice as holy good, removing them from the unconscious cycle of emotion and transmuting them into devotion.

The inner enemies (desire, lust, anger, attachment, arrogance, acquisitiveness, possessiveness, sloth, greed, pride, etc.) often seem so powerful we feel compelled to toady to them completely. Invariably we resist letting go, testily defending the fortress of rationalization and justification we've constructed to validate them to ourselves and others. Occasionally, puffed with pride, we turn them into hard and fast credentials.

The idea that renunciation is painful is false.

A rich and famous person, attracted to the simplicity of a devotee's life said, "What a great soul you are, having given up everything in the world yet are so happy!"

"No, the devotee replied, you are much greater than I. I have only renounced worldly things for eternal love but you've renounced eternal love for the goods of this world."

The consecration of positive feelings is safe, even sensible, but offering negativity seems foolhardy, not to say blasphemous. Surprisingly, God, who sees no duality, though conscious, doesn't suffer karmic rebound, accepting everything without comment. It is the part that dispassionately reflects, like a mirror, our thoughts and feelings, a thirsty cosmic sponge that soaks all projections. Knowing God's nature frees the devotee to consecrate it all, positive and negative, in love.

Consecration, therefore, proceeds renunciation triggering the devotional flow from the devotee to God, completing the cycle.

*The devotee is indifferent to obstacles
hindering the flow of Love.*

(9)

To the lover of God there is one Friend and many enemies dwelling within. Toward the enemies dispassion (fear of the enemy is the enemy) should rule the mind, toward the friend, devotion.

Purging the heart is difficult because of the strong attractions and aversions we've developed toward emotions. On one hand how quick we are to defend, justify, and rationalize them; on the other, how easily we make ourselves feel guilty, remorseful, and "sinful" because of them. This verse offers a weapon for dealing with our feelings (and our feelings about our feelings) - dispassion.

Dispassion, which teaches that emotion, a major obstacle to growth, is transparent and impermanent, helps deconstruct the frozen superstructure of ego and intellect that makes feelings unworkable and allows the devotee to creatively relate to feelings, teaching him or her to step back and allow them to play out in the world or direct them to God through prayer and meditation. Without dispassion, the inner enemies have their day and love remains caught up in objects, unable to pierce the subtle realm of Spirit.

*The whole-hearted renounce
everything but God.*

(10)

A statement unwittingly designed to raise doubts about our devotional eligibility. Can we actually live happily without attachment⁴ to all the props - family, job, status, wealth, etc.? Such questions are only relevant when we've arrived at the high devotional state to which the verse refers.

We try to solve the universal need for security in many ways, all fraught with anxiety. The need to relieve anxiety often creates a belief in God, (Marx's "opiate of the masses") but the belief in an external problem-

⁴ Attachment, not the props themselves, is the object of practice

solving agent is not devotion unless the devotee depends completely on God for security and support.

When the devotee experiences God directly and comes to know what he or she had formerly merely believed in, devotion is said to be ripe, “wholehearted.” The experience of God purifies ill-considered and superstitious notions of the Divine and leads to self awareness, insight into one’s psychology.

Devotion flowers when perception of God is continuous, though union, the forth stage, has yet to occur. Perception is panoramic, the devotee seeing the reality of God, the soul, and the world with no identity crisis clouding the mind. Devotion is pure, intense, and Godlike, filling the heart with confidence and self-assurance. Though residual worldly tendencies occasionally extrovert the mind and agitate the heart, faith is unshakable. All supports, except God, are abandoned and the heart becomes incapable of loving anything else. The world, formerly a fickle reality, becomes God’s body, and the devotee, like a fish, swims in an ocean of love. As the poet says, “The lovely form of the Lord has settled in these eyes and there is no room for any other beauty.”

In the final state the devotee and God melt into each other in Love and Understanding, leaving nothing to renounce.

*Rejecting selfish actions,
the pure devotee performs
those pleasing to God.*

(11)

God’s love is unchanging irrespective of our behavior, however unselfish actions performed with the understanding that everyone and everything is God rate special attention - because they express our full devotional potential and bring union with the Beloved, the purpose of evolution.

Often society and family demand action that conflicts with devotion: the son is required to obey tyrannical parents, the employee the boss, the citizen the government. Because devotion is a conscious discriminating process, not blind belief, the devotee is required to determine on a case by case basis which of the four classes of actions, with the exception of prohibited, are conducive to devotion.

The four classes are: (1) Obligatory - taxes, military service, and jury duty, those compelled by the society on threat of punishment. (2) Incidental - small social and family duties of a non-compulsory nature. (3) Prohibited - actions to be abandoned by all: murder, theft, adultery, homosexuality,⁵ taking drugs and alcohol. Violation of prohibitions impact negatively on society, cloud the emotions, and dull the intellect.

(4) Desire-prompted. Our society encourages unbridled pursuit of desires, inimical to self-development because it increases egoism and injures others. Sublimating desires into service of God in others purifies the heart and creates a healthy society. On the other hand, the mindless denial of desire creates an unhealthy personality, necessitating the need for a middle ground. Spiritual practice is intended to cultivate a space in the heart where the seed of devotional love can sprout. If all energy is expended satisfying our worldly desires, how is it possible to love God? Therefore the devotee should ask whether or not acting out desires actually increases his or her sense of well being and enhances devotion. In fact we want things, not for themselves, but for the love they apparently bring. So why not seek the love at the source, rather than in its pale reflections?

*Until Love is attained
scripture should be diligently followed.*

(12)

Everyone follows something. Scripture points the way to union with God. This verse addresses the devotee who believes “guidance” or “intuition” superior to scripture, a common New Age view. Because of ego’s tendency to co-opt and misinterpret the inner voice, intuition should be

⁵ None of the prohibited actions are listed in the text proper, but are found in most of the commentaries. I can think of two reasons why homosexuality might have been included. First, rightly or wrongly, behaviors that contravene biological (alcohol, drugs), universal values, and social norms produce conflict. Secondly, the purpose of spirituality is to discover identity with God through love. Attachment to the idea of oneself as a sexual being, irrespective of gender, with its immense potential for confusing love and sex, is thought to be devotionally restrictive. Though both heterosexuals and homosexuals can be deluded by their sexuality, heterosexuality, the sexual default, is not included because it is not a special identity. Special identities, sexual or otherwise, are devotionally limiting because they are based views which produce suffering. Homosexuals, with some justification, tend to believe their suffering is caused by homophobic social view but suffering actually stems from guilt, fear, desire, and ignorance arising from The Separation from God, the innermost Self. Lack of Self knowledge is the true victimizer, not attachment to a socially unacceptable behavior. Finally, any philosophy, hetero or homo, enshrining sexual desire as the *summum bonum* does not qualify as a path to fulfillment through love.

considered useful only when coinciding with scripture, not the other way around. One meets many nowadays who view God as a permissive parent and whose “guidance” seems to suspiciously coincide with ego’s every fancy. Those exclusively following intuition tend to be burdened with the belief that the spiritual path is a personal affair and God’s instructions tailor-made to every individual. In fact, devotional practice is meant to dissolve personal peculiarities in the universal experience of Love. And scripture, which admittedly is also subject to misinterpretation, is addressed to the universal in each of us. Hence its teachings are indispensable and should be “diligently followed.”⁶

The verse is also addressed to those who may not be particularly psychic but who need to base their lives on principle, not passion. Of course there are tens of thousands of scriptures worldwide, many with apparently conflicting views on the nature of God, human psychology, and the purpose of the world. Contrary to the anti-intellectual view sweeping the Western spiritual world, devotion demands clear and comprehensive knowledge. Rather than put intellect on the shelf the devotee should make a thorough study of world scripture accepting only universally valid ideas.

Or there is danger of a fall.

(13)

In the heat of exalted devotional moods ego can easily lose touch with reality and imagine itself an exceptional spiritual superbeing unencumbered by petty morality, beyond all teachings, rules, conventions, and injunctions. Therefore, the teaching and advice of outside authorities should be given careful attention.

The purpose of following a spiritual path is to show that God, not an individual, is the fountainhead. Knowledge and experience of the Almighty does not make the devotee special. On the contrary, distinctions like high-low, pure-impure, enlightened-ignorant, and spiritual-worldly should be reduced to ash in the fire of devotional love. Once the vision of God has taken root devotional practice should be continued, not suspended, to purify hidden tendencies that can cut the flow of devotion and cause the devotee to

⁶ Though many scriptures contain unpurified information and seemingly unreasonable injunctions, because profound logic supports its views, statements that confuse or disturb the ego should be carefully considered, not rejected out of hand.

become resentful, blasphemous, and bitter, blaming God, and abandoning the path - the “fall” referred to in the verse.

*Worldly duties should be performed
until body consciousness is transcended,
but care of the body should continue until death.*

(14)

Although following any path is impossible without devotion, the “path of devotion” is meant for those who respond emotionally to the world. Because such people tend to get carried away with their feelings and ignore common sense, the Gospel is urging a “head in the clouds, feet on earth” approach. The deeper the devotee dives into the ocean of love the faster conditioning dissolves, like ice in warm water, compromising relationships not centered in love. The verse, however, counsels against the impulse to discard all relationships until permanently established in the Divine, reminding the ecstatic devotee to honor nature and respect the power of the mind.

Occasionally the bonding in love is so deep the devotee loses all body consciousness and ignores even basic rules (eating, sleeping, bathing, etc.) because life and death, spirit and matter, have become one. Though no personal reason to continue living makes sense, scripture, wishing to keep the devotee on earth so his or her experience will benefit others, insists the body be cared for until death. In India devotees who have attained this state surrender the care and feeding of the body to other devotees who use it for devotional purposes.

*One characteristic of Devotion
is worship with deep attachment.*

(15)

In the highest state of devotion the devotee’s every act unconsciously radiates love - walking, talking, eating, sleeping, even breathing - the absorption in love is so complete no sense of doing or enjoying remains.

The means of reaching this state is “worship with deep attachment,” viewing the body and mind as objects given by God for the express purpose of worship and seeing everything in one’s life, not just religious symbols, as God. For example, the devotee is to see food as God, the eater as God, and

the body as God's temple. One's spouse and children are to be regarded as God's own, every spoken word thought to be the name of the Lord, all actions service of God. Bending, lying, or kneeling are to be considered prostration to God, walking as circumambulation of the Deity, all lights as symbols of the Self, sleep as union with God, and rest as meditation. Every person the devotee contacts must be offered loving service, as if he or she were the Divinity. With the intention of keeping God's name continually in the mind, in this manner mundane rituals from washing dishes to sweeping the floor are converted to sacred rites.

To a fervent devotee religious icons (stone, wood, paper, clay, and metal statuary) are not viewed merely as elevating or provocative symbols but are to be symbolically bathed, fed, entertained, spoken to, slept, and worshipped as living Divinity. On special holy days in India at the Jagannath Temple in Puri, Orissa State, God is removed from the temple on an astrologically auspicious day, placed on top of a multi-story intricately-carved brightly-painted wooden car, and pulled through the streets by thousands of ecstatic devotees on the way to the ocean for an afternoon at the beach. Although the custom has been outlawed in recent years, in the old days it was not uncommon for worshippers in the throes of ecstasy to hurl themselves beneath the great wooden wheels, crushed to death at the feet of the Lord.

To the materialist mind, projecting life into inanimate objects seems the height of irrationality, but the practice is good psychology from a devotional perspective. Just as an actress "becomes" the person she is portraying by totally identifying with every aspect of the character's life, the devotee discovers identity with the inner Self through intense identification with the symbol.

Another is love of spiritual culture.

(16)

Nearly everyone believes in love but not everyone believes in God, a strange contradiction in so far as God is love and the capacity for love. The fact that no form of love is perceivable by the senses doesn't keep us from believing in and seeking it, yet God's apparent imperceivability does. Often those ardently seeking love fancy themselves atheists.

Nevertheless, since the purpose of the world is to facilitate spiritual evolution, over the course of human development hundreds of thousands of

God realized souls have contributed to a universal culture, the basis of all major world religions and countless spiritual traditions, whose vast body of knowledge and technique forms the foundation of the religious life. Fascination with, attachment to, and fondness for this culture, a tangible manifestation of God, is one sign of true devotion.

*Complete attachment to God,
the formless Self,
is Pure Devotion.*

(17)

Worship of or contemplation on a form or symbol of God brings about identification; greater the identification, greater the love for the symbolized object. Contemplating the life of the historical Jesus, for example, may inspire personal devotion. As the meditation intensifies, a spiritual awakening might take place that transforms the personal form into the universal Christ, the Self, a being of unsurpassed beauty. It is impossible to witness such beauty, not fall in love, and become passionately attached. Because worldly beauties pale, outer attachments, personal views, automatically fall away.

*The true devotee surrenders everything
and feels extremely miserable at the
slightest lapse in remembrance.*

(18)

God's form, Love, draws devotion into the sacred Heart like the flow of oil from a lamp through the wick to the flame. So worthy of our love is God that even the thought of separation produces inordinate terror. When we love someone passionately we think of them constantly. A devotee who utterly loves God will psychologically thrash around like a fish out of water were he or she to forget the Beloved even for a moment.

Such devotion deeply affects God who becomes immensely attached to

the devotee. In an extraordinary passage from a Pauranic⁷ text, God says, “Not even the creator of the universe is a dear to me as you. I constantly follow in the footsteps of the devotee who has no worldly craving, who is tranquil at heart, who has no quarrel with anyone, who beholds me equally in all things, and who is constantly absorbed in thoughts of me - **to sanctify myself with the dust of his or her lotus feet.**”

Humbled by such devotion, God sees it as a sacred intimacy, saying, “The supreme bliss of desirelessness enjoyed by those exalted souls whose hearts are attached to me, who have made themselves utterly destitute by surrendering their all to me, who are tranquil, and because of their relationship with me, kindly disposed to all creatures, is known to no one else.”

The Devotion of the Gopis is an example.

(19)

“Gopi” is a Sanskrit term indicating someone whose vision of God is so powerful he or she drinks Love through the senses, a person whose sole attachment is Love. One of Vedic literature’s most exalted devotional works, Srimad Bhagavatam, describes the Lord’s feeling about such souls. “Oh Gopis, you have broken the chains of household obligation and clung to me with love. This act is entirely blameless. In a thousand lifetimes of service I could never repay this debt. Will you please discharge me of the responsibility of your own generosity?”

And, “The Gopis have given up everything for me and offered their hearts. I must look after them. They treat me dearer than their own children. If they send their thoughts to me and can’t find me, they loose consciousness. They are one with me and I with them.”

Gopis see Love all around, inside and out. Speaking of their love they say, “There is no room left in our hearts! How shall we accommodate anything else when the heart is fully occupied by the Lord? Whether moving or looking around, awake or asleep, the Lord’s beautiful form doesn’t leave the heart for a single moment. What are we to do when the body is brimming over with love? The jar cannot contain the ocean.”

⁷ The Pauranic or Mythological age (1000BC to the present) followed the Vedic and was responsible for the spread of Vedic principles through myths and stories.

“We are not fit for spiritual practice. What do we know of wisdom? How can we close our eyes and meditate when our eyes are full of our Beloved’s precious form? How can we wander around all day looking for God when He stays right here with us, just as our shadows are always attached to our bodies?”

*Even in the State of Devotion
the devotee sees all the Lord's⁸ glories.*

(20)

How does it happen that at the breakup of a relationship one or both parties is often heard to say, "I can't believe it. I was married to that so and so for twenty years and still don't have any idea who he (or she) is."

Disillusionment, anger, and confusion are not problems when the love is pure because the devotee is so unconcerned about his or her self and so concerned about the love object that the Beloved's nature, powers, and glories are well known.

Even when the devotional flow is broken, consciousness of the Beloved is not lost. In fact separation only increases devotion - absence makes the heart grow fonder.

When the Lord disappears in the middle of one of their love games to teach them love in absence, a love they already have, the Gopis, though unable to see Him, chide Him thusly, "O Almighty Lord, source of everything that is! It is not becoming that you ask us who have renounced everything for you to leave your protection. You yourself have decreed that it is the primary duty of every woman to protect her family. We have abandoned our families seeking protection from you who are our mother-father and you don't even follow your own advice? It is your duty as the source of all moral instruction and the fountainhead of virtue to protect us."

Worldly security never satisfies the heart. We expect our small loves to last forever because the desire for love, like love, is endless. However, no human being can ever fill such a deep need. Loving God solves the problem because God is always with us, completely conscious of our need for love, and infinitely generous. Surrender to God, the innermost Self, brings knowledge of God, the ultimate security, because it empowers us to forthrightly communicate with our deepest Self.

*Love without Self-Knowledge
is like that of a paramour.*

⁸ The apparently sexist term "Lord" does not symbolize a male Divinity. The bodiless sexless God, the Self, is often thought of as the ruler, the ultimate power behind the body and mind, and therefore a "lord."

(21)

How difficult to accept that we all have an hidden paramour within, that our needs create the illusion of love, that our lusts generate excitements which often end in degrading relationships with unholy people. A paramour's love is purely selfish. Conceived in the dark, it brings pain, suffering, and disrepute to the soul. Love without God consciousness, a self-insulting victory of matter over spirit, it is the setting sun, plunging the soul into worldliness.

Devotion is the rising sun, transcendence of spirit over matter, enlightening and elevating the soul. Devotion expands awareness and teaches how to live in the Self, the center of unconditional Love around which all existence, like planets their suns, spin. It is blessing and enriching energy, empowering the heart and mind with goodness. My spiritual teacher said, "Love actually lives life's joys, lust only seeks them. Love generates tranquillity within, lust begets excitement all around. Love is for the One in many, lust for the many in the One."

Devotion changes one's relationship to needs by satisfying the need behind the need, freeing the devotee of their tyranny. Needs, to a devotee, will never seriously affect devotion or obscure knowledge. A devotee says, "Love of God may be based on faith in God or knowledge of God. Love without knowledge is never in vain, but love with knowledge has special virtues. What joy we derive from the mere thought that God is our beloved! How great and indescribable is the bliss of those who have actually realized God as the supreme object of their love!"

*A worldly lover derives no joy
from the joy of the beloved.*

(22)

THE SEPARATION⁹

⁹ The Vedantic description of The Separation is called Maya, the "non-apprehension of Reality (Self) and the subsequent misapprehensions (guilt, fear, denial, anger, attack, defense, etc.) arising therefrom." The most eloquent expression in Christian language is found in "A Course in Miracles." For a clear and intelligent summary of Course ideas on the subject consult a booklet by Kenneth Wapnik entitled "A Talk Given on A Course in Miracles," published by the Foundation for "A Course in Miracles," Roscoe, New York. Mr. Wapnik connects The Separation with Western psychology, particularly Freud.

If we're whole, limitless, complete, unconditioned, and one with God, yet think of ourselves as limited, incomplete, conditioned and separate, we've made a mistake and are living a lie. When we've made a serious mistake we feel guilty. We see our guilt in the feelings of self-loathing, self-rejection, anger, depression, failure, emptiness, longing, desire, and arrogance that continually disturb our hearts.

When we make a mistake we also fear punishment. Of course God, being unconditional Love, will not punish us for separating (because from It's point of view there is no separation), but - and here's the rub - we believe "He" or "She" will. Fear is a natural reaction to this unholy situation because we have unwittingly removed our true support and protection in life by striking out on our own. Any small helpless creature forced to leave the nest is naturally overwhelmed with anxiety. The longer we remain separate the deeper the unconscious reservoir of fear becomes. But fear refuses to stay hidden, squirming out instead to attach itself to a thousand things, polluting our contact with the world. Though we try to deny it, it always comes back. Our next trick involves blaming someone or something, usually another person, for our unhappiness. To cover the guilt for blaming we get angry at the object, usually a person, and attack. The need to project guilt is undoubtedly the root of considerable hatred and anger. Of course attack makes us feel guilty, putting us right back where we started.

Dealing with the guilt-denial-projection-fear-attack cycle isn't the end of it. Attack means we need armor, a defensive posture, because of the fear of being attacked back. The more we defend ourselves the more we reinforce the belief in our guilt. Attack is projected fear, so defense is an attempt to protect against fear, but like all Ego-generated thoughts, it reinforces precisely what it is intended to relieve.

But for The Separation and all its twisted psychology we would be wildly happy, children sporting in a garden of delights. To correct it we try to find the Self we've seemingly lost, the state of pure Love.

We try to find it by falling in love. The love into which we "fall" is very much like the love we're seeking. In it we feel whole, complete, happy, peaceful, powerful, tender, immortal, and free. Would that it, like the Love of which it is a pale reflection, last forever.

What is "in love" love?

GENERALLY ILL-CONSIDERED FACTS ABOUT EMOTIONAL LOVE

Not knowing love's in me - when it happens - I assume its in you. So I fall in love with you. Bathed in the halo of my projection you seem absolutely wonderful, my idol my god. You saved me from my loneliness. Unlike anyone, including the most recent love-of-my-life, the last in a long line, who had the temerity to change and force me not to love him any more, you are so special, the very best. You have all the qualities I lack. You're funny, I'm serious. You're strong, I'm weak. You're beautiful, I'm plain. In an inexplicable way, I see myself in you.

If I'm honest, however, I have to admit that even though you are so incredible, certain things about you need to be fixed. And so I feel compelled to see that our oneness extends to everything. I'll make sure we do everything together, enjoy the same music, eat the same foods, maybe even dress the same way. I so much identify with you that even your belongings have become my sacred objects; those worn skin-tight jeans, that old floppy hat you picked up at a garage sale. If we manage to survive for twenty or thirty years we may actually come to physically resemble each other, like the neighbor and his dog. How I wish I knew when I fell in love I was really only in love with me.

But wait a minute! Now my happiness depends on you. I've invested so heavily in you I've become hopelessly attached and can't stand to have you out of my sight. When you're not around I think of you all the time, imagine what you might be doing, what you're thinking. I want to know everything about you, discover all your personal secrets, find out what you saw in all those other women. I analyze your behavior and compare it with your words to find discrepancies. I get very nosy, pry into your past, psychoanalyze you to your face, insist you account for every minute, and maybe even start the long slide down jealousy's slippery slope. As a bare minimum I insist we tie the knot, make sure this love lasts forever. Oddly enough, however, in spite of all this surveillance I never seem to know what's going on with you. You're as much a mystery as the day we met. Women are from Venus, men from Mars.

I hadn't figured I'd become so clingy when I fell in love. I seem to have been tricked into thinking I can't do without you, my cupid. Remember - you shot the arrow. In the old days our love was so terribly free and happy. I even let you do little things on your own and didn't feel jealous at all. Now

my dependence on you puts me in conflict and I seem to love myself less. What a terrible irony! In the beginning I loved me more because you made me feel so free.

Not only did I lose my freedom, I accepted anxiety as a way of life. They say anxiety is a reasonable response to love because the world is always changing. I change, you change, the relationship between us changes. Much as I hate to face it, I know, in the back of my mind, that one day we'll be separated (because you've changed) but nothing's to be done about that because I'm in love with you, my ball and chain.

OK. OK. You're right, it isn't all that bad. Because I want you to love me I try to make you happy. My happiness is your happiness. I'm continually thinking of little things to make your day. Of course this attachment to your happiness has its downside - if you don't feel good, I suffer. Why can't you be responsible for your own happiness? And why am I neglecting my own needs to satisfy yours? Better yet, why aren't you taking care of me like I'm taking care of you? It just doesn't seem fair. You go blithely about your own business and I go blithely about your business. It doesn't seem right. If love is its own reward, why do I feel so incomplete?

Along with the desire to serve, I try to surrender to you, do what you want, a love-inspired ideas that seems O.K. with you. Not my will but thine, a terribly romantic idea which puts me in hot water with my ego, who sees it differently. It would like you to surrender to me, do things my way, since I love you so much.

Finally, though you're never out of my sight physically or mentally, and it's clear you're here to stay, I seem to always "want" you. When you sit down after dinner in front of the telly I want you here with me, tidying up the kitchen. When you're off on business the long phone calls are a poor substitute for the real you. I want union. When we make love I feel unhappy if our special moments are not perfectly synchronized. I won't rest until we're absolutely one. Still, in spite of all our passionate unions, I feel separate.

No matter what I do, no matter how hard I try to set you straight the record speaks for itself: you don't really love me. We never spend any quality time together, go out dancing, like when we met. You're always schmoozing clients on weekends, working late, watching football, even Monday nights. And, I know I shouldn't say this, but you've really slacked off in the hay too. You used to take your time, make me feel wonderful. Not any more. Its all over in a matter of minutes. What's wrong with you? I don't think you love me in spite of all my devotion. The more I think about

it the more it seems that you probably never loved me. How could you let me love you like that, take advantage of me, vulnerable as I was? It's unconscionable! You beast! You lair!! You said you loved me, but we can see what kind of love it really was!

Well, I've got news for you. I never loved you either. I only loved you for the happiness you brought. I had to work very hard ignoring the many signs cropping up every day telling me you're not my prince charming: your bad manners, your vanity, your big ego.

Just hurt? Defensive? How dare you! I've never been so offended in my whole life! I try to share my feelings with you and this is how you react!

OK. Maybe it isn't as bad as I make it sound, but, believe me, I've had it. Nonetheless, just to show you how lucky you are, and because I'm not quite ready to hit the streets looking for my next most incredible someone, for your sake I'm going to deny you're a mess and try to see your good side. After all you pay the bills, make me look good in public, and, of course, we have the whole past life thing to work out properly, lessons to learn, and all that.

You're worth one more try. I really mean it this time. What? That's baloney! I **can** do without you. You think I'm some sort of love-starved waif? Over the hill? How dare you! I've never been so offended in my whole life! I've still got my figure unlike you, sitting around all day swilling brew, munching chips! You're wrong, I'm staying for you, giving you one more chance to shape up. Without me you're nothing. I've enough love for both of us. Still, I have to admit, every day you're looking more and more like my worst nightmare.

Here's the plan. We just have too many issues to sort out on our own. We'll do this right, make a proper profession of our relationship, call in the experts. Maybe if you hear it from someone else you'll realize how lucky you are, how much you really do love me down deep. But until I see concrete evidence of your love I'm cutting you off, throwing out my sexy underwear.

I was right, you S.O.B. You never loved me. Yes, those are the papers. I get the house, the kids, and half your retirement. This is war, you bastard. The best years of my life down the drain.

As much as we'd like to think its not really like that, it usually is. And, if we're going to sincerely address the emotional side of our personalities and present a pure heart to God, we should understand the

psychology of conditional love, how The Separation works out in relationship.

As indicated above, when we're cut off from our love nature we have a deep need to "fall" in love and invest someone else with Godlike qualities. To protect the projection we have to insist that our god or goddess demonstrate his or her love by fulfilling our special needs, which creates dependence and attachment. Fear our needs will not be met brings anxiety and anger.

Unfortunately people are people, concerned with their own needs, so ours are neglected unless we agree to support our lover's projection by fulfilling all his or her special needs, a heavy price to pay. Even then a lover can't completely satisfy our needs - causing cracks to appear in the projection. To protect our projection we become delusional, imagine there's something wrong with the love object and/or try to manipulate it with anger or guilt. Anger is psychic aggression which gives rise to guilt, reinforcing the original guilt. Fear also develops because attack invites retaliation. To protect against retaliation we become defensive, reinforcing fear.

With so much unconscious baggage is it any wonder this kind of love is endangered? Secondly, it's virtually impossible to keep the illusion alive for extended periods because: (1) our needs are always changing, (2) our relationship to our needs is always changing, (3) the love object's needs are always changing, and (4) the love object's relationship to his or her needs is always changing. When anger and guilt no longer work the love withers on the vine and, depending on the depth of attachment to the projection (how guilty we are) turns to hate. Convinced the love object has failed, we dig up a more cooperative subject.

As the verse points out, "a worldly lover derives no joy from the joy of the beloved." Even in the beginning when the projection is most vivid, the desire to serve and surrender to the beloved is usually a fear-motivated device to keep the projection alive. At no point in this process is the lover every seriously concerned with the beloved for his or her own sake because this kind of love is about an attempt at healing The Separation, not about love.

To care for and respect the lover as a manifestation of the Beloved the lover should come to the relationship relatively free of special needs. Only under the aegis of Spirit can two separate selves find a safe non-judgmental context in which to evolve in love. When conflict arises the problems lend themselves to solutions because both know that selfishness and deception

are impossible with God the witness to every perception, impulse, thought and emotion.

In the highest state of Love the feeling of relationship, duality, is absent, and the devotee a celebrant, unconcerned with his or her own special needs, seeking only to honor, glorify, and worship God. All possessions - body, mind, health, wealth, talent, life itself - are considered sacerdotal instruments to be continually used in loving service. An ancient text says, "The desire for gratification of one's senses and mind is lust, whereas the desire to gratify the senses and mind of the Lord is devotion. Lust is pitch darkness, devotion the brilliance of the sun in a cloudless sky."

Such an attitude is pleasing to God who takes pleasure in a life embodying our highest ideals, and who celebrates any action, no matter how tiny, that binds us in love.

*Devotion is superior to action,
knowledge, and discipline.*

(23)

God's nature is being, awareness, and love. Being is the foundation of life. Life is action and through disciplined action we seek God. Awareness manifests as intelligence, the basis of intellect through which we strive to know God. Pure love gives birth to the feelings and emotions through which we seek to love God.

As spokes of a wheel converge on a hub, all paths converge on Devotion. However, the devotion referred to in this verse is not Devotion, the ultimate goal, but the devotional path, the rituals and states of mind that lead to Devotion. Because no special qualifications are required, the path of devotion is deemed "superior" to disciplined action (yoga) and knowledge. Knowledge requires a sophisticated intellect capable of deep inquiry, ruthless discrimination, and pure reason. The path of disciplined action requires a strong body and great stamina. The path of love requires only love, which we have by nature, making it accessible (superior?) to all.

The paths of action and knowledge tend to attract devotees with self-reliant psychologies, but the path of devotion, which stresses dependence and humility, sees the concepts of independence and autonomy as fertile

ground for spiritual materialism,¹⁰ the enrichment of ego. God supports all efforts to reach Him\Her, allowing devotees freedom to doubt, argue, and go their own way. However, the more reliant the devotee, the more support is given.

Much ado is made of the difference between paths but there is no difference because all three are within each of us, psychologies that help the seeker adjust the physical, emotional, and intellectual aspects of the self and attain the pathless goal, pure Love.

The State of Devotion is the goal of all seeking.

(24)

A verse meant to remind us that devotion is not merely a state of mind, or a feeling of the heart but the goal itself, our innermost nature. All techniques and rituals bear fruit when they bring the devotee into the state in which all seeking stops, a state beyond religion and spirituality.

God is averse to pride and attracted to humility.

(25)

Though not a human being, God is completely aware of our need for union. Of the two attitudes we can assume vis-a-vis God and the world, pride, because it is based on the dualistic view that ego is real, will not lead to happiness. In fact the proud suffer immensely because they are not in harmony with either God or society.

The Self is neither proud or humble, but humility is devotionally advantageous because it levels ego and makes our path through life pleasant and efficient. The heart free of conflict is fertile ground for growing the seed of devotional love.

*It is said devotion
should be preceded by knowledge.*

¹⁰ The term was coined by Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche in a famous book, "Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism," published by Shambala Press, Berkeley.

(26)

God can be known directly or indirectly. Direct knowledge is based on direct perception, seeing God in the Heart. Indirect knowledge comes from inference or the testimony of God knowers. For example, the beauty, order, and power of the universe presupposes a beautiful, ordered, powerful Force behind, just as smoke indicates fire. Or a person of good character might report his or her experience of God. Devotion can be developed on the basis of any means but the highest devotion is based on direct perception. Though based on indirect knowledge, other forms of devotion can, if pursued diligently, bring direct experience.

*It is also said that devotion
and knowledge are interdependent.*

(27)

God shines in the intellect as wisdom, as devotion in the heart. We won't seek wisdom without devotion, nor can we practice devotion without knowledge. As knowledge increases devotion grows, giving rise to deeper knowledge. Around and around they go, eventually melting into one another in the experience of God. Then who will know whom, who will love whom?

But Pure Love is its own fruit.

(28)

Our finite loves spring from the Separation but Love is self-born. The one who has Love wants nothing else.

*Knowledge of food won't satisfy hunger and
knowledge of God won't satisfy spiritual hunger.*

(29)

Only the knowledge arising from the immediate experience of oneself as limitless unconditional wholeness, not knowledge of or belief in God, will permanently satisfy our deep need to be whole.

*Seekers of liberation should follow
the path of devotion.*

(30)

Everyone, knowingly or unknowingly wants to be free of the sense of limitation and inadequacy. The pursuit of pleasure, power, wealth and knowledge only provides qualified and momentary freedom, but devotion frees the mind of limitation because the devotee turns his or her life over to God. Though simple in theory, surrender to God is difficult in practice. Overcoming the tendency to meddle with one's life is like trying not to scratch an itch.

*The teachers, prophets, saints and sages
sing of the practice of devotional love.*

(31)

For millennia humans have loved God. Contact with Self realized devotees who support the spiritual culture is the easiest way to attain supreme Devotion.

*Devotion is realized by renunciation
of attachment to worldliness.*

(32)

Attachment to the idea that worldly objects are the path to happiness, not the objects themselves, needs to be dropped before devotion can flower. Material objects, including feelings, thoughts and ideas, which are subtle insentient forces, have no dominion over devotion. The wealth of the man in

the Biblical parable who couldn't enter the "kingdom of heaven" (read attain a state of Pure Love) was a materialistic state of mind.¹¹

Because the mind can only pay attention to one thought at a time, it can either meditate on the thought of God or another object - not both. To practice devotion the heart must be disconnected from the ego thought system and taught to meditate on the name of God. When the flow of love is redirected the heart becomes light and subtle, a field wherein God sports in pure delight. As the mind purifies, the devotee becomes aware that God is the sole enjoyer and the devotee the object of enjoyment, living solely for the pleasure of God.

*The State of Divine Love is attained
by ceaseless hearing and singing The Name
even while engaged in daily activities.*

(33)

Worship is a finely tuned sensitivity to the presence of God, the loving the Consciousness because of which the mind thinks and heart feels. A reverent and grateful heart, not religious ritual, is spiritual practice. If the heart is in a devotional mood, even apparently mundane activities like washing dishes or driving home from work generate spiritual results equivalent to dedicated ritual worship. Because daily activities require only a tiny fraction of the mind's power, the devotee can utilize the remainder in the continuous remembrance of God.

The tension between the spiritual and material forces in the mind makes devotion hard work. At the onset material energies dominate the mind making re-direction of attention to God difficult. The contemplation on and loving repetition of a symbol of the Self endowed with mystic power, in the seat of meditation and in a congregational setting where the mood is intense, counteracts dark forces and instills deep devotion.

"Hearing" is studying scriptural teachings, reading stories of the Divine as embodied in mythology and the lives of devotees, saints, sages, messiahs, and prophets, taking them to heart, and patterning one's life on their example. Inwardly, "hearing" is listening to the mystic sound, the Logos, as it vibrates in the Heart Space. The worldly, unaccustomed to the

¹¹ "It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

sweet pleasures of worship, have little appreciation of the beauty of the unfolding inner process triggered by chanting.

A nineteenth century Russian devotee gives a remarkable insight into the process in a description of his spiritual journey, *The Way of the Pilgrim*. "Many so-called enlightened people regard persistent offering of the same prayer as useless and trifling, the thoughtless occupation of simple-minded people. But they do not know the secret of this mechanical exercise, how frequent service of the lips imperceptibly becomes a genuine appeal of the heart, sinks down into the inward life, becomes a delight, become natural to the soul, bringing it light and nourishment and leading it on to union with God."

Because the Name is known to have a miraculous effect, it has been chanted by billions of souls over millennia. The *Shrimad Bhagavatam*, a devotional work of the Hindus, says "Just as the sun removes darkness from mountain caves and the wind dispels heavy clouds, so the singing of the Divine Name causes it to enter the cave of the Heart dispelling the clouds of ignorance, bringing sorrow to an end."

*Devotion is primarily attained by the
Grace of God and association with great souls.*

(34)

The “Grace of God” covers any of thousands of situations, ordinary and extraordinary, that invoke a vision of God: spiritual practice, great good fortune, intense tragedy, and association with great souls, beings who have, for whatever reason attained union with God. Because continuous union purifies the heart, the presence of these souls awakens unconditional Love in those with whom they associate.

*But contact with great souls,
though infallible in its effect,
is very rare
because they are difficult to recognize.*

(35)

Of all beings, humans, though six billion, are quite rare. Of the six billion a tiny percentage is actively inclined to spirituality. Of those an equally small fraction pursue the inner life with diligence, among whom only a handful are permanently established in union with God. Finally, of the thousands of enlightened beings presently in the body, not all feel inclined or empowered to teach, avoiding the public platforms and popular forms of worship. “The one who says doesn’t know and the one who knows doesn’t say.”

The signs of Devotion, a mind refined in the fire of Divine Knowledge, are subtle. Often the communication with the Divine is so intimate and the mind so quiet, nothing appears to be happening all. Because they are so rare the unevolved have difficulty recognizing them. “John came neither eating and drinking and they say he hath the Devil. The Son of Man came eating and drinking and they say, “Behold a gluttonous and winebibbing man, a friend of publicans and sinners. “

Devotion is only possible through God's grace.

(36)

The great soul's union with God is God's grace and the devotee's contact with the great soul is also God's grace. Therefore all devotion is God's grace.

*Between God and great souls
there is no sense of difference.*

(37)

The essence of God is Love. The essence of human beings is Love. One who suffers no sense of limitation with reference to love is a great soul, not different from God, an idea with great potential for misunderstanding.

Associated with the macrocosmic mind and the five elements, God, Consciousness, creates the universe. Associated with the microcosmic mind and the five elements, God creates us. Though the macrocosmic and microcosmic creations differ in scale and longevity their essence, God, is the same. One who knows his or her essence is not different from God.

According to the non-dual school of Vedanta¹² there is no universe or individual soul apart from God. Everything is only Consciousness-Being-Love. Ignorant of our essence, we take the universe and our selves as separate from each other and God. To explain the separateness we invent a Creator, a personification we call God. When we wake up to the Truth and discover our identity with God we discover that creator, creation, and creature are only concepts.

Therefore cultivate a relationship with a great soul.

(38)

¹² Vedanta is a means of God knowledge that comes from three sources: The Upanishads, Brahma Sutras, and the Bhagavad Gita.

The spiritual world is continually abuzz over the miraculous transformations visited on seekers by great souls. Books, cassettes, and ads in a raft of New Age magazines proclaim the wondrous powers of Spirit that descend on attendees of intensives, channellings, and workshops of all ilk. It sounds too good to be true, but our curiosity is piqued. We hear of a great soul, touring the world with an entourage of devotees, giving mediations, talks, and “darshans,”¹³ handing out mystical incantations and a pre-packaged yogic lifestyle. We give it a try and it works - temporarily. A few months later another mahatma¹⁴ blows into town and offers different advice - gurus are a fraud, you’re already enlightened, take it easy. We give non-doing a try and after the non-dust settles discover we’re back to ground zero, a bit older but no wiser. Eventually we’re well known on the spiritual circuit, having developed an arms-length list of exotic credentials (twenty-three ten-day Vipassana¹⁵ retreats) but little else. At which point we’re tempted to write off the whole business and heed mom’s advice, “The Lord doesn’t bring in the bacon.” Perhaps she’s right; we’ve gone off half-cocked. Maybe it’s time to get a job.

To attain excellence in any worldly calling requires years of committed study. During the course of the education, working with professionals in the field, savvy comes. Spirituality is no different. When the time is right and the devotee ready, God sends a mentor, often a complex and fascinating personality, who is willing to bring all aspects of the devotee’s life - money, family, food, sex, etc.- into the Light.

The teacher creates problems for the ego who tries to mould the relationship to suit its fancy, often by installing the mentor on a high pillar and creating a such deep gulf of fearful respect and submissive love communication is impossible. Invariably it presents an exaggerated picture of its virtues and tries to hide unflattering qualities. Pitted against someone who knows its games, someone who may occasionally seem more a tormentor than a savior, it’s bound to take a beating. But the compassionate and unflappable teacher, backed by God and the ancient spiritual culture, has a knack for turning conflict into growth, showing the devotee that emotional negativities are transparent and workable, transforming them into devotional energy.

After the sorting out period the devotee’s life enters a profoundly spiritual phase, regularly punctuated by periods of intense communion with

¹³ Sanskrit term indicating an audience with an enlightened being during which God is experienced.

¹⁴ Sanskrit term meaning great (*mahan*) soul (*atma*.)

¹⁵ Insight. A very ancient and powerful (Buddhist) meditation technique.

the Divine, during which deep appreciation of God takes root. Once having learned to live unpretentiously and love purely, the devotee finds it demeaning, humiliating and embarrassing to love selfishly.

Though the Divine inexorably achieves Its purpose, It is conditioned in the short run by the eccentricities of the mentor and the eligibility of the devotee. As the devotee purifies, God showers Grace more abundantly, revealing mystic secrets. The full blessing, the State of Devotion, signals the culmination of the relationship with the spiritual friend - both becoming one in God. Established in the State of Devotion the need for special love wanes and the devotee re-enters the world, transforming the lives of those around.

Shun evil company.

(39)

The Gospel, unlike literalist religions, defines “evil” as ignorance of the Self, a cloud of unknowing that, like “original sin,” brings sorrow, distress, and misfortune. Often portrayed in Fundamentalist iconography as a horned, hooved, pointy-headed fire-breathing red devil, evil is simply a boring accumulation of negative tendencies locked in the unconscious mind, reinforced and kept alive over time by civilization - tendencies that percolate up to surface consciousness and shroud the soul, preventing it from feeling God’s love.

As such, “evil” is an aggressive grasping passion that keeps the mind constantly disturbed, and a slothful inadvertent dullness preventing accurate perception. “Evil” people lack self-awareness and express whatever impulses disturb their minds: anger, pride, fear, depression, hypocrisy, arrogance, vanity, intolerance, competitiveness, violence, lust, greed, etc. Acted out, these devils bite back, devouring peace and reinforcing existing negativity.

Though the actual “evil company” is our own gross mind, negative tendencies are reinforced by association with unspiritual people. Often friends and family merely pay lip service to the devotee’s spiritual inclinations; professional life may force fraternization with materialistic and cynical minds. The best way to avoid bad company is to avoid bad company; cut off the relationship or cut off the attachment to the relationship. The idea that karma has to be “worked” out is often an excuse to avoid looking at unholy attachments.

With reference to gross people, regardless of their lack of intelligence or spirituality, The Gospel insists on separating the “sin” from the “sinner,” loving them unconditionally as temporarily distorted manifestations of God. When devotion is unshakable, association with worldly company is possible though The Gospel does not encourage proselytizing. The heart is ready when the heart is ready and will, guided by God, hook up with devotees that can be of service.

*For it leads to lust, anger, delusion,
loss of memory, loss of discrimination,
and total ruin.*

(40)

Materialist culture endlessly bombards the senses with attractive images, aggressively encouraging us to desire the objects they represent. At every turn we are asked to enjoy sleek, warm, gooey, tasty bodies (human and animal, living and dead) and objects, subtle and gross. So long has the culture been pandering to our empty selves, so total is our conditioning, not desiring these things seems quite impossible.

Constantly craving gratification, the mind becomes obsessed. The more it broods over desirable objects, the more it desires them. Because desire attracts objects, enjoyment increases. Greater enjoyment increases attachment. As attachment grows freedom shrinks. Loss of freedom brings anger. Anger increases desire. Before long the personality becomes twisted and distorted, pressurized by a backlog of unfulfilled desires. Unable to bear the tension and incapable of manifesting enough objects to keep it satisfied, the mind seeks relief in fantasy. Incapable of remembering what's important, discrimination breaks down, the purpose of life is forgotten, and the soul does hard time in a loveless dungeon.

*These forces, like ripples, swell into great waves
under the influence of bad company.*

(41)

Just as DNA carries the blueprint for certain physical characteristics, the soul contains genetic material, samskaras,¹⁶ that blueprint the psychological and spiritual qualities to be expressed in the coming incarnation. The samskaras are like seeds and the company we keep the field. Virtuous tendencies sprout in good company. The devotee should never underestimate the power of negative tendencies. Feed and water them and they'll grow into a monstrous plant capable of choking out devotion.

*Who crosses Maya?
Who really crosses Maya?
The one who gives up attachments,
serves great souls,
and is free of possessiveness.*

(42)

The theory of Maya¹⁷ explains why we feel so loveless and incomplete when we're complete and love-filled by nature. Because our love nature is seemingly hidden we feel empty, an emptiness that creates mini-universes, endows them with reality, and sets us up to possess, enjoy, and attach to them.

We love the physical body, the most obvious universe, more than the divinity it apparently encases. Though evanescent as a dream, Maya creates the emotional world, projecting a heavy moving shadow of feeling on the screen of our lives, tricking us into thinking that it's real. On the intellectual level Maya is the flood of ideas, dreams, and schemes flooding through the mind. Maya also gives birth to a stillborn ego, the feeling of separateness, and the Unconscious, the momentum of our pasts.

Spiritual literature presents her both as a powerful woman bound and determined to lead us astray, not a popular image in these gender-sensitive times, and alternatively as a great ocean of illusion, difficult to fathom, nearly impossible to traverse. The verse repeats itself to call attention to Maya's all-pervasive power and remind those who think they've crossed her

¹⁶ For a detailed discussion of the samskaras, subconscious impressions, see Chapter II, "Meditation The Science of the Self" by the author.

¹⁷ Technical Vedantic term that means, "The non-apprehension of Reality (the Self) and the subsequent misapprehensions arising therefrom." A more trenchant definition is "That which isn't."

treacherous currents to double-check and see if they're really as free and unconditionally loving as they think.

Devotion, cultivated through renunciation, service, and non-possession, is the sturdy boat that shuttles us across. Contrary to popular opinion, renunciation, a dirty word these days, doesn't deny enjoyment because it teaches that the world is the body of God and the souls its enjoyers. As God's body, a Garden of Eden, the world has no power to addict. Seen through a loveless needy materialistic ego, however, it can easily become a dangerous drug.

To rout possessiveness the following views should be pondered: (1) Phenomena are devoid of self-nature and therefore unpossessable; (2) All things being temporal are not permanently possessable; (3) Possession is a concept depending on an equally conceptual possessor; (4) As the Self we already possess everything.

Service of great souls, a sure way out of Maya, does not mean writing a fat check for TV evangelists or slavishly worshipping a guru. Though physical service is not excluded, service is following the ideas and ideals propounded by great souls, supporting spiritual culture, living a simple and noble life, loving ourselves and others purely, and worshipping God, the Great Soul within.

*Who crosses Maya?
Who really crosses Maya?
The one who loves solitude,
cuts worldly ties,
gives up getting and keeping,
and transcends ego.*

(43)

Because we don't really like ourselves, we don't spend much time alone. Our jobs, families, and the superficialities of social life swallow all our time, conveniently helping us avoid looking at our selves; we may have no idea how caught up in Maya we are, how unspiritual, insipid, and uninspired our lives have become. One day we can no longer ignore the nagging little voice that's been saying life will never make sense unless we take the impulse to escape seriously.

For some strange reason we don't, as usual, jet off on another fun-filled vacation to the latest trendy resort, but stay right where we are and quit working overtime. Instead of watching the tube till late hours, making small talk on the phone, or taking in the bright lights of the city, we actually spend a quiet evening at home reading a good book. We're in bed by ten-thirty and up, feeling rested and perky, at six. Maybe we sit and meditate for twenty minutes before the kids wake up. Little by little we create a quiet place for ourselves in the midst of our frenzied lives.

Nothing profound should be done to walk the spiritual path. In a way, considering how insane our lives have become, reclaiming a few minutes of silence from a day of chaos is a dramatic statement. We needn't become a Buddhist, don the hair shirt, sell the farm and run off the India. These are too obvious, too much part of the frantic, grasping psychology we're trying to break.

The most powerful statement to make is to become a disciple of solitude, allowing the mind and emotions heal. At first silence's humorless stare makes us embarrassed, as if we're naked in public. It seems to enjoy our discomfort as it slyly points out our neuroses one by one. We're tempted to opt for excitement - crank ourselves back up to the mind's level and blend in with the incessant energy - but somehow we know better. And the silence, who by now seems a little less threatening, tells us to ride it out. We may wonder what to do next, now we've discovered meditation.

Actually there's nothing to do, no books to read, no mantras to chant, no gurus to seek. Sitting in silence is enough. Slowly our emotional capital returns. If we stick with it, we'll find silence a wise friend capable of molding our thinking into a clear and logical force. As we sit we'll learn that it's quite all right to get into ourselves, to think deeply, to ask questions. "Who am I? What is life all about? What is love?" no longer seem the stupid queries of dippy spiritualists, but important ideas. And, surprisingly, we find ourselves unembarrassed to be asking them.

Solitude, aloneness, is the natural condition of the Self, more than a state of mind or a physical condition. But because we don't realize it's our nature we begin by cultivating it physically. Retrieved from the depths, it goes with us into the world as teacher and guide, a sturdy ark to ferry us across the vast ocean of Maya, a sharp knife to cut the artery of discursive thought, an infinite sponge to soak our mental drippings. Only in silence can we tune to the compassionate emanations from the sacred Heart.

To culture silence is to cut worldly ties. When we're comfortable in the silence we no longer indulge our neuroses with the same panache. As

we become aware, we're liable to feel ashamed and repent, offering our sufferings to the silent Being, vowing to be done with them. Worldliness is not an absolute state but the graspings of an unspiritual mind, one unaccustomed to silence.

Moving deeper into silence we become aware of the psychology behind our psychology, the "whys," and see there's nothing to achieve or protect. The springs of aggression dry up and the need for security fades.

Getting into silence, sitting in it, appreciating its sweet boredom, is the royal road to self-transcendence. The Self is not an incredible mystical experience but the simple clear silent awareness that is our very essence, the light in which all activities of the ego are illumined, the one sure way to cross the ocean of Maya.

*Who crosses Maya?
Who indeed crosses Maya?
The one who renounces the fruits of action,
overcomes egoism, and is free of
the pairs of opposites.*

(44)

Another beautiful verse presenting a menu of subtle actions that lead out of darkness.

Concern with what we want ("the fruits of action") takes the mind out of the present where God dwells. The Bhagavad Gita,¹⁸ Bible of the Hindus, says, "You have right to the actions but none to the fruits thereof." Selfless dedicated action destroys anxiety for results and makes work enjoyable for its own sake, one of the simplest paths out of Maya.

Egoism is ego, an individual, with attitude - the view that it is something other than what it is. A tree, for example, is an ego, embodied Consciousness, with no idea that it is anything but a tree. Never worrying it's too small, too tall, or too big around the middle, it simply follows its nature: holding to the earth, sucking water through its roots, transforming carbon dioxide into oxygen, providing shade for all and sundry. A human who harbors an "I" thought other than "I am pure Love" is egoistic.

The "pairs of opposites" is spiritual lingo that describes the nature of the mind. In Love there are no opposites, but in Maya everything is an

¹⁸ An excellent resource, because it presents India's most important spiritual ideas.

opposite because life is viewed through a split psyche. The unenlightened see joy and sorrow, good and bad, pleasure and pain, right and wrong, now and then, gain and loss, me and you, success and failure, and a host of others. Overcoming these built-in contradictions is the spiritual path, the royal road to liberation, self-transcendence, and Divine Love.

*Who crosses Maya?
Indeed, Who crosses Maya?
The one who renounces scripture
and attains an unbroken flow of devotion.*

(45)

The real question underlying today's immense social and political conflicts is identity. Who are we? What are we doing here encased in these strange meat tubes? And where are we going? Careful observation is not required to conclude that human life is experimental, contradictory probings in many directions in search of an answer.

Scripture, speaking from the distant past, has something to say: we are here to realize our identity with all life, the one loving energy that holds it all together. It's picture, one from which educated and uneducated alike can benefit, painted on a broad canvas, piques curiosity, stimulates inquiry, and clears doubts.

An impartial study of scripture from many traditions reveals common ground: God is formless awareful Spirit capable of taking form, the essence of the world and the individual soul; It is free of suffering and limitation, beyond everyday means of perception; given the right conditions, It can be known here or hereafter; Its nature is love, that which glues "the ten thousand things" together; It is the *summum bonum*, that which is to be known.

Scripture functions best as a work book, a technical manual penned in sometimes symbolic language, an aid to insight. It's subtle truths, which the devotee experiences in moments of prayer and meditation, raise the foundation on which its ethical and moral pronouncements rest. It's purpose is to turn our attention inward, support us in trying times, and intensify our faith. Because it is such a good friend, it may displace the living presence it heralds.

Transcending scripture means the devotee must develop an understanding that everything, even the apparently mundane, because it is God, is scripture, script - symbol directing attention to God. On the inner level scripture is face to face vision of God, seeing and hearing the Word with inner senses as it pours from the mouth of the Infinite, gentle and invigorating as warm summer rain.

Renunciation of the book, the verbal and intellectual sheath of scripture's bright sword, is not blasphemy but a natural evolutionary stage, a shedding of props and formula, signaling the arrival of an understanding that the devotee has **understanding**, a firm foundation, the experience of God. Ritual and desire cease and God Itself becomes scripture, the sole support, the formula for living. At this level you need nothing else because the Heart is bleeding sweet unstoppable love. Having attained the state of Devotion

Cross, and ferry others across.

(46)

Not only the living presence, but the very idea of enlightened devotees inspires great devotion.

Supreme Devotion is indescribable.

(47)

Describing this level of Love would be like a person made of salt jumping in the ocean to tell his or her friends on shore of the experience and dissolving before saying a word. A famous devotee, Mirabai, said she knew nothing of God. The moment she felt His touch she lost consciousness and was unable to speak.

It manifests in rare souls.

(48)

In spite of repeated disappointments, we always believe that life, as we define it, will get better if we just keep trying to make it work. Though light falls equally on a mirror and the wall on which it hangs, reflections are seen only in the mirror. A heart soiled with impurities will not mirror God's love. One in a million knows that life is always limited and unsentimentally turns toward God, willing to purify mightily to receive The Blessing.

*The State of Devotion is devoid of attributes,
unselfish, expansive, subtler than subtle,*

and immediate - an unbroken inner experience.

(49)

Scripture defines by pointing. A sign saying “San Francisco 20” doesn’t mean the sign is a place called San Francisco 20 but that San Francisco is twenty miles in a certain direction. Scripture provides a track down which the devotee’s thoughts and feeling can run, one pointing to the destination. Its definitions should be thoroughly chewed, digested, absorbed, assimilated, and forgotten. One day out of the blue, while washing the dishes or fixing a flat, the real meaning, an experience of Devotion, comes.

What is Devotion?

“Qualityless.” Humans fall in love for the sake of qualities in the lover: sexiness, emotionality, brilliance, self-confidence, beauty, etc. But pure Love, eternally present, has no qualities.

“Unselfish.” Discussed earlier.

“An unbroken inner experience.” As we pass from state to state¹⁹ suffering and enjoying, experience is broken up causing confusion about ourselves, and life. Pure Love, or Pure Consciousness, if you will, pervades all states and illumines our weaving in and out of them. Through devotion we can become inwardly aware to the degree that we constantly experience the unchanging State of Love.²⁰

“Expansive.” Physical and emotional love runs in peaks and troughs, rising and falling like waves in the ocean of the Unconscious, but infinitely creative Pure love expands in unending concentric rings.

“Subtler than subtle.” Devotion is not a feeling or emotion. The physical body is gross, limited, un-selfconscious consciousness. The mind is subtler, aware of the body. The Unconscious is even subtler, causing and pervading the mind and body. The innermost layer is God, Pure Consciousness, Who pervades and is aware of every atom of all the other layers.²¹

“Immediate experience.” The experience of life in the gross and subtle bodies is changing and mediate, conditioned by an interaction

¹⁹ A detailed discussion of the three states and their relationship to the Self is discussed in “Meditation, The Science of the Self,” and “Who am I?” by the author.

²⁰ A detailed discussion of the nature of the “experience of the Self” is found on page 12, Chapter 1 in “Meditation, The Science of the Self.”

²¹ The three bodies and their relationship to the Self are also discussed in the two books listed in footnote thirteen.

between a knowing subject and an object, gross or subtle, but the “experience” Pure Love is immediate, bodiless, and changeless. One needs no experiential filter to “experience” oneself. One is oneself.

*Attaining it, the devotee sees Love everywhere,
hears the Beloved in every sound,
thinks only of the Beloved.*

(50)

In the State of Devotion the sweetness of Love permeates everything as it reveals itself in every object. There is no otherness.

Having attained this State a devotee says,

*In streets and alleys,
gardens and groves,
doorways and thresholds,
woodlands and bowers,
In lightening and clouds
Wherever I look
I see nothing but the Lord.
It is He alone who is spread before my eyes
and settled in my heart.*

and,

*The whole universe is painted
in the colors of my beloved.
Actually the creation has vanished
and ignorance disappeared.
There is no time
and I have forgotten myself.
With whom will I confide the secret of my Heart
for everyone has disappeared?
Even the secret is gone because
while gazing on my Mother my heart was stolen.
Now it is She and She alone I see everywhere.*

*Secondary devotion is threefold
according to the psychology of the individual.*

(51)

What we are devotionally depends on what we are psychologically. The subconscious impressions controlling our psychology are of three types: sattva, rajas, and tamas.²²

Tamas is veiling energy, the power of inertia, darkness, and sleep, manifesting materially as matter, physical substance. Psychologically tamas is the sleepy dullness we feel after a big meal, hearty exercise, or a day at the office. The unflattering terms sloth, laziness, and stupidity describe this common state of mind.

Perception takes place when a perceived object and the mind of a perceiving subject are bathed in light. For example, to see a tree physical light is essential. To register the perception, a mind, psychic light, is necessary. If the mind's dull or asleep, knowledge will be distorted or not occur. When the mind's under the spell of tamas our critical faculties are suspended and we're unaware of what's going on.

Devotionally, the tamasic mind is incapable of ascending to higher planes where God is known directly. To it God is usually a personification, an all-powerful being to be worshipped fearfully and slavishly. The tendency to see God as an authoritarian Mother-Father figure is often counterbalanced by the belief in oneself as a helpless child of God. Such a mind is naturally superstitious and generally believes in magic, ghosts, evil spirits, poltergeists, sin and the Devil.

The dark energy dictates a commitment to formula, especially ritual, and literal interpretation of scripture. Ignorance loves organization, swelling the ranks of churches worldwide. Because thinking for oneself is considered willful and disobedient, the tamasic devotee is easily manipulated by false prophets and power-hungry priests, and attracted to cults of personality. To question or attack his or her narrow-minded faith is to gain an enemy for life. Religious history is replete with examples of the excesses wreaked from this state of mind.

²² A comprehensive discussion of the the "gunas," the qualities that color psyche and matter and their relationship to purification of mind is found in Chapter 3, "Meditation, The Science of the Self."

On the positive side tamasic faith is unshakable, capable of withstanding life's pinpricks and her major crises. The conviction that God exists is steady, deep, and heart-felt.

Rajas, the mode of passion, is a projecting, striving, grasping, aggressive energy. Under its influence the mind is continually roiled with distracting thoughts and emotions which conceal the Self and cut off the flow of love from within. The extroverted rajasic mind, rarely self-aware, views the world as the source of all meaning and searches passionately for objects, people, and situations that will supposedly fulfill it.

The mind under Rajas' power makes the devotee vain and self-centered, not above asking God for worldly things - money, sex, power, position, etc. The theory of abundance and prosperity consciousness making the rounds on the spiritual circuit in the last twenty years is tailor-made for passionate devotees who tend to be status and image conscious, viewing devotion as evidence of spiritual attainment, often using it to impress or humiliate others. Scratch the surface of this type and you have a hypocrite, more interested in presenting a devotional front to the world than a devotional heart to God. Unlike the steady dependability of the tamasic type, the active devotee will change faiths and practices at the drop of a hat.

Once committed to the path, the rajasic devotee becomes a dynamic bundle of energy, capable of making great progress in no time. His or her businesslike concern with results and passionate love of God attracts God like nothing else. The some-say-ambitious belief that union with God is possible allows the devotee to transform rajas into sattva, the highest of the three secondary types of devotion, gateway to the Divine. Both rajas and tamas are material, not spiritual energies, because they direct the mind to the world rather than God.

The third strand of energy is sattva, with a foundation in the Absolute. Light is indispensable for knowledge, and the minds in whom it predominates have clear understanding and love of truth. Essentially spiritual, the light quality confers intelligence, peace, curiosity, and awareness. In the world sattvic individuals make up the intelligentsia, providing society with its ideas and ideals, its creative motor. The light element is the foundation for a high and noble devotion because it permits the heart to know God.

The devotee situated in the mode of light enjoys the ego of a superior soul, one who knows more and loves unconditionally, one attached to purity and goodness, the golden chain tethering him or her to life. Sattva is

devotionally desirable because the veil separating the devotee and God is so thin.

In reality, nature, comprised of the three energies, is continually evolving and involving, the energies weaving in and out of our consciousness like strands of fiber in a rope binding us to the world. Each soul possesses all three energies but tends to be anchored in one or the other. Devotional practice is meant to purify rajas and tamas, thereby increasing the relative proportion of sattva. As the heart purifies, attention becomes subtle and turns within, awakening to God.

Secondary devotion, regardless of type, is a means of attaining Primary Devotion, union with God.

*Of these, each succeeding type
is superior to the proceeding.*

(52)

Because the devotee is unaware of the inner world and enjoys a distorted perception of reality, the dark type is considered the lowest. Though rajas is also extroverted and provides a distorted view of reality, it is thought superior because it provides the energy to pursue spiritual goals. Turned toward self discovery it converts to sattva, considered the best because it confers powers of discrimination, dispassion, contemplation, and meditation, essential tools for re-discovering God.

Devotion is the easiest practice.

(53)

Devotion is easiest because love is our nature. Actualizing it only requires that we be what we are.

Yet taking our love out of objects and special relationships is often hard work, made easier when we realize that attraction to outer things is a misunderstood and misdirected attraction to God, the love apparently dwelling in them. Our fascination with wealth, power, love, and intelligence, for example, is really a fascination with the spiritual wealth, power, love and intelligence hidden within ourselves.

How can something natural to us become a practice? When we love God's forms without loving God we suffer because forms, and our loves with them, always die. Loving in the presence of love objects is easy but loving in their absence is hard. Therefore, to turn our love into an unbroken flow of devotion, we have to practice. To practice is to love.

Love is its own proof.

(54)

Lovers find themselves compelled to prove their love every day, but nothing we can do or say proves the existence of Love. Even before we think of proof it is proved because we are it. Does our existence require proof?

It is supreme bliss and peace.

(55)

Bliss and peace are wholeness, lack of limitation, not the feeling of happiness. We feel happy because the emotions become temporarily stilled when we get what we want.²³ Agitation is a reasonably constant state because we're so much identified with the ego, the incomplete part of ourselves. When the ego is transcended and the Self re-cognized we live in constant peaceful blissfulness.

*Having surrendered worldly and spiritual interests,
the devotee is indifferent to gain and loss.*

(56)

Desire is suffering. As long as we think there is something to gain or lose in the material or spiritual worlds we are not at peace. In fact we can't gain anything because we already have what we think we want. Nor can we lose anything, because anything that could be lost wouldn't be real.

²³ See "Removing the Wall" on page 3 of "Meditation, The Science of the Self."

*Whether practicing devotion
or having attained the state of Devotion,
worldly activities should be performed
in a disinterested spirit.*

(57)

The practice of devotion is the practice of living. Greedy, grasping minds are incapable of practicing devotion. To exhaust the unspiritual tendencies that prevent contact with God (extrovertedness and dullness) scripture enjoins us to serve the world in a disinterested spirit. Once the spirit of dedicated service sprouts in the mind the heart becomes quiet and meditative, allowing our natural devotion to surface. To avoid a fall, the devotee who has attained the State of Devotion should also practice selfless service.

With a “disinterested spirit,” the view that everyone and everything is a manifestation of God, life ceases as an unpleasant network of obligations and responsibilities and becomes an enjoyable game of love. In the Bhagavad Gita God says, “Consider my case. I’m not bound by any obligations. There is nothing in the universe I don’t possess. Yet I work ceaselessly nonetheless. Were I to stop mankind would no longer follow me and all would be lost.”

Eschew worldly talk.

(58)

No matter how profound the awakening, the Unconscious is very powerful, invariably recycling negative energy. The cynical, materialistic, and degenerate attitudes and ideas that flood the media must be ignored if devotion is to flower. The text, in the original, specifies four types of “worldly talk:” sex lust, monetary greed, hatred of others, and atheism.

Avoid argument.

(59)

Devotion is not missionary zeal, designed to convert. The devotee lives Truth, the only argument in its favor.

Abandon negative impulses.

(60)

Obviously. Sometimes, however, negativity, in spite of patient and persistent effort, does not yield, so the Gospel proposes a brilliant and unusual idea in the next verse.

*If, having offered everything,
the devotee is still plagued with negativity,
it should be offered to God.*

(61)

Taking a negative attitude toward our negativity, thinking of ourselves as worthless sinners, for example, reinforces negativity, destroys discrimination, clouds self awareness and derails spiritual practice. Taking a negative attitude toward others is karmic disaster. To deal effectively with negativity, as a last resort, we are encouraged, like Job, to project it at God.

If the purpose of spiritual practice is to produce an unbroken flow of thought and feeling in the direction of God, allowing negativity to break the flow is spiritually detrimental. Therefore, even though our offerings are apparently ugly and inappropriate, we should place all negativity at the altar of our Deity.

If I'm angry with myself or the world and can't cop to it, rather than abandoning my spirituality, why not direct the anger to God for denying me the courage to overcome weaknesses, for my inability to transcend pride, vanity, and arrogance? Rather than lose my connection with the Self why not blame God for failing to reveal the Divine form and keeping me under the thrall of negative traits? When I'm suffering rejection and have forgotten that God's love is always flowing, why not accuse God of depriving me of His or Her love? With imagination any negative tendency can be laid at the feet of the Lord.

One idea behind this practice is to protect myself and others from my negativity. Turned toward God negativity doesn't recycle but dissolves like clouds in the vast inner sky. As the love offering proceeds, the barrier between the devotee and Beloved becomes increasingly transparent.

Repressing negativity solidifies it, erecting a thick wall of duality around the ego, cutting it off from God's loving embrace.

How does God, the innermost Self, feel about this practice? Just as a lover listens indifferently the tirade of the beloved because the love behind the angry words is perceptible, so God understands the devotee's distress and appreciates his or her desire to maintain contact at all costs, graciously accepting, nay, encouraging, all expressions of love, even the foulest abuse. Paying attention to God, irrespective of the emotional state, the devotee becomes absorbed in God and experiences mystic union.

A touching example of a negative relationship is provided by a commentary on this verse by H. Poddar, an Indian devotee. "When a child begins to toddle, it often stumbles and falls. Hearing the cry, the mother runs to help, but the child becomes angry with the mother, even though she was not at fault, chiding her to make her feel guilty. "Why did you leave me alone? See what happens when you leave me?" it says. Then it decides to punish her. "I'll never talk to you," it wails. "I'll never sit in your lap!" The mother, in an attempt to appease its anger tries to give comfort by taking it in her arms but it evades her and runs away weeping. Why does it do so? Because it recognizes its power over her and hers over it. She is everything to the child and the child is totally dependent on her. There is no discrimination. The child can express anything without fear, including all its negativity. The dependent devotee makes God the object of passion, anger, and pride."

*Transcending the causes of devotion
play the love games.*

(62)

The cause of devotion are: (1) Pain and sorrow. Confused and weary from suffering in the world the person turn to God for help. (2) Unfulfilled desires. Frustration arising from the inability to obtain one's goals produces a belief in God. (3) Curiosity. The desire to know what makes the world tick leads to an investigation of its cause.

LOVE GAMES

Styles of Worship

The relationships and psychologies we bring to the spiritual path were formed in early childhood in a worldly setting. Rarely were we informed that the purpose of life is to love and realize the Self. In fact, the family, and later the society at large, were assigned the task of supplying our love needs. By and large, the relationships developed unconsciously, serving purely physical or emotional needs. Had relationships supplied us with lasting happiness we would never have developed a longing for God.

Recognizing this, the path of love provides an opportunity to redefine life's goal as union with God and utilize remnant psychologies to attain it. In fact, every psychological tendency and the relationships it spawns, no matter how negative, has the potential to awaken love of God. For example, if a parental relationship functioned successfully, we will have developed love and respect for elders, an attitude that can quickly be converted into love and respect for God.

The "bhavas,"²⁴ devotional moods that purify the heart and bring us closer to God, convert the basic elements of worldly love as enumerated under the heading "Generally Ill-Considered Facts About Emotional Love," (guilt, anger, identity, attachment, anxiety, desire for knowledge, service and surrender, and desire for union) into devotional love.²⁵ The devotional moods are love games, to be practiced consciously in the theater of our relationships.

THE SLAVE

The Slave, is based on the idea that we're all slaves to the Unconscious. Who isn't chained to physical passions, indentured to selfish feelings, painfully shackled to unforgiving thoughts? The more we strive for freedom, rail and rebel against the injustices of society and aggressively court empowerment, the more we admit our bondage to the unreal.

To convert the feeling of powerlessness into a positive devotional force is the purpose of "dasya bhava," a devotional psychology ultimately leading to self love and freedom. A service-oriented psychology, the devotee worships God and Its manifestations, people particularly, with a whole heart, putting his or her life completely in God's hands, seeing his or herself as God's property, faithfully and diligently executing all Divine instructions with mindless efficiency. Such devotees support and maintain

²⁴ Sanskrit term meaning "mood or feeling."

²⁵ See commentary on verse 22, page 20.

religious, charitable, and spiritual institutions, faithfully serve enlightened souls, spiritual teachers, and God-intoxicated devotees.

The Slave is considered a sophisticated love game because it develops loyalty and respect, natural feelings in the presence of The Master/Mistress. Secondly, to distinguish God's voice from the many self-serving ego voices requires a quiet mind and keen discrimination. Diligently practiced, this bhava quickly reduces ego inflations to rubble.

THE WIFE

If The Slave is not your cup of tea try The Wife, another high devotional stance. The tie between the husband and wife is the strongest and sweetest in the world, containing all love expressions, particularly sexual intimacy, which is taken to symbolize the union of the devotee and God, the ecstatic wedding of the individual and supreme Selves. In this mood of complete identification and attachment the devotee, regardless of sex, sees God as the husband or wife, to honor and obey in every life situation, even beyond the grave. Just as devoted spouses will gladly suffer for each other, the devotee will suffer any misery on behalf of his or her beloved Husband or Wife.

A quotation found on the back of an eighteenth century painting reproduced in a book entitled, Krishna, the Divine Lover, illustrates the mood as practiced by a sect of devotees known as the Shakti Bhavas, worshippers of the Divine Mother, Radha, consort of Krishna.

"This sect is in favor with those with an effeminate turn of mind. They declare themselves to be the female companions of Radha, with the idea of paying her homage and establishing identity, even taking on the manner of speech, gait, gestures and dress of women. At monthly intervals, in the manner of menstruating women, they put on red-colored clothes as if affected by menstruation and pass three days in this state. After menstruation is over, they take a ceremonial bath. In the manner of married women anxious to be physically united with their husbands as enjoined in the scriptures, they take to themselves on the fourth night a painting of Sri Krishna, and stretch themselves, raising both legs, utter "ahs" and "oohs," adopt coy women-like manners, and cry aloud, "Ah Krishna, I die! Oh Krishna, I die!" Through practices like these they believe they earn great merit and please the Lord by engaging themselves the whole night."

THE FRIEND

A more common form of worship, one that transforms worldly love into devotion, is Sakya, friendship, in which equal love flows between God and the devotee. God is seen as a tried and true confidante, a close relative or family member, one with whom innermost secrets can be shared.

"Henceforth I call you not servants, for the servant knoweth not what the lord doeth, but I call you friends, for all things I have heard of my Father, I have made known to you."

Practitioners of this bhava find their greatest happiness in the happiness of the God in others and dedicate themselves to the spiritual welfare of their friends.

That devotees may become competitive and develop a God ego is thought to be the downside of this type of devotion, the expression popular in New Age circles years ago, "God is my co-pilot," for example. A true devotee would think of his or her self as God's co-pilot.

Nevertheless a diffident, sacrificing, attitude toward God, The Friend, is cultivated. As do close friends, the devotee acutely suffers moments of separation, continually craving God's company, either in the form of a deep experience, or through communication and conversation with other devotees. The tender, joyful, and playful relationship of nine and ten year old children serves to model this charming mood which sees God as a dear playmate sporting among His or Her creations.

THE CHILD

A popular bhava because we so easily identify with childlike parts of the psyche, this method is based on the universal need of children to love their parents. The devotee is enjoined to love God with the unsuspecting faith of the child, acknowledging and accepting his or her state of total helplessness, ignorance, dependence, and attachment. Practically the devotee treats all fatherly and motherly figures as God, including his or her own parents. Parents, our physical source, make nice symbols of God, our spiritual source. The realization that we are part and parcel of His or Her being instills confidence in our own divinity, the effect being non-separate from its cause.

Similar to The Slave, this love game is considered an imperfect vehicle for God realization because it does not, except indirectly, cultivate

knowledge of God, leaving the devotee vulnerable to exploitation and manipulation from both inner and outer sources. Ultimately, of course, love begets knowledge because the intellect develops natural curiosity for what the heart loves, but in the short run this devotional posture is at best a preliminary step in the soul's long march home. Because this style of worship produces such deep attachment, unless the devotee cultivates understanding of the formless aspect of God through scriptural study and meditation, he or she is in danger of forgetting God's greatness and glory, and merely using God, like a child its parents, to satisfy basic needs.

MOM AND POP

Vatsalya, the parental bhava, is thought superior to The Child because parental love is tempered with understanding, a sense of duty and responsibility. The precious and profound love of God produced by this mood is balanced and enhanced by an equally deep attempt to probe the mysteries of the Divine through scriptural study, meditation, and reflection.

Vatsalya taps the universal need to parent and can be successfully practiced by anyone who has felt the need to protect and nurture a small helpless creature. Children, because of their purity, innocence, and guileless bliss, make excellent symbols of God. When the devotee develops this feeling for his or her inner Self, he or she shines with maternal or paternal splendor. When maternal feelings for God achieve rapturous intensity, this mood is even known to produce mammary secretions in women!

Because it forces the devotee to identify with the "inner parent," this mood helps heal the negative views of parents that accompany the reluctance to leave their "inner child"²⁶ and attain spiritual maturity. The bhava also teaches the devotee to detach from ideas of power, fear, and punishment associated with God. Calling into questions ideas of reverence and obedience, the bhava also roots out atavistic concepts of low self esteem and unworthiness associated with God's glory, majesty, and grandeur - projections of a primitive religious consciousness. Unlike the child, the mother and father are not moved to awe in the presence of the child. Because they cannot ask favors of a child the bhava negates the tendency to ask favors of the Lord. And, like parents their children, the devotee is enjoined to make any sacrifice for the sake of God.

²⁶ The psychological, not the spiritual inner child. The psychological inner child, unlike the spiritual which is fully-developed at birth, is subject to growth and development into full adulthood - or not.

THE PASSIONATE LOVER

*"Oh, for one kiss from Thy lips, my Beloved!
The thirst of one kissed by Thee increases forever,
his²⁷ sorrows vanish and he forgets all things but Thee."*

About this kiss, Swami Vivekananda, says, "Aspire for that kiss of the Beloved, that touch of the lips that makes the devotee mad, which makes a man a god. To him who has been blessed with such a kiss, the whole of nature changes, worlds vanish, suns and moon die out, and the universe itself melts away into that one infinite ocean of love. That is the perfection of the madness of love."

A selfless lover eager to gratify his or her beloved is the intriguing model for this bhava which takes the bliss of physical orgasm as a symbol of the powerful experience of ecstatic meditation on the Self.

Sringarasa²⁸ bhava, the attitude of passionate love of God, lover and beloved, is often considered the most advanced love game because passionate spiritual love is the hardest to develop owing to the difficulty of consistently experiencing the Self. Because of excessive attachment brought on by the experience of extreme joy in the presence of God, it is equally difficult to break.

A completely spiritual love, the devotee sees God, the innermost Self, as divinely beautiful and lovely, an Adonis or Aphrodite, to be worshipped with an affection verging on the erotic. In this style of love, all conventions, reservations, hesitations, and personal views are cast aside and an exclusive, potentially jealous, love cultivated. A gargantuan appetite, craving for the embrace of God, the experience of the Self is evidenced, the need for nirvana or samadhi²⁹ replacing the need for physical gratification. Just as lovers locked in the throes of orgasm do not know what is inside or outside, which body is which, so the devotee in union with the Self knows neither internal nor external, and is unable to distinguish his or her body from God's (all matter). In the culmination of this bhava all sense of duality disappears, leaving only the sweetest bliss.

²⁷ In spite of apparently sexist language the Swami's vision of God was universal and impersonal. Not only did he not see God as a male, he was a great champion of all socially oppressed groups, particularly women.

²⁸ Sringarasa is Sanskrit for springtime when passionate love affects most species.

²⁹ Technical terms from the Yoga philosophy indicating the state of the Self. "Nirvana" means "without flame" and indicates the desireless nature of the Self. "Samadhi" means "equal vision," and indicates the state that confers universal vision on the devotee.

ABSENCE MAKES THE HEART GROW FONDER

Obstacles to ecstatic meditation, return to mental and emotional states of mind, are treated as opportunities to develop love in absence, just as lovers desire for the beloved is increased by separation.

This bhava in no way resembles the modern view of tantra yoga or "spiritual sex." Based on the fact that true love only comes from within, this mood is a sophisticated technique for sublimating sexual energy into high meditative states of mind, successfully practiced only by virtuous celibate individuals or married souls in a mature non-possessive relationship. Unlike worldly love, which is born of Rajas, passionate love of God is born of the sattvic element and aims to gratify God, the object of one's affections, not the devotee.

The state of mind and the emotions produced by the realization of the presence of God, the deity in the Heart, is sattvic and includes loss of consciousness and suspension of animation as if asleep, erratic breathing, perspiration, thrills, chills, horripulations, shivering, breaking voice, change of color, and shedding unselfish tears from the sides of the eyes.

The sattvic devotional manifestations of realization of the absence of God's presence are sleeplessness, helplessness, fickleness, depression, and anxiety. When they descend from the ecstatic heights of devotion, devotees practicing this bhava often see God as a fickle, inconsiderate, unfaithful lover prone to selfish disappearances and are not above exhibiting signs of haughty superiority and disdain, fervent yearning, regret because of the Beloved's uncaring attitude, and a sense of folly for having become involved with God in the first place. Occasionally the separation causes such anguish the devotee accuses the Lord of cruel injustice: the perverse dispensation of pleasure to others while the devotee, who has not forgotten the Beloved for a minute, continues to suffer.

FORBIDDEN LOVER

Operating under the assumption that the more love is obstructed, the more it intensifies, this bhava, a variation of the Passionate Lover, converts feelings of secrecy and shame associated with love into a positive devotional psychology.

Love of God often awakens in the most unlikely and inconvenient

circumstances. When a declaration of love would invite ridicule, condemnation, and persecution, taking God as a forbidden lover is helpful. Devoid of outer signs, the Forbidden Lover is a "stealth" psychology, through which the love of God grows by inner yearning, silent repetition of the Holy Name, and meditation. Devotees whose possessive, insecure, and jealous spouses can't tolerate the idea of inner freedom and divine love can benefit greatly from this bhava.

*The highest class of devotees
have single-pointed love of God.*

(63)

Single-pointed love is possible when, through sustained practice, the Unconscious is relieved of the lion's share of its rajasic and tamasic³⁰ energies.

*When pure devotees speak of the Beloved,
their voices break with emotion,
hair stands on end in ecstasy,
and their tears purify the earth.*

(64)

Contact with God is like falling in love or taking a powerful drug because it's radiant energy heightens emotion and alters perception. Devotees attaining this state may speak in tongues or experience bizarre involuntary bodily postures; the hair may stand on end and the skin horripilate. The atmosphere around such devotees is charged with purity, clarity, and ecstasy.

³⁰ Rajasic energy produces intense mental and emotional agitation and tamasic energy brings sloth, stupidity, and dullness to the mind.

*They sanctify sacred places,
divinize action,
and lend authority to scripture.*

(65)

Places are sacred because God-realized devotees frequent them. A devotee's actions are sweet because God is pure sweetness. Scripture's power lies in its ability to change lives. Changed lives enhance the power of scripture.

Because they are one with Love.

(66)

God lies hidden in the innermost recesses of the heart, eternally radiating love. To experience it we can associate with pure devotees who, having surrendered their egos, like rivers flowing into the ocean, have become the ocean.

*When a devotees realizes God
the ancestors revel,
the gods dance with joy,
and the earth acquires a savior.*

(67)

Devotion is the root of the tree of life, bringing sustenance to all its branches and leaves, past, present, and future. "Ancestors" means that all human spiritual strivings find fulfillment in the realization of God. "Gods" are virtuous souls attempting to actualize their divinity. True Devotion is a great umbrella, shielding the world from the rain of secularism and materialism. A pure devotee proves that God lives, giving hope and inspiration.

*Among them there are no distinctions of class,
culture, education, appearance,
birth, wealth, or profession.*

Because they are God's own.

*Scripture should be continually meditated on
and actions that increase devotion
consistently performed.*

Now is the right time to practice.

(68-71)

*To attain devotion
cultivate the virtues.*

(72)

To purify the heart we must become acutely aware that we are not isolated individuals, but human beings functioning in a universal system of relationship, sharing common values. For example, a world-wide value for honesty exists because nobody likes to be deceived. A value for non-violence exists because no one likes to be injured. Values are important from a meditative perspective because ignoring universal values creates inner and outer conflict, cutting off contact with our love.

The following is a partial list of values to cultivated.

(1) HUMILITY or SELF-ACCEPTANCE. People with an exaggerated sense of themselves continually conflict with the world around. Because they don't feel good about themselves they continually try to make themselves look good. Such people live in constant fear of exposure and need an excellent memory to keep their stories straight.

The way out is to value yourself as you are. When you get right down to it nobody who really loves you cares how you look and those who do aren't worth posturing for. When this is understood it's possible to accept yourself as you are, warts and all.

(2) NON-INJURY. In thought, world, or deed. Nobody wants to be hurt physically or mentally by themselves or others. When I think negatively about others the thoughts rebound to injure me. Thinking negatively about myself is painful because I am a perfect Being. Negative thoughts about Ego, the imperfect being, stir up emotional pain and reinforce Ego's false self-concept. All false values are based on lack of Self Love, knowledge that everything is Me, the Self.

(3) ACCOMMODATION. To expect reality to conform to personal views is egoism. Accommodating reality is a sign of advanced spirituality.

(4) RECTITUDE. Thoughts and emotions manifest as words. Words create actions. Actions rebound favorably or unfavorably. So to act effectively words and thoughts must be aligned. Rectitude is alignment of thought and action, moving consistently in one path.

(5) SERVICE. Willingness to facilitate the suggestions of the inner or outer guide, surrendering to the spiritual way, and discipleship, following higher ideals.

(6) CLEANLINESS. Commitment to the purification of the soul.

(7) PERSEVERANCE. Sticking to the path.

(8) SELF-CONTROL. A misunderstood term because the mind can't be ego controlled. It means taking the position of an observer of the thought process, becoming aware of how one thinks, where the thoughts come from, the patterns of emotion and feeling, allowing control to come through awareness. Self-control is switching attention away from the mind and turning it toward the Self.

(9) NON-IDENTIFICATION WITH EGO. Knowledge that I'm not the Ego.

(10) NON-ATTACHMENT. If ego and the objects in the world are essentially devoid of self-nature, what's to cling to? Another form of dispassion.

(11) COMPASSION. Non-clinging, non-possessive, non-attached selfless love of beings based on the understanding that we are all one. A nun was waiting at a river for the ferry when a small scorpion fell off a rock into the water. To relieve its suffering she scooped it up and returned it to the rock only to receive a sting in return. A few minutes later the scorpion fell in again and she saved it again receiving a second sting. A witness couldn't believe she was foolish enough to pick it up the second time.

"What's wrong with you?" he said contemptuously, "Are you mad? I can understand saving it the first time, but the second?"

"It's the scorpion's nature to sting," she replied. "And mine to save."

(12) EQUANIMITY. Refusal to allow the mind to go up and down based on the positive and negative energies passing through it. Related to dispassion and non-attachment.

(13) LOVE OF SOLITUDE. Appreciation of one's existence apart from others. Until you like yourself the mind will never be capable of realizing the Self. Knowledge that people are not required for happiness.

(14) LOVE OF TRUTH. Understanding that life's goal is the Self-Realization, the State of Devotion, and the commitment to follow the path to the end.

(15) FAITH. Belief, with or without knowledge, that God permeates every atom of the universe.

*The Compassionate One is to be worshipped
constantly and wholeheartedly.*

(73)

*When invoked,
The Divine Nature is revealed
to the inner eye.*

(74)

Though one, Love expresses in many ways.

(75)

Electricity functioning through a bulb produces light, through a radio, sound, through a heater, heat. Though the manifestations differ all are nothing but electricity.

*The teachers of the ancient Gospel
fearlessly declare these truths.*

(76)

The culture of Devotion, our divine heritage has flourished since the dawn of civilization. Though not the first, the Western world's most famous devotee, Christ, declared the Gospel by offering his life as witness to the power of Love.

*Whoever has faith in this Gospel
becomes a lover of God
and attains union.*

(77)

Finally, the Lord says,

*“Though I willingly grant salvation,
I hesitate to give Pure Love.
Whoever wins it surpasses all,
is adored by all,
and rules the world.”*

(78)