

8. Devotion Of The Cowherd Maids

The meaning of the Krishna *Avatar* is beyond your understanding. Why, all the *Avatars* (divine Incarnations) are inexplicable, in the language of this world, in the vocabulary of common people. To attempt it is to encase the ocean in a canal by its side. You can understand it only when you become lost to the world and its attachments through the expansion of your sympathies and the purification of your motives. The One Godhead was experienced by the cowherd maids (*gopis*) as immanent in every being; they steadied their minds and installed Him therein.

Veerabhadra Sastry said just now that the Lord will not stay in the heart unless it is maintained, fixed, and unagitated. Of course, when you place a child in the cradle, it must be firm and unmoving, but once the child is laid, the cradle can be swung, for it is only when it is swung to a song that “I am glad and you are glad.” Remember, the Lord is also a child, He is the personified Being-Awareness-Bliss (*Sat-Chit-Ananda*), devoid of qualities (*gunas*).

Sastry said that when Uddhava came to Gokula, the cows were fat and full, the cowherd maids (*gopis*) were happy and joyful, and the place was full of fragrance and music.” But the facts were different. The place was forlorn, and the men and women were disconsolate and helpless. The cattle were also overcome with grief. Uddhava brought them all a fresh lease of life. Krishna told him, “Their hearts are merged in Mine; their minds think only of Me; they have forsaken even bodily needs, and they exist only because they hope to see Me again, some day.” So how could the *gopis* be as happy and gay as Sastry described? Uddhava himself was humbled at the sight of their complete surrender and the pangs of separation that consumed them. That is the very reason Krishna sent Uddhava to them. Every act of Krishna had a meaning, a purpose, and a sweet aptness.

The simple gopis were wiser than yogis

The *gopis* were convinced that Krishna was the Lord. Many yogis and ascetics, many kings and great kings (*rajas* and *maharajas*) among whom Krishna moved had not realised that truth. The unlearned simple cowherds and cowherdesses were wiser. When you too feel so affected by those pangs, you can understand the *gopis*, not until then. For that pain, the message of Krishna is the antidote. “Your grief is caused by your limited artificial outlook; you take Me to be a limited bound entity, so you feel I am far away, I am absent, I am by your side, etc. You are hugging a delusion. Awake to the Truth and establish yourselves in joy.”

The One does not, of its own free will, desire to become many. It has no desire. It has no likes and dislikes. It is immanent and transcendent. It is all this and more. What then is the reason for this manifold appearance? The reason lies in the mind of the devotee. You declare. “Baba appeared before me in this form; I saw Baba in this form.” But what happens is that you desire that vision. I do not change into that form. The Lord is sugar, sweetness. You may drop it into tea or coffee or milk or water. Into whatever thing you put it, it will make it sweet. That is My nature, My signature: sweetness. Once It has melted, what remains is neither water nor sugar but a third thing: syrup. But when your tongue is bitter through envy, hatred, and pride, how can you taste the sugar?

Seek God just as you seek food

The Lord cares for the motive, not the object offered. The tiny leaf from the cooking vessel that Droupadi gave Krishna satisfied His hunger and the hunger of the universe—for she saturated it with her devotion. The

tulsi leaf placed by Rukmini in the scale was able to balance the weight of Him who has all the 14 worlds in His belly, for her intent added so much weight to it. The handful of flattened rice that Kuchela took to Krishna was worth less than a paisa, but it was suffused so heavily with the devotion and faith of his wife that it brought great good fortune. It is possible to fill a world of feeling in an atom of deed, and the Lord will value and appreciate that.

Krishna is the causeless conditioning. You cannot discover the causes for His acts or deeds; it is sheer waste to search for them. If you go on searching for causes and then trying to tread the path, you may not get the chance at all. You have come as humans in order to reach God, remember that. People stop you on the way and ask, “Why do you go to Madhura-Brindavan, to Thirupathi, to Puttaparthi?” But nobody asks you, “Why do you take food?” In fact, one has to seek God just as one seeks food. Both are necessary for happiness. People seek happiness because they are originally and truly free, immortal, so they seek to overcome death.

Everyone must rise to the level of the cowherd maidens

Do not blame the Lord for your failure in spiritual practice. Examine yourself. Suppose you set the alarm clock for 6a.m. and go to bed; if it rings only at 10a.m., you infer that something is wrong with its nuts, bolts, springs, wheels, etc. So too, when the expected results do not materialise, infer that something is wrong in you yourself, your habits of food, drink, sleep, conduct, behaviour, or attitude toward others. Everyone, be they a *Brahmin* or pandit or student or artist, has to adhere to a strict code of discipline. Without that, victory is beyond reach. You must become master of the senses and attain the Supreme Energy (*Maha-asthi*) from this basic deluding power (*mayasakthi*). In short you too must rise to the level of the cowherd maidens (*gopis*).

The body is assigned to you as a boat to cross the ocean of worldly life (*samsara*), but you use it for storing things that give worldly joy and do not launch it on the waters. Misusing it like that, it comes in the way of all activity that is really conducive to happiness. Use it in the way of righteousness (*dharmā*), and success will be yours. Bhima asked Dharmaraja whether he would agree to it if Duryodhana invited him for another game of dice after the 12 years of forest and the one year of incognito were over, and he replied, “I can never deviate from the path of *dharmā*.” Since that was his attitude, the Pandavas were helped by the continuous grace of Krishna and the blessings of sages like Markandeya and Veda Vyasa. The Kauravas, on the other hand, were debilitated by curse after curse from enraged sages and by one ill omen after another.

The cowherd maidens are best examples of yearning for the Lord

Your spiritual practices involve not reading or writing as much as actual experiencing. Ravana was a past master in the four *Vedas* and the six *Sastras* (spiritual sciences); his ten heads were full of them. But to what avail? He had no peace (*santhi*), nor could he give peace to his kith and kin. What is the profit if you simply repeat, “Delicious food, delicious food” a thousand times? You have to eat, digest, and assimilate.

You have no deposits on your account in the bank of Bhagavan’s grace, yet you dare issue cheques, expecting His grace when in distress! Have the deposits, or, at least have some property on hand (like service to others, love toward all, nonviolence) so that you can mortgage it and get help. If you have neither, why blame the bank?

Through your daily avocations and activities you can realise the Lord, believe Me! The cowherd maidens (*gopis*) are the best examples of this, the best proofs. Remember ever the name of the Lord with the agony of unfulfilled search, and remember ever His beautiful form with the agony of being forced to be away —then you

too can see Krishna in your midst. That yearning must be there. Then the result is certain.

The Lord wants sincerity, not imitation

Prahlada was immersed in that thought when he was thrown downhill, trampled by the elephant, and tortured by the minions of his father. He paid no heed, for he heeded only his Lord; he needed only his Lord. The cowherd maidens also, when they listened to Krishna's flute (*murali*), lost all attachment to the world and to the senses and to the manifold objective phenomenal things; they yearned for the sublimest spiritual merging with the Infinite, which was always calling on the finite to realise its finiteness.

By the purification of impulses, one gets into the higher stage where the mystery of the Divine is grasped — the realm-of-spirituality (*salokya*) stage. Then, by contemplation of the Divine, the stages of proximity to Divinity and likeness of the form of Divinity are won. Many great mystic poets attained this height. Jayadeva sang in that strain. But if you sing that song in the same way, Krishna will not appear. He wants sincerity, not imitation. The name uttered with sincere faith was the flower offering of the cowherd maidens (*gopis*); that was the bead of their rosary.

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