

## 48. Develop the characteristics of genuine devotees

During the *Thretha* era (*yuga*), when Narada asked Sri Ramachandra about the nature and characteristics of His servants and of the spiritual aspirants, He answered,

“Listen O Narada! People who are my slaves are full of love; they always stand by righteousness (*dharma*); they speak the truth; their hearts melt with mercy; they are devoid of wrong; they avoid sin; their nature is well-founded; they will renounce everything gladly; they eat in moderation; they are engaged in doing good to others; they have no selfishness; they aren’t worried by doubts. They won’t lend their ears to flattery but are eager to listen to the praise of the good nature of others. They have beautiful, strong, and holy character. Spiritual aspirants are those who endeavour to acquire such qualities and possess such a character.

“Now I shall tell you about those who are dear (*priya*) to me: Anyone who is engaged in repetition of the name (*japa*), penance (*tapas*), and vows (*vratha*), anyone who has self-control (*samyama*) and discipline (*niyama*), anyone who has faith, patience, comradeship, kindness, and joy as well as unalloyed love (*prema*) toward me—such a person is dear to me.

Now, about my real devotee. Whoever with discrimination and renunciation (*viveka* and *vairagya*), humility and wisdom (*vinaya* and *vijnana*) is aware of the knowledge of Reality, whoever is always immersed in the contemplation of my divine play (*leela*), whoever dwells on my name at all times and under all conditions, and whoever sheds tears of love whenever the Lord’s name is heard from any lip—these are my genuine devotees.”

Thus did Sri Rama answer Narada. So the Lord will protect in all ways and at all times those who worship Him in complete and uncontaminated devotion (*bhakthi*)—just as a mother protects her infants, a cow saves her calf from danger, and the eyelids guard the eyes effortlessly and automatically.

When the infant grows up into an adult, the mother won’t pay so much attention to its safety. So too, the Lord doesn’t pay much attention to the wise one (*jnani*). The devotee of form (*sa-guna bhaktha*), like an infant of the Lord, has no strength except the strength of the Lord. For the realized soul (*jnani*), their own strength is enough. Therefore, until one can rely on one’s own strength, one must be an infant in the Lord’s Hands, as a devotee of the form, right? No one can become a devotee of the formless Supreme (*nir-guna bhaktha*) without having been a devotee of the form.

## 49. Surrender completely to the Lord

So, devotees should grow up like infants in the lap of the mother and, thereafter, become realized souls who can rely on their “own” strength and be free. Still, both have the same source of strength, the Mother. Those indeed are really fortunate who grasp this secret of the path of devotion, who develop one-pointed devotion and straighten the traits of their character, who transform themselves into infants in the lap of the Lord, and who get everything done as He wishes.

Therefore, those who yearn to be devotees, servants, dear ones (*priyas*), and one-pointed devotees should take up the corresponding path and name and live accordingly. The devotee should develop the above-said characteristics of devotion; the dear ones should follow the love (*prema*) of the Lord; the one-pointed devotee has to surrender completely to the Lord.