

Chapter 1. The Bhagavatha

The name *Bhagavatha* can be applied to every account of the experiences of those who have contacted God and the Godly (*Bhagavan* and *bhaktha*). God assumes many forms and enacts many activities. The name *Bhagavatha* is given to the descriptions of the experiences of those who have realised Him in those forms and of those who have been blessed by His grace and chosen as His instruments.

The great work known by that name is honoured by all masters of the *Vedas*. It is a panacea that cures physical, mental and spiritual illnesses. The *Bhagavatha* is saturated with the sweetness of nectar, and it shines with the splendour of God.

The principle of descent (*Avatara*) of God on Earth, the incarnation of the Formless with form for the uplift of beings —this basic fact makes the *Bhagavatha* authentic.

By *Bhagavatha* we also mean those with attachment to God, those who seek the companionship of God. For such, the book *Bhagavatha* is most precious; it is the breath of their life. Being in the midst of such *Bhagavathas* fosters one's own devotion. Unless you have a taste for God-ward thoughts, you will not derive joy therefrom. To create that taste, the *Bhagavatha* tells stories to the earnest inquirer that relate to incarnations. Then, one develops the yearning to experience the thrill of God, through all the levels of consciousness. He who has this intense yearning can be a true *Bhagavatha*.

God incarnates to fulfill the yearning of devotees

People believe that incarnations of God happen for only two reasons: the punishment of the wicked and the protection of the righteous. But these represent only one aspect of the task. The granting of peace and joy, of a sense of fulfillment, to seekers who have striven long —this too is the task.

The *Avatar*, or form incarnate, is only the concretisation of the yearning of the seekers. It is the solidified sweetness of the devotion of godly aspirants. The Formless assumes the form for the sake of these aspirants and seekers. They are the prime cause.

The cow secretes milk for the sustenance of the calf. That is the chief beneficiary. But, as we see, others also benefit from that milk. So too, though the devotees (*bhaktas*) are the prime cause and their joy and sustenance the prime purpose, other incidental benefits also accrue, such as the fostering of *dharma*, the suppression of evil, and the overwhelming of the wicked.

There is no compulsive rule that incarnations should occur only on the earth and in human form. Any place and any form can be chosen by the fully free. Whichever place and form promote the purpose of fulfilling the yearning of the devotee, that place and form are chosen by the will of God. God is above and beyond the limits of time and space. He is beyond all characteristics and qualities, and no list of such can describe Him fully. For Him, all beings are equal. The difference between man, beast, bird, worm, insect, and even a god is but a difference of the 'vessel' (*upadhi*).

God is like the electric current that flows through various contrivances and expresses itself in many different activities. There is no distinction in the current; it is the same. To speak of it as different is to reveal one's ignorance (*a-jnana*). So too, the one single God activates every vessel and gives rise to manifold consequences. The

wise see only the one uniform current; the ignorant feel that they are all distinct.

God appreciates the consciousness of unity as the basic motive of acts. He doesn't appreciate the activity itself being one without variety; it is suited to the various needs. The fruits of activity (*karma*) appeal only to those who identify themselves with the body and not to the others, who know that they are the indestructible *Atma*.

Again, you must know that there is no end to the incarnations in which God indulges. He has come down on countless occasions. Sometimes He comes with a part of His glory, sometimes with a fuller equipment of splendour, sometimes for a particular task, sometimes to transform an entire era of time, an entire continent of space.

It is the story of the last of these that the *Bhagavatha* elaborates. The subject matter of the *Bhagavatha* is the drama enacted by the *Avatar* and the devotees who are drawn toward Him. Listening to it promotes the realisation of God. Many sages have testified to its efficacy and extolled the *Bhagavatha*, which they helped preserve for posterity.

Train yourself toward God and godly disciplines

Generally speaking, people get drawn to sense objects, for they are victims of instincts. Instincts easily seek sense objects. They come along with the body and aren't derived by any training. The infant seeks milk from the mother's breast, and the newborn calf nestles at the udder. No training is needed for this. However, for the infant to walk and talk, some training is necessary, because these actions are not automatic but are socially prompted, by example and by imitation of others.

Training is essential even for the proper pursuit of sense pleasure, for it is the wild untrained search for such pleasure that promotes anger, hatred, envy, malice, and conceit. To train the senses along salutary lines and to hold them under control, certain good disciplines like repetition of the name (*japa*), meditation (*dhyana*), fasts (*upavasa*), worship at dawn and dusk, etc. are essential. But however much their value is praised and their practice recommended, people don't develop a taste for them. This is because the desire for sensory pleasure has struck deep roots in the human heart. When one is asked to do spiritually salutary acts, one has no inner prompting at all. Still, one shouldn't give up in despair. Until the taste sprouts, the disciplines have to be strictly followed. This taste is the result of training. No one has it from the very beginning, but constant practice will create the zest.

The infant doesn't know the taste of milk. By taking it daily, it develops an attachment for it, which is so deep that when milk is to be given up and rice substituted, it starts to protest. But the mother doesn't despair; she persuades the child to take small quantities of cooked rice daily, and by this process, the child starts liking rice and gives up milk. Milk was once its natural food; by practice, rice becomes its natural food—so natural that if no rice is available for a single day, the child becomes miserable.

So too, though sense pleasures are "natural" at first, by means of practice and training and listening to the commendation of the wise, slowly the greater and more lasting pleasure derivable from the glories of the Lord and their recapitulation is grasped. Thereafter, one can't exist without that atmosphere even for a minute; one feels that there is nothing as sweet as the experience of listening to the splendour of the Lord. The company of the worldly, who chatter about the senses and the sense objects, will no longer attract; the company that exults in praising the Lord will draw and hold.

Exulting in praising the Lord is the real hallmark of the good. Spiritual seekers (*sadhakas*) and votaries of the Lord should be judged by this, and not by external apparel or appearances. Mixing with people who revel in

sensory talk and activities puts one out of court. Instead, spend your time in the company of the godly, and be engaged in godly affairs. Avoid getting mixed with the company of the ungodly. Don't see their activities or listen to their accounts. Only those who avoid such can be called *Bhagavathas*, or God's own.

Cleanse your heart through listening to expositions of the glory of God

Reading and enjoying the stories of the glory of Krishna in some sacred spot, temple, prayer-hall shrine, or hermitage of a saint or sage, or in the company of the virtuous and the good—that is a source of great inspiration and joy. It makes people forget everything else. Or, one can approach pious men, serve them, and listen to their exposition of the glories of God. Taste for such wholesome literature is the result of accumulated merit and endeavour. This merit rewards one with such company. Listening will be enough in the beginning; later, the stories will arouse interest in the nature and characteristics of God, and the aspirant will seek and find for themselves the path to realisation.

Listening to expositions by the wise is much better than reading oneself—although one can be looking into the text while listening. It is preferable to listen in company rather than alone; it is excellent to listen with a number of earnest aspirants. If the person who expounds has had the thrill of genuine experience, then it is the supremest luck, for it yields best results. For their face will blossom into joy and their eyes will shed tears of joy at the very contemplation of the glory of the Lord. Those who listen to such a person will catch that inspiration and will experience the joy themselves. In the midst of a group that weeps, tears will spring out of the eyes of those who have come in. Just as all smile in unison when an infant smiles, so too the words of those who are saturated with devotion to God will saturate the hearts of those who listen. It is impossible to measure the profit that one can derive while in the company of the great.

Through that process of listening, a dirt-laden heart will be transformed into a clean, illumined heart, shining with genuine light. To the foul odours of sense pursuits, keenness to listen to the glories of God is a valuable disinfectant, besides being in itself so full of sweet fragrance. The listening will cleanse the heart through the prompting it gives for good work.

Such a cleansed heart is the most appropriate altar, or tabernacle. In that fragrant bower, the Lord will establish Himself; at that very moment, another incident will also happen: The group of six vices that had infested the place will quit without so much as a farewell.

When these vices quit, the wicked retinue of evil tendencies and the vulgar attitudes that live on them will break camp and disappear without leaving even their addresses! Then, man will shine in his native splendour of truth and love (*sathya* and *prema*); he will endeavour without hindrance to realise himself; and, finally, he will succeed in merging with the Universal and Eternal. He will liberate himself from the tangle of ignorance (*maya*). His mind will fade away; the long-hidden secret will be revealed to him; and he will discover his divinity.

Let Love alone occupy your heart

Man's nature is love (*prema*). Man cannot survive a moment when deprived of love. Love is the very breath of his life. When the six vices to which he was attached so long disappear, love is the only occupant of the heart. But love has to find an object, a loved one. It cannot be alone. So, love is directed to the dark-blue divine child, the charming cowherd boy, who is purity personified, who is the embodiment of service, sacrifice, and selflessness,

who has taken residence in that cleansed altar. There is no scope now for any other attachment to grow. So, step by step, this love for Madhava (God, Krishna) becomes deeper, purer, and more self denying, until at last, there is no other need for thought and the individual is merged in the Universal.

When Vaasudeva (Krishna) enters the heart of a person, *Vasu-deva* (the god of wealth) no longer has a place therein. On the other hand, when the god (*deva*) of wealth (*vasu*) is seated in the heart, the divine Vaasudeva cannot dwell therein.

An attempt to accommodate both in the heart is bound to fail. Darkness and light cannot exist at the same time and place; they cannot continue together. Wealth and divinity (*dhana* and *daiva*) cannot be joint ideals; when riches are sought, God cannot also be achieved. If both are sought, man will achieve not wealth or divinity but the devil (*dayya*).

It is creditable if man behaves as man; it is laudable if he behaves as the God (Madhava) he really is. But to behave as a demon or beast is despicable. Man was long born a mineral and died a mineral; then, he promoted himself as a tree. He was long born a tree and died a tree, but in the process, he got promoted as an animal. Now, he has risen to the status of man. This rise from one scale to another has been acknowledged by science and spiritual experience. Now, alas, he is born as man and dies as man. It is a greater shame to slide into the beast or a beastly ogre. Praise is man's due only if he rises to the divine status. That is real fulfillment of his destiny.

Therefore, avoid contact with vices, develop attachment to virtues, transmute the heart into an altar for the Lord, and destroy all the shoots and sprouts of desire. Then, the lake of your inner consciousness (*manasa-sarovar*) will be sublimated into the pure ocean of milk (*kshira-sagara*), whereon the Lord reclines on the serpent-couch. Your real Self will, like the Celestial Swan (Hamsa), revel in the placid waters of that lake. Thus transformed, it will discover endless delight.

Drink from God's limitless sweet nectar

Who can mark the beginning of the continuous waves of the ocean? It is an impossible task. If people decided to do so, the wave with which they started the calculation would be considered the beginning and the wave with which they stopped would be, for them, the last, the end. There is a beginning and an end for the count, but there is no beginning or end for the process. In that boundless illimitable expanse, no one can visualise either. God's glory is the shoreless ocean. When people start describing it, it begins for them; when they finish their description it is the end, as far as they are concerned. But His glory is beyond space and time. Only little minds, limited minds, will argue that God's glory has a beginning and an end. The stage on which He plays (His *leela*) has no boundaries.

The story of His play is all nectar; it has no other component, no other taste, no other content. Everyone can drink his fill from any part of that Ocean of nectar. The same sweetness exists everywhere, in every particle. There is nothing inferior to mar the sweetness.

Love of God and love for God are both eternally sweet and pure, whatever the method of your accepting or attaining them. Such love is holy and inspiring. Sugar is sweet when eaten during day or night. For it is night or day for the person who eats, not for the sugar. Sugar behaves uniformly always.