

### 23. Accept the rigours of spiritual discipline and follow the path of devotion

To realise that the Self is beyond all these lesser categories, devotion (*bhakti*) is the first requisite. Devotion merges in wisdom (*jnana*) and becomes identified with it. Devotion ripens into wisdom, so don't speak of them as different. At one stage it is called devotion, at a later stage, wisdom. Once it is cane, later it is sugar.

Through devotion, the individual soul (*jiva*) is transformed into Siva —or rather, it knows it is Siva and the soul-idea disappears. To posit oneself as a soul is ignorance (*a-jnana*); to know oneself as Siva is spiritual wisdom.

A white cloth that has become dirty is dipped in water, soaked in soap, warmed, and beaten on a slab in order to restore its colour and condition. So too, to remove the dirt of ignorance that has attached itself to the pure being-awareness-bliss (*satchidananda*) *Atma*, the water of unblemished conduct and behaviour, the soap of Brahman, reflection on the warming of repetition of the name and meditation, and the slab of renunciation —all three necessary. Only then can the fundamental Brahman-hood of the *Atma* shine forth.

It doesn't help if the soap is good but the water is dirty. All that soap and all that bother of heating and beating are sheer waste, for the cloth continues as dirty as ever. This explains why many aspirants fail. Though they have meditated on Brahman for many years and studied about it for long, their modes of behaviour and conduct are all wrong. The fault lies in the water, not in the soap! The daily habits, acts, and activities are mean and low, and the meditation (*dhyana*) on Brahman is all a waste.

In their ignorance, people hesitate to accept the rigors of spiritual discipline, considering them as so many fetters to free living. They decry the divine command and denounce divine grace. That command is not understood and appreciated; it is disobeyed and even fought against. But the wise one who plants wheat will be blessed by a harvest of wheat; the fool who plants tare weeps because wheat does not grow. For everyone in the world, whether we believe it or not, two plus two make four; the result does not depend on your likes and dislikes. The fact that in every being there is the Supreme is a similar inescapable reality. God will not give up if denied or enter if invited. God is there, as the being's very Being. This is the truth, and if you want to know it and experience it, develop the vision of the spiritually wise (*jnani*); without that vision, you can never see it. Just as the telescope alone enables you to see things that are far away, so the “wisdomscope (*jnana-drishhti*)” is essential to see Brahman immanent in every being.

Just as the child refuses to believe in things beyond its circle of vision, the weakling, who is afraid of the travail of winning that intelligence (*drishhti*) refuses to believe in the all-pervasive, all-inclusive Brahman!