

17. Avoid doubters and ignorant people

Every aspirant who seeks the Eternal through the path of devotion should strive to keep away from the turmoils, cruelties, and falsehoods of this world and practice truth, righteousness, love, and peace. This is indeed the path of devotion. Those who seek union with God and those who seek the welfare of the world should discard as worthless both praise and blame, appreciation and derision, prosperity and adversity. They should courageously keep steady faith in their own innate reality and dedicate themselves to spiritual uplift.

No one, not even a great spiritual personality (*maha-purusha*) or *Avatar*, can ever escape criticism and blame. But such people do not bend. They hold on to truth. Truth will not yield to threats. The real nature of the great sage or the *Avatar* is realised by those who indulge in criticism or blame only after they wade through unbearable trouble; then they also start to praise. The weakness of ignorance is the cause of this failure. So, let aspirants keep away from all such waverers and ignorant people and desist from discussing their beliefs and convictions with them. Let them become immersed in holy books and be in the company of devotees of the Lord. Later, rich with the experience of realisation and courageous on account of that contact with reality, they can mix in any company without danger and even endeavour to direct other minds on to the truth that they themselves have seen.

18. Develop devotion and faith

Three types can be recognised among those who seek to do good deeds and tread the path of self-realisation.

1. Those who are too frightened by troubles, losses, and difficulties to begin the endeavour. They are of the lowest type.
2. Those who, after having undertaken the journey and gone some distance, are depressed and defeated by obstacles and disappointments and give up in the middle. They are of the middling type.
3. Those who steadfastly adhere to the path with calmness and courage, whatever the nature of the travail, however hard the road; these are, of course, of the highest type. This steadfastness, this faith and constancy, is the characteristic of the devotee (*bhaktha*).

You may be deluded by attachment to this illusory world and attracted by temporal joy, but don't barter away the means of achieving permanent and complete happiness. Carry on your spiritual duties with full devotion. God cannot be known without faith and steadfastness. The Lord comes only through supreme devotion (*para-bhakthi*); supreme devotion only through spiritual wisdom (*jnana*); spiritual wisdom only through faith (*sraddha*); and faith, only through love (*prema*).