

36. Be universal in outlook

In spite of this, devotees and aspirants have been framing some form or other of the Divine as the basis of their devotion, each according to the stage of their own inner progress. They worship the supreme Lord (*Paramatma*) as existing in some Ayodhya or Dwaraka and nowhere else, as found in places where some image or picture exists and nowhere else. They worship that form itself as complete (*purna*). Of course, it is not wrong to do so. But devotees should not proclaim that only their belief is the truth, that the names and forms that they have ascribed are the only names and forms of the Divine, and that all other forms and names are worthless and inferior. It should be realised that the names and forms that are the ideals of others are as dear and sacred to those others as such names and forms are to oneself.

When a form is idealised like this, it really becomes a symbol of the Universal. But how can a mere symbol of the Universal ever become the Universal itself? Conscious always of this, everyone should acquire the vision that all forms of the ideal are equally valid and true, without giving room to senseless hatred. Without this, it is impossible to realise the Complete (*Purna*). All these gross forms of the ideal are fully saturated with the subtle, divine Principle.

The taste of the vast ocean is to be found, complete and undiminished, in every single drop of its waters, but this does not mean that the drop is in the ocean. Though we recognise the drop and the ocean as separate entities, the nature and taste of both are identical. Similarly, the Universal Soul (*Sarva-antaryaami*), *Paramatma*, and the gross form and name that the supreme Lord assumes and through which He is realised —these are not separate entities but are identical.

When the all-pervasive, all-inclusive pure Existence is described, the matter and method depend on the principles of the speaker and tastes of the listener. When the individual name and form imposed by the devotee are transformed into the Attributeless and the Formless, it is referred to as *Brahman*; when this same *Brahman* appears with attributes and forms, it is referred to as Rama, Krishna, Vishnu, or Siva.

Don't the followers of other religions agree that all distinction between the devotee and God disappear when the devotee attains the ecstasy of mystic union? The *yogis* and philosophers of other lands and faiths also accept without demur that this distinctionless experience can be earned through supremest devotion (*para-bhakthi*). Even if some little trace of difference is retained, it is due to the individual's own taste and desire and not to anything specially basic.

It is only when name and form come in that it is named differently as nature (*prakriti*), the supreme Lord (*Paramatma*) and devotee (*bhaktha*). When name and form are absent, doubt and discussion whether it is masculine, feminine, or neutral won't even arise. Then, any description fits. For something that is above and beyond imagination, any name and form can be ascribed. In fact, It has no attribute and no form. It is all pervasive, omnipresent. When this subtle omnipresence is systematically worshiped through a gross form, with attributes, the devotee will clearly realise its nature through the spiritual practice (*sadhana*) itself.