

50. The nine paths of devotion

Mere reading and rolling on the tongue are of no avail. Spiritual bliss (*ananda*) is the result only of action. This bliss is not dependent on caste or race or sex. Even in those days, while Sri Rama was gladly partaking of the feast of roots and fruits selected and reserved by Sabari for him after tasting every individual item herself, she asked him,

“Lord! I am but a woman. Moreover, I am of feeble intellect. Above all, I am low-born. How can I praise You? I don’t know what to do or how!”

Sri Rama smiled and said, “Sabari! My mission is only the kinship of devotion. I have no kinship of race or caste. Of what use is it to have status, wealth, and character but no devotion? Like the cloud that does not bear rain, which wanders about in the sky, people without devotion are at the mercy of the winds, however much status in caste, wealth, power, and fame they may possess. Devotees reach me through nine paths; any one of the nine paths takes them to Me.”

Then, Sabari prayed Sri Rama to tell her the nine paths, and Sri Rama responded thus:

Listening to stories about God (*sravanam*)

Singing the name (*kirtanam*)

Remembrance of God (*Vishnoh-smaranam*)

Serving the holy feet (*paada-sevanam*)

Reverence toward nature and all life (*vandanam*)

Worship (*archanam*)

Dedication, servitude (*daasyam*)

Befriending (*sneham*)

Surrender to the Self (*Atma-nivedanam*)

The devotee who sincerely practises any one of these paths can attain Me. I am bound by these nine forms of devotion (*bhakthi*). That is why you have been able to so easily obtain this opportunity of seeing, touching, and speaking with Me, an opportunity that even *yogis* find too difficult to get. You have realised life’s purpose today. See! Today’s words are only the works of yesterday!