

The Attributes of Supreme Bhaktas

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A number of us are indeed serious about devotion to the God notwithstanding our religious faith or background. We do a number of things in the name of devotion to the Lord. We pray in the morning and in the evening, make offerings of what we have cooked for the day, do bhajans and poojas, engage in weekly satsang, meditate for 30 minutes focusing on the God and so on. Due to our sincerity and seriousness, despite mounting social, family and official pressures we somehow manage to steal about 30 – 45 minutes daily to pray to the Lord. When some calamity strikes such a person, especially the one who seems to be well meaning in life, religious and perhaps also engaged in some devotional practices regularly, the top of the mind issue is “Why did it happen to me?”

True Devotion?

The mind opens up a Pondera’s box and analyses a host of issues surrounding this. “I have been all along good to people, I have never indulged in any bad practice, have not even thought of harming others, have been a well-wisher and so on...” This can take one to the basic question of why is my devotion not answered by the God. There are several variations of these but the central issue in all these cases would be, of what avail is this devotion. If we travel further in this train of thoughts triggered by the mind, the next issue that might surface is perhaps a lingering doubt, “Is my devotion not good enough or pure enough?” If all that mentioned above is not true devotion then what indeed is the hallmark of a true devotion?

These questions and doubts arise not just during periods of mental agony and distress. The very fact that we tend to unwittingly link outcomes in life to our genuine efforts of devotion is an indication that we are still a work in progress on matters of devotion to the Lord. For a genuine seeker, this is a real issue that needs to be resolved. In its resolution lies our ability to develop clarity on what we must aspire for in the name of devotion to the Lord. In response to this, Shri Krishna provides some clarifications as to what are the attributes of a bhakta of the highest order in chapter 7 of the *Gītā*.

Supreme Bhakta’s approach towards God

Shri Krishna considers a *jñānī* as a supreme bhakta and describes the attributes of such a bhakta as follows. Of the different types of bhaktas (*teṣāṃ*), a true bhakta of the highest order (*jñānī*) excels (*viśiṣyate*) on account of two distinct attributes; one is the ability of such a bhakta to be constantly connected (*nitya-yuktaḥ*) with the God, the other is the ability of the bhakta to exhibit single pointed and focused devotion (*eka-bhaktiḥ*) towards the God. He further says that to such a bhakta (*jñānīnaḥ*) I am (*aḥam*) deeply (*atyartham*) closer and dear (*priyaḥ*) and he/she is also (*sa ca*) dear to me (*mama priyaḥ*).

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तेषां ज्ञानी नित्ययुक्त एकभक्तिर्विशिष्यते ।

प्रियो हि ज्ञानिनोऽत्यर्थमहं स च मम प्रियः ॥ 7.17

*teṣāṃ jñānī nitya-yukta eka-bhaktir-viśiṣyate,
priyo hi jñānino'tyartham-ahaṃ sa ca mama priyaḥ.*

Krishan re-emphasises the attributes of such a bhakta once again in the next *śloka*. All the bhaktas (*ete sarve*) are indeed noble (*udāraḥ*) only (*eva*). A true bhakta (*jñānī*), on the other hand (*tu*) is my “self” (*ātmaiva*). This is my considered opinion (*me matam*). This is because, such a person (*saḥ*) is indeed (*hi*) constantly connected (*yuktātmā*) to God and has set himself/herself (*āsthitaḥ*) in a path (*gatim*) that is the ultimate (*anuttamāṃ*) and focused towards me (*mām*).

उदाराः सर्व एवैते ज्ञानी त्वात्मैव मे मतम् ।

आस्थितः स हि युक्तात्मा मामेवानुत्तमां गतिम् ॥ 7.18

*udāraḥ sarva evaite jñānī tvātmaiva me matam,
āsthitaḥ sa hi yuktātmā mām-evānuttamāṃ gatim.*

From both the above *ślokas* it is abundantly clear that single pointed focus towards God in a constant fashion is the real attribute of a true bhakta. The two attributes are interconnected, because only when a person is able to have a single pointed focus he/she will also be able to have a constant communion and vice versa. Single pointed focus does not necessarily mean that give up everything and keep thinking only about the issue of devotion. It rather means that even when we engage in other worldly activities, one of the dimensions of our focus has to be God.

This implies that although one may spend an hour or so in the morning and in the evening doing prayers etc. he/she should be constantly immersed in the thought of the Lord while engaged in other daily chores. This is the literal meaning of *yuktātmā* or *nitya-yuktaḥ* as described by Shri Krishna in the above *ślokas*. The benefits of being in the constant thought of God are many as Krishna has pointed out in Chapters 8 and 9 of *Bhagavad Gītā*.

Constantly thinking of God

What does it mean to be in such a state and how is practically possible? Think of a two year old child, who will be active at all times except during sleep. The child is at its steepest learning curve, constantly engaged in a variety of activities, exploring new things, learning new skills, ideas etc. In spite of all these diversions, every now and then the child will look around and ensure the presence of the mother in the vicinity. The moment the mother is out of sight, it will cease to do its activities, look for the mother and perhaps start crying loudly to draw the attention of the mother, if she is elsewhere. Once the mother is back in sight, the child resumes its activities. We can learn our lessons from this to solve the issue on hand.

The child looks for the mother every now and then only because there is a constant thought of the mother. We need to similarly cultivate the thought of God all the time. This

is a habit that will come only by constant practice of the mind. Our mind is capable of processing several routines and logic at the same time. A shining example is a *śatāvadhāni* who is able to handle 100 things simultaneously by mere training and coaching of the mind and the intellect. Therefore by conscious effort, we need to keep one stream of thought constantly running at the back of our minds, thinking only of God. To facilitate this, our ancestors suggested to offer everything that we do from moment to moment to the Lord, and see the Lord in everything that we come across. The greatest by product of this approach to our life will be that we will cease to become judgmental about outcomes. Since the outcomes are the result of the activities that we made as our offerings to God, they become the *prasāda* from God. Therefore, we will find no need to judge outcomes in life using a set of expectations linked to our devotion to the God.

Just as the two year child, we must become uncomfortable, if not fearful, when the thought of the God is out of our minds. Instead of crying and shouting as the child does, we may have to devise a mechanism to bring back the thought. Until then we must feel restless. It is all about capturing one's own mind space. A few activities in life can help us achieve this slowly but steadily. For instance, hearing good lectures (*Hari Kathas, Pravacanas* etc.) for about 3 - 5 hours every week will be useful. The idea of *tri-kāla Sandhyā Vandanam* devised by our ancestors is again another structured method to get back to the thought of God.

While in office, we must try to take a short break from our work (and more importantly the thoughts) for a few minutes and refocus/contemplate on God. Before venturing into anything big, new or important, we must remember God for a few moments in deep contemplation. Similarly, when we receive the outcome of our work, results, applauds, awards, brickbats etc., it is time to bring back the thought of God. Such repeated practices will slowly begin to stay put God in our mind.

The real evolution of a true bhakta lies in his/her ability to stretch the thought of God beyond the 30 minute morning prayer in the Pooja room. A person reaching this stage of living indeed crosses a major threshold in life and will soon see himself/herself in a new highway of devotion with no obstacles arising out of mental agony. Such a person will indeed be blessed. Not surprisingly he/she will feel closer to God as Krishna mentioned in these *ślokas*.