

PREMA
VAHINI

Stream of Love

SATHYA SAI BABA

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!

51. Devotion is of two kinds: effortful devotion and self-surrender

Those who follow the above-said nine-fold path are of two kinds.

- (1) The followers of the hard path.
- (2) The followers of the safe and easy path.

These are sometimes referred to as (1) devotion with effort (*bhakti*) and (2) self-surrender (*prapatthi*). That is to say, the practice of the young of the monkey is devotion and the practice of a kitten is self-surrender.

Devotion has to be continuous, uninterrupted, like the flow of oil from one vessel to another. Though the two kinds are basically the same, the practices are different. Without love (*prema*), nothing in this world can be acquired. Only when there is love does attachment (*anuraaga*) in its turn produce the desire to protect and guard. In both the above kinds of people, love is equal, no doubt, but in actual manifestation there is a difference. In the young-of-the-monkey path, the child has to rely on its own strength to protect itself—wherever the mother might jump about, the child has to attach itself fast to the mother’s belly and not release its hold, even if pulled apart! So too, the devotee has to stand the tests at the hands of the Lord and hold on to the Lord’s name at all times and under all conditions, tirelessly, without the slightest trace of dislike or disgust, bearing the ridicule and the criticism of the world and conquering the feelings of shame and defeat. The example of this type of devotion is that first among devotees, Prahlada.

The path of surrender is instead like the way of the kitten. Just as the kitten simply continues mewling in one place, placing all its burdens in the mother cat, so the devotee puts complete trust on the Lord. The mother cat holds the kitten in its mouth and removes it to more elevated places or transports it safely through even very narrow passages. So too, the devotee places all burdens on the Lord and surrenders fully to His will. Lakshmana is the witness of this path.

The discipline of surrender (*prapatthi*) is much superior to that of devotion (*bhakti*). The characteristic of surrender is complete self-surrender, in all aspects. To serve Rama, Lakshmana renounced all obstacles in his path, like wealth, wife, mother, home and even sleep and food. And this was not for a day or month or year but for a full fourteen years. He felt that Rama was his all, his happiness and joy, that He would grant him everything that he needed, and that his life’s purpose was only to follow Him, serve Him, and surrender his will to Him. If all burdens are placed on the Lord and He is followed ceaselessly and unforgettingly, He will certainly provide everything. This is the nature of the surrender type of devotion.