

# *Devotion, Worship, Loyalty*



From Bhagavan Das. *The Science of the Emotions*. Adyar: Theosophical Publishing House, 1924 (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.), pp. 151-59. A searchable PDF of the 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. of 1908 can be found in our Constitution of Man Series.

**True Devotion is characteristic of the aspirant on the Path of Renunciation; pseudo-Devotion is found on the other Path; Worship on both.**

Devotion has already been alluded to as distinct from Worship. At first sight — inasmuch as it generally and prominently makes a tie between an inferior and a superior — it may indeed appear to be a simple, and not a complex, Emotion of the nature of Worship. But it is in reality somewhat complex. Devotion is a self-surrender, a self-sacrifice, a giving of all one has to another. Such *giving* necessarily implies superiority in the giver. The inferior receives. But surely if, as already said, the feeling of Devotion is the feeling of an inferior towards a superior, and at the same time Devotion implies giving, and giving implies the superiority of the giver — is there not here an insuperable contradiction in terms?

Let us look closer. It is only *generally*, and not invariably, according to even current language, that Devotion is the feeling of an inferior to a superior. A husband is devoted to his wife, a mother to her infant, a benevolent physician to his patients in a hospital. Is the word “devoted” here misused and misapplied? Or are the mother, the husband, the physician, inferior to the objects of their Devotion? Neither is evidently the case. But a servant is also devoted to his master; a soldier in the ranks to his officer; a disciple to his teacher; a worshipper, a creature, to his Deity and Creator. Here the inferiority is obviously on the side of the devoted person, and the word devoted is equally correctly used.

Is the word then used in two different senses in the two connections? It would appear so. The significance of the word is service and help in both places. What then is the difference? It is this. In the first case the service and help are truly service and help directly to the object itself of the Devotion; and the Devotion here is in reality only Tenderness. That the Tenderness should receive the name of Devotion in this reference is due to the fact that attention has been excessively fixed on the large element of self-sacrifice in the Tenderness, and on the aspect of persistence which the Tenderness has put on, and which self-sacrifice and persistence it has in common with the mood which is more appropriately indicated by the word under discussion.

In the second case the persistent service that is implied is mostly *co-service* with the object of devotional attachment to another object altogether. A Deity, a Teacher, a ruler or officer, as such, does not require any sacrifice for himself from his votary, or disciple, or subordinate. He requires it for others whom he himself is “serving,” *i.e.*, helping — a world, a race, a government, a cause, a public movement, an institution, and their constituent parts. *To these* (whole and part respectively), both the object (Deity, *etc.*), and the subject (votary, *etc.*) of Devotion are superior, though in vastly different degrees. So far as the Deity, or teacher, and other superiors accept a service to themselves from the inferior, they do so either by giving permission to the inferior to make repayment, in his small way, of kindness done to him formerly, and thereby to that extent lift him from inferiority to equality, as before said; or they graciously

and voluntarily contract a new debt, an obligation to that inferior, to be necessarily repaid in the future, and thereby voluntarily put themselves in the position of the debtor, an inferior to that extent and in that reference; they would probably do so for the educating in the devotee of higher qualities, possible only in connection with a sense of power and confidence. To sum up, Devotion in the sense of Devotion to an ideal, a teacher, a Deity, is Reverence, wherein a partnership in serving others is sought; and, however generally inferior the devotee may be, the very fact of partnership gives a limited equality. Defined in terms of desire, Devotion is the desire for equalisation with the Ideal, who is the object of that Devotion, not by direct receipt of gift through prayer, as is the case in pure Worship, but by means of obedience to the behests of and guidance received from that Ideal.

The significance of Devotion has been considered before also, in connection with Worship. The difference between the two is naturally rather difficult to state precisely, because they are always more or less intermixed in practice, as said before; and because, in their higher, or unselfish, aspect, they, and Love, have the same ultimate end and purpose, namely, mergence, union, identification to the fullest extent possible. The common use of language indicates this overlapping of the significance of the three: A mother “loves,” or “worships,” or is “devoted to” her child. Similar unavoidable synonymisation of more or less distinguishable words is observable in the works on *Bhakti*, in Sanskrit. Thus:

We will now explain *bhakti* [Love or Devotion]. Its nature is extreme Love or Devotion [*prema*] to someone. Vyasa says it is addiction [*anurāga*] to worship [*pūjā*]. Garga says it is predilection for hearing [persistent listening to conversation or teaching about Ātma, the Self]. Shāndilya says it is the continuous realisation of the Universal Self in the object of devotion and in one’s own self. Nārada says it is the surrendering of all actions to God, and the feeling of the greatest misery in the forsaking of or by Him. Love [*bhakti*] is its own end. The sons of Brahmā, Nārada and Sanatkumāra say that Love is its own reward. Inexpressible is the essential nature of Love [*prema*], etc.<sup>1</sup>

But we will easily see what is meant in these passages, and be able to make in the mind the distinction that is not very to express in words, if we remember that the Self only is its own end, that Love is our *feeling* of Its Unity, that realisation of this Unity, to whatever extent possible, is its own reward, is *moksha* or deliverance from the sorrows of separateness, is *nis-shreyas*, the highest good, *summum bonum*. To express the distinction in words, we may reiterate that in Worship, merely as such, self-surrender is not an element, but that its essentials are an acknowledgment of inferiority and a prayer for help. In Devotion proper, on the other hand, self-surrender is an essential element, offer of service of any kind that may be needed, generally for the helping of others, and there is also present a touch, lighter or stronger, of the sense of equality-identity already achieved, a feeling of belonging to the same household, of partnership in the same concern, *esprit de corps*. That offer-

---

<sup>1</sup> *Nārada-Sūtra*: 1, 2, 16, 17, 18, 19, 26, 30, 51, etc. So too *Shāndilya-Sūtra*, 1 (*bhakti*), 2 (*anurakti*), 6 (*rāga*), 44 (*sammāna*, *prīti*, etc., as varieties of it).

[Cf. “Nārada Bhakti Sūtra,” in our Higher Ethics and Devotion Series. For an in-depth analysis of Bhakti, see Chapter 5, “Nārada and Krishna speak with One Voice,” in *Compassion: the Spirit of Truth* (2009), the first of our Major Works Series. — ED. PHIL.]

ings and sacrifices are made generally in Worship also is only to prove actively the acknowledgment of inferiority; the real significance of such is this:

*Behold, I am truly humble before thee, and cling to, and depend on, and ask of, and expect from, none else than Thee, and in proof of this I offer up to Thee all that I have and hold nearest and dearest — only to show that they are not nearer and dearer to me than Thou.*

Because this significance underlies acts of worship, does it come about, when the worshipping jīva is of the very selfish or “demoniac” or “titanic” or “satanic”<sup>1</sup> type, that his evil selfishness transforms what should be the pure offerings of devotion into foul uncleanness and slaughter and orgy, and turns God-worship into Devil-worship, the Right-Hand Path into the Left-Hand Path, White Magic into Black. True Devotion is characteristic of the jīvas on the *nivṛitti-mārga*, the Path of Renunciation; pseudo-Devotion is found on the other Path; Worship on both.

Knowing Hari [the Universal Self, from the metaphysical or transcendental standpoint, and the larger individuality of the Logos or Ruler of our cosmic system, from the empirical standpoint] to *be* all beings [of the whole world-process, or of our system], the wise should extend *bhakti*, love, devotion, to all beings undeviatingly.<sup>2</sup>

To have to use the words inferior and superior and equal in such connections looks awkward, no doubt, because of the long-established emotional associations of these words. But it is hoped that in the present psychological analysis of emotions, only the strictly and rigorously scientific significance of the words will be looked at, and all other ordinary associations discarded for the time being. Without such temporary balancing of the mind, useful discussion of the subject will remain impossible.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the statement that “only the greater can give to the lesser” may appear objectionable to minds full of the purest devotion, that are ever ready to give all for the service of the object of their devotion, and yet are also ever full of the sense of their own littleness and inferiority, where the object of devotion is a Master or a God. But what has been said before in analysis of Devotion may help to bring out the true significance of this. To that may be added here: the words “greater” and “smaller,” “superior” and “inferior,” “higher” and “lower,” “older” and “younger,” *etc.*, which should always be interpreted in a comparative sense within restricted limits, as, “in this particular respect only,” “so far only.” What is very inferior altogether, may equally undoubtedly be distinctly greater in some one little respect. Because it is smaller *on the whole*, is no reason why it should not be clearly superior in one particular matter. Because man is superior to the elephant, it does not follow that he is superior to it in physical strength also. There is no breach of reverence involved in the recognition of a truth. Consider the cases of genuine self-sacrifice of life by one for the sake of another. In the moment of such sacrifice, the maker of it invariably rises above the object for the protection or saving or helping of whom the sacrifice is made. The words

---

<sup>1</sup> *Āsura, daitya, rākshasa, etc.* See *Bhagavad-Gita*, ch. xvi.

<sup>2</sup> *Vishnu-Purāna* I, xix, 9

<sup>3</sup> [In order to understand the meaning of Superiority, Equality, and Inferiority in this context, from a psychological perspective, look up definitions on pp. 36-43 in *The Science of the Emotions*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. of 1908; pp. 65-74, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., of 1924]



used themselves indicate this. In the *Purānas* we have instances of how, by acts of sacrifice, the younger becomes truly the elder of his elders.<sup>1</sup> And this is but in accordance with the metaphysical law which requires that none shall be really and essentially greater or smaller than any other, but that (the whole of time and space and motion being considered) all shall be equal, for indeed they are *One*; and we see the reflection of this inner metaphysical fact and law, in and on outer practical human life, in the incontrovertible fact that the greatest are absolutely dependent in some vital respects on the so-called smallest (*e.g.*, the municipalities of the greatest capitals of the earth on their scavenging staff), and *vice versa*, of course. All are inter-related and none can do without others.

### Loyalty and Fidelity are lesser grades of Devotion.

The element of desire, the desire of co-operation, co-service, is less active, less urgent, here; it waits for an occasion instead of seeking one, or even seeking to create one, as Devotion in its excess of zeal sometimes does. Etymologically, loyalty is lealty,<sup>2</sup> legality, lawfulness, fidelity to law, the readiness to give such service as is lawfully due. Hence, as law involved right and duty, there is necessarily implied an element of reciprocation in loyalty. Sovereign and people have to be loyal to each other. Loyalty has to be two-sided, and not only one-sided, it has to be mutual, if it is to last; though the man in authority, to whom power has been entrusted for public service, has always tended to think that everything is due to him and nothing from him, that he is public master instead of public servant.



- “Devotion in the Bhagavad Gita,”
- “Devotional Songs of Kabir,”
- “Divine vs. Worldly Love,”
- “Heart Doctrine and Higher Ethics,”
- “Narada Bhakti Sutra,”
- “The Story of Narada and the Supremacy of Bhakti,

— in our Higher Ethics and Devotion Series.

---

<sup>1</sup> Puru, the son, gives his youth to Yayāti, the father, and wins greater fame and honour. Sudeva, the soldier-servant of Ambarīsha, who was a typical devotee of the Lord, rises to higher worlds than his master because he has sacrificed his body in battle-service. In modern literature, Fouquet, in a burst of pitying tenderness, rightly calls the king whose servant he is, “my son,” when he has saved him from the imminent danger of lifelong imprisonment in a dungeon, at great risk and loss to himself (Dumas’ *Le Vicomte de Bragelonne*). The ex-convict and robber, Jean Valjean, “rises above” the good Bishop, in the opening scenes of Victor Hugo’s *Les Misérables*.

<sup>2</sup> [Archaic Scottish for loyalty, from Anglo-Norman *lealtà*, one of the variants of old French *loiauté*.]