

Devotion, Worship, Loyalty



Abstract and train of thoughts

True devotion versus pseudo-devotion.

True Devotion is characteristic of the aspirant on the Path of Renunciation; pseudo-Devotion is found on the other Path; Worship on both. 3

Loyalty and Fidelity are lesser grades of Devotion. 7

Shelley on the devotion of the moth for the star.

The Paths of action, renunciation, and their endless variants.

Irreverence, profanity, and flippancy are incipient fear + the desire to belittle.

In order to remove the element that causes the fear, and thereby to gain for oneself the consciousness of increase, in contrast with the belittlement of the other. 9

Suggested reading for students.

More commonly confusing words. 11

Further reading on devotion. 13

Further reading on e-motions. 13



True devotion versus pseudo-devotion.

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From Bhagavān Dās.¹ *The Science of the Emotions*. Adyar: Theosophical Publishing House, 1924 (3rd ed.). pp. 151-59. A searchable PDF of the 2nd ed., of 1908, can be found in our Constitution of Man Series.

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

¹ Dr. Bhagwan Dās was born at Varanasi on 12th January 1869. After a brilliant career as a student, he joined government service as a deputy collector. But he was too great a man to remain a relatively minor government official for long. Learning, more especially of religions and philosophy, was of absorbing interest to him. For a time he came under the influence of Dr. Annie Besant in collaboration with whom he founded the Central Hindu College. This institution developed in time into the Benares Hindu University. Later, he founded the Kashi Vidyā Pith, a national university and was its head for a number of years.

He was not only a philosopher, but a prominent public figure as well. He was an esteemed member of the Central Legislative Assembly of undivided India. He presided at a number of social and political conferences. He was associated with the Hindustani Culture Society and was president of the National Committee on Communal Riots. As a fighter for national freedom, he courted imprisonment.

An erudite scholar in Sanskrit, he coined a large number of Hindi words. He wrote no less than 30 books, a number of them in Sanskrit and Hindi. A majority of his works concern philosophy and ancient Indian lore. He studied other religions, as also diverse subjects like psychology and socialism. He wrote books on these subjects as well. He was thus a many-sided personality with achievements to his credit in several fields. His pre-eminently distinguished position in the country was recognised when the highest national award of Bharat Ratna was conferred upon him. He passed away on 18th September 1958, rich in years and in honours.

Dr. Bhagwan Dās will be chiefly remembered as a thinker. He tried to bring the West nearer to the east and made the old intelligible in terms of the modern. He wrote:

. . . the thoughts, the ideals, the ways of human communities require exogamous alliances . . . for a new lease of richer life. Any honest exchange of commodities spiritual, as well as material, is profitable to both the parties concerned.

He was a great believer, in synthesis. To quote him again,

In essentials, in principles, in great things, unity; in non-essentials . . . liberty; in all things, charity; this should be our guiding star.

This great son of India is no more, but the ideas which he expounded live on. The Indian P & T Department is happy to issue a special postage stamp in memory of the great philosopher on the occasion of his birth centenary. — [Indian Post](#)]

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.¹

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 offerings 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”² 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,

¹ *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* (2021), the first of our Major Works Series. — ED. PHIL.]

² *Āsura*, *daitya*, *rākshasa*, etc. See *Bhagavad-Gīta*, ch. xvi.

or of our system], the wise should extend *bhakti*, love, devotion, to all beings undeviatingly.¹

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.² 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 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.³ 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.

¹ *Vishnu-Purāna* I, xix, 9

² [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*, 2nd ed. of 1908; pp. 65-74, 3rd ed., of 1924]

³ 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*.

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,¹ 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.

Shelley on the devotion of the moth for the star.

Composed in 1822 by Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822), and published in the *Posthumous Poems of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, by John and Henry L. Hunt in 1824.

One word is too often profaned
For me to profane it,
One feeling too falsely disdained
For thee to disdain it;
One hope is too like despair
For prudence to smother,
And pity from thee more dear
Than that from another.

I can give not what men call love,
But wilt thou accept not
The worship the heart lifts above
And the Heavens reject not,—
The desire of the moth for the star,
Of the night for the morrow,
The devotion to something afar
From the sphere of our sorrow?



¹ [Archaic Scottish for loyalty, from Anglo-Norman *lealté*, one of the variants of old French *loiauté*.]

The Paths of action, renunciation, and their endless variants.

Modified after *The Science of the Emotions*, p. 472 fn. in *From Compassion: The Spirit of Truth* (2021).

- The Path of Action is the path of attachment to, of engagement in and pursuit of the material life, or arc of a monad's descent to objectivity.
- The Path of Renunciation is the path of detachment from, of disengagement from and renunciation of the material life, or arc of a monad's ascent to subjectivity.

The whole of the ancient Indian theory and practice of Life is embodied in these two words, Action and Renunciation, and their endless variants:

	Action	Renunciation
Bhagavad Gita	Raga Sa-kama Shakti	Vairagya Nish-kama A-shakti
Buddhism	Tanha	Nirvana
Christianity	Sin	Salvation
Jaina	Sanchara	Prati-sanchara
Mimansa	Karman	Nais-karmya
Modern Science	Disintegration Evolution	Integration Involution
Narada Bhakti Sutra	Worldly Love	Devotional Love
Nyaya	Sarga	Apavarga
Sankhya	Iha	Upa-rama
Smritis and Puranas	Pravritti	Nivritti ¹
Solar Bird of Life (In and out of time)	Hamsa (a-ham-sa) (I) am He	Soham (sah-aham) He (is) I
Vaisheshika	Duhkha	Nis-shreyas
Vedanta	Bandha	Moksha
Yoga	Vyutthana	Nirodha

The underlying idea of all these pairs is the same. Each pair expresses only a somewhat different aspect or shade of the same fact. Indeed, it may be said, *all* pairs of opposites whatsoever are but expressions of the infinite shades of that same fact.

¹ Cf. *Mahatma Letter* 15 (67) p. 89; 3rd Combined ed. [Contrasting Svabhāva with Fohat]

Irreverence, profanity, and flippancy are incipient fear + the desire to belittle.

In order to remove the element that causes the fear, and thereby to gain for oneself the consciousness of increase, in contrast with the belittlement of the other.

From Bhagavān Dās. *The Science of the Emotions*. Adyar: Theosophical Publishing House, 1924 (3rd ed.). pp. 224-26.

Irreverence, Profanity, Flippancy, are incipient Fear plus the desire to belittle, so as to remove the element that causes the fear, in conversation with others; and also thereby to gain for oneself the consciousness of increase, in contrast with the belittlement of the other. They are distinguishable from that good-humoured and easy talk which is due simply to the fact that the speaker is more familiar with the subject than others, and therefore moves therein or thereabout with greater ease. A loyal “subject” may speak of the sovereign whom he has never seen and reveres from a distance as “His Majesty,” and never in any more familiar fashion.¹ A minister who is less removed from him, speaks of him as the king, or even by name. In both, the emotion is on the side of Love. But neither may speak of a genuine king as “the figure-head of the state.” There, the emotion would be on the wrong side, and so a case of flippancy, assuming, of course, that the king did not really deserve such a title. In the first case we have the familiarity of affection; in the second, of contempt. The so-called deadening of any emotion, with reference to any object, by repetition of contact with that object, wherever it really occurs, is due to the fact that other subsidiary emotions, such as that of surprise, etc. which are peculiar to every *new* experience, do not arise in the repetition of it and therefore the total general stimulation or excitement is less.² The matter might be put thus in other words:

¹ It may be noted that the word “subject” (from *sub*, under, and *jacere*, to throw), is inherently ugly. It means the “down-trodden,” and is necessarily in contrasting relation with a tyrannical despot as “sovereign.” There is no word in Sanskrit corresponding to “subject.” *Prajā*, the people, means, etymologically, the “progeny” of Brahmā, the *Prajā-pati*, the Creator, the Protector of the “progeny”; and *rājā*, the king, etymologically means “the pleaser” of the people. It is obvious that “loyalty” from “subject” to “sovereign” is absurdly impossible to give and viciously arrogant to ask for. The high word “loyalty,” lealty, legality, means “lawful” *reciprocal* love and duty between People and Protector, between Public and Public Servant. One-sided loyalty is a sin. The king owes, if possible, even more loyalty to the citizen than the citizen to the king, or other head of the state, the chief public servant.

² See, on this point, Goethe’s view, quoted in that generally very useful work, by Harald Høffding, *Outlines of Psychology*, p. 282:

When we have such a [fine] sight for the first time, the unaccustomed soul expands, and there is a painful happiness, an excess of delight, which stirs the soul and draws out blissful tears. Through this process the soul becomes greater without knowing it and is no longer capable of that first sensation. Man thinks he has lost, but he has gained; what he loses in pleasure, he gains in inner growth.

But this seems still to require further explanation, as in the text above.

It is not so much that “the emotions blunt themselves by repetition,”¹ as that the same circumstances, generally speaking, do not arouse the same amount of emotion a second time, for even if all the other circumstances be present, the element of surprise, which startles and arrests the attention and so makes the impression deeper, is wanting; but if there is a cumulation of *new* pleasures or pains, additional soft caresses or petty annoyances, then we have a corresponding cumulative effect in the resultant emotion; “desires grow with what they feed upon, as fire with fuel” and “love groweth out of association,” etc.



¹ James, *Principles of Psychology*, II p. 475

Suggested reading for students.



More commonly confusing words.

- ADULTERY, LUST, MALICE
- ADYTUM AND ASYLUM
- AETHER AND ETHER
- AGNOSTICISM, ATHEISM, MONISM
- AION, ETERNITY, DURATION
- APPREHENSION AND COMPREHENSION
- ASTRAL LIGHT IS A TERM VERY LITTLE UNDERSTOOD
- AURA AND MAGNETISM
- BUDDHA AND PRINCE SIDDHARTHA BUDDHA
- BUDHISM IS INNER WISDOM
- CELIBACY, CONTINENCE, MONASTICISM
- CHEMIST AND ALCHEMIST
- CHILIASTS, MILLENNIUMISTS, MILLENARIANS
- DARKNESS IS INNER LIGHT
- EMANATION AND RADIATION
- EMBLEM AND SYMBOL
- GRAIKOS, HELLENE, HELLAS
- HIGHER SELF AND HIGHER EGO
- IMAGINATION AND IMITATION
- JIVA AND JIVATMAN
- JNANA AND YAJNA
- KAMIC VERSUS MANASIC ACTION
- KARMA AND KRIYA
- KARMA, NEMESIS, ADRASTEIA, THEMIS
- KOSMOS AND COSMOS
- KRONOS AND CHRONOS

CONFUSING WORDS SERIES
SUGGESTED READING FOR STUDENTS

- LAUGHTER, SMILES, TEARS
- LIGHT AND HEAT
- LUST, JEALOUSY, PHYSICAL LOVE
- MAGNETISM, MESMERISM, HYPNOTISM
- MATERIALISM, SPIRITUALISM, MONISM
- MUZIRIS, MNIZURIN, MNOUZIRIS
- NIRVANA AND PARINIRVANA
- PANTACLE AND PENTACLE
- RAJA AND RISHI
- REMEMBRANCE, RECOLLECTION, REMINISCENCE
- SKANDHA, SHLOKA, STANZA, SUTRA
- SPIRIT, SPIRITS, SPIRITUALISM
- SPIRITUALISM IS A PHILOSOPHY OF YESTERDAY
- SVABHAVA AND SVAYAMBHU
- TELETE, MYESIS, EPOPTeia
- THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL OCCULTISM
- THEOSOPHIST AND THEOSOPHER
- TRANSMIGRATION, REINCARNATION, GILGULIM
- TRIRATNA AND TRISHARANA
- TRUE AND FALSE PERSONALITY
- UNITY AND DUALITY
- VACH IS NOT MERE SPEECH
- VEDANTA, BUDDHISM, THEOSOPHY
- VRIL AND BOVRIL
- WILL AND DESIRE
- YOGIS AND MAHATMAS





Further reading on devotion.

- CHAITANYA'S DEVOTIONAL PRAYER, in our Mystic Verse and Insights Series.
- DEVOTION IN THE BHAGAVAD GITA, in our Higher Ethics and Devotion Series.
- DEVOTION OF THE MOTH FOR THE STAR, in our Mystic Verse and Insights Series.
- DEVOTIONAL SONGS OF KABIR, in our Higher Ethics and Devotion Series.
- DIVINE VS. WORLDLY LOVE, in our Higher Ethics and Devotion Series.
- HEART DOCTRINE AND HIGHER ETHICS, in our Higher Ethics and Devotion Series.
- NARADA BHAKTI SUTRA, in our Higher Ethics and Devotion Series.
- THE DEVOTIONAL LOVE AND NOBLE ASPIRATIONS OF LOWER MANAS, in our Constitution of Man Series.
- THE STORY OF NARADA AND THE SUPREMACY OF BHAKTI, in our Higher Ethics and Devotion Series.
- WORSHIP OF PLANETARY SPIRITS IS IDOLATROUS ASTROLATRY, in our Planetary Rounds and Globes Series.

Further reading on e-motions.

- ADULTERY, LUST, MALICE, in our Confusing Words Series.
- ANGELS WEEP AT THE SIGHT OF HUMAN SORROW, in our Higher Ethics and Devotion Series.
- BHAGAVAN DAS ON THE TRIUNE NATURE OF EMOTIONS, in our Constitution of Man Series.
- DIVINE VERSUS WORLDLY LOVE, in our Higher Ethics and Devotion Series.
- FROM THE STRONGHOLD OF YOUR SOUL, CHASE ALL YOUR FOES AWAY, in our Constitution of Man Series.
- LOW BUFFOONERY AND MOCKING LAUGHS, in our Constitution of Man Series.

