

CHAPTER TWENTY

Pure Devotional Service Surpasses Knowledge and Detachment

The processes of karma-yoga, jñāna-yoga and bhakti-yoga are explained in this chapter, in terms of the presence of different good and bad qualities in particular candidates.

The Vedic śāstras are the words expressing the order of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. In these Vedic literatures is found an outlook of duality, based on such concepts as the varṇāśrama system, and at the same time the Vedas reject this dualistic vision. Uddhava, desiring to understand the reason why the scriptures contain such conflicting ideas, and how these might be reconciled, inquired from Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa about this matter. In response the Supreme Lord replied that the Vedas describe the processes of karma-yoga, jñāna-yoga and bhakti-yoga for facilitating the attainment of liberation. Karma-yoga is designated for those persons who are not detached and who are full of gross desires; jñāna-yoga is for those who are detached from the fruits of activity and have given up material endeavors; and bhakti-yoga is for those persons who have taken to the principle of yukta-vairāgya, appropriate renunciation. As long as one has not become uninterested in enjoying the fruits of one's work, or as long as one's faith in the topics of discussion of the Supreme Personality of Godhead on the path of devotional service has not awakened, then one must continue to fulfill all the prescribed duties of his karma. But neither the renunciant nor the devotee of the Supreme Lord need carry out ritualistic duties.

Persons who follow their own duty, who abandon that which is forbidden and who are free from greed and other unhealthy characteristics attain either monistic knowledge or else, if they are fortunate, devotion to the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Such knowledge and devotion can be achieved in the human form of life, which is therefore a desirable object both for those living in hell and for the demigods. The human body, even though it awards the whole purpose of existence in the form of knowledge and devotion, is ephemeral; therefore one who is discriminating should soberly strive for liberation before death comes. The human body is like a boat, Śrī Gurudeva is the helmsman, and the mercy of the Supreme Lord is the favorable breeze. If the person who has attained such a rare boat in the

form of the human body does not desire to cross over the ocean of material existence, he is in fact the killer of the soul. The mind is fickle, but one should not indifferently allow it to act as it will. Rather, one should conquer the senses and the vital air and by intelligence endowed with the qualities of goodness should bring the mind under control.

Until the mind finally becomes stable, one should continue to meditate about the process of the creation of all material things in sequence from subtle to gross and of their destruction in reverse sequence of gross to subtle. One who has a sense of detachment and renunciation can give up false identification with the body and other sense objects by constantly studying the instructions of his spiritual master. By the yoga practice of yama, niyama and so forth, by cultivation of transcendental knowledge and by worship of and meditation upon the Supreme Personality of Godhead, one can remember the Supersoul.

Virtue, or *guṇa*, means to remain steadfast in the object of one's particular platform of qualification. By developing the desire to reject one's accumulated material association by pursuing the injunctions of what is good and what is bad, all of one's inauspicious material activities become diminished. By devotional service to the Supreme Personality of Godhead all perfections are achieved. Anyone who renders service to the Supreme Lord by constant devotional service will be able to steadily fix his mind upon the Supreme Lord, and thus all desires for sense gratification sitting within the heart will be destroyed to the root. When one directly perceives the presence of the Supreme Lord, his false ego becomes completely eradicated; all of his doubts are shattered, and heaps of material activities become diminished to nil. For this reason the devotees of the Supreme Personality of Godhead do not consider knowledge and renunciation to be the means for achieving the highest benefit. Only in the heart of a person who is devoid of material desire and disinterested in material things can devotional service to the Lord arise. The piety and impiety that result from ritualistic injunctions and prohibitions cannot be applied to the unalloyed pure devotees of the Supreme Lord.

Text 1:

Śrī Uddhava said: My dear lotus-eyed Kṛṣṇa, You are the Supreme Lord, and thus the Vedic literatures, consisting of positive and negative

injunctions, constitute Your order. Such literatures focus upon the good and bad qualities of work.

Text 2:

According to Vedic literature, the superior and inferior varieties found in the human social system, varṇāśrama, are due to pious and sinful modes of family planning. Thus piety and sin are constant points of reference in the Vedic analysis of the components of a given situation — namely the material ingredients, place, age and time. Indeed, the Vedas reveal the existence of material heaven and hell, which are certainly based on piety and sin.

Text 3:

Without seeing the difference between piety and sin, how can one understand Your own instructions in the form of Vedic literatures, which order one to act piously and forbid one to act sinfully? Furthermore, without such authorized Vedic literatures, which ultimately award liberation, how can human beings achieve the perfection of life?

Text 4:

My dear Lord, to understand those things beyond direct experience — such as spiritual liberation or the attainment of heaven and similar material enjoyments — and in general to understand the means and end of all things, it is imperative that the forefathers, demigods and human beings consult the Vedic literatures, for these literatures, being Your own laws, constitute the highest evidence and revelation.

Text 5:

My dear Lord, the distinction observed between piety and sin comes from Your own Vedic knowledge and does not arise by itself. If the same Vedic literature subsequently nullifies such distinction between piety and sin, there will certainly be confusion.

Text 6:

The Supreme Personality of Godhead said: My dear Uddhava, because I desire that human beings may achieve perfection, I have presented three paths of advancement — the path of knowledge, the path of work and the path of devotion. Besides these three there is absolutely no other means of elevation.

Text 7:

Among these three paths, jñāna-yoga, the path of philosophical speculation, is recommended for those who are disgusted with material life and are thus detached from ordinary, fruitive activities. Those who are not disgusted with material life, having many desires yet to fulfill, should seek perfection through the path of karma-yoga.

Text 8:

If somehow or other by good fortune one develops faith in hearing and chanting My glories, such a person, being neither disgusted with nor very much attached to material life, should achieve perfection through the path of loving devotion to Me.

Text 9:

As long as one is not satiated by fruitive activity and has not awakened his taste for devotional service by śravaṇaṁ kīrtanaṁ viṣṇoḥ, one has to act according to the regulative principles of the Vedic injunctions.

Text 10:

My dear Uddhava, a person who is situated in his prescribed duty, properly worshiping by Vedic sacrifices but not desiring the fruitive result of such worship, will not go to the heavenly planets; similarly, by not performing forbidden activities he will not go to hell.

Text 11:

One who is situated in his prescribed duty, free from sinful activities and cleansed of material contamination, in this very life obtains transcendental knowledge or, by fortune, devotional service unto Me.

Text 12:

The residents of both heaven and hell desire human birth on the earth planet because human life facilitates the achievement of transcendental knowledge and love of Godhead, whereas neither heavenly nor hellish bodies efficiently provide such opportunities.

Text 13:

A human being who is wise should never desire promotion to heavenly planets or residence in hell. Indeed, a human being should also never

desire permanent residence on the earth, for by such absorption in the material body one becomes foolishly negligent of one's actual self-interest.

Text 14:

A wise person, knowing that although the material body is subject to death it can still award the perfection of one's life, should not foolishly neglect to take advantage of this opportunity before death arrives.

Text 15:

Without attachment, a bird gives up the tree in which his nest was constructed when that tree is cut down by cruel men who are like death personified, and thus the bird achieves happiness in another place.

Text 16:

Knowing that one's duration of life is being similarly cut down by the passing of days and nights, one should be shaken by fear. In this way, giving up all material attachment and desire, one understands the Supreme Lord and achieves perfect peace.

Text 17:

The human body, which can award all benefit in life, is automatically obtained by the laws of nature, although it is a very rare achievement. This human body can be compared to a perfectly constructed boat having the spiritual master as the captain and the instructions of the Personality of Godhead as favorable winds impelling it on its course. Considering all these advantages, a human being who does not utilize his human life to cross the ocean of material existence must be considered the killer of his own soul.

Text 18:

A transcendentalist, having become disgusted and hopeless in all endeavors for material happiness, completely controls the senses and develops detachment. By spiritual practice he should then fix the mind on the spiritual platform without deviation.

Text 19:

Whenever the mind, being concentrated on the spiritual platform, is suddenly deviated from its spiritual position, one should carefully bring it under the control of the self by following the prescribed means.

Text 20:

One should never lose sight of the actual goal of mental activities, but rather, conquering the life air and senses and utilizing intelligence strengthened by the mode of goodness, one should bring the mind under the control of the self.

Text 21:

An expert horseman, desiring to tame a headstrong horse, first lets the horse have his way for a moment and then, pulling the reins, gradually places the horse on the desired path. Similarly, the supreme yoga process is that by which one carefully observes the movements and desires of the mind and gradually brings them under full control.

Text 22:

Until one's mind is fixed in spiritual satisfaction, one should analytically study the temporary nature of all material objects, whether cosmic, earthly or atomic. One should constantly observe the process of creation through the natural progressive function and the process of annihilation through the regressive function.

Text 23:

When a person is disgusted with the temporary, illusory nature of this world and is thus detached from it, his mind, guided by the instructions of his spiritual master, considers again and again the nature of this world and eventually gives up the false identification with matter.

Text 24:

Through the various disciplinary regulations and the purificatory procedures of the yoga system, through logic and spiritual education or through worship and adoration of Me, one should constantly engage his mind in remembering the Personality of Godhead, the goal of yoga. No other means should be employed for this purpose.

Text 25:

If, because of momentary inattention, a yogī accidentally commits an abominable activity, then by the very practice of yoga he should burn to ashes the sinful reaction, without at any time employing any other procedure.

Text 26:

It is firmly declared that the steady adherence of transcendentalists to their respective spiritual positions constitutes real piety and that sin occurs when a transcendentalist neglects his prescribed duty. One who adopts this standard of piety and sin, sincerely desiring to give up all past association with sense gratification, is able to subdue materialistic activities, which are by nature impure.

Texts 27-28:

Having awakened faith in the narrations of My glories, being disgusted with all material activities, knowing that all sense gratification leads to misery, but still being unable to renounce all sense enjoyment, My devotee should remain happy and worship Me with great faith and conviction. Even though he is sometimes engaged in sense enjoyment, My devotee knows that all sense gratification leads to a miserable result, and he sincerely repents such activities.

Text 29:

When an intelligent person engages constantly in worshipping Me through loving devotional service as described by Me, his heart becomes firmly situated in Me. Thus all material desires within the heart are destroyed.

Text 30:

The knot in the heart is pierced, all misgivings are cut to pieces and the chain of fruitive actions is terminated when I am seen as the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

Text 31:

Therefore, for a devotee engaged in My loving service, with mind fixed on Me, the cultivation of knowledge and renunciation is generally not the means of achieving the highest perfection within this world.

Texts 32-33:

Everything that can be achieved by fruitive activities, penance, knowledge, detachment, mystic yoga, charity, religious duties and all other means of perfecting life is easily achieved by My devotee through loving service unto Me. If somehow or other My devotee desires promotion to

heaven, liberation, or residence in My abode, he easily achieves such benedictions.

Text 34:

Because My devotees possess saintly behavior and deep intelligence, they completely dedicate themselves to Me and do not desire anything besides Me. Indeed, even if I offer them liberation from birth and death, they do not accept it.

Text 35:

It is said that complete detachment is the highest stage of freedom. Therefore, one who has no personal desire and does not pursue personal rewards can achieve loving devotional service unto Me.

Text 36:

Material piety and sin, which arise from the good and evil of this world, cannot exist within My unalloyed devotees, who, being free from material hankering, maintain steady spiritual consciousness in all circumstances. Indeed, such devotees have achieved Me, the Supreme Lord, who am beyond anything that can be conceived by material intelligence.

Text 37:

Persons who seriously follow these methods of achieving Me, which I have personally taught, attain freedom from illusion, and upon reaching My personal abode they perfectly understand the Absolute Truth.