

Devotee.

By Hanuman Prasad Poddar.

Some people, these days, have persuaded themselves to believe that the path of Devotion is strewn with roses and that one can become a perfect devotee even though wallowing in the mire of sins and gross vice. This accounts for the fact that any number of the so-called Bhaktas can be had in India to-day. There are people who repeat the name of God once or twice out of lust, anger, avarice, or hypocrisy, or wear the costume of a devotee, and proclaim themselves Bhaktas. They never stop to think that a *Bhakta* has to undergo fiery ordeals, that he is required to quaff poison with all reverence and love, taking it to be a gift of God, and that he has to give up all attachment, with

sensual enjoyments and luxuries, worldly possessions and even his dear and near ones, and dedicate himself with all his being to the Lord. True devotion is attained only by serving the Lord in a disinterested way through the performance of one's legitimate duties, after comprehending the nature of God through spiritual knowledge. A devotee is God's own man (*निजजन*). The Lord bears the whole burden of his *योगक्षेम* (supplying his wants and preserving what he has already attained) and takes upon himself the duty of looking after his comforts and protecting him against all mishaps. Hence a devotee is altogether free from sins and afflictions. He embodies in himself the highest

ideal for the world to follow, for he manifests in himself the divine virtues of the Lord. Only such devotees are dear to the Lord, and it is for the redemption of such devotees alone that He holds himself responsible. A devotee dedicates his heart, his mind and intellect, his body, his family, his wealth and other possessions, nay, his very desires and ambitions, and everything else, to the Lord, and becomes free from cares and anxieties. He finds his Lord pervading the whole universe; hence he offers his love to all the creatures of the world, moving and motionless, and is almost mad after serving them. In Tulasidas' *Ramayan* Lord Sri Rama characterises a devotee thus:—

सो अनन्य जाकी असि मति न टै हनुमंत ।
मैं सेवक सचराचर रूपरासि भगवंत ॥

"Know him to be My exclusive devotee who always looks upon the universe as My image and is keen to serve it as such."

The life of such an exclusive devotee is wholly dedicated to the Lord: all his actions are God's actions. He is solely devoted to the Lord and worships Him alone. He has no attachment with anything connected with the world and bears ill-will against none, nay, not even against those who bear a hostile attitude towards him. He knows nobody except his Lord and finds His divine activity manifested everywhere and at all times in the universe. Life and death are equally agreeable to him. A Hindi poet has well said:—

जीवन-मरण चरणके चाकर, चिन्तारहित चित्त है नित्य ।

"He looks upon life and death as subservient to the will of his Lord; his mind is therefore always free from worries and anxieties."

He never feels wearied of his existence, nor does he ever shudder at the thought of death. If death—which is so terrible in the eyes of the world—ever presents itself before him with a view to pleasing the Lord, he finds it very attractive and runs to embrace it with great love and ardour. He feels that no one else but his Lord has appeared before him in the guise of death, to bless him with a vision of His divine form and to take him in his arms. He recalls to his mind the declaration made by the Lord in the *Gita*, viz., that "He is all-devouring Death" (मृत्युः सर्वदण्डाहृत्), and greets Him in that form with a heart full of joy. That is why a devotee cheerfully lays down his life at the altar of his faith in order to please his Lord. He deems it a proud privilege to part with his life for the sake of the Lord. He hastens to sacrifice his life, just as a pauper runs after money, wherever, whenever and in whatever manner he feels he is called upon by the Lord to part with it. The poet Narayana says:—

जो सिर सँटै हरि मिले तो हरि लीजै दौर ।

नारायन ना देखें गौहक आवै और ॥

"If you can get hold of the Lord even by wagering your head for it, you will be well-advised to do so at once. Who knows, says Narayana, another customer may come forward in the meanwhile."

Such devotees carry their head in the palm of their hands, as it were, seeking an opportunity to lay it at the feet of the Lord ! And they consider themselves very lucky if they can make it of any use to the Lord. That is the reason why even the gravest danger cannot deflect them from the path of righteousness; nay, not even the greatest calamity can deter them from following the path of God-realization—

यस्मिन् स्थितो न दुःखेन गुरुणापि विन्वास्यते ॥

(*Gita* 6. 22.)

Wild elephants, mad with fury, were let loose against Prahlada to trample him under their feet; attempts were made to have him bitten by huge venomous serpents; magic spells and deceitful tricks were also used against him; nay, he was hurled from high mountain-peaks, pent up in a dark cell filled with poisonous gases and crushed under the dead weight of huge rocks; but Prahlada was firm like a mountain. His faith in the Lord was unshakeable and he would not budge an inch from his determination. He did not give way to fear nor did he die. He emerged safe from all these ordeals, leaving his father in great bewilderment. Hiranyakasipu had at last to acknowledge the superiority of his son's prowess and wondered how intrepid he was, even though a child. Now, where did the strength of Prahlada lie? What superhuman power did he possess which enabled him to set at naught the vast resources of his mighty father and to baffle all the attempts made by him upon his life? The answer is—he was a devotee of God, his heart was overflowing with divine Love. He had placed himself entirely in the charge of the mighty Lord of the universe and had accordingly become fearless and free from all sorts of worries and anxieties. He strongly believed—nay, actually perceived—that the whole universe was pervaded by the Lord, that everything in the world was an image of the Lord. Thus whatever weapons Hiranyakasipu used to make short work of him appeared to him as God Himself. Such being the case, how could the Lord kill His own devotee? Nay, in order to vindicate the truth of his statement and to give ocular proof of his omnipresence the Lord who pervades the whole universe in His unmanifest form emerged out of a stone pillar in a wonderful

form, half-man, half-lion. A Hindi poet has beautifully expressed this idea in the following line:—

प्रेम बड़ो प्रह्लादहिको जिन पाहनते परमेशुर कादे ।

“Great, indeed, was the love of Prahlada who manifested God out of a stone pillar.”

Mira cheerfully drank the cup of poison sent to her by her brother-in-law; the celebrated Bhakta Haridas willingly underwent the tortures inflicted on his person by the Mohammedan officers, loudly chanting the names of the Lord all the time, and begged forgiveness of the Lord for the sins of his oppressors. This should not be taken to mean that devotees are cowards and hence they put up with every wrong. A coward can never be forbearing. He is afraid of death and would always try to avoid danger. He would in his heart of hearts resent a wrong done to him and would even curse the wrong-doer. The heart of a devotee, however, is always replete with forgiveness, compassion, harmlessness, love and other such virtues. That is why he harms no one. Nay, he seeks to do good to others even though he may have to undergo some hardships in doing so. He does a good turn even to those who harm him. Hence ignorant people take him to be weak and cowardly. In fact, however, devotees are very brave. Forgiveness, harmlessness, compassion, etc. are virtues subsisting in those who are brave, and not in cowards. People, these days, assume the garb of devotees, while their heart is tormented by fears of various kinds. Assuming the existence of spirits and ghosts, they begin to tremble out of fear, while going along a particular road. For fear of catching infection they give up nursing their own dear and near ones who may be suffering from an infectious disease, and thus

demonstrate their callousness. For fear of incurring opprobrium in society or losing their false prestige they are loth to abandon even such customs as are ostensibly sinful. They hesitate in giving up their vicious practices even though knowing them to be such. They lend their moral support to an unjust and unrighteous rule for fear of being sent to gaol or fined. They take leave of divine virtues like truthfulness, harmlessness and honesty, for fear of incurring loss of wealth and property. Nay, they coax and cajole sinners and wrongdoers and knowingly support them with a selfish motive. Surely, all this is not Bhakta-like. A devotee never swerves from the path of duty out of fear, nor does he ever commit a sin out of greed or fear. He never hesitates in abandoning an immoral practice, nor does he give up nursing an invalid for fear of catching infection or losing his life. And he never countenances injustice. Having found shelter under the protecting feet of the Lord, he banishes fear out of his mind once for all, becomes fearless for all time to come. To behave civilly with all and to speak sweet and useful words becomes a second nature with him, although he is not afraid of even death in speaking the truth. When a man feels secure even after having taken shelter with an ordinary Police Officer or magistrate, how can one who has clung to the protecting feet of the Lord (who is the Devourer even of Death and a terror to the God of Death) be afraid of anyone? A baby resting in the comfortable lap of its mother can have no fear, no anxiety. One who is haunted by fear, even though believing himself to be a devotee of God who is the supreme Mother, Father and Grandfather, all in one (माता बाबा पितामहः), has neither appraised the worth of God nor has

he turned his face towards Him. On dedicating oneself to the Lord one has no room left for fear. It is His vow to render him immune from fear who betakes himself to the Lord only once:—

अमयं सर्वभूतेभ्यो ददाम्येतद्भ्रतं मम ॥

A true devotee can never abandon the path of virtue, the path of service of God, for fear of any harm befalling himself. His body, mind and money—all belongs to God. Under such circumstances what harm can befall him if he devotes them to the service of God. On the contrary, he considers his proud privilege and a matter of immense gratification to him to be able to do so. Hence a devotee regards himself very lucky if he dies in harness while nursing an invalid or spends his whole fortune in feeding the hungry and the poor.

Remembrance of God and repetition of His names becomes an automatic process with him like respiration. He has no duty left for himself except service of God. Whatever he does, even his bodily functions and daily routine such as eating and drinking, he does for the Lord. He survives in the world only because his Lord wants that he should continue to exist in that particular form and to be called by that particular name. He has no interest left in the world nor is he keen to renounce it. He has no attraction for worldly enjoyments nor does he decry renunciation. He conducts himself in accordance with the wishes of his Lord, dances to His tunes, and becomes an instrument in His hands. He is indifferent to honour and indignity as also to pleasure and pain. If the game of his Lord is accomplished by his being insulted or subjected to hardships, he rejoices in it. Likewise, if His drama

is properly enacted by his being honoured or made to enjoy pleasure, he gladly accepts both. He does not covet honour or worldly pleasures like those who are given to sense-gratification, nor does he show his aversion to them like one who has renounced the world. In accordance with some secret hint received from the Lord he applies himself whole-heartedly to that which pleases the Lord, which fulfils the game of the Lord, giving up all notions of shame and fear or gain and loss. He experiences great joy in doing so. To say nothing of worldly enjoyments, he considers even the bliss arising out of liberation as nothing compared to this joy. He does not accept the gift of salvation offered by the Lord Himself and takes delight only in serving the Lord as desired by Him—
 शिष्यमानं न युक्तं विना मत्सेवनं जनाः । Such a devotee is a natural friend of all. He does not take the life of any creature or inflict pain on anyone with a selfish motive, even for the sake of universal sovereignty or even heavenly bliss, much less for the sake of any worldly enjoyment or sensual pleasure. He is, however, always prepared even to offer battle to his enemies to vindicate a righteous cause and to kill and be killed for the sake of the Lord, in order to fulfil His game and in response to a hint from him. Vices like lust, anger, greed, hypocrisy, fear, pride, selfishness, violence, negligence, sloth and so on evacuate his heart once for all and vir-

tues like compassion, harmlessness, forgiveness, bravery, modesty, spirit of service, purity, selflessness, love, truthfulness, continence, serenity, self-control, absence of attachment with worldly enjoyments, dispassion, attachment with every one taken as an image of God, absence of pride, pride over one's connection with the Lord, contentment, even-mindedness, etc. develop in him, as a matter of course, as necessary adjuncts to Devotion. Ardour, perseverance, purity, faith, tranquillity, cheerfulness, etc. are his constant companions. He does not coerce others nor does he allow himself to be coerced by others. He never intimidates others nor is he afraid of anybody. He does not molest anyone nor does he fall molested by others.

He is the friend of all, everyone's kinsman and relation and a true servant of all. He is truth incarnate, an ocean of patience, an abode of forgiveness, a mass of splendour, fearlessness personified, and a store-house of love. Influenced by his pure and ideal behaviour, the hearts of worldly creatures naturally turn towards God. Such a devotee is really the most beloved and trusted messenger of God. He abides in the Lord at all times and the Lord always abides in the chamber of his heart.

तस्याहं न प्रणश्यामि स च मे न प्रणश्यति ॥

(*Gita* 6.30)

