

What is Shraddha?

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The first seed of bhakti-yoga is shraddha, faith, belief, but there is a substantial difference between what is called “certainty of belief” and “consider to be true” in bhakti and in other theology.

For the sake of one’s eternal peace and one’s eternal bliss, which means to behold and experience God, people and theology *void of* bhakti think that it is necessary to devote oneself to religion, and the first step to this is to believe, with inner certainty trust that *God is*, that His realm is, and that a certain inner and outer attitude towards Him and the path of redemption lead to Him.

All this is fundamentally different from the *bhakti* in the Bhagavatam and the other Shastras. Here *shraddha* is not only “consider to be true”, and in spite of not beholding [Him], still courageously put one’s trust in that He exists, that He has done this and that, and does so, but “shraddha yasya sevane”: certainty of belief or the firm conviction that seva, to render seva, to serve God, is life’s sole purpose. To believe that “God is” etc. is not enough; this is required of everyone who treads the paths of karma, jnana, or yoga. The certainty of belief that seva for Him, to serve Him, to spend oneself, now, physically, mentally, stronger, and stronger, and later with one’s cit-body, is the sole *purpose*, the one *and* only true *aim* of life; without a trace of ogling at the deliverance from the obstacles and the suffering that the body etc. are exposed to here in this world – or there, in His realm, where the situation of the lila, the Divine play, is intensifying, changing, at every moment (Cf. Bhagavatam 1.1.3, “dharmah

projjhita kaitavah”) – without ulterior motives of any kind, without every motive, including the ogling at moksha [liberation]; projjhita; free, empty, discarded, relinquished).

Here is a religion that is completely free from all desire for any form of personal advantage, i.e., adulterated service, free from kaitava, without deceit. God’s shakti is a potency of service, it can never come to me in unpolluted form, seize me, and make my whole being glow, if I do not fully accept this “free from kaitava”. Kaitava means ogling at physical, mental, spiritual advantages or having the advantage of enjoying one’s own individual atma and its absorption in the undifferentiated Brahman. This distinguishes true bhakti from every other religion on earth.

Shraddha in His seva, this is the seed that determines the nature of the whole tree of sadhana-, bhava-, and prema-bhakti, from the very beginning of bhakti to Radha’s Own bhakti. In the beginning: faith, belief [in seva] – and in the highest (Radha), the extreme of *actions*, knowing and deeds in Radha.

Shraddha in His seva, without this shraddha in His service *no one* is able to practise any of the angas, the limbs of sadhana-bhakti, not even to clean a temple or wash a bhakta’s clothes.

CC 2.49: “When someone has the unheard-of good fortune (45–48) to encounter a bhakta and in his close association (sanga) shraddha in Krishna-*bhakti* arises ... (krishnabhaktye shraddha yadi hay)

Bhakti-Rasamrita-Sindhu 1.2.14 (page 27): “When – due to unheard-of good fortune – shraddha in Bhagavan’s seva has arisen in a person, and he is neither too closely attached to the world, nor simply denies it, then he is adhikari, entitled to bhakti-sadhana.”

And at the highest stage: (CC 2.22.11): “Nitya-mukta is he who is eternally turned to Krishna’s lotus feet; is called Krishna’s parishada (eternal companion), and has the good fortune of rendering *seva*, the fortune of being allowed to serve Him.

From the cleaning of the portico in His temple to [Radha's] unmada, mana, scolding – the *joy of seva*! The bhakta experiences this joy, from the beginning (vaguely) to the highest stage of suffering in the separation [viraha] (to endure everything unselfishly, for the sake of His joy).

It is certainly human to desire happiness and bliss for oneself, but bhakti is not earthly-human. Bhakti is not enjoying the bliss that one has; it is the fortune of rejoicing in *seva* for Him, i.e., the *joy* that *He* has.

As soon as one forgets that the gopis do all *seva* for the sake of *His joy*, without any trace of expecting sukha (bliss, happiness) for themselves – something which the most ordinary bhakta already does – he is bound to stray and fall into sensuality and pursuit of pleasure. Therefore, from the simple sweeping of a temple to the listening to the Gita-Govindam etc.: who harbours any trace of selfishness is automatically excluded from all bhakti.

As *seva*, real actual service for His sake, for His joy, is both beginning *and* end, both method *and* goal (i.e., is eternal), it is perfectly clear that those who do not even have the ordinary *belief* that God is eternal *form* – which in itself is not a qualification to become a bhakta – but is of the opinion that the Absolute is without form, already from the beginning cannot have any trace of bhakti (*seva*, service [of God]), and that their tears, enthusiasm etc., by no means are a sign of an experience of God, but human, all too human sentimentality.

Mana, scolding etc. are forms of *seva* that the highest prema-parishads in the Vraja-lila [have and] do from time to time. Notice what *seva* means: with body, words, mind, soul, atma etc., with all ecstatic enthusiasm wanting to give *Him* delight, and really do so. And the experience that one has given *Him* delight, this is the enjoyment of the joy of *seva*.

This is not only something negative, unselfish; it is wanting to do *seva* for the sake of His joy, to give Him joy. By nature, bhakti is not human at all; it is *His potency*, which stems from the Eternal and not the human heart, however noble it may be.

Already the mere sweeping of the portico of the temple is *joy*. Have He and His parishads not said that it is my duty as novice on the bhakti path to do so? I do this because I know that He and His parishads have said in the Shastras that He is pleased when I do what *He* stipulates. This is what gives me joy.

I do this *for His sake*, not because He needs me, but because it pleases Him when I do the lowliest of all work as seva. Who thinks that the bhakta sweeps just like someone else who wants to perform good deeds in order to get eternal bliss and then be relieved of the pain of serving and self-mortification, simply does not understand this.

Only those who are averse to God think that the scolding in the lila, mana (feeling wounded), unmada (Divine madness) are expressions of greatest bewilderment in a noble human being. That scolding, mana, wanting to embrace oneself, love plays can be *expressions* of the highest seva of God – practised by His eternal co-players or God Himself – is inconceivable to the human brain. As it is said in Bhagavatam 1.1.1: “This is mind-boggling (leads astray) even for those who are the wisest of the wise and the greatest of thinkers.”

And still, in the same way as the *sevakas* – from *the temple-cleaner* to *Radha Herself* – are never pleased with themselves and their seva for His sake, in the same way He is *never* pleased with Himself, in His efforts to do *everything* He can for the sevaka, if the latter only wants seva and no other joy than the joy of seva. In this way the bhakta and God vie with one another in eternity, in the competition of *seva*, in *prema*. Who reads what it means to do Mahaprabhu’s seva, which in every moment requires the most acute attention, he may have an inkling of the ananda in the eternally increasing restlessness of the seva.

“Prema is not to be found in the world of humans, because who could live with such prema on earth?!”

“Bhagavatam is not bhakti-tradition, it is Bhagavan’s Own sound-form.”

Bhakti begins with shraddha, the faith, the belief in the service of God. The service intensifies and on the highest stage of maha-bhava-prema it is the highest realisation of the supreme form of SERVICE. A bhakta does not serve with the expectation that God would manifest Himself to him or incorporate him into the lila, so that he could experience God and experience rasa. In the rasa-lila, Krishna says that He is not one of those “beasts” who react upon such “love” at all, and that the gopis’ love is called “pure”, because it is completely free from this motive. (Bha 10.32.17)

The gopis are no atmas or souls, they consist of *God’s Own shakti*, the potency of serving knowledge, whereas the atma of a prema-bhakta becomes completely permeated by, and carried away by this power of service, and *when* he becomes incorporated into God’s realm, then he will receive a body, mind etc. that consist of this potency of service.

The gopis are forms of cit-shakti, which can be gathered from the words in their reply to Krishna when He tells them to return home. They are *Krishna’s eternal spouses, His eternal shaktis*. Krishna plays with His (eternal) shaktis in the same way as Purusha plays with those shaktis who belong to him. Gopis’ so-called husbands were *not* deceived, because these men never came into personal contact with the true [original] gopis, because the corresponding cit-shakti-forms of those gopis who were created by Yogamaya fully resembled the original ones, and these duplicates were always by their side. Radha and other Krishna-gopis have never been married to gopas, but in order to intensify the lila, they often believe that they are married to the gopas. In reality, *no one* is deceived, because the yogamaya-spouses, who are just as real as the original Radha etc., are always faithful to the gopas.

The gopis are infinitely higher than the atma-ramas, those who rejoice in their own atma. When a bhakta prays: “Oh, if I only had such intensity of sacrifice in my service of God as the pleasure-seekers of the world have to women,” then this is nothing but a stammer to indicate that he is discontented

with the degree of intensity in his own service; it is not a comparison, because there we have service, and here dirty lust.

‘Love of God’ is a perilous translation of the word prema-bhakti. This is not to *love* and to rejoice in beholding God and experiencing the ananda that God is, as a reward or to attain higher stages as a result of the service. The bhakta does not serve to “participate in the lila”; this would be stinking selfishness, the opposite of bhakti. It is not the bhaktas who say that bhakti is service and not sentimental piety, but Bhagavatam, Krishna Himself. The bhakta serves to be able to serve God, and primarily those who serve HIM; this is the only reason why he wants to participate in the lila. Salokya etc. are different forms of mukti that the bhakta completely rejects because he wants to serve and not experience.