Supreme devotional love (Parā bhakti)

Tvatpāda pūjā sambhōga parataṃtraḥ sadā vibhō
Bhūyāsaṃ jagatā mīśa ekaḥ svacchanda ceṣṭitaḥ

Meaning: O Lord! May I be eternally absorbed in worshipping You! Freed from all hurdles, may I be able to worship You freely and happily!'- If this is your prayer then your mind will remain fixedly upon the Supreme Lord. Divine bliss will be yours!

To enjoy limitless divine bliss, it is imperative to make attempts towards obtaining God's love. The cowherd-women (Gopikas) of Brindavan enjoyed Srikrishna's pure love. In order to obtain this love, they surrendered completely to Him. Considering the Lord's bliss as their own, they experienced ultimate bliss and thus rendered their life fruitful. Truly they were supreme, blessed souls!

Uddhava, the supreme yogi, who grasped the depths of their devotional love for Srikrishna prayed, 'I offer obeisance to the dust from the holy feet of these Gopikas. I wish to be born as a bush, a creeper or a plant in Brindavan so as to serve the dust from their holy feet'.

In the form of the ultimate consciousness and bliss, the Lord resides within the heart of every living entity. It is our duty to strive towards merging into that consciousness.

Every atomic and sub-atomic particle in this creation is but a form of the Supreme Lord. Hence, with such understanding, cultivate feelings of devotional love towards the Supreme Entity. You will then be blessed with His vision (darshan).

Elephant-king Gajendra fervently beseeched the Lord and earned His love, didn't he? Draupadi, who called out to the Lord with absolute devotion, obtained a place in His heart. Vibhishana (brother of Demon Ravana) totally surrendered to the Lord and acquired His love. From this it is evident that devotees select varied paths in order to earn His love.

Divine love is not physical. It is a heart to heart love wherein He responds to the call from the heart. Worthless, insignificant love that emerges towards material entities dies abruptly. However, once love towards the Supreme emerges in the heart, it remains forever! It

remains ever-pure and ever-lasting! While highs and lows are experienced in insignificant worldly love, they fail to exist in love towards Godhead and hence help us earn merit.

The one who masters such supreme love perceives the Lord as existing everywhere. In everything he perceives only the luminous auspicious form of the Lord. Within his mind too he perceives only the Lord's divine form. At all times he listens only to auspicious glories of the Lord. He sees the Lord in everyone he meets and converses. He considers every task of his to be a service to the Lord. Thus, perceiving the Lord in every action, in everyone and in everything at times he tends to forget his external surroundings!

Maharishi Śuka was a supreme yogi who attained such an exalted state! While describing Krishna's rāsa-leela dance (Krishna's cosmic dance with the cowherd-women) to Emperor Parikshit, he forgot himself and his surroundings and slipped into absolute Samadhi. A little while later, when describing the story of Kuchela (Sudāma) he once again entered the state of Samadhi. During both these instances, through earnest prayers and through other techniques, Emperor Parikshit with enormous difficulty managed to bring Maharishi Śuka to the state of normalcy. Those who are thus filled with absolute supreme love towards the Lord experience ultimate bliss similar to what Maharishi Śuka experienced.

The love that Mother Radha had for Srikrishna was pure, unpolluted and ultimate! If the composite divine bliss which propels this entire creation were to take on a form, it would be the form of Mother Radha. Her divine essence has been explicitly elaborated in Devi-bhagavatam, Brahma-vaivarta-purana, Padma-purana, and Garga-purana.

One morning Mother Radha remembered Lord Srikrishna who instantly appeared before her. Seeing her beloved Lord, Radha turned ecstatic. When her heart overflowed with devotional love she forgot totally about her existence. In that state while she was offering worship to the Lord, in lieu of flowers she sprinkled water upon Him and vice versa. When it was time to offer sandal paste, she offered Kumkum and when it was time to offer Kumkum she offered to Him betel leaves. Her love however caused the Lord's heart to melt totally and in great delight He accepted all offerings unmindful of her mistakes. It was time to offer food to the Lord. In her eagerness to feed banana fruit to the Lord, she peeled them and placed the peel in His hand. The Lord, who was totally captivated by her pure, supreme love, ate the peels with great relish!

To the Lord her total devotion, her pure mind and her pure feelings were important and hence He was absolutely delighted. Such is the greatness of supreme love that the Lord allows Himself to be held in the sway of such devotees.

During our worship, the Lord primarily observes our mind. It is therefore imperative to perform worship with total focus upon the deity.

Tat prāpya tadēvā-valokayati, tadēva śṛṇōti, tadēva bhāṣayati, tadēva cintayati- This is how Maharishi Nārada describes supreme divine love (parā bhakti) in his composition, Nārada bhakti-sutras. He says-

The supreme devotee perceives only the loving form of the eternal Lord. He engages only in listening to topics pertaining to the Lord. His speech is devoted exclusively to subjects related to his dearest Lord. His thoughts are eternally centred upon his beloved Lord. His actions, gait, speech, movements, work, love, play, looks are all centred upon the Lord himself. He thus perceives the Lord in every action of his- this is the definition of supreme devotional love (parā bhakti).

You too muse strive and cultivate supreme devotional love. Make sincere attempts to keep your mind focused upon Him. Earn His grace and enjoy limitless supreme bliss. May the grace of the primordial Guru Dattatreya ensure success in your spiritual attempts!