

All Glory to Sri Sri Guru & Gauranga

To Love God



Srila Bhaktivinode Thakur

Overview

To Love God is a short English article written by Bhaktivinoda Thakura in 1871, describing bhakti (love) as the religion of the soul. The piece is based on Christ Jesus' teaching "Love God with all thy heart, with all thy mind, and with all thy strength, and love man as thy brother.

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It was Christ Jesus who first said “Love God with all thy heart, with all thy mind, with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and love man as thy brother.” This is an absolute truth indeed; but different men put different interpretations to this noble expression. The expressions of all great men are nice but somewhat mysterious – when understood they bring the truth nearest to heart otherwise they remain mere letters that “kill.” The reason of the mystery is that men, advanced in their inward approach to the Deity, are in the habit of receiving revelations which are but mysteries to those that are behind them. The stages of progress are very much the same as the circles of spiritualism which, though not true themselves, explain a great deal about the gradual development of the soul.

We have understood some spiritualists to maintain that matter when sublimated converts itself to spirit. This theory is indeed against any inward conviction. Matter is matter, and spirit is spirit; one of them cannot form the other. Spirit is certainly of superior existence;

though we cannot fully understand in our present state of material imprisonment, what relation spirit does exactly bear to matter, space and time. Metaphysics apart, we decide that the human soul rises higher and higher and can understand things of which we have no idea at present. Subject to this important rule, Christ Jesus of Nazareth received and uttered these words quoted above.

To readers who are a little above the scale of ordinary men, these expressions of Jesus teach, that man should love God with all his heart (meaning the affections of the heart perceivable in all children as opposed to hate), with all his mind (meaning the intellect which knows, as opposed to ignorance of, good things), with all his soul, (meaning the principle of the human constitution which worships the Almighty and feels its own immortality) and with all its strength (meaning all active work). To the inspired, however, more things and better and sublimer meanings appear beneath these holy words of the inspired Jesus. He teaches man to love God and not to know, infer, hate or think of God. He tells us that man in his absolute state is not the intellect or the body but is the pure soul itself.

The essence of the soul is wisdom and its action is love absolute. The absolute condition of man is his absolute relation to the Deity in pure love. Love then alone is the religion of the soul and consequently of the whole man. The pupil asks here "What have I to do with the heart? – my heart loves to see the 'sun to smile', 'to eat the sweetest dishes and to see a dance'". Jesus profoundly

replies “Yes, you must love God with all thy heart. Your heart now runs to other things than God, but you must, as you train a bad horse, make your feelings run to the loving God.” This is one of the four principles of worship or what is known in Vaishnava literature as Shanta Rasa. Then the pupil says “My Lord, the intellect takes me elsewhere from God, i.e. it wants to take me to Positivism; please instruct me what am I to do?” “Yes,” replies Jesus “you must love god with all your mind, i.e. when you perceive, conceive, remember, imagine and reason, you must not allow yourself to be a dry thinker but must love. Love alone can soften the dryness of the intellect, you must develop the intellect on all good and holy things by means of love of truth, spiritual beauty and harmony.” This is the second phase of Vaishnava development which passes by the name of Dasya Rasa. The pupil then enquires whether the development of the affections and the intellect is quite enough for him. Then says the Lord, “You must love God with thy soul also, i.e. you must perceive yourself in spiritual communication with the Deity and receive holy revelations in your sublimest hours of worship.” This is called the Sakhya Rasa of the Vaishnavas – the soul approaching the Deity in holy and fearless service. The disciple apprehends that he will be lost in such a position and will be unable to act. Then the Saviour tells us these words, “You must love God with all thy strength or will – you are wrong to conclude that you will loose your active existence – you will get it the more. Work for God and to God, proceeding from no

self interested views but from a holy free will (which is alone the strength of man) and identifying itself with pure love, will fully engross your attention.” This description is of Bhakti in general. Then Jesus proceeds to tell us “You must love man as thy brother.” From this is inferred the fourth phase of love which is a feeling that all men are brothers and God is their common Father. This is Vatsalya Rasa in its first stage of development.

Bhakti (love) is thus perceived in the very first development of the man in shape of heart, then in the shape of mind, then in the shape of soul and lastly in the shape of will. These shapes do not destroy each other but beautifully harmonize themselves into a pure construction of what we call the spiritual man or the Ekanta of Vaishnava Literature.

But there is another sublimer truth behind this fact which is revealed to a few that are prepared for it. We mean the spiritual conversion of the soul into a woman. It is in that sublime and lofty state that the soul can taste the sweets of an indissoluble marriage with the God of love. the fifth or the highest stage of Vaishnava development is this, which we call Madhura Rasa, and on this alone the most beautiful portion of the Vaishnava Literature so ably expatiates. This phase of human life, mysterious as it is, is not attainable by all, nay, we should say, by any but “God’s own.” It is so very beyond the reach of common men that the rationalists and even the ordinary theists cannot understand it, nay, they go as far as to sneer at it as something unnatural.

Oh God! Reveal Thy most valuable truths to all so that
Your own may not be numbered with the fanatics and
the crazed and that the whole of mankind may be
admitted as “Your own.”

(To Love God originally written in English as an article
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