

CHAPTER 12

DEVOTIONAL SERVICE

Lord Krsna ended the previous chapter by explaining that His two-handed form as Syamasundara is the most confidential realization of Godhead. He then gave Arjuna an imperative to perform pure devotional service (11.55), and promised to reciprocate with such service by bringing Arjuna back to Him. Some persons might mistake the awe-inspiring Universal Form shown in Chapter Eleven to be more significant than Krsna's two-armed form. Foreseeing this, Arjuna opens Chapter Twelve by asking Krsna to state once and for all which type of worship is best: personal worship of Krsna, or impersonal worship of the Universal Form.

Bhakti over impersonalism (12.1-7)

Main Theme:

Pure devotional service is superior to impersonal meditation.

Sub Points:

- A. Krsna consciousness is full of activities, but these are not material, because they are all done for the sake of pleasing Krsna (12.2).
- B. The ultimate conclusion of impersonal *yogic* meditation is to come to the final stage of appreciating that Sri Krsna is the highest realization of the absolute truth (12.3).
- C. This chapter concludes the middle six chapters focusing on *bhakti* by confirming that pure devotional service is the supreme religious path because it is the easiest and most assured of success.
 - a) Impersonal meditation is extremely difficult. To fix the mind on something unmanifest is practically impossible. It is easy and pleasant to fix the mind on the variegated attributes of Sri Krsna (12.3-5).
 - b) In impersonal meditation, one must completely annihilate the activities of the senses - an extremely difficult task. In devotional service, one engages the senses in pleasing service to Krsna (12.4-5).
 - c) The main reason that pure devotional service is the best path is that Krsna Himself personally delivers His devotees. Followers of other *yoga* systems must rely on their own limited strength of mind and will; the surrendered devotee, however, receives unlimited strength and protection directly from his beloved Lord. Therefore *bhakti* is the safest and surest path of self realization.

Successive stages of devotion [from highest to lowest] (12.8-12)

Having established the superiority of *bhakti*, the question now becomes "how does one perform devotional service?" Krsna answers this directly, and, considering that all people will not immediately be qualified to take up the highest form of pure devotional service, He outlines a hierarchy of stages leading to that ultimate goal.

Main Theme:

Bhakti-yoga is a systematic process of cultivating attachment toward Lord Sri Krsna while becoming detached from the material world.

Sub Points:

- A. How to perform pure devotional service.
 - 1. The best way to perform *bhakti*.

The devotee spontaneously thinks of Krsna always, and lives in a direct, realized, intimate relationship with Him (12.8).
 - 2. If you can't do that...

Practice doing it; follow regulative principles to practice fixing the mind on Krsna. This will increase your spontaneous desire and eventually promote you to the stage described in Text Eight 12.9).

3. If you can't do that...
Work for Krsna. One who cannot practice fixing his or her internal senses (the mind and intelligence) on Krsna should fix his or her external senses by physically engaging in Krsna's service. This will purify and eventually elevate one to the stage described in Text 9 (12.10).
4. If you can't do that...
*Try to cultivate renunciation to the fruits of labor by sacrificing a portion of them to "some good cause." Doing so generates detachment, and better prepares one for performance of *bhakti-yoga* (12.11).*
5. If you can't do that...
*One may then need to engage in another path of *yoga*, such as meditation, philosophical speculation, or regulated fruitive activities. These pious activities will help begin one's attempt to become free from deep-rooted material desires. This will give a beginning push to the person's attempt to come to God. Still, it is better to sacrifice one's fruits of labor for Krsna as described in Verse 10, than to engage in non-devotional meditation (12.12).*

Qualities that endear one to Krsna (12.13-20)

Having described the stages of devotion, Krsna now enumerates the transcendental qualities automatically achieved by a *bhakti-yogi*. Pointing out these qualities further substantiates the theme of Chapter Twelve: that *bhakti* is the most efficacious method of spiritual advancement.

Main theme:

One engaged in *bhakti-yoga* exhibits transcendental qualities that mark him or her as a devotee. The Lord is pleased with such a devotee.

Sub Points:

- A. The characteristics mentioned here are not independent of *bhakti*. They automatically result from surrender to Krsna.
 1. These qualities fall into two categories.
 - a) Essential - *svarupa-laksanam*.
 - b) Ancillary - *tatastha-laksanam*.
 2. All the qualities mentioned in Texts 13-20 are ancillary, except the final one: *bhaktiman* -devotional service to the Lord.
 3. Thus, devotion to Krsna is the essential characteristic from which all other good qualities automatically manifest.
- B. One can achieve peacefulness in the midst of material distress by seeing all difficulty as Krsna's mercy.
 1. When material miseries arise, the devotee appreciates that due to his past misdeeds, he deserves much more suffering, but because of Krsna's kindness, his reactions are reduced. He thus remains calm, quiet, and peaceful (12.13-14).
 2. Furthermore, because he is fixed in the service of the Lord and the spiritual master, the devotee is not pushed by the dualities of the material world such as heat and cold; happiness and distress; honor and dishonor. Srila Prabhupada states, "Actually, because a devotee is always engrossed in Krsna consciousness and engaged in devotional service, such material circumstances cannot move him" (12.15 purport) .
- C. The impersonal conceptions of the Absolute Truth can be useful for one who is not at the level to perform devotional service (12.20).
 1. If one is not eligible to perform pure devotional service due to being hindered by material attachments, the impersonal conception can help detach him from fruitive results, and make him understand the difference between spirit and matter. However, this impersonal process is unnecessary when one is ready to surrender to the Lord (when one has the association of the pure devotee (12.2,12).
 2. Srila Prabhupada warns that advancement by the impersonal path can be dangerous, because impersonal tendencies may linger and disturb one when he tries to advance to the level of *bhakti yoga*.