

Discourses/Articles
by
Swami Krishnananda
The Divine Life Society
Sivananda Ashram, Rishikesh, India

THE PATH OF DEVOTION IN THE EPICS AND PURANAS

DEVOTION, or love of God, is a renowned way of the saints and sages who could speak to God as one could speak to a human being. While all saints and sages were of this special character throughout the world, India, especially, has been known since ages for the practicality of religion and the very intimate relationship that a devotee can maintain with God. Always, in most of the religions, God has remained a distant object of reverence and obedience to divine law. We have, here, a religion that has come to the homes of people and become a part of the daily life of the individual; and religion becomes a living feature in the world only when God becomes something vital in one's daily life—for religion is love of God. The daily contact that we inwardly establish with God is religion. Our personal relationship with what really is, is religion. And while cultures of the past in different countries had towering philosophies and scientific achievements of their own, it is rarely that we find God coming to the hearts of people and speaking in the language of man. The lives of saints and sages are a more elaborate commentary on the nature of the working of God than all the scriptures and revelations that we hear of, because the saints it is that bring God to the world in a living flame of experience rather than through the vehicle of language and words, textbooks or even scriptures.

It is this interesting theme which is dear to the heart of man, to the intellect rather, that is the preoccupation of a very interesting and prominent set of religious literature in this country, known as the Epics and Puranas. The country is filled with people who adore God in terms of the description in this type of religious literature. We have always a name given to God. We have always a heart-to-heart feeling of relationship with the God that we worship, whether in temples or in our homes. We can cry before God. We can sob and weep before Him. We can represent our petitions before Him, and we need not merely fear Him. This is what the Puranas tell us. While it is often said that religion commences with the fear of God, we may also say that religion culminates in the love of God. It is not merely a philosophic love that the Puranas and Epics speak of; rarely do we find love being philosophical. It has, of course, a philosophy of its own, which rationalistic philosophy cannot understand. All our loves are super-rational. A mystical feature characterises all affection in the world, mystical in the sense that they are purely private, and we will not explain, nor can we explain, this feeling of ours to other people in the world. All love, whatever be its nature, is inexplicable. The moment it becomes explicable in a scientific language, it ceases to be affection charged with vitality. It has a very uncanny feature, which also is the characteristic of the love of God.

The way in which we contact God in our life—'in our life', is the phrase to be underlined—is our practical religion. That which the scriptures speak of, is one kind of religion which only keeps us in a sense of reverence and awe and creates in us a particular type of Bhakti called *Aisvarya-Pradhana-Bhakti*, that is, the love of God as

Creator, Father and Sovereign Supreme, the love of God as Isvara or the Master of all Creation. *Aisvarya-Pradhana-Bhakti* is one type of devotion which is especially to be noticed in the later Sri-Vaishnava literature of the South, initiated by the great Vaishnava theologian, Ramanuja; but we have another type of internal contact that the devotee established with God, more intimate, we may say, in one sense. Sometimes, it goes by the name of *Madhurya-Pradhana-Bhakti*, the devotion which was emphasised by certain other teachers of the Bhakti schools, especially Nimbarka, Vallabha and Gauranga Mahaprabhu, as well as the Tamil saints, the Alvars, who preceded Ramanuja. Here, all intellectuality, ratiocination and analytical approach ceases, and the soul speaks to God in its own language. It contacts God in the vitality of being, rather than the words that the tongue speaks. As already mentioned, love does not want any philosophy, nor does devotion to God. It can feel the presence of God. Why should we try to analyse Him? When I can touch Him, see Him, hear Him, contact Him, and imbibe whatever He has, why should I try to subject Him to scientific analysis or philosophical disputation?

Thus it is that in a symbolic language the Puranas speak of such saints as Narada going to all the worlds including Vaikuntha, Satyaloka and Kailasa. These analogies of saints like Narada penetrating through all the realms of the cosmos, contacting God on one side and meeting man and even the demons on the other side, is a representation of the significance of divine devotion—the extent to which devotion can reach in practical life. One of the peculiarities of the representation of God’s activity in the Cosmos, in the Puranas and Epics, is that creation is said to be constituted of different layers—the fourteen worlds, realms, or Lokas as they are called; and to make the theme interesting, catching and vibrating to the soul, to make you have a stir in your personality and to make your hair stand on end even by listening to the glories of God, the Puranas employ a technique of making God a personality similar to your own. He also lives in a realm, as you do. He has certain features as you also have, and He sees you. Not only that, He sees through you. He sees your past, your present and your future, Not merely that; God is the repository of supreme compassion, pity and mercy. He is not merely a judge who is pitiless to your representations, who reads only the textbooks on law and says, ‘I am not concerned with justice but only with law,’ as some of our judges may say today.

God is not concerned not only with law but also justice. There was an Englishman, a Chief Justice of the Calcutta High Court. It is said that one of the advocates stood up and said: “Your Lordship is, after all, bound to do justice”. The Chief Justice remarked: “Far from it; I am here to dispense law”. This shows the way in which man’s mind works, and the way *Dharma* works in the world. *Dharma* is not law merely; it is also justice. If there are five hundred witnesses against an innocent man, he can be hanged, though he has committed no crime. This is law working, but it is not justice. And this happened actually. This is not merely an illustration. A poor man was hanged once during the British regime and the mistake was realised much later, some ten years afterwards, that an innocent man was hanged; and the then Government, in order to hush up the fuss that people might create, paid a sum to the wife of the victim and asked her to go to Bangalore and settle down there. But there was no mistake on the part of the judge, because he had evidence.

Well, the point is that God is justice, it is true, not merely law; but He has also a very tender feeling for man. This is what the Puranas want to make out, which even the

Vedas and the Upanishads do not properly explain. Your heart begins to melt when you think of God in terms of what the Puranas describe of Him. Nothing can be more effective than the method which touches your heart. If I speak to you in a way in which your heart responds, you are mine at the very moment; but if I speak to you as a lawyer, as a scientist or a metaphysician, you may nod your head, but, then, go your way.

This psychology of the human mind was very quickly realised by the authors of the Puranas who were not just interested in telling you something which is not a fact, as people there are who will merely cajole you by non-factual information. The Puranas tell you of the factual relationship that you have with God and which you have forgotten. It is not that the Puranas recount only grandmother's stories, as our so-called educated, modern youth might think. Not so. It is not a sweet lie that they tell us. It is a new type of truth which you have forgotten in your pride of intellectuality through a wrong type of education into which you have been introduced and which began to instruct your intelligence with an erroneous logic of God being subject to understanding and intelligence and having nothing to do with the private life of the emotions of the human being.

The special emphasis of the Epics and Puranas is that God can hear you and speak to you, and you speak to God. All the stories, analogies and symbols that these scriptures employ for describing man's relations with God and *vice versa*, signify that God is nearer to us than we imagine; and He shall help us even if we do not know Him. This is another speciality which this religious literature reveals to us. Even if you forget God, God shall help you. It is not that He thinks of you only if you think of Him. That would be a very legal way of looking at Him. God is not merely a legal man. He is, therefore, portrayed as not merely the Pitamaha (Grandfather) or Pita (Father) but also Mata (Mother) and Dhata (Supporter). 'I am the Saviour, the Protector, the Generator, the Withdrawer, the Sustainer, the Onlooker, the Supervisor and many other things of that nature'—these are magnificently described in the pregnant words of the Bhagavadgita.

What God is, man is not supposed to know; but enough it is if you understand that it is easier to contact God than any other thing in the world. This is what the Puranas and the Epics want to tell you. Other scriptures of a more logical character may argue that God is difficult of approach, more difficult than anything else in the world; but here you are told that other things are more difficult of approach than God. Other things may be far away from you, but God is nearer to you than they. Your own wife and children may be very near you, but God is nearer still. Even such relations who are your own kith and kin may not help you in your difficulty, but God shall help you instantaneously. People help you only when you ask for help, but God helps you even when you do not ask for help, because God is one who knows what you want. You are not always in a position to understand what your needs are. Mostly you are in a confused state of mind. You cannot ask what you want, but God's speciality is that He can know what you would need even after hundreds of years, and those things are provided for even now. Provisions are made for your journey that has not yet commenced. He is like a very good tourist officer or travel agent—whatever you may call Him! He is more than all the people, who only show a lip-sympathy to you. His love for you is more than your love for Him. This is another speciality of the divine devotion portrayed in the Puranas. God's love for man is much more than man's love for God. He wants you more than you want Him. Who can understand this mystery? It is also said with great meaning and significance that when a

devotee takes one step towards God, walking, God takes one hundred steps towards the devotee, running. While the devotee walks one step, God *runs* one hundred steps towards the devotee!

The stories of the Puranas and the Epics illustrate this important point of the divine relationship that eternally subsists between God and man. No one can read this literature without a stir in one's nerves and rapture in one's mind. No one can read this wondrous literature without a tear in one's eyes, because here it is that you know how to touch God through your soul, through your feelings, through your affection. When do you shed a tear? When your feelings are stirred; not even the best scientific argument can make you shed a single drop of tear. The heart should be shaken from its very roots, and then even the philosopher kneels down on the floor.

This is how God is brought to the home of man by the Puranas. A very interesting incident is recorded in the Drona-Parva of the Mahabharata, which shall simply strike you with wonder, and actually make you sob for the love that God has for man. During the war, after Jayadratha is slain, Arjuna is speaking to Bhagavan Vedavyasa on many a matter. One of the surprises which Arjuna expressed to Maharshi Vyasa was: "O Maharshi! Can you explain to me one interesting thing? Whenever I was up in arms in battle, I used to see some mysterious figure moving in front of me, which I could not decipher properly, sometimes visible, sometimes not visible, but not touching the ground. I saw a figure like that of a human being, now coming out of the mist as it were, making himself slightly visible to my eyes, now going into the background of the misty atmosphere of the war field, but his feet were not touching the ground. He was just a few feet above the ground level. He was doing nothing, just looking this way and that way, moving to this corner and that corner. The only speciality that I observed in his feature was that he had a trident in his hand, he had a knot of hair on his head, and I saw some snakes round his neck. These were all the things that I could see of him in the personality. I could not understand what it was, who he was, and what was the meaning behind it." Vyasa smiled and replied: "O Arjuna! It is very good that you spoke to me about this mystery that you saw, and I shall take this opportunity to tell you something of this miracle, which you cannot understand, nor can any man understand. Do you know who fought this war, and who it was that worked through your arms? Do you know that you have, yourself, no power to stand the ferocious warriors like Bhishma, Drona and Karna? Do you know the power of Bhishma? Not all the three worlds can stand before him, what to talk of the Pandavas! Arjuna! Can you stand before this mighty ferocity like that of a Bhishma who could defeat Parasurama, who learnt the art of warfare from Vasishtha himself? Is there a man in all the three worlds who can stand before Drona? Who defeated these warriors? Well! It is the greatness of those beings whom you cannot see with your eyes. They have worked this miracle for your sake, Arjuna, and remained always in the background. Do you know whom you saw? It was Lord Siva. You are indeed blessed. He knew the pitiable condition in which you all were. He came down from Kailasa to help you, not telling you what His intention was; and He knew that it was humanly impossible for any person to stand these—Bhishma, Drona and Karna. Not all of you, Pandavas, put together, can face them, even if they are to fight throughout their lives. 'What would be the fate of these poor children?' Siva knew this, and He is moving in the midst of the Kaurava forces sucking the energy of them all, not taking any direct action. Who could stand before Him if He were to take action; the very odour that emanated from His body was enough to paralyse all the Kauravas. Arjuna! I

need not speak to you more about this wondrous being that you saw. Blessed thou art that you could see Him.” And, after this narration, there is a beautiful prayerful description of the mighty Lord of Kailasa, which Vyasa speaks to Arjuna.

God works thus; and there are other incidents which we shall see, in what followed, to the same effect, as on occasions when Bhishma himself spoke to persons like Duryodhana many a time. Every day Duryodhana came after sunset and wept before Bhishma. “What is this? What is happening, Grandsire? Thousands of my people are being killed every day, and you are yet alive”. Bhishma said: “My dear child! Do not tease me and taunt me like this every day. You are under the impression that I am only pretending to fight. It is not so. I would have pounded all these Pandava forces including the Pandavas themselves, in a single day, but for the presence of a single person there, who is sitting in the chariot of Arjuna. But for Him, the Pandavas would not have been there on the first day itself. I alone am sufficient; all your army is not necessary. Duryodhana! You do not know my strength. But what can I do! You do not understand the difficulty into which you have been involved. I have told you many a time that you should not engage yourself in a conflict with those people whom Krishna is helping, but you would not listen to me, and now you come and taunt me. Well! Tomorrow I shall do my best”. This happened twice or thrice. Bhishma did his best. He went to the extreme of his ferocity. Like fire blazing he began to fight through the forces. Thousands were massacred by a single arrow that Bhishma shot, but not a single Pandava could be killed. Again Duryodhana cried at night: “What is all this? You could not kill even one Pandava, Grandsire, and I have depended upon you people. After so many days of battle, you could not bring down even one of the Pandavas”. Again it was the same reply that Bhishma gave: “My dear child! I do not want to get angry with you, though you try to irritate me. But I shall tell you the truth again. You shall not win what you have in your mind as long as Govinda is on the other side”. “Well! This is the old story again”, said Duryodhana, “and I am not here depending on you senile people. I have my comrades like Karna”. And there was a cutting reply from Bhishma. Bhishma held his tongue, however, because there was no use frowning at the stupid man, Duryodhana.

And how does God help? The Mahabharata, again, is an instance on the point—Asvatthama’s ferocity, to give another instance. We are told that Asvatthama, one day, approached his father Drona and said: “You teach everything to Arjuna, whatever you have taught me. What is the difference between a disciple and a son? No difference at all? The son naturally is dearer than disciples. You teach Arjuna everything. Will you not teach me something which Arjuna does not know?” Drona thought: “This is a very foolish son, not as wise as Arjuna, and I should not teach him mysteries that may enable him to work havoc”. But Asvatthama went on pressing the father with importunities: “Teach me something which Arjuna does not know, otherwise what is the good of my being your son.” All the Astras Arjuna was taught. There was nothing that Arjuna did not know, because of instruction from Drona. But on account of a fatherly affection for even a stupid son, which every father has, Drona finally agreed. “All right, come here, I shall give you something, but beware. I am giving you fire in your hands by which you can burn the worlds; but my child, do not use it against devotees of God, because it will not work against devotees of God. It will work against real enemies. This is the Narayana-astra, the missile that is invoked with the power of Narayana. I am telling you this today, and I am initiating you into this mystery. If you release this, all the world can be reduced to ashes; but do not use this. I am warning you, lest you should be yourself in

danger when you misuse it.” Yet Drona was cautious. He did not tell him how to withdraw the missile, because if he could withdraw it, he would go on using it again and again. He knew the lack of understanding of Asvatthama and the eagerness of his to use it one day or the other! So he could use it only once. Once if is let off, it is let off forever. It could not come back for a second use. But there is a method of withdrawing it also, which in this particular case, Drona never told Asvatthama.

And you know, the occasion came for it. When Drona left his mortal coil, the fury of Asvatthama knew no bounds. He said: “I know the secret; today the Pandavas shall not be in this world. My father has told me something, and today there shall be none remaining on the Pandavas’ side, not Yudhishtira, not Bhima, not Arjuna; and he took out his ‘cat out of the bag’, and he let it out with the invocation of Narayana-mantra. Well! You know what happened? Not even an atomic bomb can work such havoc. It multiplied itself into a million-fold. Everywhere, the whole sky was filled with burning missiles; and there were no stars, no sun, no moon, no sky. It was all fire. That was all. And when Arjuna saw that sight, Krishna was accosted: “O Lord! What is this that is coming? I cannot understand it. Some new thing is coming which I have not seen up to this time.” Krishna said: “I know what it is, and there is no remedy for this. No one can stand against this. The best thing for you all is to stop fighting. It shall not do any harm to those who will not fight it. It is destructive only to the enemies. Those who prostrate themselves before it are not its enemies, and so the best thing for you would be to cast down your arms and offer prostration to it, and then it shall exhaust itself” Nobody knew what this mystery was, what it was that was coming; but then Krishna said that there was no fighting with it; and to all it was proclaimed loudly: “Cast down your arms, prostrate yourself before this Fire that is coming; that is the only way of saving yourself.” And all did this except Bhima. He retorted: “I am not a coward. I, a Kshatriya to cast down arms—nothing doing! I shall see to it.” He took up his mace and began brandishing it. Krishna and Arjuna went there and told him: “This is not the time to show your valour, friend, please listen to us.” But he would not listen; then he was pulled down by Krishna and Arjuna. “Come down, stupid man, you do not know what you are doing.” Since there was nobody to fight, the Astra went here, there, everywhere, seeing and searching for a single enemy. Nobody was there to fight with it, and so, finally, it extinguished itself. Thereafter, the flame entered the body of Krishna, because He was Narayana Himself. It entered the body of Narayana.

Asvatthama was gazing from the top of a tree to see what was happening, to see the heap of ashes of the Pandavas. But no such thing happened. He saw no ashes anywhere! They were all fighting as before. “What is this? What is the matter? My father also told a lie, Rishis tell lies, God tells lies, the whole world is a lie, fie upon all things, fie upon even parents, fie upon truth, there is no truth in this world,” he cried and went back cursing everyone. And he met Vyasa on the way. “Whom are you cursing? What is the matter?” asked Vyasa. “What is the use of saying anything? The earth is not worth living in when even a father can tell a lie; my father told me a falsehood that he initiated me into a mystery which Arjuna did not know, but when I used it, it proved futile. Can there be anything worth depending upon in this world? Is there such a thing as truth in this world?” wailed Asvatthama. Vyasa said: “Your father has not told you a lie. He had initiated you into a tremendous mystery regarding which he has already given a caution to you—to use it not against devotees of God. You used it against Narayana Himself. It has gone to Him, from whom it came. It was the Astra of Narayana and it has gone back

to Narayana. You have used it against Krishna and Arjuna who are the manifestations of Narayana and Nara in this world.”

Use not your power against God. You may be wondering why these stories, these histories are recorded in the Epics and Puranas. Yes; it is to stir your feelings as to how God can help you and save you. Krishna had a private conversation with Arjuna; they were very, good friends, you know, they used to go for walks together, dine together, sleep together, work together. And, in comradeship, when Arjuna talked about the mighty beings that were felled down in the war and the mysteries about such people like Karna and others who had powers and weapons which were invincible, Krishna spoke: “My dear friend! Do you know how anxious I was as long as Bhishma, Drona and Karna were alive? Do you know that I did not sleep properly as long as these three were alive in the world; and do you know what I did? Do you know why Karna did not use his missile against you? If he had used it, it would have been difficult for you to face it. He had a Sakti that he was daily worshipping for your destruction. He would tell himself; ‘Tomorrow it shall be used’. Many tomorrows passed; everyday he used to say, ‘What has happened to me? I forgot about it. Tomorrow morning I shall use it’. Arjuna enquired: “Krishna, why did he not use it for so many days?” He actually never used it. It was used against a wrong person later on, due to a mishap that took place. “Do you know, Arjuna, why he did not use it? Everyday, in the morning, when he was to face you in battle, the first person that he would look at was myself. I was in front of you, and the moment he looked at me, I hypnotised him; and his mind became muddled. He would not remember anything, and until I foiled his Sakti, I did this work of hypnotising him every day so that he would not remember anything. And I know that you have no idea as to why I sent Ghatotkacha. But you know, the Sakti was used against him, though it was kept for a different end. Not knowing all this, you and your brothers were weeping that your man was killed.” If you read the Mahabharata you will know how the incident happened. Draupadi called out: “Krishna! Krishna!” when in the court of the Kauravas, Duhsasana was trying to strip her of her clothes. The Supreme Lord at once saved her modesty by willing the apparel on her person to be endless! It is said Duhsasana fell down in a faint with the fatigue of unsuccessfully disrobing her. It is also believed that Krishna Himself became the unending clothes.

Again, egged on by Duryodhana, Durvasa, the great Tapasvin, would have reduced the whole clan of the Pandavas to ashes with his anger, but Lord Krishna saved them. Durvasa came with his eighty thousand disciples to the Pandavas and asked for “Bhiksha” for all of them to be ready when they had taken their bath and returned for it. The Pandavas had just finished their midday meal and Draupadi had washed clean the Akshaya-Patra (the inexhaustible dishing bowl) which would keep filling up as it was emptied by serving the food from it. But this could be so only until the Patra (vessel) was cleaned after Draupadi had finished her meal—after that, this miracle would not happen. So Draupadi was in the greatest fix. And she turned to her Saviour, and prayed to Lord Krishna. There was a knock at the door in a few minutes, and, lo, Krishna was there most unexpectedly. Suddenly He wanted something: “Oh! I am terribly hungry! Give me food! Quick, I am dying of hunger”. “But, Krishna, we have finished our meal and I have washed the vessel. That is why...” “Oh! Bring me the vessel. I know there is food in it.” It was vain to keep protesting, and Draupadi brought the vessel. Under the rim of the vessel there was a leaf, remaining from the vegetable, sticking to it. The Lord ate that; ate it as the Virat that He was, and the whole Cosmos was fed! Durvasa and his

disciples mysteriously felt their bellies full! When Bhima went to invite them, at Yudhishtira's behest, for their meal, they vanished in fright, lest they should incur the displeasure of Yudhishtira for not being able to accede to his request. No one could know the mystery. Such is the miracle the Lord works to save the devotees.

The Pandavas had been exiled to spend twelve years in the forests as the result of the game of dice that they had lost. When in the forests Krishna came to enquire after their welfare, Draupadi shed burning tears, relating to Him the humiliation she had been submitted to at the Kauravas' court and how neither her husbands nor the elders present there stood up to avenge the wrong. Krishna wiped her tears and it was He who took, then, the vow to destroy the herd of the Kauravas and avenge the wrong she had suffered. And He did this without lifting a single weapon against them! Who but He can save His devotees in His unbounded mercy and love for them!

It is again Krishna that defends Bhima who had to use a so-called unfair means to kill Duryodhana by splitting his thighs. Yudhishtira accused Bhima in the name of Dharma that a true warrior does not win by unfair means. Then the Lord Krishna points out how time and again Duryodhana had been most meanly unfair, why Yudhishtira himself was unfair in playing dice and in his attitude of letting the Kauravas humiliate Draupadi and preventing the other Pandavas from acting. Bhima had taken an oath to avenge the wrong done to Draupadi by killing Duryodhana. In avenging a wrong, the end justifies the means, He hinted. When God becomes fire, He burns; when He is ice, He freezes. He is war and peace, the worst and the best, for opposites become reconciled in universality.

Galore are such instances in the great epic, the Mahabharata; and all these incidents related now are detailed variously in the Sabha, Aranya, Bhishma, Drona, Karna, Salya Parvas.

And now, behold, the Srimad-Bhagavata Purana. Look at how the Lord rescued Ambarisha from Durvasa's anger. You will find it narrated in this Purana as the Ambarisha-Upakhyaana. Durvasa fancied an insult and a disregard in the matter of etiquette in entertaining an honoured guest who had been invited for 'Bhiksha' on a Dvadasi Day, by king Ambarisha. Durvasa dashed on the ground one of his 'Jatas' and thus created an ogre to eat up Ambarisha. Instantaneously, Sudarshana-Chakra, the Discus, came swishing like a ball of fire to destroy Durvasa. The supremely merciful Lord Narayana had sent it to save His great devotee and destroy the wrong-doer, even without being asked by the devotee himself. Durvasa ran for refuge to the three worlds and none could protect him from the Sudarshana. Finally he was advised to seek refuge at Ambarisha's feet itself. He did, to his humiliation, and was saved.

The Bhagavata relates the thrilling anecdote of Krishna's sports when He put Brahma in the proper place. Not a soul knew of this *Lila*. Brahma saw it after a whole year. He was humbled and realised that Krishna was no cowherd but the Supreme Being above whom none exists. Brahma hid all the calf-herders and all such things in a cave unknown to any one, telling himself that Gokula will come begging of him, the great creator. Lord Krishna quietly multiplied Himself as every calf-herder with exactly his dress, his ornaments and his mannerisms and the staff each carried which had identical bends, and crooks and the number of knots the staff had, and every one of the calves. In

the evening the calf-herders and the calves (the substitutes) returned as usual to Gokula. A cow can spot its own calf amongst a thousand of them! Yet every cow accepted the substituted calf, with even greater love and affection. Every mother of the calf-herder was thrilled in a new and mysterious way at her (substituted) child, she loved him deeper, and she failed to realise that it was not of her flesh and blood. Brahma, rather mystified, came to the cave and found all he had shut in there! Yet Gokula was not the less even by a calf herd's staff! Brahma released all, and, falling down at the Lord Krishna's feet begged His pardon for the arrogance he had shown as the creator.

Such are His unfathomable and inimitable acts of love He has for His devotees, and for all that are His.

The point is that these miraculous occurrences, the subtle working of God, above the ken of the human mind, physically portrayed in the Epics and Puranas, bring out that God is conscious always of what our needs are, and He takes incarnations, not merely as a four-armed Krishna or a Rama or a Narasimha or some such person, but in all necessary forms and manifestations as the occasion may demand. He works the miracles that are needed, and if you truly come to know of it, every incident of our life is a miracle. Nothing can be regarded as natural, if the truth about it is investigated. That we are breathing is a miracle. That we are alive in this world is a miracle. That the cells of our body have joined together to form this personality is a miracle. That the earth does not go and dash itself against some other planet is a miracle. That the ocean does not exceed its limits is a miracle. That the stars do not fall on our heads is a miracle. That you are able to stand on your two legs is a miracle. That your heart does not stop working is a miracle. What is not a miracle in this world? What power has man over even the smallest occurrence in this world? Have you the power to lift even your finger, if all the nerves of your body are not to collaborate? Do you know what wondrous co-operation there is among the internal mechanisms of our body to make even a finger lift itself? If you have seen a huge mechanism, do you know how many parts collaborate to make a small part tick or move or touch? A very humble cog is moving somewhere, unknown, unseen perhaps, but you know what co-operation it receives from all the other parts of the machine. Do you know that all the muscles, all the nerves, all the cells have to collaborate even to enable the eyelid to go up and down, what to talk of breathing which is a more complicated process? Are you sure that the next early morning you will wake up? In what confidence is it that you can say, "tomorrow morning I shall do this"? Who keeps this heart beating? What is this miracle? Life is a miracle, indeed. It is not an equation of mathematics. It is not a formula of science. Life is a miracle, because God is a miracle, all that is connected with God is a miracle, and that is why the creation of God also is a wonder, A human being himself, being a part of this creation, is a miracle, and when man begins to know this miracle which is God and His creation, he becomes humble before this gigantic machinery of the cosmos. What is this puny, tiny human body before the relentless movement of the astronomical universe? What power has this tiny being? The purpose of the teachings of the Puranas and the Epics is to humble down man's ego before the greatness of God. God's wondrous powers are portrayed in the description of His Avataras, in the instantaneous actions that God takes, and the premonitions of man's needs God has always in His omniscience.

It is difficult to go into the vast field of the teachings of the Itihasas and Puranas, but all of them in their beautiful and grand personification of God as Father, Friend and even Mother, speak in a single language of God's love for man. As already mentioned, it is not man's love for God that is so much emphasised as God's love for man. Yes; it is the other way round. They say, rather than your running after God, when God starts running after you, then it is that your devotion is complete. You know Eknath Maharaj's story, wherein we are told that Sri Krishna became a servant as Srikhandia and washed the saint's clothes every day until He was discovered; and He vanished afterwards. He used to grind wheat for Sant Sakkubai. Such instances are countless as sung in the Epics and Puranas.

Sceptics may laugh at these stories, but what is scepticism but ignorance of the mystery of God. You will easily believe me if I tell you that God shall see to it that even a spoon of sugar is supplied for your tea, when it is needed. This is not a joke or an exaggeration. Even the smallest needs shall be looked to. Your cup of tea shall come to you at the proper hour, if God sees to it, and He does. It is not human effort that works in the end, God's grace it is that works, so proclaim the Puranas, which is another way of saying that God alone works. Nobody else can work, because nobody else really is. The others are only secondary existences who exist only by sufferance. The real existence is God's. While the portrayal of God existing in Vaikuntha, Kailasa, Satya-Loka, etc., and many other descriptions of this nature, are available in the Puranas and the Epics, they tell us, too, that God can reduce Himself to the level of human relationship also, if need be, and it is futile to think that God is only supra-rational, transcendent and qualityless.

There are some philosophers who say that God is only Nirguna, abstract attributeless being. How can He become Saguna, endowed with attributes? How can He become man? How can He take an Avatara or incarnation? Why do you ask "how He can", when you hold that He is omnipotent? To say that He is only Nirguna, that He is only this or that, is to bring about a limitation on God. You say that God is limitless in every respect. You have to look upon God only with awe and love. You should not try to describe Him through your logic. Some say: "There are no fourteen worlds. There are no hells and heavens. This is all a fiction of the brain." Someone said that Ganga flows only through the nose—perhaps in the rainy season when we catch a cold! People have such stupid notions that the river Ganga is only the Sushumna nerve and Yamuna and Sarasvati are Ida and Pingala nerve-currents. There is no Ganga outside. This is extreme mysticism that misses its point. Mysticism is the truth of all things, but when it misses its aim and takes only one side of the issue, it goes wrong. As long as the external bread can satisfy your external hunger, the external Ganga also exists in which you can take an external bath. If the bread is purely mystical and you take only psychological bread and pulse every day, which is only flowing through the Sushumna, then of course, Ganga also does not exist outside, it is true. But there is an error in the application of logic many a time, though logic is good by itself. Mostly, we go to extremes in our application of the logical categories to principles of life. It is not that rationality is bad or logic is futile, but it should be properly applied by a properly trained mind. Then it is that we take both the sides of an issue into consideration. God is inside as well as outside, and you must speak only in the logic of the given realm in which you are, the state of evolution in which you find yourself. And in the dream condition, you must speak and use only the dream logic. So, to say that God is this or God is that, that God cannot take

Avataras, or God cannot become a human being in his incarnations, would be to misapply the philosophical logic by a transcendent use of the categories, while the argument is from the lower level. There is a misapplication of the system of logic, when you speak from a lower level by applying the logic of the higher level. This should not be done. What is really meant is that there is no delineating of God's powers and God's glory.

This fact of God's greatness, put in a humanised language and by a humanised application of fact, the Puranas and the Epics try to bring out in their beautiful, mellifluous style, and they speak to you in such a feasible and acceptable way that it goes into your heart. The method they apply by which the meaning enters into your heart is so effective that you think in terms of what they say, and there is no other way of thinking. This is how art works in a more effective manner than science and logic. The Puranas are artistic expressions of spiritual truth, and that is why they appeal to your heart more than philosophical treatises. The Harikatha Kalakshepa system (discourse by song and music) of which many of you may be familiar, is more interesting and appealing, more capable of bringing truths into your mind, than a scientific exposition of philosophy, because here there is intimacy established with your feelings rather than with your understanding. This is to say that the Puranas and Epics speak in the language of feeling and love, rather than in the rules of understanding and intellectuality. This is the speciality of the Itihasas and Puranas—God coming to man in feeling, in practice, in symbol, in art, in visualisation, in practical contact rather than merely a possibility of the future. God is today, not only tomorrow, and He is with us just now, capable of blessing us with His bounty.

The Puranas make out that there is nothing that God cannot give us, and God does not take time to act. He does not say: "Let me see tomorrow, come afterwards". Such an excuse God will not trot out. God has no time factor, and He has not space factor. He does not take time to travel. He does not take time to act. And there is nothing that He cannot give us. He is the superabundance of all the blessedness that the human mind can think of. He is not merely what He can give to man, but He Himself is the embodiment of what He gives. Devotion is the way to God.