

Selfish and selfless devotion

Question: Shri Maharaj Ji, could you tell us something about sakam bhakti (selfish devotion) and nishkam bhakti (selfless devotion)?

Answer: All of you must have heard or read about these two words, sakam (sa or with, kam or desire) and nishkam (nish or without, kam or desire). Sakam means having a desire or being selfish, and nishkam means having no desire or being selfless.

Let's talk about sakam, being selfish. Generally this word is used in two areas, the mayic or material area and not in God's area. The context of this question is God's area.

What is selfish devotion? It means practicing devotion and asking God for the world. People think that through selfish devotion God fulfills our desires and gives us whatever we ask for. For example, Dhruva prayed to God with a desire to become a king, and he became one. Draupadi prayed to God to have her honour and life saved, and they were. Gajaraj prayed to God to be saved from death, and he was. This means whatever they prayed for from God, they received. In general, selfish devotion is 100% wrong because it is just pure selfishness. It is not selfish love. First we should love God and then desire something from Him.

For example, a man standing on the side of the road is asking for a lift from someone in a car, "Hey, can you give me a ride?" The man in the car is thinking, "Is he crazy? I don't even know him. Why is he asking me for a lift?!" So he doesn't stop the car. In other words, he has no relationship to that man. He feels no love for him. Similarly, we have no love for or relationship with God, and yet we want Him to fulfill our selfish worldly desires. People in the world are considered crazy if they behave this way with others, and in the spiritual area they are considered even more crazy. If God were to give us everything we wanted just by demanding it from Him, what would the condition of the world be like after that?

Let's move ahead and consider what sakam prem, selfish love is. This means to first love God, develop a relationship with Him and after that desire something from Him. If a man is asking for a lift from one of his relatives, that relative feels it is his duty to help because of their relationship.

In selfish love there are also two areas. The first area is the material area. We can only ask for those things our intellect is aware of. For example, if offered a piece of candy or a priceless diamond, a young child will choose the candy. This is the extent of his understanding. Our intellect is mayic. Before God realization we will only desire material things. We develop a relationship with God and before it becomes firm, we start demanding things from Him. We go to Vaishno Devi or any other pilgrimage place or temple and start expressing our demands. It may happen that some of our desires are fulfilled as a result of our material destiny. We assume God has answered our prayers and fulfilled these desires, and due to this we develop faith in Him, but we are mistaken. If the next time when we pray to God and get an opposite result, our intellect will become anti-God. We will become atheistic. So before God realisation, we will demand worldly things from God.

The second area is when we have selfish desires and we are also surrendered to a true Saint. If this is the case, these desires are correct. Because as a result of that Guru's teachings, we won't ask God for the world. We will instead ask for His divine love so we may attain His eternal divine service (seva). This is not wrong. Rather, this should be our inner desire that

we attain God's eternal service so we may give Him happiness. In order to receive God's service, we need to have selfless love for Him. For that kind of love, we need to receive God's divine vision, and to receive His divine vision, we have to purify our minds by shedding selfless tears of love.

This kind of selfless love starts developing in the primary stages of devotion or sadhana. Sometimes we have problems practicing this. Later on, we realise our mistakes and move forward. Slowly this feeling of selfless love becomes completely firm and then it keeps on increasing every moment.

This progress doesn't happen in selfish devotion because the devotee has expectations. If his desires are fulfilled, then it's fine. If not, then his mood goes off. He may think, "I shed so many tears for God and He never came. The world is much better than this." His devotion and faith then start to reduce. But a selfless devotee says, "If it makes Him happy that I should continuously shed tears then I will continue to do so." This devotee remains happy in his Beloved's happiness. By practicing the kind of selfless love, we will attain our ultimate aim of supreme divine bliss.

Jagadguru Shri Kripalu Maharaj Ji