

# Nine Forms of Devotion

## Sakhyam (Sneham)

### Cultivating the attitude of Friendship with the Lord

Sakhyam (Sneham) is the cultivation of a bond of close friendship with God. To be always with the Lord, to treat Him as one's dear relative or a friend belonging to one's own family, to love Him as one's own Self, is the Sakhya stage of devotional path. God is the innermost and the dearest of all friends. Worldly friends may desert a person, but God will never desert His devotees.

Initially, you develop your devotion by turning towards God and approaching Him. Then you strengthen your love for God by cultivating the attitude that you are His devotee or His servant and you surrender yourself to His Will. As your love for God deepens, you progress to the stage where you feel an intimate closeness to God and experience His presence continuously. Seva (service) brings human beings closer to each other and promotes affection and friendship. Without this friendship and feeling of love for one's fellowmen, one cannot attain intimacy with the Lord, which among the nine forms of devotion to God is the penultimate stage before total surrender to God. The Sakhya level of love is very deep. It takes a lot of Sadhana (spiritual practice) and depth of understanding to reach that level.



Swami says, "Arjuna exemplifies how devotion can be developed by cultivating the friendship of the Lord through complete faith and loyalty. Friendship implies also love. Arjuna's love was totally concentrated on Krishna. Arjuna and Krishna lived together closely. Arjuna accompanied Krishna like a shadow. He experienced innumerable troubles and was subjected to calumny and abuse. But through all these experiences, he did not allow his faith in Krishna to waver. He always prayed: 'Krishna! You are my sole hope and refuge. There is none other to protect me'. In this way, looking upon Krishna as friend and kinsman, Arjuna relied on Krishna for everything. Krishna, for his part, was even ready to act as Arjuna's charioteer in battle. Arjuna made Krishna the charioteer of his life."

Bhagawan Baba has said: "At one time Arjuna questioned Krishna, 'Swami, do you have any intimate people? Krishna replied, 'to me there exist no friend or enemy. Who is there in your heart? It is I. Who is there in the heart of the person who accused you? It is I. Love the One God who is present in everyone's heart. Those who love thus are my intimate ones'. We should install God in the chariot of our heart. What we have to propagate today is only Love. Excepting Love there is nothing else in this world. Love is God. Love is Life. And this Love is everything. Develop Love more and more."

Swami says, "See God in every being and then true Sneham (friendship) will blossom. This type of true Sneham can come only when you follow the advice of Krishna:

*Adveshta Sarva Bhuuthaanaam Maithrah Karuna Evacha*

*Nirmamo Nirahamkaarah Sama Dhukha Sukha Kshami (Gita- 12/13)*

(He who has no trace of hatred towards any creature, who is friendly and compassionate towards all, who is free from the bondage of 'I' and 'mine', who takes pain and pleasure as equally welcome and who is forbearing in spite of provocation...)

Develop these qualities in you, for they are the signs of true Sneham (friendship), for it is only when you are proceeding on the God-ward journey along the nine stages of Bhakti (devotion) that you can attain this Divine ideal of true friendship."

Bhagawan Baba says: "God is an ancient friend with whom the devotee can experience an unrestrained intimacy. When you recognise this truth, you can behave with natural ease and freedom towards God. You are free to confess your lapses to such a friend. You have to receive His counsel. You can then get your heart purified. Offering your sullied heart to the Lord is like presenting a soiled currency note, not acceptable to others, to the Reserve Bank for getting a new one. Only God can accept it and replace it with a new one. Therefore offer all your bad qualities to God and receive from Him all good qualities."

Swami says: "Buddha renounced all the palatial comforts and took to sanyasa (renunciation). He wandered in the forests, listened to the teachings of noble souls and studied holy texts. But none of these could give him satisfaction. Ultimately, he realised that his heart is the true holy text given by God and God is his true friend. He discarded all books and stopped visiting noble souls. He turned inward and enquired into the truth.

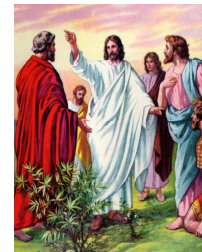
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Ignoring the holy text (heart) and forgetting the true friend (God), man is going hither and thither in search of peace. Let your lives be suffused with love. Let your hands undertake deeds that are beneficial to society at large. Let your thoughts be centred on the principle of love. You should rise from the level of individual to society ultimately merge in God.”

“Whatever one does, one should do it to please God. One should cultivate Divine feelings. The word satsang means being in the company of the Divine, not merely in the company of good people. Divinity is within us. That is Sath. One has to develop friendship with Sath. That is true satsang and true friendship. Never depend on worldly friendship. Worldly friends come and go. Only friendship with God is true and eternal.

Sacred feelings promote thoughts about God and the principle of Love. God does not have a form apart. He does not have a place apart. Truth is God. Love is God. Correct conduct is God. When you practise these, you are worshipping God. At that time, without doubt, God will be present in immediacy and in a cognisable way. Love with suffused devotion; Love with a full heart; Love for the sake of Love and become friends with God. You can then love anything. You must not have narrow feelings like ‘me’, ‘my family’ and ‘my relatives’. You must develop the prayer, ‘Everyone in this world must be happy’ (Lokaa Samasthaa Sukhino Bhavanthu). Expand your heart. You will experience blissful life.”

Jesus told his disciples (John 15: 9-17) “I have loved you even as the Father has loved me. Remain in my love. When you obey me, you remain in my love, just as I obey my Father and remain in his love. I have told you this so that you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your joy will overflow. I command you to love each other in the same way that I love you. And here is how to measure it- the greatest love is shown when people lay down their lives for their friends. You are my friends if you obey me. I no longer call you servants, because a master doesn’t confide in his servants. Now you are my friends, since I have told you everything the Father told me. You didn’t choose me, I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask for, using my name. I command you to love each other.”



Swami says, “Of all the nine forms of devotion, Sneham (Sakhyam) is the most important. It is only when you cultivate this feeling of friendship with God, you can reach the last stage of Atmanivedanam (self-surrender). For this purpose, you must have a pure heart, which in turn is based on love and devotion. You must have pure and selfless love towards one and all. Love is a gift of God. Friendship is the stepping stone for self-surrender. So you should develop friendship with God and be a recipient of His Love.”

Bhagawan Baba says: “There are many who are ‘near’ to Bhagawan, but they are like frogs in a lotus pond. The frogs are near to the lotus, but do not taste its honey. But bees come from remote distances to taste the honey in the lotus. It is therefore not enough if you are near. You have also to become dear to the Lord. You cannot take with you, when you pass away, even a handful of earth. So, make the best use of your years now by leading a selfless, dedicated life. Thereby you should earn God’s Grace and share it with others.”

Sakhya-Bhava is a feeling experienced in the mind by a pure devotee and he is eternally related with the Supreme Personality of Godhead in that feeling. The friend of God stops desiring the world and the worldly. His eye is fixed on his divine Friend and he becomes a friend of all creation. His intentions have become purified, meaning he is no more selfish, he no more works for personal gains. From personal he has moved to the universal.

For the devotee who has acquired this great love, there can be no rules or expectations. Swami says, “No reason for love, no season for love” is Divine love, is the unconditional love. The devotee with unconditional love has reached the threshold of Godhead. Being so close to divinity, the devotee’s vision is extremely clear and so the secrets of God are revealed to him, for between friends there are no secrets. In the Gita, Krishna declares, “he who searches me out in friendship he shall find Me. Then, I am always with him. He will never lose sight of Me nor will I ever lose of him.”

“Take one step towards Me and I shall take a hundred steps towards you,” Swami has said to us time and time again. Baba says, “This is not the kind of friendship that can be cultivated by just saying hello. Instead you

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have to make your heart hollow so that it can be filled with the Divine and His secrets.” We have to live our life virtuously. This is easiest done by installing the Lord, our Friend firmly in our heart.