

## Nine Forms of Devotion

### Atma-nivedanam (Total Self-Surrender)

*"Whoever surrenders himself unto me and takes refuge in me, I will redeem him of all sins and grant him liberation"*  
- *Bhagavad Gita*

Atma-nivedanam is the highest form of devotion in which the devotee offers everything to God, including his body, mind and soul. He keeps nothing for himself. He loses even his own self. He has no personal and independent existence. He treats grief and sorrow, pleasure and pain as gifts sent by God and does not attach himself to them. He considers himself as a puppet and an instrument in the hands of God. He has no ego left in him, having surrendered it at the altar of God. This self-surrender is absolute love for God. There is nothing but God-consciousness in the devotee.

Having totally surrendered himself to God he qualifies for God's care and protection as declared by Him in the Gita in the assurance, '*Yogakshemam vahaamyaham*'. It means "I shall bear the burden of your welfare, here and hereafter." The condition for fulfilment of "*Yogakshemam vahaamyaham*" as given in the Gita by the Lord is "*Ananyaaschinthayantho maam, ye janaah paryupaasathe.*" This means meditation on the Lord unhampered by any other thought and steady worship.

Surrender and grace are inter-related. Surrender draws down God's grace and grace makes surrender complete. Surrender starts the purification of the heart. Grace completes it. But one has to do some sadhana to receive God's grace, "the sadhana of keeping the pot upright to receive the rain, the sadhana of opening the door of your heart, so that the sun may illumine it." Bhagawan Baba says, "When you have done your best and that is found not enough, then call on me, I am ever ready to reinforce your effort with My Grace."



Surrender to God brings an incredible benefit, which Swami explains with a simple analogy:

*"Take the example of wanting some light in your house. You may light a candle or switch on an electric lamp. But at dawn when the sun rises, the whole city will be flooded with the sun's light. The light of your little lamp is very weak compared to the splendour of the Sun, shining magnificently everywhere. This is the unlimited power of God compared to the limited power of man. How can you reach this unlimited power of God? How can the limited capacity of a human being be transformed in the unlimited capacity of God?"*

*The means is surrender.*" This does not mean that the devotee personally becomes powerful; rather, the infinite power of God is available for the protection of the devotee who surrenders.

Swami identifies three types of surrender:

The first affirms, *I am Yours*; the second asserts, *You are mine*; and the third declares, *You and I are One, the Same*. Each is a step in the rising series, and the last is the highest of them all. In the first stage, the Lord is fully free and the devotee is fully bound. It is like the cat and the kitten; the cat shifts the kitten about as it wills; the kitten just meows and accepts whatever happens. This attitude is very gentle and within easy reach of all. In the second, the devotee binds the Lord, Who is to that extent 'unfree'! The third stage is one of inseparable devotion. The devotee offers all to the Lord, including himself, for he feels that he cannot withhold himself. That completes his surrender.

The awesome power of God can be bound by the power of love; therefore in this path of devotion, you can tie up the Lord Himself and keep Him locked up in your heart! The Koran says precisely the same thing: *My earth and My heaven containeth Me not but the heart of My faithful servant containeth Me*. These days devotion for God is at such a low ebb, that Swami often says that it is not man who is searching for God but

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God Who is searching for a devotee! Swami constantly emphasises that we must install the Lord in our hearts. Clearly, when you welcome God into your heart, you must cleanse your heart thoroughly. Only when you purify your heart, will God be pleased to enter it.

As long as you have the feeling of “I and Mine”, surrender is not possible. When you have surrendered yourself to God, offer your everything to Him, unreservedly and unconditionally. Then God will look after everything. Everything is His. To obey His command is the characteristic of a person who surrenders himself to God totally. Swami says, *“The easiest path to self-realisation is the surrender of the ego. Arjuna surrendered and so, the war in which he was engaged was transformed into a spiritual exercise! Do not pit your tiny ego against the Almighty; leave it to His Will and you will have lasting peace. When asked where God is, people point towards the sky or some far distant region; that is why He is not manifesting Himself. Realise that He is in you, with you, behind you, before you and all around you; and He can be seen and felt everywhere.”*



What earned for Arjuna the right to be taught by the Lord is the fact that he stood in complete and total surrender and was prepared to take whatever instructions the Lord would give. It is to such a person and under such circumstances that one can give the sacred meaning of the scriptures or the sacred significance of the Divine. Every one will have to deserve this, earn this by good conduct, by good behaviour and by doing good deeds. Krishna says, “Fix thy thought on Me; be devoted to Me; worship Me; do homage to Me; thou shall reach Me. The truth do I declare to thee; for thou art dear to Me. This is My teaching, My grace.”

Dr Hislop’s Conversations with Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba:

Hislop: Swami has said that one cannot surrender that which he really does not own and of which he is not in control.

Sai: *It is not a question of surrendering or giving to some other one. One surrenders to oneself. Recognition that the Atma is oneself is surrender. Surrender really means the realisation that all is God, that there is nobody who surrenders, that there is nothing to be surrendered, nor is there anyone to accept a surrender. All is God. There is only God.*

Hislop: What does surrender to the Lord mean in such common things as shaving, going to the market, walking and so on?

Sai: *Surrendering to the Lord is surrendering all thoughts and actions, not wishing for the fruits of the actions, but doing the action because it is one’s duty. The act is dedicated to the Lord and the results, therefore, are borne by the Lord. Since the ego, in this way, is not fed and cultivated, it disappears before long. For example, if one shaves, which is classed as an uninspired mundane task, the attitude is that one is preparing the body for the sake of the Lord in the heart, and one is making the best of his appearance to honour the Lord, and not for one’s personal vanity or reward. Also, in walking, offer the action to the Lord to maintain a body fit for the Lord to live in; and that is the attitude for every single act of the day.*

Seeing Him in every Being, being aware of Him every moment of existence, being immersed in the bliss of this awareness; that is, merged in the relationship caused by profound devotion and love to Him; all acts, big and small, dedicated to Him, (wish, will, attitude, activity, fruit, consequence) everything from beginning to end, the renunciation of all attachment to the self and the performance of all acts in a spirit of worshipful non-attachment; This is what the Lord seeks from you.

Of course, it is hard to effect this full surrender. But if man makes but the slightest effort towards it, the Lord Himself will confer the courage to pursue it to the end. He will walk with him and help him as a friend; He will lead him as a guide; He will guard him from evil and temptation; He will be his staff and support. To visualise the Lord as resident in all and as responsible for everything (for He is the director of the play) is the

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hallmark of devotion. The total dependence on God is considered as surrender. What is sought to be surrendered is your mind, but when it is itself turbulent and beyond your control, then how can you surrender it? Mind can only be surrendered when it is serene. In that stillness of mind one apprehends the all-pervasive aspect of God.

Devotion is not praying before a deity for sometime everyday or deliberating about spirituality now and then. It is a constant search with yearning for realising Him amidst all worldly preoccupations. Like a village maid who balances pots of water on her head deftly and chats with her friends without losing balance, a spiritual seeker must stay attuned to God without getting distracted by his worldly engagements. He should surrender to God with total faith that whatever happened in his life was the working of the divine will. Surrender to God is love which transcends all other love that human beings are usually familiar with.



Emperor Bali, the grandson of Prahalada, was an example of a devotee who completely surrendered to the Lord, offered everything he possessed to the Lord and thereby sanctified his life. "I offer to you, oh Lord! All my wealth and possessions, as well as my entire self. I take refuge in you, protect me, oh Lord!" This was the attitude of self-sacrifice with which Bali offered himself to Lord Vamana. He was prepared to offer his head to the Lord and go down to the nether world. No sacrifice was too great for him to win the Lord's grace. When his guru, Sukracharya advised him to go back on the gift he had promised to Vamana, the incarnation of Lord Vishnu, Bali rejected the advice declaring that his life, his body and all that he had belonged to the Lord and was prepared to give away everything regardless of what happened to him.

In Atma-nivedanam the devotee loses his identity in the Divine and functions as a joyous instrument in His hands. Naturally he becomes the channel through which great missions get executed. The resigned mental state of such a person surrendered to God is like that of the proverbial bird on the mast of a ship that was unaware when the ship set sail and entered the ocean from the mouth of Ganga. When it realised that it was too far away from the shore, it tried to fly back to the shore. But even after flying in all four directions, it could not find the shore. Ultimately it settled down tired on the mast of the ship in total surrender and free from worry. True self-surrender comes only after extreme self-effort.

Many among those who try to practise this type of self-surrender often get into a mechanical rut- of merely uttering such words. This is because, although we make an act of surrender, we are really not sure whether God accepts them or not. It is therefore essential also to remember that God accepts whatever we offer. Then we shall be very careful not to commit any evil. Such a conviction that God accepts the acts and their fruits which we offer can transform our life. It is important to understand that the path of self-surrender is not one of inertia or laziness. Although the ego and the sense of doership is weakened, action is not abandoned. A person truly resigned will be intensely active and yet feel equally strongly that he is not the doer.

Offering a coconut to the Lord in the temple symbolises Atma-nivedanam. In the temple one offers the coconut to the Lord by breaking its hard shell, which symbolises the little 'i' (the ego). The white sweet flesh, which symbolises the purified mind, is then offered to the Lord. A purified mind is a mind which has been transcended. If one can break this hard shell, the little 'i', then only can one merge in Him.

Swami points out that the concept of total surrender to Lord Almighty is common to all religions:

*"The basic lesson that each religion teaches is to surrender to the sovereign will of God and leave the consequences of deeds, well done, to the Lord Himself. It is His will, and your duty is only to shape yourself into a fit instrument."* Abraham surrendered himself and obeyed God's call to migrate to a foreign land. Moses, who could have lived an easy life, refused to remain in luxury as a member of Pharaoh's family. He

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surrendered himself to God and led the Israelites to freedom, out of their bondage to Egypt. Jesus, in the garden of Gethsemane prayed, “Not my will but yours be done.”

To ascend to the higher realm we need to surrender our ego- self. To surrender our self, we must surrender our thoughts, emotions and desires. Ironically, by surrendering, we will be able to receive and respond to whatever God sends our way without the distortions by the ego-personality. God consciousness has already been put in the heart of every being. When we surrender the self, then God’s Will moves through us and our actions will become His actions. All we need to do is to surrender our belief of self-sovereignty. God is with us all the time. In the Quran Allah says, “I am closer to you than your jugular vein”. So He is always close and present. But we are not present with Him. We are busy with ourselves through our thoughts, emotions and desires.

Surrender to God is seen by Muslims as the defining characteristic of their faith, basic to their own sense of identity as Muslim and touchstone to their sense of unity. Unlike many religions, Islam takes its name from ‘an attributive title’, that is, Islam describes anyone who has the attribute of Islam(surrender), and of being Muslim(one who has so surrendered), having surrendered himself to God or resigned his will to God’s Will in such a way that he experiences the well-being of God’s peace. Practising the five pillars of Islam is a fundamental requirement of Muslim surrender.

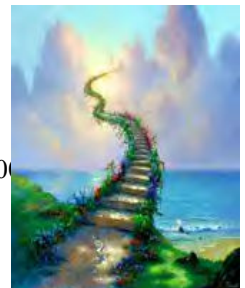


Jesus Christ showed through the cross and resurrection the ultimate example of one who completely surrendered to God’s Will. God offered, in perfect love, all of the Divine Self. Surrender or love is not usually done by one great sacrifice or event. Giving of oneself to God is through multitude of small actions and attitudes offered each day. It may take the form of a smile, a kind word, helping a neighbour, resisting the temptation to repay evil with evil, study of God’s word (scriptures), serving God’s people (friend, stranger, enemy), spending time with God’s people (in worship and a congregation), and spending time with God (prayer) we surrender or give ourselves to God in love in small ways. Through each faithful action we turn from self to God. One cannot really do a great act of love if one cannot first do a small one (F.W. Robertson). The point is to give of yourself in small ways so you can grow to surrender all of yourself to God as God has already done for us. Only by giving of yourself totally to God can you know the fullness of God’s eternal and infinite love. The main principle of surrender to the Christian is “emptying the self” so that God may live through us. The supreme act of surrender which we are called to emulate is the surrender of Christ first as coming into the world as God incarnate and then the surrender to the Cross in the act of sacrificial atonement.

When we surrender to God, we are acknowledging that what we ‘own’ actually belongs to Him. He is the giver of all things. We are responsible to care for what God has given. By surrendering to God, we admit that He is ultimately in control of everything, including our present circumstances. Surrendering to God helps us to let go of whatever has been holding us back from God’s best for our lives. By surrendering to God, we let go of whatever has kept us from wanting God’s ways first. Self surrender can be looked upon not only as a spiritual discipline or the goal, but a way of life, as an essential value to be practised in day-to-day life. In total self-surrender we live in the present without expectations or the thought of what is going to happen in future.

The Sikh Ardas (prayer) demands a complete surrender to Divine Will. The Lord will never fail him who throws himself at His Mercy. Moreover, this submission eliminates the ego, the wall that stands between man and his creator. The reading of the Guru Granth Sahib is itself a kind of prayer. We seek the Guru’s command. He gives us wise counsel, but it is for us to obey. Merely worshipping the scripture without carrying its teaching into daily life is the very negation of prayer.

The nine modes of Bhakti are the ways in which a devotee attains the Supreme Ideal of life. A devotee can take up any of these paths and reach the highest state. The path of

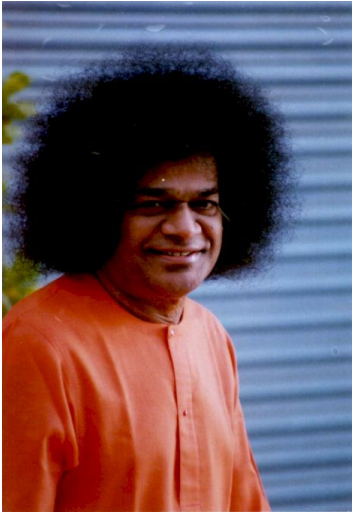


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Bhakti is the easiest of all and is not very much against the nature of human inclinations. It slowly and gradually takes the individual to the Supreme without frustrating his human instincts. It is not direct assertion of God, but a progressive realisation of Him. It is futile to argue which spiritual practice is more beneficial. As long as one gets sleep, it hardly matters where one sleeps. Similarly, one should have purity of mind whatever may be the spiritual practice one undertakes. In order to purify the mind, one should develop the principle of love.

Atma-nivedanam is living in oneness with the whole creation. It is merging one's will in the Will of the Lord, not resisting or questioning whatever is happening because nothing remains apart from Him. Nothing can take one away from God, because God is one's reality. Without God one is nothing. One is because God is. Kindle love divine in your heart, for this is the immediate way to the Kingdom of God. Pray to the Lord, sing His glory, recite His Name, become a channel of His grace, seek His Will, do His Will, surrender to His Will. You will become one with the cosmic will. Surrender unto the Lord. He will become your charioteer in the field of life. He will drive your chariot well. You will reach the destination, the abode of Immortal Bliss.

### Prayer of Surrender



Why get agitated? Let Me take care of all your business. I shall be the one who will think about them. I am waiting for nothing else than your surrender to Me, and then you do not have to worry any more about anything. Say farewell to all fears and discouragement. You demonstrate that you do not trust Me. On the contrary, you must rely blindly on Me.

To surrender means: To turn your thoughts away from troubles, to turn them away from difficulties you encounter and from all your problems. Leave everything into My hands saying "Lord, Thy will be done. Thou think of it." That is to say: "Lord I thank you for you have taken everything in your hands, and you will resolve this for my highest good."

Remember that thinking of the consequences of a thing is contrary to surrender. That is to say, when you worry that a situation has not had the desired outcome, you thus demonstrate that you do not believe in My love for you. You will prove that you do not consider your life to be under My control and that nothing escapes Me.

Never think: How is this going to end?... What is going to happen? If you give into this temptation, you demonstrate that you do not trust Me. Do you want Me to deal with it...yes or no? Then you must stop being anxious about it! I shall guide you only if you completely surrender to Me and when I must lead you into a different path than the one that you expect, I carry you in My arms.

What seriously upsets you is your reasoning, your worrying, your obsession and your will to provide for yourselves at any price. I can do so many things when the being, as much in his material necessities as in his spiritual ones, turns to Me saying: "You think of it." then he closes his eyes and rests quietly. You will receive a lot but only when your prayer will rely fully upon Me. You pray to Me when in pain so that I will intervene, but in the way you desire it. You do not rely on Me, but you want Me to adjust to your requests.

Don't behave like sick ones who ask the doctor to treat, all the time suggesting the treatment to him. Do not do that; but rather, even in sad circumstances, say: "Lord I praise and thank You for this problem, for this necessity. I pray to You to arrange things as You please for this terrestrial and temporal life. You know very well what is best for me."

Sometimes you feel that disasters increase instead of diminishing! Do not get agitated. Close your eyes and tell me with faith: "Thy will be done. Thou think of it." And when you speak thus, I even accomplish a miracle when necessary. I only think of it when you trust me totally. I always think of you, but I can only help you completely when you rely fully on Me.

—Sathya Sai Baba

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Note: Unable to confirm if it is Swami's speech.