

ANANTA SATSANG • SACRED TEXTS

अलौकिकि प्रेम

Alaukik Prem

Divine Love Beyond the World



Swami Ramsukhdas

*The Gopīs, Union, Separation,
and Ever-Growing Love*

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The Gopīs, Union, Separation, and Ever-Growing Love

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The translation preserves the source's distinctions between worldly and divine love, desire and *prema*, separation-longing and union, the guṇa-constituted and the divine, majesty and intimate sweetness, and liberation and ever-growing love. Technical devotional terms are retained where a single English equivalent would flatten the argument.

Translator's Note

The title *Alaukik Prem* names love that does not belong to the economy of worldly pleasure, pain, merit, demerit, possession, or self-gratification. Depending on context, *alaukik* is therefore rendered as ‘divine,’ ‘beyond the world,’ or ‘supramundane.’ The source's intimate Vraja theology is presented in its own devotional register rather than recast as modern psychology or symbolism.

Terminology Guide

Kāma means desire for one's own pleasure, while *prema* seeks the Beloved's joy. *Viraha* is separation-longing and *milana* is union. *Rasa* is the living relish of divine love; *svarūpa-śakti* is God's intrinsic divine power; *aīśvarya* is divine majesty; *mādhurya* is intimate sweetness; and *apnāpan* is the conviction of intimate belonging - that God is one's own.

Alaukik Prem

Om. Salutations to the Supreme Self.

On the moonlit night of the autumn full moon, Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa began to play His flute. Hearing its sweet and captivating sound, the gopīs hurried away to meet Him just as they were. This was such an extraordinary state of divine love that the gopīs themselves no longer knew: Who are we? Where are we going? Why are we going? Everything belonging to Bhagavān is divine, beyond the world, and made of pure consciousness. His flute was therefore divine, and so was its sound. On hearing that divine sound, no inertness remained in the gopīs either. Becoming fully conscious, they set out to meet the One who is pure consciousness.

In *kāma* - worldly erotic attraction - a woman and a man each want to obtain pleasure from the other and draw the other toward themselves. They therefore remain especially attentive and adorn their bodies. In *prema*, however, there is not the slightest wish to take pleasure or to draw the beloved toward oneself. That attentiveness disappears; one even forgets one's own body. The gopīs therefore forgot to dress and adorn themselves. The moment they heard the flute, they set out just as they were, with clothes and ornaments in disarray: “Some went near Kṛṣṇa with their clothes and ornaments put on awry.”

vyatyasta-vastrābharaṇāḥ kāścit kṛṣṇāntikaṃ yayuḥ

At that time, some gopīs were shut inside their homes by their husbands, sons, and others, or by their fathers, brothers, and others, so that they had no way to leave. Śrī Śukadeva Ji Maharaj describes what happened to the gopīs who found no way out:

*duḥsaha-preṣṭha-viraha-tīvra-tāpa-dhutāśubhāḥ |
dhyāna-prāptācyutāśleṣa-nirvṛtyā kṣīṇa-maṅgalāḥ || tam eva
paramātmānaṁ jāra-buddhyāpi saṅgatāḥ | jahur guṇa-mayaṁ
dehaṁ sadyaḥ prakṣīṇa-bandhanāḥ ||*

“Their inauspiciousness was swept away by the fierce, unbearable heat of separation from their dearest Beloved; their auspiciousness was exhausted by the fulfillment they experienced when, in meditation, they attained Acyuta's embrace. Though united with Him even through the paramour-conception, they were united with that very Supreme Self. Their bonds were immediately and completely exhausted, and they relinquished the body made of the *guṇas*.”

“The fierce heat of the unbearable separation from their supremely beloved Śrī Kṛṣṇa burned away those gopīs' inauspiciousness; and the happiness they experienced by embracing Śrī Kṛṣṇa, who appeared in their meditation, destroyed their auspiciousness.”

“Although those gopīs held the paramour-conception toward Śrī Kṛṣṇa, their relationship with the one Supreme Self, Śrī Kṛṣṇa, caused all their bonds to be destroyed immediately and completely, and they relinquished their body made of the *guṇas*.”

Suppose, on reflecting upon the verses above, we take them to mean that the gopīs' sins were destroyed by the fierce burning of separation from Bhagavān - “their inauspiciousness was swept away” - and that their merits were destroyed by the happiness born of meditation - “their auspiciousness was exhausted” - so that, freed from sin and merit and thus liberated, they went and met Bhagavān. This interpretation does not appear reasonable. Separation and union occur only after one has risen above sin and

merit. The pleasure and pain produced by sin and merit belong to nature, whereas the happiness and pain connected with Bhagavān - union and separation - do not belong to nature; they are beyond the world. Separation from Bhagavān and union with Him arise when one's relationship with the *guṇas* has been severed, whereas sin and merit arise through a relationship with the *guṇas*. Without such a relationship, sin and merit cannot occur at all. To call the happiness and pain of divine love - union and separation - the fruit of sin and merit is, in truth, to disparage them. A relationship with Bhagavān brings *yoga*, union with Him, not *bhoga*, self-centered enjoyment. Enjoyment is a cause of sin.*

kāma eṣa krodha eṣa rajo-guṇa-samudbhavaḥ | mahāśano
mahā-pāpmā viddhy enam iha vairiṇam ||*

“It is desire; it is anger, born of the *guṇa* of passion. It is all-devouring and greatly sinful. Know it here as the enemy.”

One point deserves careful thought. Sin and merit are not exhausted by one's becoming happy or unhappy, but by the arrival of favorable or unfavorable circumstances. Becoming happy or unhappy is not the fruit of sin or merit; it is the fruit of ignorance, of foolishness. Separation from Bhagavān, however, is the fruit of divine love. When a relationship with Bhagavān has arisen, how can ignorance remain? Ignorance abides neither in knowledge nor in love. A person becomes happy or unhappy only so long as he has neither realized his true nature nor come to love Bhagavān. The exhaustion of sin and merit is no great thing. Everyone's sin and merit are constantly being exhausted, for favorable and unfavorable circumstances continually come and go before every being. Merits are ceaselessly exhausted in heaven, and sins are ceaselessly exhausted in the hells. Sin and merit fall within the *guṇas* born of

nature. Both therefore belong to the same class: both cause bondage, both are inauspicious and impure, and both arise and perish. Separation and union arising from a relationship with Bhagavān, by contrast, are utterly divine, conscious, beyond the world, eternal, and ever-increasing divine love. A relationship with Bhagavān destroys not merely sin and merit, but ignorance itself - association with the *guṇas* - which is their cause. Sin and merit therefore belong to an altogether different category from separation and union.

When knowledge of Reality dawns, a knower is not freed from circumstances; rather, he is freed from happiness and sorrow. Favorable and unfavorable circumstances continue to come before the knower in accordance with *prārabdha*, the karma already bearing fruit, but circumstances do not affect him: he does not become happy or unhappy, because he is beyond the *guṇas* - “the same in pain and pleasure, established in the Self” (Gītā 14.24). If favorable and unfavorable circumstances themselves bestowed happiness and sorrow - if happiness and sorrow were the fruits of merit and sin - a person could never become free of them. Yet the knower does become free of happiness and sorrow: “freed from the pairs of opposites known as pleasure and pain” (Gītā 15.5). Prahlāda Ji, Mīrābāī, and others faced many adverse circumstances, yet they did not become unhappy. A person is therefore not free to be without circumstances, but is completely free not to undergo them as enjoyment or suffering - not to become happy or unhappy. For, as a part of the Supreme Self, changelessness is intrinsic to him. *Consequently, in the Bhāgavatam verses cited above, dhutāśubhāḥ cannot be taken to mean that sin was destroyed, nor kṣīṇa-maṅgalāḥ* that merit was destroyed. What, then, do these expressions mean? Let us now consider this.*

īśvara aṁsa jīva abināśi | cetana amala sahaja sukhārāśi ||*

“The individual being is an imperishable part of the Lord: conscious, stainless, and by nature a treasury of happiness.”

anāditvān nirguṇatvāt paramātmāyam avyayaḥ | śarīra-stho 'pi kaunteya na karoti na lipyate ||

“Because this imperishable Supreme Self is beginningless and without *guṇas*, O son of Kuntī, though dwelling in the body, It neither acts nor is tainted.”

The heat - the pain - the gopīs experienced in separation from Bhagavān was unbearable and intense: “the fierce, unbearable heat of separation from their dearest Beloved.” This heat is utterly unlike the afflictions of the world. Worldly affliction contains nothing but pain, whereas the heat of *viraha*, separation-longing, contains nothing but bliss. Eating a chili burns one's mouth and brings tears to one's eyes, yet one does not stop eating it, because one finds a certain *rasa*, a savor, in it. In the same way, a loving devotee finds in the fierce heat of *viraha* a *rasa* incomparably more extraordinary even than that. This is why a great soul such as Caitanya Mahāprabhu regarded *viraha* itself as supreme. Worldly affliction arises from a relationship with sins, whereas the heat of *viraha* arises from divine love for Bhagavān. In that heat, therefore, the devotee experiences bliss because a mental relationship with Bhagavān remains: “the fulfillment of Acyuta's embrace attained in meditation.” Just as thirst is not in truth separate from water, *viraha* is not in truth separate from *milana*, union. Thirst arises only because there is a relationship with water. Water is remembered in thirst; thus thirst itself takes the form of water. In the same way, *viraha* itself takes the form of union. Separation and

union are two states of the one divine love. In relation to the world, pleasure is a form of pain and pain is also a form of pain. In relation to Bhagavān, however, pain - separation - is a form of happiness, and happiness - union - is also a form of happiness, of bliss. The reason is that worldly pleasure and pain - favorable and unfavorable conditions - arise through association with the *guṇas*, whereas separation from Bhagavān and union with Him transcend the *guṇas*. The pain arising from a relationship with Bhagavān - *viraha* - therefore gives far greater bliss even than worldly pleasure. Worldly pain involves a relationship with the world, which is an absence; the pain of *viraha* involves a relationship with Bhagavān, who is presence and reality. In worldly pain, karmas perish after yielding their fruit, while the independent existence of the doer remains. In the pain of *viraha*, however, the very cause of karma - association with the *guṇas* - is destroyed. The doer's independent existence does not remain; only the Supreme Self's existence remains. Worldly pain does not destroy the bondage of birth and death, but the pain of *viraha* destroys it completely: "their bonds were completely exhausted." The fierce heat of separation from Śrī Kṛṣṇa therefore caused the gopīs' body made of the *guṇas* to fall away. At the same time, by inwardly uniting with Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the gopīs experienced a happiness extraordinary even in comparison with that of Brahmaloka. All worlds up to Brahmaloka cause bondage because return from them is inevitable: "All worlds, up to the world of Brahmā, are subject to return, O Arjuna" (Gītā 8.16). The happiness of Brahmaloka thus still belongs to nature, whereas the meditation-born happiness the gopīs attained transcends nature. The point is that the pain of separation from Bhagavān and the happiness of meditation-born union did not merely destroy the gopīs' sins and merits; they also destroyed association with the *guṇas*, the cause of birth and death. When association with all three

guṇas - sattva, rajas, and tamas - disappeared, their body made of the guṇas also fell away and they reached Bhagavān: “Their bonds were immediately and completely exhausted, and they relinquished the body made of the guṇas.” For sattva, rajas, and tamas all bind the embodied, imperishable being to the body. Association with these guṇas is itself the cause of birth in higher and lower wombs: “Association with the guṇas is the cause of its birth in good and evil wombs” (Gītā 13.22). Since their association with the guṇas had been destroyed, the gopīs did not enter a higher or lower womb; rather, they attained Bhagavān directly. That is, the gopīs were freed from the fruits of all auspicious and inauspicious actions that produce karmic bondage: “Thus shall you be freed from the bonds of karma, with their good and evil fruits” (Gītā 9.28). The bondage through which the pain of the hells is experienced, and through which the happiness of heaven, Brahmaloḥa, and other worlds is experienced - that bondage, association with the guṇas, was completely destroyed for the gopīs. Bondage is caused not by sin and merit themselves, but by association with the guṇas. Thus, in the Bhāgavatam verses cited above, dhutāśubhāḥ means that rajas and tamas were destroyed, while kṣīṇa-maṅgalāḥ means that sattva was destroyed. The guṇa of sattva is illuminating and free from affliction, and so it is called “auspiciousness” here. Yet even though sattva illuminates and is free from affliction, it binds through attachment to happiness and knowledge: “It binds through attachment to happiness and through attachment to knowledge, O sinless one” (Gītā 14.6). By inwardly embracing Śrī Kṛṣṇa, who appeared in their meditation, the gopīs experienced an extraordinary happiness. That happiness destroyed even the attachment to happiness and knowledge arising from sattva; in other words, even their attachment to sātṭvika happiness and sātṭvika knowledge disappeared. In this way, association with all

three guṇas, the cause of birth and death, ceased completely. With that association gone, the gopīs' body made of the guṇas also ceased to remain.*

sattvaṃ rajas tama iti guṇāḥ prakṛti-sambhavāḥ | nibadhnanti
mahā-bāho dehe dehinam avyayam ||*

“*Sattva, rajas, and tamas* - these *guṇas* born of nature bind the imperishable embodied being to the body, O mighty-armed one.”

The following exchange between King Parīkṣit and Śrī Śukadeva Ji further establishes the same point: the gopīs had become free of all three guṇas. Parīkṣit asked:*

kṛṣṇaṃ viduḥ paraṃ kāntaṃ na tu brahmatayā mune |
guṇa-pravāhoparamas tāsāṃ guṇa-dhiyāṃ katham ||

“O sage! Those gopīs did not regard Śrī Kṛṣṇa as Brahman; rather, they regarded Him only as their supreme husband. How, then, did the body formed by the current of the *guṇas* - the body made of the *guṇas* - come to an end for those gopīs whose understanding was attached to the *guṇas*?”

Śrī Śukadeva Ji replied:

nṛṇāṃ niḥśreyasārthāya vyaktir bhagavato nṛpa |
avyayasyāprameyasya nirguṇasya guṇātmanaḥ ||

“O King! Bhagavān is imperishable - entirely free of change - immeasurable, not an object grasped by knowledge, free of the *guṇas* such as *sattva*, and endowed with divine qualities such as beauty. He manifests before all solely for the supreme welfare of human beings.”

The Gītā calls the guṇa of sattva “free from affliction” - tatra sattvaṃ nirmalatvāt prakāśakam anāmayam (14.6) - and also calls the supreme state “free from affliction” - janma-bandha-vinirmuktāḥ padaṃ gacchanty anāmayam (2.51). The difference is that sattva is relatively free from affliction, whereas the supreme state is unconditionally free from it.*

Knowledge of Reality destroys one's relationship with the body - the sense of “I” and “mine” in it - but it does not destroy the body itself. When one is liberated while living, accumulated karma and karma now being created are exhausted, but *prārabdha*, the karma already bearing fruit, is not. Thus, even after liberation while living and the dawn of knowledge of Reality, the body remains as long as the momentum of *prārabdha* remains. If the body were destroyed immediately, who would teach this knowledge? How would the tradition of the knowledge of Brahman continue? The heat born of the gopīs' separation, however, was so extraordinary that not only did their association with the *guṇas* cease, but their body made of the *guṇas* was also destroyed. All three kinds of their karma - accumulated, presently being created, and already bearing fruit - were exhausted together, immediately (*sadyaḥ*) and completely (*prakṣiṇa*): “their bonds were immediately and completely exhausted.” This establishes that in separation, bondage is released quickly, whereas in union it takes time. Separation contains a bliss extraordinary even in comparison with union.

The intense anguish of separation burns away *guṇa-saṅga*-association with the qualities of nature, or primal ignorance-which is the root cause of birth and death. The beginningless association with the qualities was not destroyed in the gopīs who heard the flute and went to God, for they did not undergo the intense anguish born of separation. But for those who

did undergo that anguish, the entire world, together with their beginningless association with the qualities, ceased to exist, and they were the first to go and meet God. In the intense anguish of separation, their bodies fell away; through the bliss born of meditation, they became non-different from God. They met God not outwardly but inwardly, and that is the real-complete-union.

Although those gopīs had a lover’s conception (*jāra-buddhi*) toward Śrī Kṛṣṇa—that is, their gaze was directed toward the beauty of the Supreme Lord’s body—even so, they attained God: “They came into union with that very Supreme Self, even through a lover’s conception” (*tam eva paramātmānam jāra-buddhyāpi saṅgatāḥ*). Despite that conception, there was not the slightest desire in the gopīs for their own happiness—that is, no *kāma*. Had they desired their own happiness, they would have adorned their bodies before going to God. The term *jāra-buddhi* is used here because the gopīs were married to others, while their love was for Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Their bodies composed of the qualities of nature no longer remained; how, then, could a mentality of enjoyment remain? There was no locus left for such a mentality; only the Supreme Self remained.

This extraordinary condition of the gopīs arose through God’s supremely divine intrinsic power—His *vastu-śakti* or *svarūpa-śakti*—not through their own power of feeling. Through God’s intrinsic power, their lover’s conception was destroyed. Just as all things that come into contact with fire become fire-like through fire’s inherent power, so too, whatever attitude—desire, hatred, fear, affection, or any other—a devotee uses to form a relationship with God, that devotee becomes of God’s own nature through God’s intrinsic power. *The devotee’s attitude and effort do not accomplish this; it is God’s supremely divine svarūpa-śakti** that acts.

Through desire, hatred, fear, or affection-just as through devotion-many have fixed the mind on the Lord, cast off their sin, and attained His state. The gopīs did so through desire, Kāṁsa through fear, kings such as Śiśupāla through hatred, the Vṛṣṇis through relationship, you through affection, and we through devotion, O Lord.

The source’s printed explanation reads: “Not one but many people have fixed their minds on God through desire, hatred, fear, and affection, washed away all their sins, and attained God just as devotees do through devotion. Thus the gopīs fixed their minds on God through desire, Kāṁsa through fear, kings such as Śiśupāla and Dantavakra through hatred, the Yādavas through family relationship, you people-Yudhiṣṭhira and the others-through affection, and we-Nārada and the others-through devotion.”

The reason is that God manifests solely for the highest welfare of living beings: “O King, the Lord’s manifestation is for the supreme good of humankind” (*nṛṇāṁ niḥśreyasārthāya vyaktir bhagavato nṛpa*).

In the Gītā, God names four kinds of His devotees: the seeker of worldly ends, the distressed, the inquirer, and the knower-the lover. *Although the seeker of worldly ends, the distressed, and the inquirer remain related to the qualities of nature, their principal relationship is with God; therefore, they too become free of all three qualities. By some means or other, then, a living being should establish a relationship with God: “Therefore, by any means whatsoever, one should fix the mind on Kṛṣṇa”* (tasmāt kenāpy upāyena manaḥ kṛṣṇe niveśayet*). For the living being is an integral part of God alone.

When one's relationship with God remains primary, the relationship with objects of enjoyment disappears. But when the relationship with objects of enjoyment is primary, one's relationship with God is obscured; it is not erased. The reason is that the living being is eternally united with God.

“Four kinds of virtuous people worship Me, O Arjuna: the distressed, the inquirer, the seeker of worldly ends, and the knower, O best of the Bharatas.”

One name of Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa is “the crest-jewel among thieves and lovers” (*cora-jāra-śikhāmaṇi*). It means that there neither is nor can be another thief or lover equal to God. Other thieves and lovers seek only their own pleasure, whereas God enacts the roles of thief and lover solely for another's happiness. Both these divine sports of His are wondrous, transcendent, and beyond the world: “My birth and deeds are divine” (*janma karma ca me divyam*).

Worldly thieves steal only objects, but God steals, together with those objects, one's attraction, attachment, dearness, and so on toward them. Along with the gopīs' butter, God also devoured their bondage in the form of attachment. When He becomes a lover, He takes away, together with the enjoyer of pleasure, the attachment to pleasure and the very mentality of pleasure. Thus, attraction born of a relationship-*kāma*-ceases, and only attraction to God-pure *prema*-remains. No other existence remains; only God's existence remains. The point is that God allows no one among His devotees to remain a thief or an illicit lover: He steals away their very thievishness and loverhood. It is only attachment to “gold” (wealth) and “woman” that makes a person a “thief” and an “illicit lover.” Because God brings about the complete absence of attachment to

gold and woman, He is the crest-jewel even among thieves and lovers.

Although the gods too are called divine, their divinity is so described in comparison with human beings. God's divinity, however, is absolute and therefore wondrous even in comparison with the gods. That is why even the gods eternally long for a vision of God's supremely divine form: "Even the gods perpetually yearn to behold this form" (devā apy asya rūpasya nityam darśana-kāṅkṣiṇaḥ).

A doubt may arise here: if the gopīs' bodies composed of the qualities of nature no longer remained, how did they participate in the Rāsa-līlā with God? The answer is that, in reality, the Rāsa-līlā takes place only when one has gone beyond the qualities-when one is *nirguṇa*. A relationship with God after one has become free of the qualities is exceedingly wondrous compared with a relationship formed while the qualities still remain. Even the devotional attitudes of servitude, friendship, parental affection, and sweetness truly arise only when one is beyond the qualities-liberated.* A verse says:

Duality before realization gives rise to delusion. Once realization has dawned, however, the duality deliberately imagined-or accepted-for the sake of devotion is even more beautiful than nonduality.

The source's printed translation reads: "Duality before realization of Truth plunges one into delusion, but after realization, the duality accepted for the sake of devotion is even more beautiful than nonduality."

This is the wondrous distinction of the path of devotion: within it, even beforehand-while the qualities of nature still remain-a practitioner can cultivate toward God the attitudes of servitude, friendship, parental affection, and so on.

The *prema* that gives God extraordinary joy does not belong to the qualities of nature; it belongs to the *nirguṇa* state beyond them. For how could the love that even God—who transcends the qualities—longs for be composed of those qualities? Just as God’s body is divine and not composed of the qualities, so the bodies of those *gopīs* too became divine and ceased to be composed of the qualities.

Even God with attributes (*saguṇa*) is not endowed with the qualities of *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*. Rather, He possesses divine qualities such as majesty, sweetness, beauty, and generosity. Therefore, devotion to the *saguṇa* Lord is itself described as *nirguṇa*-free from *sattva* and the other qualities. For example: “But My dwelling place is *nirguṇa*” (*manniketam tu nirguṇam*, Śrīmad Bhāgavatam 11.25.25), and “Service to Me is *nirguṇa*” (*mat-sevāyām tu nirguṇā*, Śrīmad Bhāgavatam 11.25.27). By practicing devotion to God, a person goes beyond the qualities.*

“The person who serves Me through unwavering devotional yoga transcends all these qualities and becomes fit for the realization of Brahman.”

The point is that once a relationship with God is established, the qualities of *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas* do not remain at all. Thus, the bodies present in the Rāsa-līlā were not bodies possessing qualities like ours. Rather, like God’s body, they were free from all three qualities—supremely divine. Every one of the *gopīs* who went to that

Rāsa-līlā did so by God’s will, having assumed a divine body made of devotional feeling. That is why the gopīs’ husbands saw their bodies composed of the qualities of nature sleeping beside them in their own homes: “The inhabitants of Vraja thought their own wives were beside them” (*manyamānāḥ sva-pārśva-sthān svān svān dārān vrajaukaśaḥ*).

The conclusion is this: for those gopīs who did not undergo the intense anguish born of separation, their bodies composed of the qualities of nature remained beside their husbands, but-like one liberated while living-they no longer had any relationship with those bodies; only an awareness of the bodies remained. But for those gopīs who did undergo that intense anguish born of separation, neither their bodies composed of the qualities nor even the awareness of them remained. The question of any relationship with those bodies therefore does not arise at all, for their beginningless association with the qualities-the root cause of birth and death-had itself ceased.

Rāsa-līlā - Love That Grows at Every Moment

God is infinite, and therefore everything about Him is infinite: “Hari is infinite, and Hari’s stories are infinite” (*Rāmcārītmānas*, Bālakāṇḍa 140.3). His love too is infinite. Therefore, love contains infinite *rasa*. Infinite *rasa* means that love increases at every moment. For love to increase at every moment, both separation (*viraha*) and union (*milana*) must be present within it. For without separation, *rasa* does not grow; and without union, *rasa* is not experienced or savored.

In the world, neither the *rasa* of conjunction nor the *rasa* of disjunction endures, because the world is characterized by perpetual disjunction. But the *rasa* of union (*yoga*) is eternal and the *rasa* of separation (*viyoga*) is also eternal, because there is eternal union with God. Conjunction and disjunction occur within the world’s perpetual disjunction, whereas union and separation occur within eternal union with God.

For example, Mother Kausalyā says to Sumitrā: “O Sumitrā! If Rāma has gone to the forest, why do I still see Him? And if He has not gone to the forest, why does my heart burn even when I see Him before me?” Thus, union and separation dwell together in love:

*Frantic to meet Him night and day,
Even while meeting, the heart feels it has never met.
These are the words of the lover “Bhagavata-Rasika”;
None but a true lover can understand them.*

“Frantic to meet Him night and day, even while meeting”-this is union; “the heart feels it has never met”-this is separation. Rādhājī

says to her companion, “Blessed are you, for you behold Śrī Kṛṣṇa! I have never yet seen Śrī Kṛṣṇa.” Why? When Śrī Kṛṣṇa came before her, Rādhājī’s gaze caught on His jeweled earring and became still; it never moved beyond it. How, then, could she behold Śrī Kṛṣṇa?

Union with God and separation from Him are both eternal, indescribable, and divine; through them, love increases at every moment. In union, the lover perceives a deficiency in his own love: “I do not possess love as worthy of God as God Himself is.” In separation, the lover never forgets the Beloved; instead, uninterrupted remembrance-total absorption-continues. God gives both this union and this separation, and both are themselves forms of God. He gives separation so that the devotee experiences the deficiency of love within himself and, by experiencing that deficiency, love grows. He gives union so that the devotee experiences and savors love.

Whatever attitude a devotee may have toward God-servitude, friendship, parental affection, sweetness, or another-the devotee has no separate existence of his own. For in *prema*, the devotee and God become two while being one, and even while being two, they remain one. Thus, between lover and Beloved, sometimes the servant becomes the master and sometimes the master becomes the servant. It has even been said of Śaṅkarājī, “Servant, master, and friend of Sītā’s Lord” (*Rāmcaritmānas*, Bālakāṇḍa 15.2).

In South India there is a temple in which Śaṅkarājī is holding Nandī aloft! Sometimes Śaṅkarājī is upon Nandī; sometimes Nandī is upon Śaṅkarājī. Sometimes God becomes the devotee’s cherished beloved, and sometimes the devotee becomes God’s cherished beloved: “You are truly dear to Me” (*iṣṭo ’si me dṛḍham iti*,

Bhagavad Gītā 18.64). Sometimes Śrī Kṛṣṇa becomes Rādhā, and sometimes Rādhā becomes Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

The unbroken *rasa* of knowledge is tranquil, but the infinite *rasa* of love increases at every moment. To say that it increases at every moment does not mean that love has some deficiency and grows in order to fill it. In reality, love is neither less nor more. The ocean, for example, remains calm within, but waves arise on its surface and it surges upon seeing the moon. Yet even when waves rise and it surges, the ocean's water neither increases nor decreases; it remains exactly what it was. In the same way, waves arise and a surge comes in the infinite *rasa* of love, but love itself neither increases nor decreases.

When love is tranquil, lover and Beloved are one-that is, non-different. When love surges, lover and Beloved are two. Though one, the lover and Beloved are two-this is separation. Though two, they remain one-this is union.

Thus, the very *rasa*-the love-that increases at every moment is called "Rāsa." Imagine someone afflicted by a thirst that is never quenched, while the water never diminishes and the stomach never fills. In such a condition, every sip of water would yield a perpetually new savor. In the same way, within love, Śrījī receives an eternally fresh *rasa* upon beholding Śrī Kṛṣṇa, and Śrī Kṛṣṇa receives an eternally fresh *rasa* upon beholding Śrījī; the gopīs experience the *rasa* of them both. This growth of love itself is called the Rāsa-līlā.

Indescribable Love

When a person, afflicted by the world, thinks, “If only there were someone who was truly my own - someone who would take me into his refuge, hold me to his heart, and take away my sorrow, anguish, sin, want, fear, dryness, and all the rest,” God grants that person His devotion. But when a person wishes only to be freed from the sufferings of the world, to escape dependence and become independent, God grants that person liberation. Once liberated, he becomes established in the Self - “the same in pain and pleasure, abiding in the Self” (Gītā 14.24). When he is established in the Self, a subtle ego of selfhood - of individuality - remains, and because of it he experiences “undivided bliss.”

The individual being is a part of the Supreme Self, and a part is naturally drawn toward the One to whom it belongs. Therefore, after becoming established in the Self - after attaining liberation - if he is not satisfied even with liberation, the self is naturally drawn toward its Own, the Supreme Self. Liberation brings the being’s sufferings to an end and fulfills his quest for knowledge, but it does not still his thirst for love. The point is that until love awakens, the self’s hunger is not utterly extinguished. When the self is drawn toward its Own - when love awakens - undivided bliss becomes infinite bliss, and individuality is wholly effaced.

Before liberation, the distinction between the individual being and God binds one. After liberation, however, the distinction accepted between the individual being, the lover, and God, the Beloved, for the sake of love bestows infinite bliss:

*hate mohāya bodhāt prāg jāte bodhe manīṣayā |
bhaktyartham kalpitam dvaitam advaitād api sundaram ||*

(*Bodhasāra*, Bhakti 42)

“Before awakening, duality can cast one into delusion; once awakening has arisen, the duality conceived - that is, willingly accepted - for the sake of devotion is more beautiful even than nonduality.” The reason is that the distinction before awakening is caused by the ego, while the distinction after awakening - the distinction that serves the growth of love - arises once the ego has been destroyed.

When one comes to know an object in the world, that knowledge does not keep increasing; rather, ignorance of the object disappears. In the same way, when one knows one’s essential nature on the path of knowledge, knowledge removes ignorance and then itself falls silent, while the Self remains by itself, just as it always was. The path of knowledge therefore yields an undivided, peaceful, uniform bliss. But when attachment to an object of the world arises, attachment keeps increasing - “as gain increases, greed increases.” Likewise, when love for God arises on the path of devotion, that love keeps increasing. The path of devotion therefore bestows infinite bliss that grows at every moment. The point is that attraction contains a joy that knowledge does not. Knowledge of worldly objects binds, while knowledge of one’s essential nature liberates. In just the same way, attraction to worldly objects brings immeasurable sorrow, while attraction to God brings infinite bliss.

The river of love that carries the infinite rasa has two banks: eternal union and eternal separation. Eternal union gives love vitality, brings a distinctive wonder to it, and makes it surge; eternal separation makes love grow at every moment. That is, when the lover feels a want of love within, the yearning arises: “May love increase still more, still more.”

*Restless day and night to meet the Beloved,
even in meeting, the heart feels it has never met.*

A wealthy man possesses three things: (1) wealth, (2) intoxication with wealth - pride - and (3) the wish that his wealth should increase. In the same way, a lover possesses three things: (1) love, (2) love's intoxication and ecstasy, and (3) the wish that love should increase. The wealthy man's desire that his wealth should grow still more arises because the defect called greed is increasing. But the lover's desire that love should grow still more arises because the defects called egoity and possessiveness are disappearing. Once those defects have vanished, eternal union manifests where egoity - the sense of "I" - had been, and eternal separation manifests where possessiveness - the sense of "mine" - had been.

In reality, eternal union - eternal communion - and eternal separation have always been present in the individual being. But when the being turned away from God and toward the world, eternal union assumed the form of egoity and eternal separation assumed the form of possessiveness. With the arising of egoity and possessiveness, love was suppressed and attachment or delusion toward the world arose. The point is that as long as these defects remain, attachment to the world grows. When the defects disappear, peace is obtained; when one does not rest content even in that peace, love grows. Affection for the world arises from defects such as desire and anger, while love for God arises from freedom from defect. As long as even the slightest attraction to the world remains within, love has not yet been attained, for desire has occupied love's place. Once love is attained, not the slightest attraction to the world remains.

Love grows at every moment only when its first state appears to pass away and its second state appears to arise. The relinquishment of the first state is eternal separation, and the attainment of the second is eternal union. Seen truly, love contains neither decline nor arising, neither relinquishment nor attainment. Love remains eternally and continuously just as it is; because it grows at every moment, decline and arising merely appear within it.

In love, the lover feels a want within himself, and from it arises the longing - the hunger - that love should increase still more. Seen subtly, the longing “more still, more still” contains both the attainment of love and a sense of its lack. There is no lack, yet a lack appears. Love is therefore called ineffable:

anirvacanīyaṃ premasvarūpam | mūkāsvādanavat |

(Nārada Bhakti Sūtra 51-52)

Bliss is present, yet a lack appears: this is love’s ineffability.

Even great souls who have attained perfection, for whom nothing remains to be done, known, or gained, retain a hunger for love. They are naturally and spontaneously drawn toward God.

God is therefore called “the One who draws even the hosts of self-delighting sages.” Although Sanaka and the other sages were “ever absorbed in the bliss of Brahman,” they continued to listen to accounts of the Lord’s divine play:

This alone is their hope, their sustenance, and their cherished practice:

wherever the deeds of Raghupati are told, there they listen.

(Rāmacaritamānasa, Uttara 32.3)

When they entered *Vaikuṇṭha*, even their unwavering minds were stirred by the divine fragrance of the Lord's lotus feet:

*tasyāravindanayanasya padāravinda-
kiñjalkamiśratulasīmakarandavāyuh |
antargataḥ svavivareṇa cakāra teṣāṃ
saṃkṣobham akṣarajūṣām api cittatanvoh ||*

(Śrīmad Bhāgavatam 3.15.43)

“When they bowed down, a breeze bearing the fragrance of *tulasī* blossoms mingled with pollen from the lotus feet of the lotus-eyed Lord entered through their nostrils and agitated even the minds and bodies of those wise great souls who eternally abided in the imperishable Supreme.”

On seeing Lord Śrī Rāma, even Janaka, knower of Reality, exclaimed:

*My mind is detachment by its very nature,
as a cakora bird grows still before the moon.
Yet at the sight of these two, such love has arisen
that my mind has helplessly abandoned the bliss of Brahman.*

Although Lord Śaṅkara is wholly complete, his heart longs to narrate the Lord's divine play, while the heart of Pārvatī, Mother of the universe, longs to hear it. Lord Śaṅkara leaves Kailāsa, comes to Yaśodā, and pleads, “Mother, let me behold your little boy's face just once!” Even when he was travelling to Kailāsa with Satī, the sight of Lord Śrī Rāma on the road brought him into an extraordinary state:

*Satī beheld the condition Śambhu was in,
and a profound doubt arose within her heart.
Śaṅkara is Lord of the world, adored by all;*

*gods, men, and sages bow their heads to him.
Yet he bowed before that prince,
calling Him the supreme abode of Being, Consciousness, and Bliss.
Absorbed in the beauty he beheld,
he could not restrain the love that still filled his heart.*

Thus Sanaka and the other sages, Janaka, Lord Śaṅkara, and all the rest are naturally drawn toward God. This attraction itself is called love. The Śrīmad Bhāgavatam says:

*ātmārāmāś ca munayo nirgranthā apy urukrame |
kurvanty ahaitukīm bhaktim itthambhūtaguṇo hariḥ ||*

(1.7.10)

“Even self-delighting sages whose knot of consciousness and matter has been cut through knowledge practise desireless devotion to God, for God’s qualities are such that they draw living beings toward Him.” For there to be no deficiency at all, and yet to be a hunger for love - this is love’s ineffability.

Seekers devoted to *satsaṅga* also experience this: although they listen to *satsaṅga* every day, hear the Lord’s divine plays, and perform and hear devotional song and chanting, they are neither satiated by these things nor inclined to leave them. Every day they discover a fresh rasa in them, so that the rasa of the past seems pale and the rasa of the present appears extraordinary.¹ Thus love contains both fullness and want - this is love’s ineffability.

Knowledge brings establishment in one’s essential nature, and the knower consequently becomes content - “content in the Self alone” (Gītā 3.17). Love, however, brings neither a fixed station nor

contentment; it continues to grow eternally and without interruption.

Authorial footnote 1

*Those who are ever satiated by hearing Rāma's deeds
have not known their distinctive rasa.
Even the great sages liberated while living
listen unceasingly to Hari's virtues.*

(*Rāmacaritamānasa*, Uttara 53.1)

In truth, love simply cannot be defined or described. If it could be defined, how would it remain ineffable?

*The one who plunges in does not speak; the one who speaks does
not know.
Only a discerning, wise one can plunge into love's deep ocean.*

Brahman is one aspect or majesty of God's all-inclusive form: "They know that Brahman" (Gītā 7.29), and "I am the foundation of Brahman" (Gītā 14.27). In "Listen to how you will know Me completely, without doubt" (Gītā 7.1), "completely" (*samagram*) is the qualifier and God - "Me" (*mām*) - is the subject qualified. In the same way, God identifies the *adhiyajña*, the Inner Controller, as Himself: "I alone am the *adhiyajña* here in the body" (Gītā 8.4). Brahman is therefore the qualifier, and God as the Inner Controller is the subject qualified. The knower is related to the qualifier, while the devotee is related to the One qualified. In other words, the knower is related to divine majesty, while the devotee is related to the One who possesses that majesty.

The knower has an ontological unity with Brahman, while the devotee has an intimate unity of belonging with God. That is why

God says, “The knower is My very Self - this is My view” (Gītā 7.18). Here the word “knower” does not refer to a knower of abstract Reality; it refers to the knower who experiences that “everything is God” - that is, the surrendered devotee: “The person of knowledge takes refuge in Me, realizing that Vāsudeva is all” (Gītā 7.19). In the ontological unity of the knower of Reality, the individual being and Brahman become non-different, and nothing remains apart from the one Reality. In the devotee’s intimate unity, however, the individual being and God become inseparable. In that inseparability, devotee and God are one, yet for the sake of love they become two.

Although God is utterly complete and lacks nothing whatsoever, He still hungers for love: “The One did not delight alone” (Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 1.4.3). Therefore, for the play of love, God becomes two as Śrījī and Kṛṣṇa:

*yeyaṃ rādhā yaś ca kṛṣṇo
rasābhir dehaś caikaḥ kṛḍānāṛthaṃ dvidhābhūt |*

(Rādhā-tāpanīya Upaniṣad)

*She who is Rādhā and He who is Kṛṣṇa are the ocean of rasa;
one body became two for the sake of divine play.*

In reality, Śrījī is not separate from Kṛṣṇa. Rather, Kṛṣṇa Himself makes Śrījī distinct for the growth of love. The point is that, once love is attained, the devotee does not separate himself from God; God Himself makes the devotee distinct so that love may grow at every moment. Therefore, once love is attained, neither devotee nor God is lesser or greater. Each is the other’s devotee, and each is the other’s chosen Beloved.

Before the knowledge of Reality, distinction - duality - arises from ignorance; after the knowledge of Reality, the distinction of love arises by God's will.

Inseparability can exist even between two, as a child is inseparable from its mother, a servant from his master, a wife from her husband, or a friend from a friend. From the very beginning of devotion, therefore, the devotee becomes inseparable from God: "A servant's lineage and kinship belong to his Master alone" (*Kavitāvalī*, Uttara 107). The reason is that the devotee does not regard himself as having a separate existence. His feeling is: "God alone is; I do not exist at all."

Love possesses *mādhurya*, intimate sweetness. Therefore, when the devotee possesses the intimate belonging expressed in "The Lord is mine," he forgets God's *aiśvarya*, His majesty and power. A queen's child thinks of her simply as "my mother" and forgets the imposing fact that she is a queen. A holy man once told the gopīs, "Kṛṣṇa possesses immense majesty; He has a vast treasury of divine power." The gopīs replied, "Mahārāj, the key to that treasury is with us! What does Kanhaiyā have? He has nothing at all!" The point is that in *mādhurya*, *aiśvarya* is forgotten. In the world, majesty receives the greater honor; in God, sweetness receives the greater honor. When the power of sweetness is manifest in God, the power of majesty flees far away and does not come near.

In truth, the devotee does not see God's majesty at all. To love God while regarding Him as God is not love for God Himself, but love for His Godhood - His majesty. In the same way, affection for a wealthy man because one has seen his wealth is really affection for his wealthiness.

God's grace alone is the special cause of love's awakening. The separation and union by which love grows are likewise received only through God's grace. Love is not attained by the power of practices such as reverently hearing, recounting, and contemplating the Lord's divine play or chanting the Divine Name. Those practices make good use of one's time, which the Vaiṣṇava teachers have called *kālakṣepa*. God's grace is received when one takes refuge in Him. The essential thing in taking refuge is to relinquish one's reliance upon the world.

When one stands apart from the world, one knows the world; when one is inseparable from God, one knows God. For the individual being is distinct from the world and inseparable from God - this is the real and exact truth. But when one assumes unity with the body and the world, one does not truly know the world; it is precisely because the world is not known that one is drawn toward it. In the same way, when one assumes oneself to be distinct from God, one does not know God; it is precisely because God is not known that one feels no attraction toward Him. When one knows the world in the recognition "The world is not mine," one's relationship with it is severed. When one knows God in the recognition "God is mine," one becomes inseparable from Him and love arises.