



CHAITANYA CHARAN DAS

Why do we approach god?

The Vedic scriptures state that the motives with which people come to god can be categorised into four major levels: fear, desire, duty and love.

1. Fear: Some people fear, "If I disobey god, then he may punish me for my wrongdoings. So better let me go to his temple and pacify him by my worship." This sort of worship is certainly better than atheism, but it is based on a very negative conception of god as a stern judge, a cosmic punisher.

2. Desire: Some people reason, "There are so many things I want; if I pray to god, perhaps he will give them to me." Here the conception of god is more positive, as a potent desire-fulfiller, but still it is a highly utilitarian relationship based on give-and-take rather than love. Srila Prabhupada, the founder-acharya of ISKCON, would say that if we go to god to ask for bread, then that shows our love for bread, not our love for god.

3. Duty: Some people reason, "God has already given me so much - life, body, health, food, clothing, shelter. It is my duty to go periodically to his temple and thank him." Here the relationship is somewhat steady being based on gratitude for what has already been given and not on greed for what one wants to receive. Still, over time duty can become a burden. Moreover, the focus in this level is still on what god has done for me, not on god himself.

4. Love: This is the purest level of approaching god, where a devotee feels, "My dear lord, you are the supreme object of my love; I have been offering my love to so many people and things, but that has never made me happy. Now I simply want to love and serve you eternally and I do not want anything material in return for my service; I simply wish to love you and to be loved by you. Just as a parent takes care of the child without the child having to ask his parents, similarly, I know that you will take care of me. I will accept whatever is your plan for me and keep serving you no matter what happens in my material life." It is only this pure love that can satisfy our hearts fully, for love is the innermost need of our hearts.

The real purpose of coming to a temple is not to have our desires fulfilled, but to have our desires purified so that we can eventually love God purely. Whatever be our level right now, by chanting Hare Krishna, all of us can rise to pure love.

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