Chapter II

The Motives of Devotion

ALL RELIGION begins with the conception of some
Power or existence greater and higher than our limited
and mortal selves, a thought and act of worship done to
that Power, and an obedience offered to its will, its laws or its
demands. But Religion, in its beginnings, sets an immeasurable
gulf between the Power thus conceived, worshipped and obeyed
and the worshipper. Yoga in its culmination abolishes the gulf;
for Yoga is union. We arrive at union with it through knowledge;
for as our first obscure conceptions of it clarify, enlarge, deepen,
we come to recognise it as our own highest self, the origin and
sustainer of our being and that towards which it tends. We arrive
at union with it through works; for from simply obeying we
come to identify our will with its Will, since only in proportion
as it is identified with this Power that is its source and ideal, can
our will become perfect and divine. We arrive at union with it
also by worship; for the thought and act of a distant worship
develops into the necessity of close adoration and this into the
intimacy of love, and the consummation of love is union with
the Beloved. It is from this development of worship that the
Yoga of devotion starts and it is by this union with the Beloved
that it finds its highest point and consummation.

All our instincts and the movements of our being begin by
supporting themselves on the ordinary motives of our lower
human nature,—mixed and egoistic motives at first, but after-
wards they purify and elevate themselves, they become an intense
and special need of our higher nature quite apart from the results
our actions bring with them; finally they exalt themselves into
a sort of categorical imperative of our being, and it is through
our obedience to this that we arrive at that supreme something
self-existent in us which was all the time drawing us towards it,
first by the lures of our egoistic nature, then by something much
higher, larger, more universal, until we are able to feel its own
direct attraction which is the strongest and most imperative of
all. In the transformation of ordinary religious worship into the
Yoga of pure Bhakti we see this development from the motived
and interested worship of popular religion into a principle of
motiveless and self-existent love. This last is in fact the touch-
stone of the real Bhakti and shows whether we are really in the
central way or are only upon one of the bypaths leading to it.
We have to throw away the props of our weakness, the motives
of the ego, the lures of our lower nature before we can deserve
the divine union.

Faced with the sense of a Power or perhaps a number of
Powers greater and higher than himself by whom his life in
Nature is overshadowed, influenced, governed, man naturally
applies to it or to them the first primitive feelings of the natural
being among the difficulties, desires and dangers of that life,—
fear and interest. The enormous part played by these motives
in the evolution of the religious instinct, is undeniable, and in
fact, man being what he is, it could hardly have been less; and
even when religion has advanced fairly far on its road, we see
these motives still surviving, active, playing a sufficiently large
part, justified and appealed to by Religion herself in support of
her claims on man. The fear of God, it is said,—or, it may be
added for the sake of historical truth, the fear of the Gods,—
is the beginning of religion, a half-truth upon which scientific
research, trying to trace the evolution of religion, ordinarily in a
critical and often a hostile rather than in a sympathetic spirit, has
laid undue emphasis. But not the fear of God only, for man does
not act, even most primitively, from fear alone, but from twin
motives, fear and desire, fear of things unpleasant and maleficent
and desire of things pleasant and beneficent,—therefore from
fear and interest. Life to him is primarily and engrossingly,—
until he learns to live more in his soul and only secondarily in
the action and reaction of outward things,—a series of actions
and results, things to be desired, pursued and gained by action
and things to be dreaded and shunned, yet which may come
upon him as a result of action. And it is not only by his own
action but by that also of others and of Nature around him that these things come to him. As soon, then, as he comes to sense a Power behind all this which can influence or determine action and result, he conceives of it as a dispenser of boons and sufferings, able and under certain conditions willing to help him or hurt, save and destroy.

In the most primitive parts of his being he conceives of it as a thing of natural egoistic impulses like himself, beneficent when pleased, maleficent when offended; worship is then a means of propitiation by gifts and a supplication by prayer. He gets God on his side by praying to him and flattering him. With a more advanced mentality, he conceives of the action of life as reposing on a certain principle of divine justice, which he reads always according to his own ideas and character, as a sort of enlarged copy of his human justice; he conceives the idea of moral good and evil and looks upon suffering and calamity and all things unpleasant as a punishment for his sins and upon happiness and good fortune and all things pleasant as a reward of his virtue. God appears to him as a king, judge, legislator, executor of justice. But still regarding him as a sort of magnified Man, he imagines that as his own justice can be deflected by prayers and propitiation, so the divine justice can also be deflected by the same means. Justice is to him reward and punishment, and the justice of punishment can be modified by mercy to the suppliant, while rewards can be supplemented by special favours and kindness such as Power when pleased can always bestow on its adherents and worshippers. Moreover God like ourselves is capable of wrath and revenge, and wrath and revenge can be turned by gifts and supplication and atonement; he is capable too of partiality, and his partiality can be attracted by gifts, by prayer and by praise. Therefore instead of relying solely on the observation of the moral law, worship as prayer and propitiation is still continued.

Along with these motives there arises another development of personal feeling, first of the awe which one naturally feels for something vast, powerful and incalculable beyond our nature by a certain inscrutability in the springs and extent of its action,
and of the veneration and adoration which one feels for that which is higher in its nature or its perfection than ourselves. For, even while preserving largely the idea of a God endowed with the qualities of human nature, there still grows up along with it, mixed up with it or superadded, the conception of an omniscience, an omnipotence and a mysterious perfection quite other than our nature. A confused mixture of all these motives, variously developed, often modified, subtilised or glossed over, is what constitutes nine tenths of popular religion; the other tenth is a suffusion of the rest by the percolation into it of nobler, more beautiful and profounder ideas of the Divine which minds of a greater spirituality have been able to bring into the more primitive religious concepts of mankind. The result is usually crude enough and a ready target for the shafts of scepticism and unbelief, — powers of the human mind which have their utility even for faith and religion, since they compel a religion to purify gradually what is crude or false in its conceptions. But what we have to see is how far in purifying and elevating the religious instinct of worship any of these earlier motives need to survive and enter into the Yoga of devotion which itself starts from worship. That depends on how far they correspond to any truth of the divine Being and its relations with the human soul; for we seek by Bhakti union with the Divine and true relation with it, with its truth and not with any mirage of our lower nature and of its egoistic impulses and ignorant conceptions.

The ground on which sceptical unbelief assails Religion, namely, that there is in fact no conscient Power or Being in the universe greater and higher than ourselves or in any way influencing or controlling our existence, is one which Yoga cannot accept, as that would contradict all spiritual experience and make Yoga itself impossible. Yoga is not a matter of theory or dogma, like philosophy or popular religion, but a matter of experience. Its experience is that of a conscient universal and supracosmic Being with whom it brings us into union, and this conscious experience of union with the Invisible, always renewable and verifiable, is as valid as our conscious experience of a physical world and of visible bodies with whose invisible minds
we daily communicate. Yoga proceeds by conscious union, the conscious being is its instrument, and a conscious union with the Inconscient cannot be. It is true that it goes beyond the human consciousness and in Samadhi becomes superconscient, but this is not an annihilation of our conscious being, it is only its self-exceeding, the going beyond its present level and normal limits.

So far, then, all Yogic experience is agreed. But Religion and the Yoga of Bhakti go farther; they attribute to this Being a Personality and human relations with the human being. In both the human being approaches the Divine by means of his humanity, with human emotions, as he would approach a fellow-being, but with more intense and exalted feelings; and not only so, but the Divine also responds in a manner answering to these emotions. In that possibility of response lies the whole question; for if the Divine is impersonal, featureless and relationless, no such response is possible and all human approach to it becomes an absurdity; we must rather dehumanise, depersonalise, annul ourselves in so far as we are human beings or any kind of beings; on no other conditions and by no other means can we approach it. Love, fear, prayer, praise, worship of an Impersonality which has no relation with us or with anything in the universe and no feature that our minds can lay hold of, are obviously an irrational foolishness. On such terms religion and devotion become out of the question. The Adwaitin in order to find a religious basis for his bare and sterile philosophy, has to admit the practical existence of God and the gods and to delude his mind with the language of Maya. Buddhism only became a popular religion when Buddha had taken the place of the supreme Deity as an object of worship.

Even if the Supreme be capable of relations with us but only of impersonal relations, religion is robbed of its human vitality and the Path of Devotion ceases to be effective or even possible. We may indeed apply our human emotions to it, but in a vague and imprecise fashion, with no hope of a human response: the only way in which it can respond to us, is by stilling our emotions and throwing upon us its own impersonal calm and immutable
equality; and this is what in fact happens when we approach the pure impersonality of the Godhead. We can obey it as a Law, lift our souls to it in aspiration towards its tranquil being, grow into it by shedding from us our emotional nature; the human being in us is not satisfied, but it is quieted, balanced, stilled. But the Yoga of devotion, agreeing in this with Religion, insists on a closer and warmer worship than this impersonal aspiration. It aims at a divine fulfilment of the humanity in us as well as of the impersonal part of our being; it aims at a divine satisfaction of the emotional being of man. It demands of the Supreme acceptance of our love and a response in kind; as we delight in Him and seek Him, so it believes that He too delights in us and seeks us. Nor can this demand be condemned as irrational, for if the supreme and universal Being did not take any delight in us, it is not easy to see how we could have come into being or could remain in being, and if He does not at all draw us towards him, — a divine seeking of us, — there would seem to be no reason in Nature why we should turn from the round of our normal existence to seek Him.

Therefore that there may be at all any possibility of a Yoga of devotion, we must assume first that the supreme Existence is not an abstraction or a state of existence, but a conscious Being; secondly, that he meets us in the universe and is in some way immanent in it as well as its source, — otherwise, we should have to go out of cosmic life to meet him; thirdly, that he is capable of personal relations with us and must therefore be not incapable of personality; finally, that when we approach him by our human emotions, we receive a response in kind. This does not mean that the nature of the Divine is precisely the same as our human nature though upon a larger scale, or that it is that nature pure of certain perversions and God a magnified or else an ideal Man. God is not and cannot be an ego limited by his qualities as we are in our normal consciousness. But on the other hand our human consciousness must certainly originate and have been derived from the Divine; though the forms which it takes in us may and must be other than the divine because we are limited by ego, not universal, not superior to our nature, not
greater than our qualities and their workings, as he is, still our human emotions and impulses must have behind them a Truth in him of which they are the limited and very often, therefore, the perverse or even the degraded forms. By approaching him through our emotional being we approach that Truth, it comes down to us to meet our emotions and lift them towards it; through it our emotional being is united with him.

Secondly, this supreme Being is also the universal Being and our relations with the universe are all means by which we are prepared for entering into relation with him. All the emotions with which we confront the action of the universal existence upon us, are really directed towards him, in ignorance at first, but it is by directing them in growing knowledge towards him that we enter into more intimate relations with him, and all that is false and ignorant in them will fall away as we draw nearer towards unity. To all of them he answers, taking us in the stage of progress in which we are; for if we met no kind of response or help to our imperfect approach, the more perfect relations could never be established. Even as men approach him, so he accepts them and responds too by the divine Love to their bhakti, tathaiva bhajate. Whatever form of being, whatever qualities they lend to him, through that form and those qualities he helps them to develop, encourages or governs their advance and in their straight way or their crooked draws them towards him. What they see of him is a truth, but a truth represented to them in the terms of their own being and consciousness, partially, distortedly, not in the terms of its own higher reality, not in the aspect which it assumes when we become aware of the complete Divinity. This is the justification of the cruder and more primitive elements of religion and also their sentence of transience and passing. They are justified because there is a truth of the Divine behind them and only so could that truth of the Divine be approached in that stage of the developing human consciousness and be helped forward; they are condemned, because to persist always in these crude conceptions and relations with the Divine is to miss that closer union towards which these crude beginnings are the first steps, however faltering.
All life, we have said, is a Yoga of Nature; here in this material world life is her reaching out from her first unconsciousness towards a return to union with the conscient Divine from whom she proceeded. In religion the mind of man, her accomplished instrument, becomes aware of her goal in him, responds to her aspiration. Even popular religion is a sort of ignorant Yoga of devotion. But it does not become what we specifically call Yoga until the motive becomes in a certain degree clairvoyant, until it sees that union is its object and that love is the principle of union, and until therefore it tries to realise love and lose its separative character in love. When that has been accomplished, then the Yoga has taken its decisive step and is sure of its fruition. Thus the motives of devotion have first to direct themselves engrossingly and predominantly towards the Divine, then to transform themselves so that they are rid of their more earthy elements and finally to take their stand in pure and perfect love. All those that cannot coexist with the perfect union of love, must eventually fall away, while only those that can form themselves into expressions of divine love and into means of enjoying divine love, can remain. For love is the one emotion in us which can be entirely motiveless and self-existent; love need have no other motive than love. For all our emotions arise either from the seeking after delight and the possession of it, or from the baffling of the search, or from the failure of the delight we have possessed or had thought to grasp; but love is that by which we can enter directly into possession of the self-existent delight of the divine Being. Divine love is indeed itself that possession and, as it were, the body of the Ananda.

These are the truths which condition our approach to this Yoga and our journey on this path. There are subsidiary questions which arise and trouble the intellect of man, but, though we may have yet to deal with them they are not essential. Yoga of Bhakti is a matter of the heart and not of the intellect. For even for the knowledge which comes on this way, we set out from the heart and not from the intelligence. The truth of the motives of the heart's devotion and their final arrival and in some sort their disappearance into the supreme and unique self-existent motive
of love, is therefore all that initially and essentially concerns us. Such difficult questions there are as whether the Divine has an original supaphysical form or power of form from which all forms proceed or is eternally formless; all we need at present say is that the Divine does at least accept the various forms which the devotee gives to him and through them meets him in love, while the mixing of our spirits with his spirit is essential to the fruition of Bhakti. So too, certain religions and religious philosophies seek to bind down devotion by a conception of an eternal difference between the human soul and the Divine, without which they say love and devotion cannot exist, while that philosophy which considers that One alone exists, consigns love and devotion to a movement in the ignorance, necessary perhaps or at the least useful as a preparatory movement while yet the ignorance lasts, but impossible when all difference is abolished and therefore to be transcended and discarded. We may hold, however, the truth of the one existence in this sense that all in Nature is the Divine even though God be more than all in Nature, and love becomes then a movement by which the Divine in Nature and man takes possession of and enjoys the delight of the universal and the supreme Divine. In any case, love has necessarily a twofold fulfilment by its very nature, that by which the lover and the beloved enjoy their union in difference and all too that enhances the joy of various union, and that by which they throw themselves into each other and become one Self. That truth is quite sufficient to start with, for it is the very nature of love, and since love is the essential motive of this Yoga, as is the whole nature of love, so will be too the crown and fulfilment of the movement of the Yoga.