



Loneliness is usually felt to be an unwelcome state except for those who value it for creative or spiritual purposes. Man's gregarious nature prohibits him to be solitary. If one chooses to be solitary, then, he would probably face such unsavoury addresses as 'loner,' 'lone wolf,' 'unsocial,' 'standoffish,' 'introvert,' as well as a pack of such other terms as 'quirky,' 'weird,' or 'reclusive.' He may also be looked askew and be subject to a plethora of gossips and speculations as to his character. In short, he would be avoided or abandoned by those who tend to socialize. It's not bad to socialize either. However, loneliness has its own merits. Only a few recognize



## The God, The Devotee and Loneliness

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it. The disinterest of a majority toward loneliness necessitates an enquiry into the nature of this anathema.

One feels lonely in the absence of someone longed for, and stops to feel so when he gets his/her company. The company of someone dearly loved gives one a feeling of comfort, happiness, security, and a sense of belonging. This is fine in case of man. But what about God's loneliness? Does He need anybody's company? Is He troubled by loneliness the way man is? We might think God never feels lonely. And why should He? Man feels lonely, desperate, insecure because he is limited, because he is

incomplete. This does not seem relevant in respect of God because He is complete, and does not need anything or anybody for fullness. But God feels lonely. This intrigues us. We wonder 'Why'?

Company or friendship is an ontological, vital necessity. In every phase of man's life, he always wants to be friend, to communicate, to pour out his heart, to be listened to and cared for. From infancy to old age, man always needs another. The fact is that man cannot be lonely whether he wants to be or not. Friends, classmates, colleagues, family members, or people in general give us company. Sometimes we feel that such company is permanent. And delusion



faces us. Further, a different aspect of loneliness interests us, that is, the solitude of sages or hermits who possibly renounce worldliness, but not the world. Barring a few of them who distance themselves from the bustle of humanity in order to contemplate in uninterrupted solitude, others live in *ashrams* in the company of their likes, and do also mix with worldly people to provide them service. Thus, they do not seem to be prioritizing loneliness as a condition for a spiritual life. The interest for company has another side too, that is, we need the company of only those whom we love, and those who matter to us. If that is not the case, a lost child separated from its mother in a fair would not miss her and long for her company.

God's loneliness as well as His interest for company is beyond the tethers of human understanding. In *Gita*, Krishna says He is unattached, needs nobody and unaffected by anything. Yet He longs for the company of the devotees. As Salabaga writes, "Bhakata to pita, mata, bhakata to bandhu" (the devotee is your father, mother, and your friend, O Lord!) and further he writes, "Dhenu pachhe pachhe batsa game kheera lobhe / bhakata pachhare tuhi thau sehi bhabe" (as a calf follows its mother for milk, O Lord ! so you follow your devotees). The calf's dependence on the cow is vital and affectionate, and both the calf and the cow are interdependent since this relationship sustains both emotionally. In a similar way, the relationship between the devotee and God is vital and both are interdependent. However, it sounds puzzling. How is God dependent on the devotee? If yes, then what is the urgency that necessitates God to associate with the devotee physically? If He is not interested to associate physically, then, why does He incarnate, and incarnate again and again? Maybe this is how He would like to mix with His

devotees and be closer to them. Since it is difficult for man to love the formless, God comes in a form. An irresistible yearning for each other's company is an arresting feature of God-Devotee relationship. What is striking is the desire in both the devotee and God for association, that is, being physically closer to end the loneliness. Thus the bodily form of God is endeared by a devotee who, if not willing or trained to luxuriate in the formless, would not be content with God as an idea or as an essence. We might like to think as to why we yearn for the bodily form of God, His *sakara rupa*. In our day-to-day lives whenever we feel lonely, we long for the company of the people we love and want them in person. How happier we feel if the intensely missed ones come to us and give us the much cherished company! Since we are body and are corporeal, it is natural that we would long for the physical presence. We cannot be content simply with the essence. Thus we need God's presence.

Despite our knowledge that God is beyond form, beyond *rupa*, beyond the expanse of our understanding, yet we long for a bodily form, something that would correspond to our materiality and corporeal status. We yearn to see the infinite in the finite. However, the finite, visible manifestation of God, be it in the form of an idol or painting or sculpture, or an incarnation, is essentially a visible expression of the invisible, a finite expression of the infinite. Thus, there is no difference between the form and the formless, between the unmanifest one and the incarnation. That God exists validates His need for company since none can exist without company. This asseveration might look audacious or inappropriate because one would like to interrogate the rationale behind God's wish for company. Wish for company is essentially an



expression of a vital need. It is an expression of love, and love rests on the foundation of a mutual, emotional symbiosis. In this light, the relationship between God and devotee is built on mutual love, and both need each other. They cannot bear to see each other solitary. A similar degree of loneliness is contingent on a similar degree of mutual love, a similar urgency, a similar yearning for an ecstasy of union. God also feels similar urgency to listen to a devotee who has unqualified devotion to Him. Thus, the loneliness of both merge into each other where both God and the devotee become one and inseparable. God's loneliness is intertwined with the loneliness of His devotee. As a lover of God longs for His company, similarly God also longs for him. This is an extremely recondite relationship beyond comprehension.

Loneliness is a fact that man has to face. But in case of God-Devotee relationship, loneliness has no place because God would never make his devotee feel alone. The mutual relationship between God and devotee and their interdependence dismiss the possibility of loneliness in them. God needs His devotee and He wants that His devotee think of Him. As

George Herbert writes in "The Pulley", God has purposely withheld rest from man so that being desperate for rest, man would long for His company: "weariness / May toss him to my breast" (Gardner, 136). If we take the spirit of what Herbert says, it seems to be a studied plan of God to have the company of man. Since man tends to be oblivious of God in his good times, God has made this plan to make man think of Him in times of unhappiness. This divine plan to effect an inseparable union between them shows God and devotee intertwined in a cosmic reciprocity.

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