

CHAITANYA'S PRAYER: A PERFECT PRIMER

Vedanta Center of Atlanta

Br. Shankara

March 30, 2014

March is a month for the study of Raja Yoga. This is how we define Raja Yoga, on our website: “**Raja yoga** is sometimes called the yoga of meditation. It is the soul of all the yogas. A raja yogi uses ancient, proven spiritual techniques to focus his or her attention. Repeated practice of meditation concentrates the mind and reveals God or Truth.”

Topic for today is "Chaitanya's Prayer: A Perfect Primer" as a subject for meditation ...

From “Realizing God” by Swami Prabhavananda – pp. 324 and 365...

“St. John of the Cross said, ‘The more the soul cleaves to created things, relying on its own strength, by habits and inclination, the less is it disposed for this union (of the Soul or Atman with God or Brahman), because it does not completely resign itself into the hands of God that he may transform it supernaturally.’

“You know the Lord’s Prayer: ‘Lead us not into temptation.’ What is that temptation? His creation, his whole creation. It seems impossible for us to be free from desire, to have no other desire but for God. When you come to that stage of unfoldment, God becomes revealed to you. He is right there, listening to every heartbeat. (RG, pp324-5)

“‘Knowledge is power,’ says the proverb, and that is true. Until you know what your mind is doing, you cannot control it. Those who never meditate think the mind is wonderful; they do not know what a rascal the mind is. But when you try to practice concentration and meditation, you begin to realize how distracted and restless it is. Until you know what your mind is doing, you cannot control it.

“Give it rein. Many hideous thoughts may come. You’ll be astonished that it was possible for you to think such thoughts. But you will find that each day the mind’s vagaries are becoming fewer and less violent, that each day the mind is becoming calmer. In the first few months you will find that it will have a great many thoughts. Later you will find that they have decreased somewhat. And in a few more months you will find they are fewer and fewer still, until the mind comes under perfect control. But we must practice patiently each day.” (RG, p365)

What do we mean by “meditation”? Here is Swami P’s commentary on Patanjali’s Yoga Sutras, Ch. 3, V12, which reads:

“12. The mind becomes one-pointed when similar thought-waves arise in succession without any gaps between them.’

“It has been said that if the mind can be made to flow uninterruptedly toward the same object for twelve seconds, this may be called concentration. If the mind can continue in that concentration for twelve times twelve seconds (*i.e.*, two minutes and twenty-four seconds), this may be called meditation. If the mind can continue in that meditation for twelve times two minutes and twenty-four seconds (*i.e.*, twenty-eight minutes and forty-eight seconds), this will be the lower (*savikalpa*) samadhi.” (*How to Know God*, p190)

Two hymns are chanted here that are excellent subjects for meditation. Both can give rise to “similar thought waves in succession... without any gaps between them”. {You may want to talk with me about the “how” of meditation, for you...}

“Breaker of This World’s Chain” was spoken about next week; it is recited at evening Arati. In the morning, we chant together —

"Chaitanya's Prayer: A Perfect Primer"

Chaitanya’s Prayer, as interpreted by Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood, is recited every morning in the temples, convents and monasteries of the Vedanta Society of Southern California, at Ridgely, and in other Vedanta centers in the U.S.

PRAYER:

Sri Chaitanya's Prayer

Chant the name of the Lord
and His glory unceasingly
That the mirror of the heart
may be wiped clean
And quenched that mighty forest fire,
Worldly lust, raging furiously within.

O name, stream down in moonlight
on the lotus heart,
Opening its cup to knowledge of Thyself.
O self, drown deep in the waves of His
bliss,
Chanting His name continually,

Tasting His nectar at every step,
Bathing in His name, that bath
for weary souls.

Various are Thy names, O Lord,
In each and every name Thy power
resides.

No times are set, no rites are needful,
for chanting of Thy name,
So vast is Thy mercy.
How huge, then is my wretchedness,
Who find, in this empty life and heart,
No devotion to Thy name!

O, my mind,
Be humbler than a blade of grass,
Be patient and forbearing like the tree,
Take no honor to thyself,
Give honor to all,
Chant unceasingly the name of the Lord.

O, Lord and soul of the universe,
Mine is no prayer for wealth or retinue,
The playthings of lust or the toys of fame;
As many times as I may be reborn
Grant me, O Lord, a steadfast love for
Thee.

A drowning man in this world's fearful
ocean
Is Thy servant, O sweet One.
In Thy mercy
Consider him as dust beneath Thy feet.

Ah, how I long for the day
When an instant's separation from Thee,
O Govinda,

Will be as a thousand years,
When my heart burns away with its desire
And the world, without Thee,
is a heartless void.

Prostrate at Thy feet let me be,
in unwavering devotion,
Neither imploring the embrace of Thine
arms
Nor bewailing the withdrawal of Thy
presence
Though it tears my soul asunder.

O Thou, who stealest the hearts
of Thy devotees,
Do with me what Thou wilt —
For Thou art my heart's beloved,
Thou and Thou alone.

*(Translated by Swami Prabhavananda
and Christopher Isherwood)*

This Prayer brings Bhakti — devotional spiritual practice — and its goal or result into sharp focus in about three minutes. Its tone and language are intense — it can be thought of as one of the most beautiful love songs ever written.

The Prayer calls forth the heart's bliss, instructs the mind in how to overcome obstacles, and, in the voice of the spiritually awakening heart and mind, speaks lovingly and directly to the Divine within.

So, who is Chaitanya?

Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu (*mahaprabhu means mighty king or Great Lord, in the same sense as "Christ the King"*) is regarded by millions in India and elsewhere as an Incarnation of God — a reincarnation of Sri Krishna. Many disciples and followers of Sri Ramakrishna also think of Chaitanya as a previous Incarnation of the Great Master. Sri Chaitanya was born in West Bengal, India in 1485 — 529 years ago.

Swami Vivekananda – after this the Swami will be referred to simply as Swamiji – had this to say about Chaitanya:

“The brightest of (India’s) prophets of comparatively modern times in the North was Chaitanya... This one great Northern sage, Chaitanya, represented the mad love of the Gopis (for Sri Krishna).

(Chaitanya was) a Brahmin, born of one of the most rationalistic families of the day, himself a professor of logic fighting and gaining a word-victory — for, this he had learnt from his childhood as the highest ideal of life — and yet through the mercy of some sage the whole life of that man became changed; he gave up his fight, his quarrels, his professorship of logic and became one of the greatest teachers of Bhakti the world has ever known—mad Chaitanya.

His Bhakti rolled over the whole land of Bengal, bringing solace to every one. His love knew no bounds. The saint or the sinner, the Hindu or the Mohammedan, the pure or the impure, the prostitute, the streetwalker — all had a share in his love, all had a share in his mercy...”

... **end of Swamiji quote** ...

So here we have a respected Brahmin, a famous pundit of his time and place, a great success in the world as we usually think of success — and Chaitanya renounces it all to become a wandering monk, dancing madly along the roads and pathways of Bengal, chanting the name of Hari over and again in ecstatic bliss.

What happened to Chaitanya? Listen to Swami Ranganathananda, from his book *Divine Grace*:

“That is the way in spiritual life. First (you) strengthen yourself, assert yourself, and then sacrifice yourself, deny yourself in surrender to God, through super strength.

That is the correct attitude and way. First comes manliness, then comes saintliness or godliness. Erect your saintliness on your manliness; that will be a powerful saintliness. So work hard, build up your individuality; and then, when you are strong and spiritually mature... you look up and see a greater courage and a greater strength beckoning you, which makes you experience and say: ‘Not I, but Thou; Thy will be done!’”

Ranganathananda goes on to develop those thoughts beautifully in his book. He refers to the *Bhagavad Gita*, the works of Shankaracharya, and many other sources as he writes about how to move from a high state of worldly achievement to a great spiritual awakening. Yet, even

though his book is pocket size, it would be quite a challenge to memorize all of the Swami's observations and instructions.

Not so Sri Chaitanya's lesson plan. His primer on how to progress from a confession that one is utterly without devotion to the Lord, to saying "Do with me what Thou wilt — for Thou are my heart's beloved, Thou and Thou alone" — is only **54 lines long**. We can legitimately call that a Primer: It is a short tutorial that covers the basic elements of a subject, and it is memorable. (It's interesting to note that in Middle English, primer actually meant devotional manual.)

"Unpacking" the Prayer

So, let's begin to "unpack" the profoundly poetic images of the Prayer. The first line, in today's vernacular, is a "flat out call to action":

CHANT THE NAME OF THE LORD AND HIS GLORY UNCEASINGLY

That's a bit strong, isn't it? Unceasingly? Why should we go to all *that* trouble? Well, according to the *New Testament*, *The Way of the Pilgrim*, and Vedanta's own "Foursquare Gospel" — Sri Ramakrishna, Sarada Devi, Swamiji, and Brahmananda (Raja Maharaj) — the effects are worth the effort.

First, from the New Testament (*this was found on the website of The Community of the Beatitudes*):

"We are all called to pray without ceasing, says St. Paul in 1 Thessalonians 5:17. The real question is, how. The Jesus Prayer provides one good way to pray constantly... Our task is to draw nearer to God. St. Isaac of Syria says that it is impossible to draw near to God by any means other than increasing prayer."

Next, from the book, *The Way of A Pilgrim* (*these quotes are on the website hermitary.com*): "The pilgrim recalls how he heard (St. Paul's) admonition to 'pray ceaselessly'... and has set out to discover how... (He finds an Eastern Orthodox teacher), a *starets*... it is the simple advice of the *starets* that falls like a revelation upon his ears." (*The teacher said:*)

"Sit down in silence. Lower your head, shut your eyes, breathe out gently, and imagine yourself looking into your own heart. Carry your

mind, that is, your thoughts, from your head to your heart. As you breathe out, say, "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me." Say it moving your lips gently, or simply say it in your mind. Try to put all other thoughts aside. Be calm, be patient, and repeat the process very frequently."

And that is all... Soon, as the *starets* had suggested, the pilgrim found the prayer at his lips and in his mind every waking hour, as spontaneous and effortless as his breath itself." [JAPAM]

Our Foursquare Gospel (Ramakrishna, Sarada Devi, and Swamis Vivekananda and Brahmananda) said this about constant prayer:

Sri Ramakrishna... said to a devotee: "Japa means silently repeating God's name in solitude. When you chant his name with single-minded devotion you can see God's form and realize Him. Suppose there is a piece of timber sunk in the waters of the Ganges and fastened with a chain to the bank. You proceed link by link, holding to the chain, and you dive into the water and follow the chain. Finally you are able to reach the timber. In the same way, by repeating God's name you become absorbed in Him and finally realize Him."

Sri Sarada Devi: "The Mantra purifies the body. Man becomes pure by repeating the name of God. So repeat His name always... The name of God is more powerful than the senses... Prayer to God makes your heart as pure as the star. As a result of sincere and regular Japa and meditation you will find that God will speak to you. All your desires will be fulfilled and you will experience pure Bliss... **Even the injunctions of destiny are cancelled if one takes refuge in God. Destiny strikes off with her own hands what she has written about such a person...** "

Swamiji: "Prayer and praise are the first means of growth. Repeating the names of God has wonderful power. Mantra is a special word, or sacred text, or name of God chosen by the Guru for repetition and reflection by the disciple. The disciple must concentrate on a personality for prayer and praise... These words (Mantras) are not sounds of words but God Himself, and we have them within us. Think of Him, speak of Him. No desire for the world! Buddha's Sermon on the Mount was, 'As thou thinkest, so art thou.'"

Raja Maharaj: “Practice japam and meditation regularly. Do not miss even one day. Try repeatedly to steady (the mind) by fixing it on (a Name or Form of God), and at last you will become absorbed in Him. If you continue your practice for two or three years, you will begin to feel an unspeakable joy and the mind will become steady... (At first) You must forcibly pour the thought of God into your mind, then as you persist, you will be flooded with joy...”

Well now, as a TV journalist might say, turning to face the camera for “the wrap-up”: “So, it seems all the Great Teachers we interviewed agree, the effects of chanting the Lord’s Name unceasingly do indeed justify the effort.”

What does Chaitanya **himself** say are the effects of unceasingly chanting the Lord’s name?

He starts with two “summary” assertions:

... THE MIRROR OF THE HEART MAY BE WIPED CLEAN
AND QUENCHED THAT MIGHTY FOREST FIRE,
WORLDLY LUST, RAGING FURIOUSLY WITHIN...

First assertion. The mirror of the heart will be wiped clean...

A senior swami of the Order was asked about this image; he said: “Repetition of the Name (your mantra) is like a very soft cloth, slowly and slowly, very naturally wiping away layer after layer of accumulated dust — until at last is revealed an ancient mirror, and an image in that mirror, of unimaginable, incomparable beauty.

“That mirror both is, and reflects, the Self, your inmost being, your true original nature.” Breathtaking. That which we yearn and yearn for as we run after this and that, that and this — as we chase the Divine, the Truth, in its limited forms, distorted and diluted by Maya — it is, always has been, right here, waiting for us.

Second assertion: That mighty forest fire, worldly lust, raging furiously within, will be quenched — extinguished. In the immortal words of Monty Python, it will be a “dead parrot”...

Sri Chaitanya promises: If we indeed chant the Name of the Lord and His glory unceasingly, the forest fire of lust for things of the world, raging furiously within, will be dead!

Can any of us pretend we don't know what that "mighty forest fire" is? Cartoonists have our number, don't they? Think of an animated film that features some young guy cruising along in his convertible. He passes an attractive young lady strolling down the street, and "boinnnggg!" — his cartoon eyes pop right out of his head — right out of his head as he ogles that woman!

What the artist is showing us is that our senses don't just quietly lie in wait for sensations. Oh no, they reach out for stimulus; they "rage" after what they desire. And they argue with us vehemently when we try to restrain them.

Maybe you're driving down the avenue when you spot a sign that says, "If its something sweet, cold & creamy you crave, come to McDonald's for an ice cream cone — only 99 cents!" Good ad copy, huh? Gotcha! But you think to yourself, reasonably, "Yes, but I know perfectly well I don't need that cone, those extra, empty calories." And the mind right away talks back: "But it's low fat, and it's only 99 cents!" Unless you yield to that voice of temptation as you drive by the McDonald's in the next block, the senses that crave that "sweet, cold & creamy" treat will probably chatter at you all the way home. And when you get there, they will remind you there's a Fudgesicle in the freezer!

Swamiji, in his commentary on *Patanjali's Yoga Sutras*, and elsewhere, offers detailed explanations of how Chaitanya's promise is actually kept. For here and now, suffice it to say that Swamiji affirms chanting the Name — japa, Nama — actually does calm the mind so deeply that lust for the things of the world loses its grip on your consciousness and your actions.

Okay, let's hit subtotal. In four poetically charged lines, Chaitanya has made his case for what you are to do — chant the Lord's name and glory unceasingly — and the results you can expect to achieve if you do as he asks:

- Your true original nature – the Self – will be revealed in all its splendor.

- Your experience of that splendor will no longer be fragmented, lost among ever-self-renewing, unsatisfiable cravings.

Now, Sri Chaitanya begins his instructions. First, he says, ask the Lord directly for what you need to begin and start to move ahead:

O NAME, STREAM DOWN IN MOONLIGHT ON THE LOTUS HEART,
OPENING ITS CUP TO KNOWLEDGE OF THYSELF.

Key words:

NAME — Notice he doesn't say which Name, just O Name. As you say the Prayer, you don't need to replace that word with any particular name of the Lord — Chaitanya explains why a few lines later.

MOONLIGHT — Moonlight is a reflection of the Sun of Knowledge; we can handle this. Moon is a symbol of the wisdom of the ancients, the Manes. (From *Cultural Heritage of India*, Vol 1 pp375-6)

Chandogya Upanishad V4-10: Meditation on the Five Fires (most subtle to most concrete, with a spirit of self-sacrifice) –

- First Fire Sacrifice – Faith is poured as an oblation in Heaven (the highest fire)... As a consequence, the lunar world — the world of manes (ancestors) comes into existence.
- The Moon is then poured as an oblation into the Second Fire — the Rain God — and so rain pours on Earth, which is the Third Fire.

Chaitanya, having all this as a “culturally known” background (esp. among the Brahmins), asks for an outpouring — a stream — an oblation in the form of sound (Nama) to pour down on Earth (the 3rd Fire)

Also, these lines suggest that the calm of night is a good time for spiritual practice. Finally, a nod in the direction of Chaitanya's Beloved, Sri Krishna. In the Gita, Krishna says, “Among the stars of night, I am the moon.”

LOTUS HEART — *From the Mundaka Upanishad*: “The Self exists in man, within the lotus of the heart, and is the master of his life and of his body. With mind illumined by the power of meditation, the wise know him, the blissful, the immortal.”

Swami Yatiswarananda, who was a disciple of Brahmananda and served as a vice-president of the Ramakrishna Math, commented: "...(T)he spiritual aspirant... feels there is a lotus at the level of the heart, the petals of which are directed downwards. When this centre is reached (by the mind), the bud of the lotus opens and the petals get directed upwards--the lotus blooms."

And so the Lotus of the Heart becomes an open cup, ready to manifest the Knowledge of God for which you are praying. Why manifest? It's already there, in seed form, ready to be awakened to life by the "rain" of S'abda Brahman — God in the Form of Sound...

KNOWLEDGE OF THYSELF — What is this Knowledge?

Let's reprise some quotes from our Four Square Gospel about the nature of this Knowledge:

- *Ramakrishna* — When you chant his name with single-minded devotion you can see God's form and realize Him.
- *Sarada Devi* — As a result of sincere and regular Japa and meditation you will find that God will speak to you.
- *Swamiji* — The disciple must concentrate on a personality for prayer and praise... These words (Mantras) are not sounds of words but God Himself, and we have them within us.
- *Raja Mhj* — If you continue your practice for two or three years, you will begin to feel an unspeakable joy and the mind will become steady...

This knowledge is not book learning, not theoretical musings, not something heard from a speaker on Sunday morning. It is direct experiential knowledge of God, your Self, found within.

Chaitanya then speaks directly to that Self:

O SELF, DROWN DEEP IN THE WAVES OF HIS BLISS,
CHANTING HIS NAME CONTINUALLY,
TASTING HIS NECTAR AT EVERY STEP,

Ramakrishna said, ""Dive deep, O mind, dive deep in the Ocean of God's Beauty: If you can plunge to the uttermost depths, There you can find the gem of Love."

Like OM, Love is a single word that “says” what God is. Another Name for God, a more complex word, is Satchidananda. That Bliss Chaitanya speaks of is, so to speak, one-third of that term; yet Satchidananda cannot be separated. So, when you dive deep, when your mind is “drowned” in the continual chanting of the Name, you are immersed not just in Bliss, but in the totality of inseparable Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute — of God.

Therefore, when you truly are chanting His Name continually, when your entire consciousness is suffused with the Nectar of His Being, Satchidananda itself transforms you! Your actions (karma) will change, and as Holy Mother said, “Even the injunctions of destiny are cancelled... Destiny strikes off with her own hands what she has written about such a person...”

A few words about Bliss, one of the first tangible results of regular spiritual practice — Swamiji was asked about that:

Q. Sometimes sitting at Japa one gets joy at first, but then one seems to be disinclined to continue the Japa owing to that joy. Should it be continued then?

A. Yes, that joy is a hindrance to spiritual practice, its name being *Rasasvadana* (tasting of the sweetness). One must rise above that.”

Rise above it, and in Swamiji’s immortal phrase, “Stop not till the Goal is reached!” And the Goal is full realization... (“Make it my own:” *Raja Mhj*)

Chaitanya continues, still speaking to the Self within:

BATHING IN HIS NAME, THAT BATH FOR WEARY SOULS.

If your soul is NOT weary, Chaitanya’s bath may not be of much interest. If it is, then as Holy Mother said, “Man becomes pure by repeating the name of God. So repeat His name always... (this will make) your heart as pure as the star.”

Chaitanya now turns again to praise that almighty God whose Knowledge streams down in moonlight on the Lotus Heart:

VARIOUS ARE THY NAMES, O LORD,

IN EACH AND EVERY NAME THY POWER RESIDES.
NO TIMES ARE SET, NO RITES ARE NEEDFUL,
FOR CHANTING OF THY NAME,
SO VAST IS THY MERCY.

This is the subject for another talk, really, but Chaitanya the mad devotee also was a rebel against religious bigotry & oppression: fanatical devotion to one Form or Name of God, denouncing all others — & the encrustation of priest-craft — the insistence that a schedule of esoteric rites, rituals and ceremonies performed by others is necessary to attract God's compassion and grace. Chaitanya was another of India's great reformers, restoring eternal Vedic truths and traditions and forthrightly denouncing both religious bigots and greedy priests.

Not surprisingly, Swamiji clearly echoes these thoughts: "Japa is repeating the Holy Name; through this the devotee rises to the Infinite. This boat of sacrifice and ceremonies is very frail; we need more than that to know (God)... It is not necessary to go through all these ceremonials to reach the meaning of the Vedanta..."

So, having celebrated the Lord's omnipotence, liberality, and compassion, Chaitanya now speaks for the first time in the voice of the devotee. In three stunning lines the aspirant confesses —

HOW HUGE, THEN IS MY WRETCHEDNESS,
WHO FIND, IN THIS EMPTY LIFE AND HEART,
NO DEVOTION TO THY NAME.

This is the crux, the turning point, of Chaitanya's Prayer — this recognition that, though the Lord offers to take the yoke from his heavy-laden shoulders, the devotee is as yet unbending and cannot kneel so that the yoke can be removed. Lamenting lack of "yearning" — *mum'tvam*

What courage it takes to make such a statement! This is not the *mea culpa* of a weakling; it is a powerful, honest recognition of bitter truth — the aspirant's wretchedness is of his own making. As Swami Ranganathananda said, "(You) deny yourself in surrender to God, through super strength. That is the correct attitude and way... when you are strong and spiritually mature... you look up and see a greater courage and a greater strength beckoning you, which makes you experience and say: 'Not I, but Thou; Thy will be done!'"

And so the aspirant's soliloquy continues — first directed within:

O, MY MIND,
BE HUMBLER THAN A BLADE OF GRASS,
BE PATIENT AND FORBEARING LIKE THE TREE,
TAKE NO HONOR TO THYSELF,
GIVE HONOR TO ALL,
CHANT UNCEASINGLY THE NAME OF THE LORD.

Now the game – the eternal spiritual quest – is well and truly on! The devotee reviews, step by step, what must be done to break his unbending pride, to gain devotion. Swami Yatiswarananda once told a young man who is now a senior monk in the Ramakrishna Order, “For every one step forward spiritually, you must take two steps ethically!”

Humility, patience, forbearance, modesty, magnanimity — those are ethical steps. And then the repeated “memo to self”: Let nothing deter me from chanting the Holy Name.

Next, addressing the Lord, the devotee **affirms** that he no longer yearns after the attractions of a worldly life:

O, LORD AND SOUL OF THE UNIVERSE,
MINE IS NO PRAYER FOR WEALTH OR RETINUE,
THE PLAYTHINGS OF LUST OR THE TOYS OF FAME;

Affirmation of *vairagya* – renunciation of the 4 great obstacles! Instead of these, the aspirant now prays for the highest:

AS MANY TIMES AS I MAY BE REBORN
GRANT ME, O LORD, A STEADFAST LOVE FOR THEE.

A plea for yearning (*mumukshutvam*).

Quick note about being reborn: Listen to this verse from the *Devi Mahatmyam* (700 Mantras on Sri Durga, the Divine Mother) —

“Salutations be to you, O Narayani, O you who, in the form of minutes, moments and other divisions of time, bring about change in things, and have thus the power to destroy the universe.”

Based on this premise, and on Sarada Devi's promise that, “Even the injunctions of destiny are cancelled if one takes refuge in God...”, it is possible to think that you do not need to wait for another lifetime for your

life to change. It's possible you can be reborn, and Mother can grant you that precious, steadfast love for the Lord this instant, this very instant.

NEXT LINES: Since we can't imagine that any word of Chaitanya's Prayer was written carelessly — he was, after all, a master logician — it could be that in these next, very dramatic lines, the Mahaprabhu also makes a joke — a clever play on words. He wrote:

A DROWNING MAN IN THIS WORLD'S FEARFUL OCEAN
IS THY SERVANT, O SWEET ONE.
IN THY MERCY
CONSIDER HIM AS DUST BENEATH THY FEET.

If, in His mercy, the Lord makes you part of the dust beneath His feet, it's pretty clear your drowning days are over — where is the world's fearful ocean then? Naturally, there's much more to these four lines than a sort of spiritual jest; in seed form, they point toward one of the relationships one can have with the Divine — the attitude of a servant.

For indeed we are — whether willing or not — a servant of the Divine Will! As Sri Sarada Devi said plainly:

“Listen, dear, when God first created man, He endowed him with the spirit of goodness. As a result, men were born with wisdom and it did not take them long to realize that the world was an ephemeral thing. Immediately they took the Name of God and set out to meditate on Him and by His grace were liberated from the bonds of life. God thought, “This will not do, this is not the way to make them play the game of life.” In the end, along with the spirit of goodness, He mingled in profuse quantities of the spirit of materialism and that of vanity. Now the game of life went on with a swing!”

That quote starts on p. 212 of *In the Company of the Holy Mother, By Her Direct Disciples*

Think of what She said: Each of us is serving to make God's game of life go on, and with a swing, no less!

No doubt that's because, as the great old song lyric says, “it don't mean a thing, if it ain't got that swing!”

Swami Prabhavananda was fond of saying, we should give every aspect of our lives a “Godward turn.” To apply that thought here, perhaps Chaitanya is suggesting that —since we do serve the Lord’s purposes — it’s best if we purposefully remind the Lord we are His servant and ask for his merciful protection. (*If it’s all within, who is reminding whom? This can be seen as instruction to the Buddhi...*)

Ramakrishna once said to M. (who wrote the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*) “...(I)n order to realize God, one must assume one of these attitudes: santa, dasya, sakhya, vatsalya, or madhur... Dasya (is) the attitude of a servant toward his Master. Hanuman had this attitude toward Rama. He felt the strength of a lion when he worked for Rama...”

In the next lines of Chaitanya’s Prayer, we hear a devotee whose transformation is nearly complete. Unceasing repetition of the Lord’s name has filled the devotee’s being with the Lord’s presence; any thought of worldly achievement or pleasure has vanished. All that remains is an intense yearning for union with the Beloved (called Govinda, a name of Krishna). Chaitanya writes —

AH, HOW I LONG FOR THE DAY
WHEN AN INSTANT’S SEPARATION FROM THEE,
O GOVINDA,
WILL BE AS A THOUSAND YEARS,
WHEN MY HEART BURNS AWAY WITH ITS DESIRE
AND THE WORLD, WITHOUT THEE, IS A HEARTLESS VOID.

Many great devotional mystics have echoed this abandonment of self to the Divine. Half a world away, a contemporary of Chaitanya put his very similar passionate longing into these words — they are from:

The Imitation of Christ,

by Thomas a Kempis, a 14th & 15th Century German mystic

“O Thou Beloved:

Love eternal, my whole Good, Happiness which hath
no bounds, I desire to appropriate Thee with the
most vehement desire, and the most worthy
reverence.

I desire to reserve nothing unto myself.

O everlasting light, surpassing all created
luminaries, flash forth Thy lightning from above,
piercing all the most inward parts of my heart.
Make clean, make glad, make bright and make alive
my spirit, with all the powers thereof, that I
may cleave unto Thee in ecstasies of joy.”

“...that I may cleave unto Thee in ecstasies of joy.” Amen! End of quote from Thomas a Kempis.

Chaitanya, in the last nine lines of his Prayer, summarizes the final stage of his devotional spiritual practice, the Madhura Bhava – roughly translated, the Sweet Mood. This is the completely selfless attitude represented by the relationship of Sri Radha to Sri Krishna, in their *lila* in Vrindavan. Sri Ramakrishna called this madhur relationship Chaitanya’s greatest contribution to the spiritual world. Ramakrishna said, “Madhur (is) the attitude of a woman toward her paramour... This attitude includes all the other four.”

The last nine lines of Chaitanya’s Prayer are:

PROSTRATE AT THY FEET
LET ME BE,
IN UNWAVERING DEVOTION,
NEITHER IMPLORING THE
EMBRACE OF THINE ARMS
NOR BEWAILING THE
WITHDRAWAL OF THY
PRESENCE
THOUGH IT TEARS MY SOUL
ASUNDER.

O THOU, WHO STEALEST
THE HEARTS OF THY
DEVOTEES,
DO WITH ME WHAT THOU
WILT —
FOR THOU ART MY HEART’S
BELOVED,
THOU AND THOU ALONE.

(Radha! Radha! Radha!)

Body, mind, and intellect and all they are or seem to be, offered to the Beloved – the Divine.

“Now before you can come to that state of meditation, which is *samadhi*, you first have to practice, and then you begin to feel the presence. He is: you become convinced of that. No more hearsay. Then you begin to feel that he is moving, living. You talk to him. These are facts. Ultimately you realize your oneness with him. In all these experiences there is a felling that it is not through your attempt, but through his grace. Whenever any experience comes, immediately there will come this understanding: not by my struggle, not by my effort, but by that divine grace. It is a tangible experience. IT IS THEN THAT YOU BECOME A BLESSING TO

YOURSELF AND A BLESSING TO ALL MANKIND. YOUR VERY PRESENCE BECOMES A BLESSING TO ALL. (Emphasis added – Br. Shankara)

“In conclusion I’d like to quote Swami Vivekananda: ‘In meditation we divest ourselves of all material conditions and feel our divine nature. The touch of the soul can paint the brightest color, even in the dingiest places. It can cast a fragrance over the vilest things. It can make the wicked divine, and all enmity, all selfishness, is effaced. The less the thought of the body, the better, for it is the body that drags us down; it is attachment, identification, which makes us miserable. That is the secret: To think that I am the Spirit and not the body, and that the whole of the universe, with all its relations, with all its good and all its evil, is but a series of paintings, scenes on a canvas of which I am the witness.’”
— *Realizing God*, from bottom of p370).