

[My Turn](#)

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Duty Supersedes Love

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My observation is that we do too many things in life out of love, instead of duty. For example, we eat food not because the human body is a temple of God (Deho Devasya Devalayah) but because we love the taste of food. We take care of our children not because that is our duty, but because we love our children. We take care of our parents not because that is our duty, but because we love our parents. We work not because that is duty, but because we love the money, power and influence that work brings to us. The list goes on and on.

We must do things in life more for the sake of duty than love. There are many reasons. Duty is defined by scriptures, which are divine, eternal and timeless, whereas love can be a fleeting emotion. If you do things for the sake of duty, you are likely to make rational decisions, whereas, if you do things for the sake of love, you are likely to make emotionally tainted decisions. It is good to have a heart, but the head must rule the heart. There is nothing wrong in being soft-hearted, as long as one is hard-headed also.

If you do things for the sake of duty, you are likely to make decisions that are correct, consistent, reliable and fulfilling, whereas if you do things for the sake of love, you are likely to make decisions that may appear to be correct and gratifying in the short term, but not so in the long run. When my daughter was in high school, she had to go out of town at least twice a month to participate in debate tournaments. Out of our emotional attachment with her, we were sometimes tempted to discourage her from going to these tournaments. However, since we considered it to be our duty to provide her with the best opportunities for self-development, we suppressed our emotions and let her do what was the right

thing for her to do. She did manage to gain admission to an Ivy League college because of her debate experience.

If you do things for the sake of duty, it will provide you with joy and bliss, whereas if you do things for the sake of love, it will provide you with momentary pleasure. I vividly remember how I tended to overeat when I was a teenager because of my love for food, which did provide me with momentary pleasure. However, later on, when I started gaining weight, I decided to curb my food intake. I did not want to die prematurely because of poor health, since that would have prevented me from performing my duties toward my family members.

If you do things for love, you will develop an unhealthy attachment to the object of your love, which can engender the following problems: 1) You will be depressed once the object of your love becomes unavailable to you because of death, separation or a change of heart. After all, everything in the material world is ephemeral (Brahma satyam, jaganmithya). 2) You will become a slave to the object of your love, since you have given the key to your happiness to someone other than yourself. True happiness, bliss, resides in you, since bliss is the true nature of your real Self. 3) It will become impossible to keep a sense of detachment from the material world. Remember the teaching of the Bhagavad Gita, which states that one must be like a lotus leaf, which even when submerged in water is never wetted by it. In other words, our scriptures tell us to "be in the world but not of the world." Duty and love are not mutually exclusive of one another, if by "love" we mean "true love," since duty is rooted in true love. While true love is selfless, "garden variety" love is based on self-centeredness and can be characterized as lust. If the craving for lust is satisfied, it creates greed. If it is denied, it creates anger. Thus, self-centered love opens the triple doors of hell, comprised of lust, anger and greed. If you reflect on all this, you can easily see why the Bhagavad Gita emphasizes that we perform selfless actions based upon duty, while consecrating the fruits of our actions to the Supreme Reality, or God.

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