

## ***For the love of the God/ġess: bhakti, the path of devotion***

*Fix your mind on Me, worshipping Me, sacrificing to Me, bowing down to Me; in this way you shall come to Me, I promise, for you are dear to Me.*

-- Lord Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita*, 18.65

*In a world where everything is Krishna, what is lacking?*

-- David L. Haberman, scholar/pilgrim

IN THIS CLASS we will be studying *bhakti*, the intensely devotional relationship with God that is the most widely practiced form of spirituality in India today. The *Bhagavad Gita* is the first Indian text to explicitly refer to *bhakti* as a spiritual path. Scholars agree that this tradition's origins lie in South India during the time of the composition of the great epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. During this time great temples were built, within which images or *murtis* of the gods and goddesses were worshipped. The stories of each god and goddess were compiled in texts called the *Puranas*, and poet-saints wandered from temple to temple, composing songs of praise, longing and worship. At the heart of this tradition lies the intimate engagement of the devotee with his *ishtaġevata*, or chosen deity. This relationship unfolds through love and worship expressed through both the physical body and the imagination, ideally leading to a total immersion in the awareness of the Beloved. The devotee can express their love by adopting the role (or *bhava*) of a lover, mother, friend, servant, or other intimate relationship with the god or goddess. Many contemporary Indian devotees go on pilgrimages to worship deities in their temples, or to visit the places that are associated with the stories of their beloved deities.

### **REQUIRED ASSIGNMENTS:**

READ this excerpt from *Journey Through the Twelve Forests*, by David Haberman: A western scholar of Hinduism participates in a traditional Hindu pilgrimage as part of his research, and encounters Lord Krishna along the way.

READ this excerpt from *The Ambrosia of the Sport of Govinda*: This 16<sup>th</sup> century text is the basis for a visualization practice done by some devotees of Krishna.

CONTEMPLATE AND JOURNAL ABOUT your own experiences of intense love. Can you imagine cultivating this kind of relationship with God?

### **OPTIONAL:**

ATTEND a local kirtan.